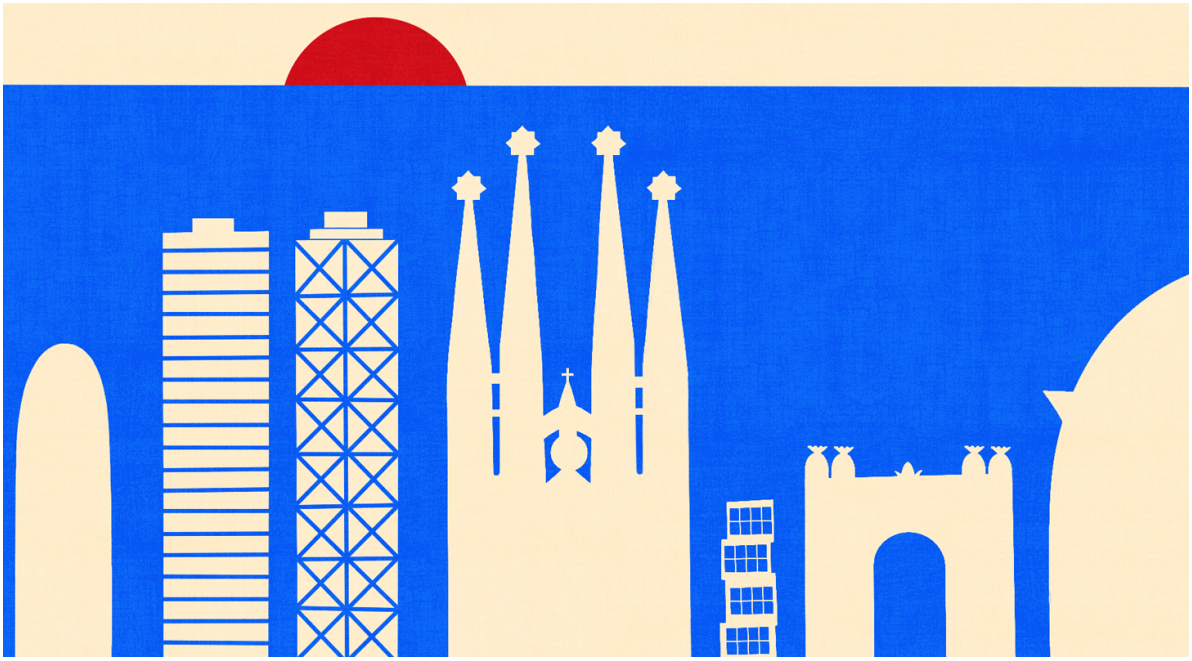
GOVERNANCE AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE EUROMEDITERRANEAN SPACE

A Vision for a Shared Mediterranean Project

Elisabet Nebreda



“Not even fish would dare to swim in the [Mediterranean] sea without showing the insignia of the Catalan kings,” proclaimed Admiral Corral Llança, according to the Chronicle of Ramon Muntaner. A phrase that captures the eternal link between Catalonia and the Mediterranean. A unifying light that shines into the night of history and that today we want to rekindle with a view to the future.

Indeed, the idea of the Mediterranean is a characteristic feature of Catalonia that has traditionally acted as an added value of its external projection. Evoked as a historical benchmark, the Mediterranean character of Catalonia has been identified above all with exchanges, both commercial and cultural, framed in complex and changing political and geographical contexts.

For Catalonia, the Euro-Mediterranean partnership that emerged from the Barcelona Declaration 25 years ago has been a central element of its external projection. On the other hand, membership of the European Union has allowed us to share a project that offers the added value of the neighbourhood and the association: a relationship between peers in a Mediterranean area of cooperation and partnership.

> The Mediterranean Strategy of Catalonia emerges as a tool with a vision for a Europeanist and Mediterraean future, strengthening relations between the societies on both shores of the Mediterranean

And still within the European framework, Catalonia has advocated an innovative southern Europe that, far from being peripheral, is an emerging area of competitiveness on the continent. And to this end it has driven alliances and networks in its immediate western Mediterranean vicinity.

At the Government of Catalonia, we understand that in order to deploy a global strategy in the region, we must equip ourselves with instruments that adapt to the reality of this context. Therefore, at the Ministry for Foreign Action and the European Union we wanted to build a multi-year strategy that marks a vision and a line of work towards this region and that incorporates the foundations for an inclusive, intercultural, sustainable and feminist foreign policy. The Mediterranean Strategy of Catalonia, MedCat 2030 promoted by the Government, emerges from this context as a tool with a vision for the future in which we not only reaffirm our fully Europeanist and Mediterranean commitment, but also prioritise the strengthening of relations and the exchange of knowledge between the societies on both shores of the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean Strategy of Catalonia

The need for decisive action in this field is determined, first, by the social, cultural and economic opportunities it entails. Some significant data shows this: 21% of the total number of foreign residents in Catalonia comes from the southern shore of the Mediterranean; the Mediterranean represents 28% of all Catalan cooperation in the world. Almost 25% of university mobility originates in a Mediterranean country, albeit mostly northern. Today, about thirty centres, international institutions and networks dedicated exclusively to the Mediterranean are based in Catalonia. Similarly, relations with the Mediterranean represent 32.7% of foreign trade in Catalonia, with sectors such as agri-food, where Catalonia has exported 25% more in recent years than it imports from the entire Mediterranean. With Barcelona as the most important port in terms of passenger volume, Catalonia is the largest intermodal logistics hub in southern Europe, and the region accounts for 28% of the total volume managed in Catalan ports.

The Mediterranean must also face major global challenges and this leads to external action aimed at building long-term partnerships that enable us to respond to the social, humanitarian, environmental, political and economic challenges that affect the region. To address this global dimension, one of the fundamental axes of the Mediterranean strategy is commitment.

A commitment to the establishment of a regional model that is a counterpoint to the “border Mediterranean ” that creates disaffection within fortress Europe. We think of the asset of a Catalan society increasingly enriched by its diversity and with great civic involvement, in which the values of exchange, hosting and interculturality emerge as Mediterranean features for Europe. At a moment of increased xenophobic and extremist discourses, we believe in a Mediterranean narrative linked to the concept of diversity, citizenship and dialogue.

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The priority of fostering strong and effective relations with the neighbouring countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean lies in the objective of promoting changes that translate into a profound transformation of the region. After the wave of popular mobilisations experienced by the south since 2011, we must keep in mind the value of the undeniable dynamism of many social, economic and cultural actors on the southern shore who, with their drive, are managing to open debates on issues related to freedom, participation, gender, and others.

For this reason, the Government of Catalonia seeks to champion and integrate gender policies in its Mediterranean external action, understanding that young people and women must become key actors and drivers of change to alleviate current inequalities. In addition, the actions provided for in the lines set out in the action plans will serve to publicise and promote the exchange of good practices and gender policies in the areas identified as relevant.

Renewed vision

These actors ask us for a commitment in this shared geographical, cultural and economic space, with a partnership that provides responses to the fundamental challenges posed by the societies of this basin. For Catalonia, the idea of a Mediterranean citizenship is central to putting the issue of rights and freedoms and shared challenges back on the political agenda. In this context, the European and Mediterranean spirit of Catalonia can become a stimulus to contribute precisely to the Mediterranean playing a key role in the demands of the societies of the south of the basin.

Catalonia not only occupies a physical space in the Mediterranean but is Mediterranean

and, in this respect, a second axis of its strategy is the promotion of a renewed vision of European policies in the region.

As part of Southern Europe, we share with our southern neighbours those challenges arising from their peripheral situation and which mainly concern the aspects of connectivity, cohesion of their territories, sustainability of the productive model and key sectors in competitiveness such as the tourism and agri-food model.

However, we must not forget that this neighbourhood with the countries of the southern shore means that we feel more keenly and harshly the consequences of the shameful lack of solidarity of the member states of the European Union in matters of migration and asylum. A selfishness that is turning our sea into the grave of thousands of people fleeing famine, wars and persecution in their countries or simply seeking a better future for themselves and their families. We cannot ignore the cries for help of thousands of human beings that the roar of the waves has silenced forever. There is an urgent need for a common migration and asylum policy that puts solidarity, security, respect for human rights and, above all, people at the heart of everything.

In the framework of territorial cooperation, and despite the complexity of what we can call the “European Mediterranean arc”, it is necessary to emphasise the interest this arouses among the regions of Southern Europe, spurred on by European programmes that aspire to develop the areas of cohesion, sustainability and competitiveness. Therefore, with the MEDCAT 2030 strategy we want to highlight the positive impact that this southern area can have on the construction of the European project if it takes advantage of its potential and, for example, fosters models of social innovation that are committed to a responsible and sustainable co-management of resources as an engine for a more sustainable and inclusive development of the whole basin. The diversity and geographical proximity of Southern Europe also favours the deployment of citizen-centred technological and digital innovations in key areas such as health, mobility, public administration, education and the blue economy.

The European Mediterranean forms a space of relations between the networks of multilevel actors, which form a framework that enhances Euroregional synergies and alliances. For Catalonia, it is essential to build a coherent strategy in Europe that values this diverse territorial perspective and takes advantage of the capacity of Euroregional and cross-border actors to promote reinforced cooperation in key sectors.

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Nevertheless, a necessary condition for benefiting from these potentialities is the consolidation of an integrated and inclusive area of growth that is committed to polycentrism and benefits from the infrastructure and technological endowment of smart cities and territories. In Catalonia we are committed to highlighting the existing synergies promoted through the networks and work on multilevel structures that provide added value.

The recovery of the spirit of multilateral and multilevel collaboration and territorial cooperation in the framework of networking is essential to drive forward an open and inclusive development of the Mediterranean area, especially the Western Mediterranean. The strengthening of Euro-Mediterranean territorial cooperation programmes and the progressive establishment of a macro-region with a basin vision would strengthen this integrated approach. In Catalonia we want to develop important activity through our active participation in the Euroregional, cross-border and transnational networks.

It should be remembered, for example, with regard to the cross-border area, that Catalonia is a member of the Pyrenees Working Community (CTP) together with the Spanish and French Pyrenean regions. Catalonia has also actively contributed to the deployment of the Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion, an area of enhanced cooperation together with Occitanie and the Balearic Islands. In the European advocacy dimension, we are actively working on the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions and its Intermediterranean Commission (IMC-CRPM). We also support a single networking platform: the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance, led by the CRPM, the Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion, Medcities, Arco Latinio and the Adriatic-Ionian Euroregion.

In short, and as a third axis of the Mediterranean strategy, we highlight alliances to provide visibility, encourage relations and exchanges and project and bring the Mediterranean closer to Catalan society. With the approval of this long-term strategy, the Government seeks to make its contribution to a dynamic Mediterranean community that, far from being an abstract ideal, defines opportunities and moves forward with projects. Hence the desire to intensify instruments that promote exchange and reciprocity on both shores, as well as on the scale of the western Mediterranean and the Levant.

Therefore, we propose to place Catalonia as a Mediterranean hub. We want to position Catalonia and Barcelona as actors committed to the transformation of the region, promoting the establishment in Catalonia of a critical mass in the Mediterranean area (research and analysis centres), networks and associations and institutions, and foster the creation of an ecosystem of interconnected bodies that form alliances and act together in order to encourage a transformative change in the region. We want to strengthen the institutional presence and promote institutional, economic and cultural exchanges and exchanges between civil society associations and organisations to improve mutual knowledge and share innovative experiences with actors on the southern shore.

Conclusions

Finally, I would like to highlight something to which I have not made explicit reference, but which, if you look closely, has been present throughout this article when talking about cooperation, gender, economic stimulation, the environment, education, networking and cooperation. When we talk about the MEDCAT 2030 strategy, we are also talking about the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. These are objectives to which the Government of Catalonia is fully committed.

The implementation of the SDGs is particularly necessary in the Mediterranean region, as this area is experiencing chronic political, economic, social and environmental difficulties. The UN 2030 Agenda is a unique opportunity to improve the well-being, inclusion, peace and security of Mediterranean communities and territories. The cross-cutting approach to how we work and connect all the areas of action that make up this global agenda is particularly useful in addressing the various common challenges facing all countries in the region: it provides the opportunity to open spaces for interaction and better cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Global challenges such as climate emergency, deep inequalities, global pandemics, or long-running wars cannot be excuses for growing authoritarianism or individual state recipes. These shared challenges must give birth to a new system of global governance based on multilateral cooperation that puts people and the planet at the centre.

The 2030 Agenda is a roadmap for a better future, as the old structures and forms of government will not take us to a new place. To meet the SDGs we need to put a chair at the global decision-making table for local and regional governments, as they are closest to and best know the people and territories they represent. Building a better world, starting with what surrounds us and our immediate area, such as the Mediterranean, is a duty we owe to ourselves, and to future generations.



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Elisabet Nebreda és secretària d'Acció Exterior i de la Unió Europea del Departament d'Acció Exterior, Relacions Institucionals i Transparència de la Generalitat de Catalunya. És llicenciada en Dret per la Universitat Pompeu Fabra i té un Màster en Relacions Internacionals per la Universitat de Nottingham i un postgrau en Dret de la Unió Europea per la Universitat de Barcelona. Abans de la seva etapa a l'administració, va desenvolupar gran part de la seva carrera professional a la consultora GEA - Gabinet Europeu d'Assessorament. Durant el període 2014-2018, va treballar al Parlament Europeu com a assessora del Grup Parlamentari Verds/ALE en qüestions relacionades amb els drets, les llibertats, la justícia i els afers exteriors.