

# Unity and Diversity in Euro-Mediterranean Identities: Euro-European and Arabo-Mediterranean Dimensions

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IT IS WIDELY RECOGNIZED that the historical interactions between the peoples surrounding the Mediterranean Sea have largely contributed to the drawing of the cultural, political and religious civilization of the region and affected the itineraries of several other movements occurring in other regions of the world. The Romans, the Islamic golden age, the Middle Ages, and the Modern Era testify to an original history that is indispensable to consider in order to comprehend the renaissance of the Euro-Mediterranean identity as a central issue to decorticate the present situation. This research is a reflection on the distinction to be made when approaching the Euro-Mediterranean identity as composed of diverse and multiple characteristics. The implications of such a dichotomized identity in a globalized world need to be examined by revisiting its history through their common bonds that rely on their past collective memories, but also through what makes them distinct from one another today. The paper begins by highlighting the importance of reflecting on national identities as a concept that is changing over time, places and the introduction of new actors on the international scene. Next, it stresses the common European identity in the light of the history of Europe and the European Union, and contrasts it with the Arab Mediterranean identity. It then calls for an essential Euro-Mediterranean dialogue in the light of a common identity in order to reflect on a common future.

In the modern concept of the nation-state, tools such as education, myths, legends, and fantasies along with other things have been used to strengthen the sense of community, to unite and reproduce, and also to reinforce, transmit and spread what is conceptualized as a 'na-

tional culture.' Quite often, definite borders constituting the narratives around the national identity, or what characterizes 'the otherness,' are constructed upon trivial prejudices and stereotypes.

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Today, although nation-states still remain the dominant socio-political organization in the international sphere, they are increasingly challenged by core changes that alter and redefine their conventional roles. The internationalization of the economy and culture, the deliberate transfer of sovereignty from nation-states to supranational structures (such as the European Union), can be considered as factors which have resulted in the appearance of new kinds of identities and the introduction of new aspects of 'the other' in cultural, economic and political terms.

Indeed, our present is an era in which the world is seriously inter-related and in which the international scene witnesses other important actors such as civil society, multinationals, or non-governmental associations. Thus, the renaissance of the Euro-Mediterranean identity, as a central issue on the political scene and among academics, suggests revisiting its history with new eyes. One should rediscover its potential as an essential bridge between other regions and different cultures. Indeed, although for centuries the Mediterranean symbolized a crossroads between the actors of both sides – the Northern shore (Christian Civilization) and the Southern part (Islamic Civilization) –, acting as a historic viaduct for a variety of ethnic, religious and cultural traditions, today the Euro-Mediterranean as a united and diverse land-related identity does not necessarily suggest a vivid and vibrant entity. Rather, if one assumes that a Euro-Mediterranean identity truly exists, one should draw attention to the importance of distinguishing between its root elements. The distinction to be made concerns the Euro-European identity as an outcome of its shared history and culture on the one hand, and the Mediterranean identity as a distinguishable historical links and joint memories on the other. Accordingly, the idea behind the existence of a common Euro-Mediterranean identity relies on what European countries as whole, including the North East ones (not only the Mediterranean ones), and North African and Middle Eastern have and still share together. Their common bond would be their past collective memories and what came up from them.



A COMMON EUROPEAN IDENTITY  
IN THE LIGHT OF THE HISTORY OF EUROPE  
AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

The complexity of national identities is illustrious; they are the product of a combination and a synthesis of various social, political and cultural stories. They are needed for a nation to be. As such, 'nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist' (Gellner 1983, 35). Rather, community identities are related to several constituents such as the history, the accomplishments achieved together, the common vision of the future, etc. but the most essential element is, unquestionably, the territorial dimension because the communities 'derive their distinctiveness from it' (Anderson 1998, 18). In this perspective, Europe today consists of nation-states, all of which had a particular genre of territorial sociabilization that came up with well-established national identities.

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Yet, the idea to unite all the different people of Europe under the same unit goes beyond the geographical dimension. Indeed, one of the first robust connections that bonded Europeans was initially the will to introduce and maintain peace on the continent. The Pan European Movement, created by Coudenhove Kalergi in 1923, was the outcome of a common wish to create an independent block due to the emergence of new global superpowers (USA, Bolshevik Russia). The appearance of such movements was not explained only by the need for political and geo-strategic prevention due to a loss of influence and strength at the international level; it was more of an expression of a common will to create a continental driving force that would lead to a common strategy towards 'foreigners.' Thus, since then, 'the other' has been defined from the European perspective as everything that is not geographically included between the Atlantic Ocean and the Ural Mountains, the Arctic Ocean and the Mediterranean.

Another reason to unite Europeans under the same entity would be their common Judeo-Christian religious history. In fact, in addition to their Judaic origins, Europeans have been linked to Christianity for centuries, through the Holy Roman Empire, from the 'Frankish king and emperor Charlemagne (742–814) and the authority of the pope.' This religious connection represents for Europeans an important di-

[190] mension of a common identity in the sense that religion, as a social and political regulator, has been for a very long time a way to bond Europeans together by common sacred roots of identity. In spiritual terms, 'European political thinking is inspired by the teachings of Augustine and the School of Salamanca' (European values and identity 2005).

Nevertheless, it is worth recalling here that non-European influences cannot be ignored. In reality, Judaism and Christianity have both emerged outside of Europe, and have developed within contexts that happened to be absolutely not European. In this sense, Europeans have throughout history shared common features with other populations that live outside their borders. In fact, their relationship with, and the influence of other continents which have practised the same or a different religion such as Africa or the Middle East is incontestable. In this regard, 'in the construction of the Turkish peril the Hapsburg monarchs and their population saw themselves in the front line. They were the Christian bulwark against the expanding Islam under the Ottoman Empire' (Stråth 2003). In this sense, historic rivalry over religion has contributed to reinforcing a certain sense of Euro-Christian identity, as for example, 'the victory over the Turks in Vienna in 1683 became in the self-reflection Austria's salvation of European Christian unity.' But before that time, the interactions with other religions had greater meaning and interest for Europeans than only rivalry. Indeed, the crusades (1095–1291) have allowed them to discover a very civilized world in the Muslim Oriental states. For the Muslims at that time, God was one part and science and reasoning was another – two clear and separated areas; while Christian Europeans were still referring to the idea that 'I think, so God is.'

Further, the creation of a school of translation of Arab and Hebrew manuscripts played a significant role in permitting the discovery of precious writings belonging to the Greek antiquity. Up until that time, the Greek philosophy such as Aristotle's was completely unknown to Europeans and this era of history, in addition to the legacy of the Roman law, has been one of most important bases of European unification around common principles such as humanism, secularism, democracy and other notions that will emerge from later movements.



From the heritage of Ancient Greece and Rome emerged the Enlightenment, which has in its turn become one of the cornerstones of a common European identity. Jointly, the main historical roots of European identity are 'a combination of Greek philosophy, Roman law, Christianity, humanism and the Enlightenment' (European values and identity 2005).

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So, yes there is a European identity in the form of a European heritage. At the risk of oversimplifying, democracy, human rights, equality, the rule of law, etc., are principles which constitute the moral base of a European identity. From the East to the West and with a broad and diverse Europe, such principles enable Europeans to unite under the same bonding agent.

European social and cultural identities as a historical development have later on taken additional dimensions. The present situation of Euro-European identities has acquired further aspects, especially with worldwide phenomena such as globalization and cosmopolitanism and more specifically, the European Union integration. On 14 September 1999, Romano Prodi in his speech at the European Parliament emphasized the idea that the Europeans need to create a kind of 'union of hearts and minds, underpinned by a strong shared sentiment of a common destiny.' Indeed, since the creation of the European Union, advocates of integration and analysts of European public opinion have come to refer increasingly to the notion of European Identity. European attitudes began to be investigated and the sense of the European community emerged in academic and scientific research. This is because the decisions of the European Union started to have an important and direct hold on European citizens. Now, Europeans can travel easily across the continent, they can work in countries other than their own, students can effortlessly spend time abroad, and more and more national norms are now the meager application of European decisions. However, we need to make a distinction here between the institutional establishment of identities and collective bargaining, and how European people internalize them. In fact, we know little about how a Spanish person came to consider himself/herself in terms of identity after the establishment of the European Union. With the complexity and the diversity inside Europe, the references of identity

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are multiple. Indeed, considering this Spanish person as first, 'Spanish' then as 'European,' and then whatever may be his/her personal reference of identity, can be wrong. If this same person comes to be living in a small village in Cataluña, his/her sense of identity would be completely different. Indeed, the majority of Spanish people identify themselves with Spain as well as with the region where they belong. Someone from Cataluña may feel at the first level as a Catalanian, then Spanish, European and maybe at the last level, Mediterranean. Contrary to frequent beliefs, the development of European identities does not necessarily mean the decline of national and local identities. In fact, it seems that Europeans acquire their identities by level of importance.

With the enlargement of the European Union to twenty-seven member states, the issue of identity and diversity became complex and fragile in a Europe where different languages, cultures and customs coexist. Today, after devastating wars that ended up with a regional integration, Europeans do unite under the same political identity, but the diversity of their identities makes it harder to speak about unity. In reality, there are in many European countries minorities living side by side peacefully or not, who do not necessarily identify themselves with aspects of the so-called European identity. Indeed, we can find Romanians, Bulgarians, and even Russians in Greece; Portugal is full of people from Angola, Brazil, Mozambique, and Ukraine. Many Albanians are in Macedonia, and there are thousands of migrants from China, South America and North Africa in Spain. London, Paris and Rome, three main European capitals are known to be full of migrants coming from all over the world. Thus, the sense of European identity varies and depends a lot on the historical roots of each group making Europe. For example, a Moroccan Muslim family living inside the border of a European state may certainly adapt to all of its realities. However, this same family may also feel more related to its state of origins than to the European country in which it lives since most of Muslim families are issued from the phenomenon of immigration.

So, during the debates over the creation of the 'European Union' in the 1950s – a European continent economically, politically and 'culturally' united – the attempt of policy makers to propose values and



establish a collective identity was under the slogan of ‘united in diversity.’ As stated above, Europeans had already respectively their own cultures and identity references; and they had to adapt and assimilate new constituent features of what it is to be European. The question that arises here is whether it is possible to apply this notion of ‘united in diversity’ to the peoples of the Mediterranean? [193]

Today it is easier to find commonalities between Europeans and to define the characteristics of their common sense of being a European, than to determine who is and who feels being a Mediterranean. Further, the fragmentation of the geo-political reality of the Mediterranean region and the break-down of communication between its inhabitants does not allow for the existence of a positive and cheerful model as ‘united in diversity.’ For its part, the wounds caused by the wars in Europe had the time to heal; and today we can witness the realization of a continental peaceful coexistence.

#### THE ARAB MEDITERRANEAN IDENTITY

‘In both the physical and human sphere, the Mediterranean is a crossroads, the Mediterranean is a heteroclite and coherent image into which everything emerges and settles back into an original unit.’ Fernand Braudel in this statement (quoted in Lonni 2003) gives a broader sense to the Mediterranean as both a local bridge and an area where human exchanges have been intense during the past and where diversity emerges from unity. The people living in the Mediterranean do have a shared ancient culture and established relations. However today, the sea has been transformed from a spiral of prosperity, full of life and tolerance to a sea representing a block between inter-continental conflicts and contrasts.

The presence of national identities in the Mediterranean is full of controversy because of the doubt around their authenticity. Some of them are, indeed, the result of a long historical and cultural homogeneity; others are the product of imagination and are far from the local history. In fact, many of the Mediterranean nation-states are born from the decolonization process that had massively occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century. The way in which the process had developed came from a new international phenomenon

[194] which advocated control of the people's movements by fixing barriers and frontiers. Rather than tolerating and encouraging the fluidity of groups and their unpredictability, the international scenario demanded more management and control. In the meantime, the European concept of national identity has been well-articulated, evoking similarity and shared values, but also suggesting separation and differences from 'the other.'

The breakings off in the Mediterranean basin have been provoked by national separations and the emergence of ideas such as civilizations in conflict. The present political landscape together with the emphasis on cultural and industrial inferiority, tend to separate the Mediterranean basin into two parts. The North side is characterized by development, modernization and Western ideas while the South shore is portrayed as the Oriental part, weak and where we find the discomfort of the diversity and the underdeveloped condition. In this regard, the European identity is based on what is common to its citizens, but also what differentiates them from the others, as if the role of identity is to make the distinction between the self and the others. They tend to emphasize their differences from people inside their borders such as the migrants and especially the Muslims living within Europe and outside such as people of the South Mediterranean. In this sense, the Mediterranean seems to be severely split into two distinct parts, and centuries of common history seems to have disappeared from memories.

It is worth here to mention that the Mediterranean is not composed of a single and static identity. Indeed, we need to think in terms of multiple belongings, as a person from the Mediterranean can enjoy different belongings to social groups without losing his or her own specificity. In fact, many identities can develop and expand especially if one works on breaking down this dominant North-South dichotomy and the Christian-Muslim opposition. With the purpose of reinventing a common identity, one should look at the reasons behind such a separation and try to solve it by learning from past-mistakes as well as giving new dynamics to the region by emphasizing the foundations of a common society. The Barcelona process has tried to put into practice this movement but without any concrete results. The reasons behind the deep hole separating the two sides of the Mediterranean have not



been sufficiently investigated by the persons concerned and this makes conflict inevitable.

In many respects, European and Arabo-Islamic societies are characterized by different cultures, religions and norms, but this does not imply that they cannot get along with each other. These differences have to be examined in order to break down stereotypes and to improve the different understanding of each other. Indeed, 'Far from thinking of Islam as alien then, the West cannot help but share the understanding of Islam as anything but time-honored and a way of life of peace. Indeed as the *Holy Quran* (49:12) says: O people! We created you from a single pair of a male and female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other, not that you may despise each other.'

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The question that arises here concerns exclusively the Mediterranean identity. Indeed, beyond the stereotypes and the constructed ideas around this region, what are the components of the Mediterranean identity? As the distinction has already been made at the present, we will have to examine it in terms of the North-South dichotomy, but with great attention not to fall into the trap of caricature. The common memories of the people from the Mediterranean have to be taken into consideration in order to understand past dynamics, but it is also important for building future strategies that would unite the region with respect for people's mind of both sides.

In this regard, the dominance of Arabo-Muslim culture had begun under the Umayyad caliphate from the mid 7th to the mid 8th Gregorian centuries. During this era, the conquests of the lands stretched from Egypt to Morocco, bringing to nomadic and settled indigenous people the Arabic language, the Arab religion (Islam) and the Arab culture. Today, the Arab majority in North Africa and the Middle East has resulted from past substantial movements of people in this area. Berbers and Copts, who existed there long before the arrival of Arabs, are now considered as minority groups inside the borders of official Arab nations. They have, in some respects, resisted and attempted to impose themselves, but their numeric inferiority has pushed them to adopt some of the dominant aspects of the Arabo-Islamic culture. Indeed, 'the Copts, who reside in Egypt, are characterized as having adopted the Arabic language while resisting Islam, while the Berbers

who reside in the Maghreb did the opposite by maintaining the Berber language while adopting the Muslim faith' (Dellolio 2008). However, it is well-known that in the Mediterranean region, no religion has ever managed to prevail over another. Indeed, the Mediterranean Sea is a frontier between three continents and a bridge between three monotheistic religions, and its position has always made it a privileged place of intercultural dialogue. In fact, the Mediterranean has always been 'the place where, in spite of Catholic and Islamic holy wars, crusades, the reconquista, the two Ottoman sieges of Vienna, the sad history of colonialism and the bloody wars of colonial liberation, no universalism or fundamentalism was ever permanently established' (Zolo 2005).

The Mediterranean is usually associated with the Arab world; but who are really the Arabs? In a time when movies and media dominate the world's perceptions of the others, the Arabs are, in reality, little understood. The classical images of the rich Sheikh, the belly dancers, and the scaring terrorist do absolutely not reflect the diversity of the present Arab society and the richness of Arab history.

Arabs are the people who are, first, united by the Arabic language as their mother tongue and who consider themselves as Arabs. The strategic ethnic designation developed by the British during the hegemony of their empire was to associate the Arab world with the Middle East, which includes also some non-Arab countries such as Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Israel. However, the Arab history is closely related with Muslim history, while the Arabs can also be Christians or Jews, as well as most Muslims are in reality from non-Arab countries such as Indonesia and other countries from sub-Saharan Africa.

Language and literature, and especially poetry, are essential to the understanding of the emergence of a common Arab identity. In fact, before the arrival of Islam, a common poetic language which was Arabic appeared as evidence to a shared culture among the different tribes of the Arabic Peninsula. The poets who illustrate this pre-Islamic age were the political representatives of rivalry in each tribe. They have been composing lyrical poems 'Qasida' to praise the values of their style of life such as honor, generosity, courage, solidarity, loyalty, etc. In this regard, a great proportion of this past common history has



been the basis of a common Arab consciousness and a shared sense of identity.

Under European colonialism, the Arab world had cautiously maintained its identity by preserving its hereditary traditions and virtues through a passive resistance which, in reality, has made the Arabs somehow rigid and inflexible in the domains of ideas and education. The foreigners were both admired and feared, their systems, ideas and behaviors were imposed on a population who had already its own cultural identity. Their resistance took the form of returning to original ideas and ceasing to question traditional concepts. Thus, the process of liberation from the outsiders took place by resisting against their values which were intended to dominate people's minds.

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AN ESSENTIAL EURO-MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE  
IN THE LIGHT OF A COMMON IDENTITY

What does the Mediterranean symbolizes in terms of spirit, habits and thinking? One should think about what is common to both sides of the Mediterranean in order to look at a common future with optimism and confidence. In fact, we can think about many representations that would make a person from both Morocco and Italy identify with it. As is well-known, 'Europe was born in the South, growing from Mediterranean roots. Like a sheet of blotting paper placed over a large blue ink blot, Europe has nurtured itself by absorbing the blue of the Mediterranean, the blue of the philosophers and the prophets' (Stetié 1999).

One of the major aspects that both shores of the Mediterranean share is obviously the climate. The Mediterranean climate is known to be sweet and rainy in the winter and sunny and hot during the summer. Throughout history, the climate has shown that it has a direct influence over the people's habits and customs. In fact, even though nature and climate does not represent a strong unifying factor, it still constitutes a joint landscape culture.

Further, the fusion between different cultures of the Mediterranean has made people advance in several domains. For example, the contact between Spanish and Arabs has produced a mutual influence which encouraged cooperative studies and a prosperous civilization. Later on,

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we will find that the Spanish people and Moroccans or Algerians have many shared habits, such as being joyful persons who like chatting and partying. Food customs could also be a symbol of the Mediterranean. Indeed, the people 'in the Mediterranean basin whether Turkish, Greek, southern Italian or Spanish, share in a common Mediterranean civilization of olive trees, bay leaves and the fish' (Toprak 1996). Here, by thinking of the commonalities, even though they are insufficient, not important and irrelevant to the contemporary political scene, we start breaking down barriers and imagine a possible reconciliation based on simple things of life such as food tables where a Moroccan, a Libyan, an Italian, a French person and a Turk can share food. As Duhamel once said 'the Mediterranean ends where the olive tree no more grows'. In addition to that, the people of the Mediterranean can possibly agree on many personal issues such as the importance of the family and how they commonly refer to it in the same way. The sense of honor and shame is shared by all the people of the world, but the way a Greek father acts within its family seems to be very close to how another father from Tunisia would behave. Without a doubt, patriarchy is very common to the people of the Mediterranean, taking its origins from a shared past where families were much interconnected.

What unites the Euro-Mediterranean people goes beyond faiths based on religions: Islam, Judaism or Christianity. The Europeans have their own identity; they can choose not to be Mediterranean. The fact that the Southern part of the Mediterranean has not yet reached the level of development of the North makes it harder for its people to not wish to attain the advancements of Europeans. Indeed, it seems obvious for a population to identify with what is considered as the best. It seems obvious that the political discourses today towards the Mediterranean are full of euro-centricity; the modernity as well as all the values they convey are seductive and place them in a superior position. Yesterday, people from the Mediterranean were one single family; that is not to say that they were one single entity, they were not and never will be. The Mediterranean is rich and diverse, full of differences in all terms. Today, this family is broken into two distinct parts, one is inferior, and the other is advanced and powerful. People from



the southern part struggle between the will to import the successful model of the Europeans, and the hope of seeing their past civilization resurrecting. The sad party of the story is that the population of the Maghreb and a part of the Middle East does identify itself with the European lifestyle and habits. They do listen to the same music, wear the same clothes and even sometimes, speak the same language. It is arguable that this it is due to phenomena like globalization, migration or colonialism. But it is also because they consider that one part of themselves have succeeded and the other have not. It is incorrect to believe that the people of the South-Mediterranean refuse to apply values such as democracy and the respect for human rights in their countries because they are culturally different and they did not manage to create a model of their own, while the Mediterranean was once the vehicle of such ideas and philosophies. The European part of the Mediterranean on the contrary does not identify with its south, it rather searches to resemble these more advanced than them, such as the US.

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However, if we notice the travels that occur in one year between the two parts, one would be astonished by the important flow of people from Europe going searching for diversity elsewhere; and people coming from North Africa or the Middle East, ready to die to reach Europe. Is it only a question of escaping from poverty? Or is it only a question of tourism for Europeans? No, I don't think so; I rather believe it is for both parts a quest for the reconciliation of past memories and an unconscious common will to retie the links in order to work together on a common future.

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