

# Towards an Urban Mediterranean Migration Agenda on this 25th Anniversary of the Barcelona Process

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The commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process is a good opportunity to identify new ways of keeping alive the ideals that are already part of the Mediterranean imaginary as an area of peace and prosperity, shared common values, and free movement of people, goods and knowledge. We are experiencing a fairly advanced process of disillusionment that has been apparent since the first decade of its anniversary, even before the launch of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008. My specific objective is to attempt to identify the main factors of this disillusionment by focusing on the EuroMed migration agenda. I will then refer to the main documents that today make up the global migration agenda to finally suggest the main lines of a potential change of scale, based on an approach more focused on Mediterranean cities and on an urban agenda of Mediterranean migration governance, closely linked to the urbanisation processes underway in the Mediterranean today.

## **The Mediterranean as a Scenario of Geo-migration Governance: Process of Disillusionment with the Barcelona Process and Disquieting Assessment**

In 1995, the Barcelona Process formally established for the first time a logic of political action within a framework of partnership in the Mediterranean with clear ideals of helping to create an area of peace, stability and prosperity through coordination and cooperation mechanisms through the reinforcement of political

and security dialogue, construction of a shared zone of economic prosperity and a free-trade area, and the rapprochement between people and societies and cultures. This European Mediterranean ideal partnership framework (EuroMed) still provides the foundation of the Union for the Mediterranean, launched in 2008, and continues to be the future of the current Mediterranean neighbourhood governance and externalisation of policies, designed after the 2004 enlargement of the European Union with 10 new member countries (Schumacher, 2018). One of the main changes from

the original idea is that we have moved from an ideal multilateral Mediterranean governance to one that is far more bilateral, whose cooperation and coordination mechanisms fall within a clear Mediterranean external policy dominated by asymmetrical power relations and conditionality, more characteristic of the *realpolitik*. Even the initial democratisation and co-development programmes that aim to address the root causes of migration do not manage to curb this tendency. Thus, on the 25th anniversary, this EuroMed narrative has failed to capture its imaginary of regional construction. Thus far, the Mediterranean has not created an environment in which people, goods, ideas and services can move freely. At present, there are too many bottlenecks in the system, already apparent on its tenth anniversary (Calleya, 2004), which will prevent the region from competing as a regional actor in the future global village.

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Within this process of disillusionment, shared by almost all the reports made so far, we can now extract a disturbing account dominated by the narratives of control, security and reactive governance, and the negative and conflict-based views of Mediterranean migration. Furthermore, this dominant geo-migration policy carries with it hegemonic binary perceptions of us/them that divide the Mediterranean into a mosaic of migration and refugee policies and national (and unilateral) control initiatives. In other words, these policies foster the Med-vision as a fragmented scenario whose keywords are ungovernability, unpredictability, complexity and unmanageability.

For me, the premise is clear. The Mediterranean regional process has been dominated by several aspects that shape the orthodoxy of the current governance paradigms of Mediterranean migration: it has been a top-down conceived process, a national-state centric governance dominated by Eurocentrism (Western-centrism). The “Europeanisation” of the Mediterranean even has certain postcolonial overtones. Furthermore, we also include in this account the fact that the bigger the refugee crisis and irregular migration narrative, the more actions that violate human rights will be legitimised. Hence the interest of states in keeping this crisis narrative at the top of the Mediterranean migration agenda. The current scenario is a history of mobility restrictions and blocking. Reality also tells us that the Mediterranean is considered the most diasporic region in the world (Gallant, 2016: 205) and, according to the World Peace Index 2018, is still the least peaceful area in the world. The latest reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) also warn us that the Mediterranean is, by far, the deadliest part of the world. This “disquieting account”, in the words of Chambers (2008: 3), of how the European states and the EU decide the bordering of the Mediterranean with a complex system of filters and channels even extends its centrifugation towards the extraterritorial space in North Africa. In this territory, quarantine areas for migrant sanctuaries are created through camps and critical zones, and a courageous network of NGOs and civil society organisations operate at sea and on land trying to mitigate the negative humanitarian consequences of EuroMed’s failure to put in place an alternative governance narrative.

In the era of social media and big data but also populism, fake news, the spread of rumours and negative stereotypes, hate crimes and how in a very short time this has had a

rapid impact on society and public opinion have become a matter of great concern that certainly also affects the Mediterranean region-making process. We also know that this news contamination affects the political narratives that often build their rhetoric on migration upon false premises only to consolidate their own reactive governance perspective. This circularity between public national narratives, most of them prejudice-based, and reactive governance is one of the European viruses that leave very little place for a more pro-active Mediterranean regional-building.

### **A Mediterranean Reading of the Global Migration Agenda: What Recommendations Can We Retain?**

There are three main non-binding UN documents that make up the global agenda today: one on migration (Global Compact), another on sustainable development (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), and a third from the UN-Habitat for a better urban future, which places migration on a new urban agenda (2016).

The UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), the first international pact on migration, adopted by 152 over 193 UN governments in December 2018, aims to ensure that the overall benefits of migration are optimised, whilst addressing risks and challenges, for individuals and communities in countries of origin, transit and destination. From the Mediterranean, Israel declined to sign while Italy, Algeria and Libya abstained. The first objective directly demands the collection and use of “accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies”; commits signatory countries to strengthen the “global evidence base on international migration” under UN guidance; and asks for a “comprehensive strategy for improving migration data at local, national, regional and global

levels.” Enhancing positive views and incorporating cities into the governance agenda is also in the list of recommendations.

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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is not directly migration-focused, since it directly sets out an action plan to eradicate poverty as an indispensable requisite for sustainable development. But there is a clear migration 2030 Agenda as long as it is recognised that poverty is a driver of human mobility, and also as long as migration is considered to be an indicator of current vulnerabilities and social exclusions. Among other actions, it recommends mobilising partnerships and strengthening global solidarity. Among other statements, the signatories “recognise the positive contribution of migrants to inclusive growth and sustainable development [and the fact that] international migration is a multidimensional reality of great relevance to the development of countries of origin, transit and destiny, which requires coherent and comprehensive responses.” It also recommends “cooperat[ing] internationally to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration that implies full respect for the human rights and humane treatment of migrants, refugees and displaced persons, regardless of their status. Such cooperation should also strengthen the resilience of communities hosting refugees, especially in developing countries.” Finally, paragraph 29 also underlines the importance of mobility in any direction, asserting the right of migrants to return to their country of origin and remembering that states must ensure that returning nationals are properly received. The 2030 Agenda directly establishes a link between current human mobility and poverty, and then

also recommends “the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies” (paragraph 10.7). It states that monitoring processes must be “rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts” (paragraph 74 [g]). With a perspective similar to that of the Global Compact, the 2030 Agenda insists on giving regional and local authorities the tools necessary to foster community cohesion and personal security (paragraph 34).

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Finally, in Quito, UN-Habitat, together with the International Organization for Migration, incorporated the migration agenda at local level. The reasons are two-fold. First, migration is considered a key driver of the growth of cities, and it is recognised at world level that urbanisation processes are directly related to migration, which makes cities diverse places to live in but also with many points of exclusion and inequalities. Second, migrants are also seen as agents of development when the right policies are implemented. This emphasis on the importance of governance mechanisms to improve positive and proactive views about migrants is paramount. This global urban governance agenda also incorporates inclusive and resilient cities and emphasises the importance of following a human rights-based approach.

Together with similar statements, and more focused on the Mediterranean, the Valetta Declaration on research and innovation in the Euro-Mediterranean region (Valletta Declaration, 2017), approved by the Union for the Mediter-

anean and the research ministers, confirmed “the key role that research and innovation play in developing an understanding of the root causes of migration and the inter-dependencies between different drivers for migration including economic, political, social, demographic, conflict-related and environmental drivers.” It also directly expressed their concerns in line with the requests to resolve the fragmentation of knowledge and data, and to find instruments to reduce the gap between research knowledge, public opinion, and policies.

These key documents are milestones of a general global trend in recent decades. They invite us to reflect deeply on the way states manage global issues such as migration and international human mobility. They offer us a multidimensional approach but can also be seen as the basis for a change in the current governance paradigm of Mediterranean migration that we can apply to the current EuroMed policy. We can collect at least three main interconnected appeals of this global-Mediterranean agenda:

- *Request a multi-scale migration approach.* In this respect, the local and regional levels are essential to implement principles and policies. This involves greater priority for cities as actors and centres of a local partnership network-node, with a regional scope capable of formulating local policies in order to overcome the prevailing geopolitical framework.
- *Request an effort to focus on positive viewpoints on migration.* This involves aiming for an advantage-based approach and innovative dimensions of migration. Migration as an asset and a resource for Mediterranean region-building can also prevail.
- *Request the reduction in the gap between governance and knowledge.* This requires a critical overview of those who produce data, information and knowledge related

with Mediterranean migration (knowledge infrastructures), its purposes and impacts to confront the knowledge deficits in the current governance of Mediterranean migration. This also explains the need to seek other ways of producing knowledge to frame new agreements on the dynamics and governance of Mediterranean migration.

### Empirical Premise: Mediterranean Urbanisation as the Main Challenge for the Governance of Migration

Mediterranean cities are considered a mixed group, and urbanisation is seen as a direct result of migration (IOM, 2015). In fact, the emergence of cities as regional leaders in determining migration patterns is the result of ongoing urbanisation, a distinctive Mediterranean phenomenon fully recognised today, as well as a historical Mediterranean trend. The Mediterranean, in effect, has been shaped through the development of its city networks. Let me quote a comment by Braudel about it: “In the 16th century, no other part of the world had such a sophisticated urban network. For Paris and London the modern age was just beginning” (Braudel, 2017: 268 [own translation]), or “[...] the Mediterranean city involves the creation of highways, which in turn create the city” (2017: 268 [own translation]). In recent decades, many cities across the Mediterranean have experienced spectacular population growth, with significant shifts from rural areas (*European Union Atlas of Migration*, 2019). Globalisation and the growth of human movements in the region have accelerated this process. The arrival of Mediterranean migrants has shaken the Mediterranean cities on both shores. In the north, many Mediterranean cities have increased population with migrants coming from the south. But southern Mediterranean cities are also experiencing continuous inflow

of migrants. Many of the forcibly displaced have moved to urban areas in search of greater security, better access to basic services, and greater economic opportunities but the lack of opportunities and exclusion also push many to initiate a migratory process to other Mediterranean cities.

When the urban dimension comes into play, new challenges arise, with notable differences between cities in the southern and northern Mediterranean in terms of size, infrastructures, development, and level of government autonomy. All socio-demographic data and reports agree that the Mediterranean of the future will not only be a more populated region but also more urban. The geographical extension and unprecedented demographic volume of Mediterranean cities have also articulated extensive nodes of urban migration corridors. This increase is also bringing about the need to incorporate new narratives on the right to the city as a new urban paradigm based on the principles of global justice, equality, democracy and sustainability. This puts urban governance at the top of the EuroMed migration agenda for the coming years. The problem is no longer how to stop the growing urbanisation trend but how to better organise it so that cities benefit from migration and Mediterranean human mobilities.

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In more concrete terms, urban populations around the Mediterranean increased from 152 million in 1970 to 315 million in 2010, and will continue to grow until 2030. According to data from UN Environment (2020), the total population of Mediterranean countries grew from 281 million in 1970 to 419 million in 2000 and to 472 million in 2010. The

population is expected to reach 572 million in 2030. Four countries account for around 60% of the total population: Egypt (82 million), Turkey (72 million), France (63 million) and Italy (60 million). The population of coastal regions grew from approximately 100 million in 1980 to 150 million in 2005, and could reach 200 million in 2030 (*UN World Population Prospects*, 2015). Population concentration in the coastal zones is highest in the western Mediterranean, the western coast of the Adriatic Sea, the east coast of the eastern region of the Aegean, and the Nile Delta. The population density in the coastal zone is highest in southern Mediterranean countries. Population growth, combined with the growth of coastal urban hubs, creates multiple population pressures that often lead to political instability, social or political protests, and emigration options. In other words, they can all be new and additional drivers of migration flows. Moreover, around 1,600 cities (more than 10,000 inhabitants) with a total of about 100 million inhabitants are located in the coastal regions of the Mediterranean, according to the *World Population Review* (2020).

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The UN's *The World's Cities Data Booklet* (2018) provides an urban snapshot of the Mediterranean, which only has two megalopolises, that is, two cities with over 10 million inhabitants: Cairo with 20 million (expected to be 25 million in 2030) and Istanbul, with 14.7 million (expected to be 17 million in 2030).

This empirical trend is causing political and social concerns in all Mediterranean governments, while confirming that current migrations place urban governance at the top

of the research agenda and migration policies in the Mediterranean. The latest UN report on Arab cities confirms this current concern about migration and includes the issue in the upcoming debates on human ecology, widely recognised when we talk about urban resilience in the Mediterranean region (UN Development Programme, 2018). This also means that Mediterranean cities can be considered laboratories of a new geo-migration policy.

### **In Conclusion: The Need for Med-Thinking in Mediterranean Migration Governance**

We need to reflect on possible new mechanisms to restart the ideal of construction of the Mediterranean region. The vision of the Mediterranean as a regional web probably belongs to the most important “romantic yearnings” of the present and past of this geographical area. Tensions have increased with the European problematisation of refugees, and migration has become part of the EuroMed agenda as one of the main centres of geopolitical tension between European and neighbouring countries, including Turkey. In the last 25 years Mediterranean migrations have not been included as potential drivers of regional construction of the Mediterranean, and EuroMed has not managed to emerge from its Eurocentric vision to adopt holistic Mediterranean-Thinking about migration (Zapata-Barrero, 2020). Migration remains a negative issue that hampers any claim to stability in the region, and gives voice to the narrative of the security of European states. In these 25 years, recognition of urban migration governance has not even been included on the agenda. My premise is that this frustrating story is closely related to the state methodology that drives most of the EuroMed governance of Mediterranean migration. Put differ-



ently, this is because the Barcelona Process has neglected the major role that Mediterranean cities play in the governance of Mediterranean migration. When re-evaluating the cooperation and coordination mechanisms for the construction of the Mediterranean region we should include urban governance on the EuroMed agenda. This is not just my opinion but constitutes a framework of recommendation of the current global migration agenda, which we should take seriously and look for ways to apply it to put EuroMed migration back on the agenda.

*A new factor of instability may emerge if there is no coordinated and cooperative strategic framework for urban governance of Mediterranean migration*

Based on projected growth in urbanisation and migration, cities are likely to become an integral part of human mobility in the near future. Thus, their urban governance capabilities will probably become a new structural parameter to be taken into account, as will climate change (*EuroMedMig Policy Brief*, 2019) and the current Covid-19 pandemic scenarios (*GRITIM-UPF Policy Brief*, 2020). The recognition of the power of cities in influencing cross-Mediterranean mobility and settlement (inclusion and diversity policies) of migrants needs to be assessed. This approach to urban governance can provide new forms of pressure due to uncontrolled urbanisation, and can even lead to political and social transformations. Thus, a new factor of instability may emerge if there is no coordinated and cooperative strategic framework for urban governance of Mediterranean migration. To summarise this empirical premise in one sentence, there is a strong interface between the urbanisation process and the migration patterns that needs to shape a future Mediterranean migration agenda. The development

of conceptual, theoretical and methodological tools to explore it would certainly help improve a new paradigm of Mediterranean migration governance.

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