

Imaginative rescaling: the making of Mediterranean scale

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1. THE MEDITERRANEAN SCALE: OPEN ISSUES

Since the 1990s, the Mediterranean scale has become more and more important in the realm of international relationships and, particularly, in the definition of many actors' macro-regional policies: from the individual European countries to the EU, international bodies (like NATO or the UN) and supranational organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Notwithstanding the multiplication of debates and analyses, the foundation of Mediterranean research centers and the over-abundance of institutional initiatives, the Mediterranean scale seems too complex to be managed through the instruments of International Relations studies. The multiplicity of possible discourses on the Mediterranean erodes the chance of obtaining a unitary point of view from the very foundations and makes the question "does the Mediterranean exist?" all but useless. The answer might be positive or negative depending on our situation. As Fareri argues:

looking at the Mediterranean, the first question we should ask is whether it represents a meaningful analytical field. If the lenses we look through are those of public policy analysis, posing this questions means asking if there are policies that assume the Mediterranean as the realm of their intervention and, even before this, if there are problems or opportunities, associated with this territorial level, which can be fruitfully examined – or exploited – on that scale (Fareri, 1995: 323).

In this article, our aim is to evaluate whether the Mediterranean scale can play a role as a real "field of action" – i.e. a unitary realm of intervention within a broader process of reorganization of international relations on the global scale – or whether it is doomed to increasing marginality, to the advantage of other scales that seem more consistent and homogeneous. To this end, our reasoning will be twofold. The first issue is related to the (im)practicality of effective political action and therefore to the (un)feasibility of real government on the Mediterranean scale. The second crucial point hinges on the difficulty of conceptualizing the Mediterranean scale itself, which is closely interrelated with the "competition" from more uniform and "aggressive" scales of analysis and action.

1.1 FROM POLITICS TO POLICIES, FROM GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNANCE.

The difficulties in conceptualizing the Mediterranean region as a unitary realm become evident when considering the progressive erosion of the potential applicability of concepts like "politics" and "government", in favor of notions such as "policies" and "governance". In other terms, analyzing the Mediterranean in a geo-political perspective, the most structured and harshest forms of social and political interaction – like the building of a political arena and of organized forms of co-government, e.g. the harmonization of the sources of juridical legitimacy – make room for a plethora of specific interventions in particular areas of cooperation and assign an increasing role in shaping social, economic, cultural and political changes to non-institutional actors, like non-governmental organizations (NGOs), associations, grass-roots movements and, more generically, to "civil society".

There is no doubt that such a change in political culture is happening on each scale, from the regional to the European, passing through the national, from the local to the global, and it is not a peculiarity of the Mediterranean. It is enough to note about the redefinition of urban and regional authorities' responsibilities in Europe, or about the growing emphasis that the European Commission lays on the concepts of governance and of civil society's participation. The very concept of "territorial competitiveness", which is fundamental in the writing of development policies – e.g. the "White Book on Competitiveness" by the EU – is founded on awareness of the limits of traditional forms of political action and government, to leave room to a broader range of actors and

subjects, conveying specific and precisely located concerns – the so called *stakeholders*. However, in the previous cases, the emphasis on policies is not uprooted from the codified modes of political action and the diffusion of governance praxis coexists with the perpetuation of organized and hierarchical structures of government. The very process of political devolution does not imply a *de-structuring and obsolescence of government forms*, but rather a *multiplication of government levels*. In a similar fashion, although EU functions depend on the definition of policies, worked out by technocratic bodies like the European Commission and the European Investment Bank – which epitomize an aspiration towards “objective” policies, without any political intervention, a parallel process of political integration is ongoing, symbolized by the democratic election of the European Parliament, which actually legitimizes the Commission itself. In other terms, we are facing a balance between politics and policies, as well as between government and governance: politics and government are not simply substituted, but rather they change, still preserving their central place in practice.

In the case of the Mediterranean, this balance seems to be utterly missing: the creation of the Mediterranean scale disregards the political and governmental dimensions almost completely. This passage is apparently counter-intuitive and it therefore needs to be carefully explained: the first pillar of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is, in actual fact, politics, so it might sound odd to say that politics is underestimated. Similarly, 90% of Euro-Mediterranean relationships occur through bilateral liaisons between the EU and each Third Mediterranean Country (TMC), and therefore with a strong involvement of structured forms of government on the national scale. To what extent is it therefore possible to speak about a deficiency of politics and government? To be precise, when talking about a lack of politics in the making of the Mediterranean scale, we allude to the lack of a real debate between different political cultures, where the ultimate goal is the establishment of a unitary political culture or, at least, a balance between a mixture of political viewpoints. When it comes to Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, the idea that it is possible to run politics just by formulating co-operation policies is quite common. It is not by chance that the political pillar, however miscalculated in comparison to the economic one, consists either in policies designed for the specific sphere of security and management of migration flows, or in policies aimed at modernizing the bureaucracy of TMCs and democratizing their regimes. To be more explicit, the political pillar is focused on institutions – such as democracy, human rights and, more recently, administrative decentralization – that are taken for granted as values, dodging the appraisal of real political negotiation.

An analogous discourse is applicable to the hypertrophy of governance over government. Prevailing bilateral agreements are the expression of an enduring disequilibrium within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership since its remote genesis in the late 70s. There is a clear dissimilarity between two regional blocks – the European Union and the TMCs – deeply differentiated in the degree of internal integration. On the one hand, Europe is rapidly pursuing greater political and governmental assimilation, albeit with some unavoidable difficulties; on the other hand, the group of TMCs, after the decline of Pan-Arabism, cannot find either a common political stance or institutionalized and structured coordination procedures. Furthermore, these two bodies change according to a variable geometry, as the former grows, compressing the space of the latter and marginalizing it. Since the 80s, in widening the scale of its integration process, the EU ended up incorporating European Mediterranean Countries, such as Spain, Portugal, Greece and, more recently Malta e Cyprus, forecasting even the admittance of Turkey into the EU. Obviously this process has triggered a geometrical reduction of the TMCs’ space, now overlapping more and more with the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. As a consequence, non-European TMCs have become increasingly marginalised and have had to face the extension of EU benefits to competing economies, like the Spanish and Greek ones.

Another feature making real governmental union on the Euro-Mediterranean scale difficult, if not impossible, is the fact that, evidently, the EU overlaps only partially the Mediterranean scale, encompassing Central, Northern and an increasing portion of Eastern Europe. This “geographical”

evidence of the hiatus between Europe and the Mediterranean means that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership must take into account political dynamics enhanced by a growing number of actors, substantially extraneous to the Mediterranean world, and taking place on a different scale.

As a third and final point, the emphasis that the EU places on civil society empowerment in the TMCs undermines the prospect for government processes on the Euro-Mediterranean scale. The increasing share of funds allocated through Western NGOs – dialoguing directly with local associations and movements – mirrors the lack of European trust toward TMC governments, often criticized because of their deficit of democracy. This process has triggered two important consequences: it delegitimizes the TMC governments – which are the predestined partners for political convergence in the Mediterranean – while attaining the unintended upshot of enhancing PTM elites' oppression of civil society. For instance, the Arab Republic of Egypt's 1997 law boosted legal jurisdiction over both Egyptian and Western NGOs.

In the broad and multifaceted framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, there are some projects consistent with the principles of politics and government, such as the organization of training programs for civil servants from the two shores or the meetings of the Members of Parliaments of the countries involved in the Barcelona Process. Nevertheless, we can say that these initiatives are extremely marginal within the overall cooperation process between the EU and TMCs. Above all, we maintain that this chasm is to some extent inborn and, for many aspects, unavoidable and irretrievable. It is impossible to hypothesize that the EU show a high degree of adaptation to the requests from the southern shore in terms of political culture, e.g. by questioning the secularity of state institutions or the prominence of democracy over other government forms. Similarly, there are actual limitations to TMC integration into a truly Euro-Mediterranean government structure: Turkey's admission into the Union, if it were to take place, will symbolize tangible Hercules' columns for Mediterranean EU enlargement. As far as the other TMCs are concerned, the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA) and the pursuit of a generic political convergence will be the last impassable frontiers of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. As a consequence, the focal point – which will be discussed in the conclusion of this paper – is understanding how policies and governance processes might be managed with a different approach, in order to narrow rather than increase the breadth and depth of the Euro-Mediterranean fracture.

1.2 THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE ARAB PHOENIX

Although this is not the place for an in-depth analysis of the concept of "scale", we shall concentrate on just a few necessary remarks, to grasp why and how this concept is pivotal in understanding the relationships between Europe and TMCs. First of all, reflection on the Mediterranean scale means questioning the homogeneity features within its boundaries, i.e. the attributes that unify the Mediterranean beyond the patent differences dividing it into an array of unique places. Looking more closely, we are scrutinizing which meaning the experience of closeness and proximity – so intense in the cultural evocations of the *mare nostrum* – assumes in daily life on the two shores. We know that talking about the Mediterranean does not mean a denial of the multiplicity of places and distances that separate them. Neither does it mean an absolute demand for unification or homogenization: creating the Mediterranean scale does not necessarily reiterate the patterns of globalization. Questioning the Mediterranean entails the search for a tricky balance between homogeneity and mixture, between identity and differentiation, which symbolizes the miraculous endowment that the Mediterranean itself has bestowed on humanity during its glorious moments.

The second feature is that each scale is produced by social, economic, cultural and political processes, which bring into being specific spaces that are recognized as analytical scales. In other

words, there are no unbiased scales, necessarily meaningful and useful to analyze human history: the fact that some scales, like the urban or the national one, are so shared and structured that they appear as crystallized and "more true" than others, is because they are the outcome of processes of more intensive and lengthy territory-building processes – i.e. what we usually call "territorialisation". There are no "natural scales", but only "human scales": this is the same as saying that, with the passing of time, some scales can lose magnitude and even fade away, regaining their significance in later historical eras.

These issues are particularly important with reference to the Mediterranean. If it is true that scales are built socially, the connotation of the Mediterranean scale cannot be assumed from the mere existence of the Mediterranean geomorphological basin: the material – we might say "geographical" – substantiation of Mediterranean space does not mean that the Mediterranean scale is suitable for our analytical needs. Nor can we accept as a guarantee the fact that for many centuries it has been the regional scale *par excellence*, i.e. the space where the relationship between societies and human communities found the primary setting of their arrangements and transformations, to the point of achieving a complex form of political, cultural and economic unity. Its relevance must be evaluated at the present time: the issue is not, in fact, whether the Mediterranean has been a scale, but if it is, nowadays, a useful scale for the analysis of international relations. Following Levy's account for the concept of scale, this is equivalent to questioning whether the Mediterranean is currently a mere area – that is to say a space made of contested and irreducible places, as in Huntington's clash of civilizations scenario – or if, at least partially, this space displays the minimum traits of concord and sharing that typify a place.

In the case of the Mediterranean, the unity issues appears immediately problematic, to the point that even a shared definition of its geographical boundaries appears difficult. The existence of the Mediterranean region is usually defined by the geomorphology of area, the existence of a relatively "closed" maritime space, the climate, the diffusion of certain crops, and the extension of some historical phenomena. In this perspective, it might be argued that the whole Balkans – and therefore also Romania and Bulgaria, or even the whole Black Sea basin, should be encompassed in the analysis of Mediterranean dynamics. More radically, if we abandon, at least momentarily, the most utopian appraisals – which hint evocatively at recognizing in the Mediterranean the realm of a style of life alternative to the Northern European and Western one – and we consider features more "objective" or at least quantifiable, then the leeway of a unity-based approach becomes minimal. Observing such issues as the political and juridical regimes, economic development, demographic trends, international security-related threats, the accessibility of education and health services, life expectation and quality, it is arduous to escape the gloomy representations interpreting the Mediterranean as a "geography of fracture", quoting the title of one of the most influential books about the region.

2. THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP: THE SPATIAL WEAKNESS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SCALE.

2.1 THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE REGIONAL COMPETITION PROCESSES.

The main element countering the making of the unitary Mediterranean scale is probably its fragmentation into sub-regions that are politically, culturally and economically more homogeneous than the Mediterranean as a whole. In some cases, it is the colonial background that directs European interests toward particular areas of the Mediterranean region. Considering, for instance, the *Official Development Assistance* (ODA) that France disbursed to support TMCs, we can easily notice that Maghreb Countries benefit from a privileged relationship with their former colonial

power when compared to the other five countries considered (Egypt, West Bank-Gaza Strip, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon). Between 1989 and 2003, Maghreb Countries received almost 8,000 million dollars out of the overall amount of 12,400 million dollars allocated to all the TMCs. This tendency was reversed only in 1991, because of an extraordinary disbursement to Egypt (almost 800 million dollars); otherwise the ration between the two sub-areas reached the peak of 1:9 in favor of the Maghreb.

Analogously, if we observe the strategic representation of global actors like the World Bank or NATO, it is fairly evident that they never select the Mediterranean as their main field of intervention, focusing their attention instead on sub-regions such as the Balkans or the Middle East. The latter, for example, seems to be strategic in the framework of international relations woven by the United States, as it entails territories – like the Arabian peninsula and Iraq – that are a fundamental center of US energy policies. The conflict between Israel and Palestine is usually contextualised in the specific geo-political framework of stabilization of the Middle East rather than of the Mediterranean, hence influencing the entire set of US cooperation policies.

This difficulty in grasping the unity of the Mediterranean scale, beyond its historical splendor or media and tourist evocations, has important consequences that can be labeled through the conceptual category of “scalar competition”, i.e. the idea that in the neo-liberal agenda territories are compelled to compete against each other in order to attract Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and to conquer confidential diplomatic relationships with Western world powers. After the fall of the Berlin wall, the Mediterranean has in fact witnessed a conspicuous decrease in its strategic international position: one of the main US interests in the area – i.e. preventing the spread of Soviet influence – vanished, while just two keystones survived: the access to fuel resources and the safeguard of Israeli security. Simultaneously, the TMCs started to lose their preferential status in EU foreign policy. The almost complete impracticality of diplomatic cooperation relationships with Eastern Europe before 1989 made TMCs the only interlocutors of the EU’s proximity and neighborhood policy. The establishment of intense relations with the East after the collapse of the Communist block ended up both increasing the competition for European development assistance and ascribing TMCs a secondary role in the European Union’s eyes: the competitors were, in practice, European countries and hence potentially candidates for integration into the EU – an event that happened in 2004, just fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin wall.

The feature that best summarizes the enduring fragmentation processes of the Mediterranean scale – i.e. the emergence of scales judged to be more meaningful and the rise of territorial competition – is undoubtedly the break-down of the basin into two unconnected areas, the Balkans and the TMCs, dependent on two different Union programs, respectively named CARDS and MEDA. This fracture took place in the very foundation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, at the Barcelona Conference in November 1995, where the Mediterranean Balkans were absent, partly because of the violent conflict underway in the former Yugoslavia. The launch of a specific framework for the Western Balkans¹ obviously depends on the need for an appropriate manner of dealing with the special issues generated by the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the consequential worsening of the latent conflict in the area. However, the divide between the Balkan Mediterranean and the TMCs did not depend only on contingent historical events: it was the political answer to a deeper perception of the “Europeanness” of the Balkans in contrast to the Islamic “other” symbolized by the TMCs.

A closer examination of these competition processes will allow us to underline some facets of the “depowerment” – rather than empowerment – of the Mediterranean scale. More precisely, our point will be that Euro-Mediterranean Partnership policies, supposed to strengthen the creation of the Mediterranean scale, is weakening this process, splitting rather than bonding. For this purpose, we have picked out four scales of analysis:

¹ Note that, in EU terminology, the word “Mediterranean” is never mentioned when referring to the Balkans.

- (i) the group labeled MEDA includes the eight “residual” TMCs, i.e. those countries that will never be entitled to even start negotiation towards full integration into the EU, limiting the scope for relations to association and cooperation agreements (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, West Bank/Gaza Strip, Jordan and Lebanon). Consequently, we are not considering in our analysis Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, on the one hand, as they entered – or are entitled to enter –the EU, and, on the other hand, Libya (which is not participating for the time being in the Barcelona Process) and Israel (whose relations with the EU are categorized as “association without cooperation”, because of the development levels already attained by this country);
- (ii) the CARDS group includes Western Balkan countries (Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia-Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania), without considering the fact that Croatia is taking the first steps in the European integration process;
- (iii) the third scale is here named CEEC8 and includes the eight Central and Eastern European countries (hence CEEC) that entered the EU in 2004 (Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Estonia, Latvia e Lithuania);
- (iv) the ensemble of independent countries, born after the dissolution of the USSR, now at the Eastern boundaries of the EU and only partially belonging to the European continent, has been denominated TACIS, with reference to the acronym adopted by the EU cooperation program (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldavia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan).

In our analysis, we considered the amount of *Official Development Assistance* (ODA) allocated in the period 1989-2003, i.e. from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the admission into the EU of a large number of countries that spent the previous fifty years under Soviet influence. As far as the geography of donors is concerned, we have taken into account the three main contributors to development aid: the European Union, the group of member states and the US.

Observing above all the total amount of disbursements, it is unquestionable that the fall of the Iron Curtain took four or five years before producing significant effects on cooperation programs: until 1992, the TMCs seem to be the only beneficiaries of Western development policies, with a growing share of funds assigned to the countries formerly belonging to Yugoslavia. It is only from 1993 that a substantial quota is earmarked for TACIS countries and from the following year also for the CEEC group (**figure 1**).

Another significant aspect is that the broadening of the field of intervention was accompanied by an increase in the overall amount of ODA allocated. At a first glance, the growing availability of funds offers counter-evidence against the scalar competition hypothesis, as the multiplication of the budget would suggest the presence of a win-win game, that is to say, of a situation where all the partners, both Mediterranean and European, take advantage of the broadening of the Western industrial countries’ neighborhood policy. Nonetheless, observing the ODA absolute values allocated to the different scales, one can see that the TMCs’ advantage has been progressively fading away (**figure 2**). Starting from 2000, the date of the transition from the program MEDA I to MEDA II, the proportion has been overturned in support of Balkan and TACIS countries. If we shift our attention from allocations and commitments to effective payments, the framework changes further in favor of the competitor scales, since disbursements for Eastern Europe are often higher than allocation. In particular, the figures record peaks towards European countries, the main one actually occurring in 1995, the year of Barcelona Conference, when disbursements toward CEEC8 rose to over 4 billion dollars, against the TMCs’ 3 billions. Finally, matching the overall Mediterranean with the whole of Eastern Europe – i.e. combining on the one hand MEDA and CARDS countries and, on the other, CEEC8 and TACIS – the outcome is that these two main scales converge toward a substantial balance, around 4.5 billion dollars for each of them (**figure 3**).

For the purposes of this investigation, it seems reasonable to draw the conclusion that the Mediterranean has progressively lost its relative advantage as the main interlocutor for the European neighborhood and proximity policy. Secondly, within the Mediterranean scale, we should be aware that the balance between the TMCs and the Balkans has been changing over the last fifteen years, with rapid growth of CARDS countries since 1998. Better put, the first conclusion is *not* that the Mediterranean scale has been simply excluded from the gains and the assets of Western cooperation to the advantage of other areas; more precisely, the contemporary order is the upshot of more complex and hence precarious equilibriums between scales, witnessing, as a consequence, higher possibilities for conflict and competition: between the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe, but also, within the Mediterranean, between the African and Asian Mediterranean and the Balkan Mediterranean.

The analysis of ODA funds according to their origin suggests some supplementary explanations about the present dynamics of scalar competition. In practice, the situation we described in the previous pages changes substantially according to the geography of donors, which express an extremely differentiated scalar strategy. In the case of the EU, the aperture toward the East coincided with a severe downsizing of the disbursements to Third Mediterranean Countries (**figure 4**). After an expansion phase, at the time of the MEDA I program, ODA disbursements supportive of TMCs rushed back to pre-Barcelona Process levels. In general, a twofold shift in EU cooperation policy has come about:

- (i) since 1997, Central and Eastern candidates for EU integration benefited from such an exponential increase in available funds that the gap between the two areas rose to a 1:4 ratio (ODA towards CEEC 8 surged up to over 1,700 million dollars, against the 400 devolved to TMC);
- (ii) within the Mediterranean space, the balance moved toward the Balkans, which in the last five years first caught up and then overtook the TMCs.

Focusing on the total of the fifteen EU members before the last enlargement – i.e. the sum of the bilateral cooperation programs that involve, with different degrees of intensity and different purposes, all the European countries – we can note a number of important and profound changes, although the perception of a weakening of the European engagement concerning TMCs is substantially confirmed (**figure 5**):

- (i) the intervention of the individual member countries with respect to Eastern Europe has been far more timely than that of the EU and the European Commission: there was evidence of the first payments already in 1990 and from 1992 the aid regime was fully operational;
- (ii) ODA flows toward CEEC were extremely intensive in the first five-year period, until 1995: in that year, CEEC disbursements amount to 3,500 million dollars (about double those for the TMCs). In that same period, preceding the Barcelona Conference, the cash flows in support of TACIS countries were almost equal to those allocated to the MEDA group;
- (iii) after 1995, there was a clear decrease in the commitment toward the candidate countries. In practice, with the strong acceleration of the negotiations for the Eastern enlargement of the EU, the center of gravity of support for the post-communist transition shifted from the single member States to the European Commission. Something similar took place in the Mediterranean, where the start up of the Barcelona Process and the blueprint of the MEDA I program gave a leading role to EU action, causing a decrease in the amount of individual state cooperation funds. In any case, in the period between 1996 and 1999, the Mediterranean scale recovered its status – partially lost after 1989 – as the main partner for European countries;

- (iv) starting in 2000, the year of the passage from the MEDA I to the MEDA II program, stabilization occurred, resizing the importance of the TMCs in line with the corresponding lowering of the European Commission's aid. With reference to the scalar relationships, the balance between the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe shifted favorably to the former (ODA in favor of CEEC8 and TACIS countries stabilized at about 1 billion dollars each). A new equilibrium also came into view within the Mediterranean, following the growth of the Mediterranean Balkans, which received double the sums for the countries of the Southern and Eastern shores in 2002,.

As a whole, the framework of European countries' ODA in support of their neighbors is characterized by a reappraisal of the role of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, with a substantial lowering of the disbursements, passing from 2 billion dollars per annum to just 1 billion at the beginning of the new millennium. At the same date, the Mediterranean Balkans were back to the high levels achieved at the beginning of the 90s, i.e. the era of Yugoslavia's implosion and the endemic spread of violent conflict and ethnic genocide in the region.

If we complete the picture by analyzing US behaviors in the region, we must acknowledge that the image of the scalar competition process changes once again, outlining an alternative geo-political interpretation opposed to the European one (**figure 6**). ODA figures after 1989 give an idea about a rationale that has followed quite different patterns, if compared with European ones. On the one hand, in fact, there is a sort of switch from the CEEC8 to the Mediterranean Balkans: again in this case the turning point is 1995, when the speeding up of the European integration process reduced the strategic importance of Eastern Europe in the eyes of the United States. On the other hand, the TMCs – still maintaining an important quota of US cooperation aid, equal to about 1 billion dollars since 1993, unquestionably superior to that of CARDS and CEEC8 – saw a rise in the competition of TACIS countries, which since the late 90s have received a stable share of about 1,500 million dollars, with a peak of 2 billion in 1999. These figures can be explained by the fact that TACIS (because of the location of conspicuous energy deposits and the dispute with Russia for regional hegemony) and MEDA countries (because of the conflict between Israel and Arab countries) are critical points of US foreign policy after the end of the Cold War.

2.2 THE INCREASING ROLE OF BILATERAL RELATIONS.

US policy in the Mediterranean can be profitably used to highlight a further limitation of this scale, i.e. the prevalence of a bilateral rather than multilateral rationale. In this context, when saying "bilateralism" we mean the phenomena that whoever – either a national or a global actor – embarks on policies on the Mediterranean scale, does not find a single interlocutor, but a plethora of countries, extremely differentiated and often in conflict with each other. In such circumstances, the only feasible strategy is to undertake bilateral relations, dictated by the contingent historical period. This feature of the Mediterranean political context, which we might label "forced bilateralism", is a direct expression – both cause and consequence – of the lack of politics on the Mediterranean scale, inhibiting the possibility of building it as a unitary scale of analysis and action for international relations.

In more precise terms, we can distinguish US from EU policy by talking respectively of "planned bilateralism" and "forced bilateralism". In practice, the long established US approach to Middle East issues – and specifically to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – strongly influences its Mediterranean policy. Traditionally, US diplomatic endeavors have been aimed at the construction and consolidation of an Israeli-Egyptian axis, founded, if not on regional cooperation, at least on mutual recognition and non-belligerence between the two most important armies of the region. Now, from the scrutiny of ODA funding, it is unequivocal that US cooperation – mainly managed by

US-Aid – is fully in line with the needs of this geo-political interpretation of the Middle East crisis (**figure 7**). Israel and Egypt are the beneficiaries of most of the funds allocated to the area: the peak was in 1996, when the two main countries received 3 billion dollars against a few million assigned to the remaining TMCs is fairly eloquent. In this perspective, it is interesting to note that in 2003, for the first time, allocations in favor of the residual TMCs exceeded – even if just a little – the commitments for Israel and Egypt. Obviously it is premature to state whether this is the signal of a real effective US policy on the Mediterranean scale – and therefore a scalar shift in assessing the extension and the meaning of the Israeli-Arab conflict – or it just depends on contingent factors, such as the determination to put pressure on their historical partners or the attempt to keep in check the Arab elites' discomfort with the lengthy US presence in Iraq.

If US bilateralism can be defined as “programmatically”, as it is founded on the selective, strategic empowerment of a few bilateral relationships on the Mediterranean scale, EU action is likely to obey to a forced rationale, making a virtue of necessity. Unquestionably, the inspiration behind the Barcelona Process is – or at least should be – multilateral by its very nature, i.e. oriented toward the making of a Euro-Mediterranean space that shows some elements of unity and homogeneity, where proximity counterbalances distance. At the same time, it is very clear that the EU is not faced with an equally homogeneous and unitary interlocutor and is therefore “compelled” to apply *bilateral policies* in order to achieve *multilateral goals*. This is likely to be the main paradox of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, even though it is necessary and unavoidable. To be more precise, the issue is whether this bilateral path effectively enhances the possibility of a more complete and pervasive multilateralism in future stages or if bilateralism ends up self-reproducing itself because of many reasons, last but not least the TMC elites' interest in maintaining the status quo and keeping control of European development aid and investment.

Much evidence confirms the risk of a further bilateralization of the relationships between Europe and the TMCs. Let us consider as an example the MEDA program, which is the main instrument of European cooperation for the Mediterranean. It is split into two main funding streams, the bilateral and the regional: bilateral programs are established in support of each Third Mediterranean Country to meet strategic needs assessed jointly by the donor and the beneficiary, while the regional stream is distinctly multilateral and entails the funding of programs and projects involving institutions from at least four countries – two European and two TMCs – on issues of truly Mediterranean concern. For this purpose, putting side by side the regional and the bilateral dimension of MEDA program can be useful to confirm the tendency – if not the drift – toward bilateralism. The distribution between bilateral and regional funds (**figure 8**) clearly offers evidence of the clear prevalence of the former over the latter: in 2002, just to show the most manifest case, the ratio was 1:19 in favor of bilateralism. In only two years is the proportion propitious to regional initiatives (in 1995 and 2001), but this seems to be a quite accidental occurrence, rather than the outcome of the belief that only multilateralism can effectively build the Mediterranean scale. 1995 is the starting year of MEDA I, and the high proportion of regional cooperation can be interpreted as a “defensive” approach, allowing the program to start even devoid of strong bilateral relationships. 2001 is also a noteworthy date in the history of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, as in that year the Barcelona Process seemed to be trapped in a bottleneck: assessing the outcomes of the MEDA I program (ended in 1999), the European Commission became conscious that in many cases the beneficiaries had not spent the funds correctly – and sometimes they had not spent them at all. For this reason, the balance between the regional and bilateral allocations in 2001 can be interpreted as a consequence of the mistrust in relation to Mediterranean partners rather than a sign of trust in the Mediterranean scale. This interpretation is substantiated by the fact that, as soon as the relationships with the TMCs changed slightly – it is impossible to evaluate whether because of a real change in their attitude or because of reasons of political and diplomatic opportunity, the bilateral versus regional ratio immediately rose to its maximum difference (580 million dollars against 30). In other terms, it seems unquestionable that regional cooperation plays the role as a “shelter commodity”, where the EU “invests” when bilateral agreements are not

feasible: bilateralism is therefore the rule, while regionalism – and consequently the Mediterranean scale – is the exception.

3. THE POLITICAL WEAKNESS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SCALE.

The “competition” with other scales, the fragmentation of the Mediterranean space in sub-regions and the subsequent implicit negation of its unity must also be interpreted with reference to the first issue raised in this article, i.e. the lack of politics and government in favor of the mere design, apparently neutral and technocratic, of cooperation policies. The two phenomena, the scalar and the political ones, cannot be interpreted separately.

3.1 EUROPEAN POLITICS AND EURO-MEDITERRANEAN POLICIES.

The political weakness of the Mediterranean depends both on the fact that policies are imposed on the region from above, without any effective debate within the Euro-Mediterranean arena, and on the fact that they are the manifestation of processes that take place outside this space, i.e. on other scales. Specifically, we believe that Euro-Mediterranean policies are strongly sensitive to the political debate and orientation internal to the EU. More precisely, the Barcelona Process suffers from the influence of three interconnected political processes, directly following the collapse of the Iron Curtain. The role that non-Mediterranean EU members undertake in the delineation of times and modes of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is the first issue. As it is part of European foreign affairs, the Barcelona Process is subject to negotiations and agreements between the European countries washed by the Mediterranean and those that do not. It is no coincidence that France and Spain are the actors that put the greatest pressure on the EU scale so that the framework of relations with the TMCs could make the leap in quality that culminated in Barcelona in 1995. However, of the fifteen countries that were EU members in 2004, only five belong to the Mediterranean basin. Moreover, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany, because of its privileged relationships with bordering Visegrad countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary), and Scandinavian nations, due to geographical and cultural proximity with the Baltic Republics, have strongly supported the prospect of an immediate and effective enlargement toward the East, rather than the strengthening of the Mediterranean vocation of the European neighborhood policy.

Secondly, the passage from EU15 to EU25 took place in 2004, increasing the political influence of Eastern Europe in the European political arena: out of ten newcomers, only two are Mediterranean countries (Cyprus and Malta) and, because of their size and geo-political weight, they do not seem able to play a substantial political role in forthcoming decisions about the Partnership. This change in the European balance is likely to weaken the status of the remaining TMCs, as they are more and more the most distant, marginal boundaries of the Union, outlining a space where there are no possibilities of full integration into the EU. Moreover, the position that Baltic and Visegrad countries will express about the Barcelona Process is also a variable that we should take into consideration. At a first glance, the political culture showed by new members is likely to raise significant problems for the building of the Mediterranean scale, for at least two sets of reasons:

- (i) Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) – principally Poland – are displaying a clear-cut preference for a foreign policy in line with the US and that privileges NATO as the defense apparatus and warranty of European security. Although this intent is justified by the requirement to escape Russian influence, it might slow down the Barcelona

Process, as the Mediterranean scale is largely underestimated by Washington strategists;

- (ii) Visegrad and Baltic countries are more eager to develop EU international relations supportive of non-member Eastern European countries, which, at present, are struggling to free themselves of Russian foreign policy influence, in particular Ukraine and Belarus.

The third political process that might hinder the future evolution of the Barcelona Process is the growing self-reflexivity about European identity roots, an issue that attained idiosyncratic importance during 2004, on the occasion of the drafting and signing of the European Constitution. We are referring here to the debate about the Christian identity of Europe, which has assumed growing, prominent political connotations, because of the presence in the European arena of a broad political grouping, cutting across all European countries, which explicitly evokes Christian values as the very foundation of its political praxis. This situation might lead to a more and more radical closure of European identity against Islam, emphasized by the perception of Islamic beliefs as a generic threat to international security and stability. The politicization of the so-called “clash of civilization scenario” between Christianity and Islam may provoke profound consequences on both the Partnership policies and the possibilities of enlargement toward Muslim countries, like Turkey and more remotely Bosnia Herzegovina. The German Christian-Democrats’ caution and the Italian Lega Nord’s fierce opposition to the definition of a precise agenda for Turkey’s admission into the EU are symptoms that cannot be taken too lightly.

3.2 THE HETERONOMY OF EURO-MEDITERRANEAN POLICIES.

We should now consider a second element that corroborates the argument of the intrinsic weakness of Mediterranean policies, i.e. their reliance on inspirations and rationalities external – and relatively extraneous – to Mediterranean space. In other words, Mediterranean policies are often not the outcome of debates taking place on the Mediterranean scale, but they simply “import” concepts, values and notions delineated on other scales. Some examples might help in highlighting this thesis.

The first case in point is the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (FTA) within the framework of the Barcelona Process. Such an initiative is ostensibly supposed to increase the degree of Euro-Mediterranean cohesion, homogenizing trade legislation in the region and enhancing economic integration between the two banks. If we shift our attention from the purposes to the effective meanings, what we are facing is actually the empowerment of other scales – like the national and the supranational – rather than the Mediterranean one. The policies aimed at uniforming the Mediterranean economies do not consider, in fact, the peculiarities of the Mediterranean space, preferring to focus on macro-economic convergence criteria, which disregard the effective territorial contexts where they are supposed to be applied. The reference is actually to the global scale – following the structural adjustment policies recommended by international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – and to the national scale – where such policies are usually implemented and monitored. For instance, 600 million euros (equal to 20% of the payments allocated in the framework of the MEDA I program) have been spent to sustain structural adjustment policies, with peaks as high as 50% in Tunisia and even 70% in Jordan.

Secondly, the programs of upgrading and modernizing the TMCs’ public administration and bureaucracy clearly show that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is essentially a mere fine-tuning of TMC government structures to models defined elsewhere and enforced from above. Considering the allocation of MEDA II commitments in 2004, we note that about 25% of funds (142 million euros out of a total of 600) are assigned to the renovation of state apparatus, above all in Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Algeria.

The third and final element that justifies our emphasis on the unilateral nature of the Barcelona Process is the acceptance of the conditionality principle, which binds the cooperation between European Union and Third Mediterranean Countries to the accomplishment of basic conditions of democratization and human rights. Notwithstanding the fact that the European emphasis on the safeguard of social, economic and personal freedom is unexceptionable, it is important to notice that the application of this principle sets a further differentiation in the TMC relationships with the EU, introducing distinctions and exceptions into the already heterogeneous TMC block. As the conditionality rule is applied unilaterally, without being heralded by a truly Mediterranean political debate, it cannot but lead to the faster disintegration of the Mediterranean scale.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of cooperation praxis shows the intrinsic limits of Euro-Mediterranean policies. From our standpoint – i.e. the assessment of the real role that the Barcelona Process plays in the making of the Mediterranean scale – conclusions cannot be other than sharply critical. Apart from the cultural and historical interpretation and evocation of the Mediterranean of times gone by, when its boundaries were *tout court* the boundaries of civilization, beside the flattery of an idea of Mediterraneanism – as fascinating in the Western imagination as intangible in daily life around the Mediterranean basin – then we must admit that the Mediterranean scale is a weak one, a space that is acquainted with separation rather than unity, with distance rather than proximity. The reasons for this weakness are well known: many of them have been discussed in this article and many others might be identified, not only in the realm of policies but also in material culture, everyday practice and national and local identities. The issue is not just the gap in the modernization process that throws into contrast the shores of this solid sea, of this liquid lowland. Differences in the political, cultural, demographic and economic conditions – usually cited when examining this unique socio-geographical fracture – have been extremely important, and they still are. What we would like to highlight is, more precisely, that a deeper mechanism (in Foucault's sense) of annihilation of the Mediterranean scale is at work and that such a mechanism operates through the restless production of other scales, which become hegemonic and predominant one after the other. At the very beginning, the formation of nationalist ideology and consequently of national states eroded the possibility of a strong Mediterranean scale: from Italian political unification – which took place at the expense of an archetypal Mediterranean state like the Bourbon's – to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, from the development of Arab nationalism out of the ashes of European colonial domination to the emergence of political Islam, the national scale has been unquestionably the main reference for the analysis and comprehension of social, political and economic processes within the Mediterranean space. At the same time, the Mediterranean scale is likely to be crushed from above, because of the materialization of supra-national and regional scales, which hold an hegemonic status in contemporary discourse and practice. Even without considering globalization, we can cite the MENA scale (Middle East North Africa), encompassing non-Mediterranean areas such as Iraq or the Arabic Peninsula, or the broader definition of Balkans, quite recurring in geo-political sciences, which unifies the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea basins in an ambitious macro-region, largely alternative to the Euro-Mediterranean one.

In such a context, we have maintained that Euro-Mediterranean Partnership policies are not an adequate means to guarantee the role of the Mediterranean scale in the Big Game of current international relations. The key point is that it is not enough to assert magic, largely rhetorical, clichés to bring the Mediterranean back to its past grandeur. The Mediterranean scale must be built through common representations and practices; and, regrettably, all present policies,

both European and national, are inadequate. Even worse, as we have tried to argue in this article, such policies wreck and weaken the Mediterranean scale, rather than building it up and strengthening it.

The issue here is once again the concept of “scale” and the way we can legitimately speak about the Mediterranean scale. If the aim is to make the Mediterranean scale as powerful as the national, the European or the Middle Eastern ones, then the contest is lost from the start. According to us, the direction should be to search for a new conception of scale, no longer frozen and crystallized in space, i.e. in pre-determined scales, applicable to any territorial analysis – as has been the case for the nation state and is happening to the global scale – but flexible, ready to grasp opportunities and meanings that are still implicit. As the Mediterranean has been a fruitful melting pot even with its clashes and conflicts, its task is to reinvent itself and its role. This function is to be the crossroads between the local and the global. The Mediterranean is, in fact, an inexhaustible panoply of traditions and knowledge, often the vanguard and the inspiration for contemporary theories on local development. One example is the Italian industrial districts, but also the rediscovery of wine and gastronomic traditions or the invention of the agricultural and food “presidia”. At the same time, we are conscious that the inescapable question is: what future awaits these production local systems? In such a period, when even Italian design is suffering the impact of globalization and bearing the consequences of its past short-sightedness, how can Southern Mediterranean local systems have any hope of emerging and championing their identity and production in an era of vicious and merciless competition? Within a few days or weeks, we can see the same mass-produced goods along the alleys of Alexandria, Jerusalem, Naples, Marseilles, Sarajevo and all of them are *made in China*. In Cairo, the fanus, the Ramadan lamps, are produced less and less by craftsman recycling cans and plates, but are kitsch sub-products imported from China. This is the battlefield of the Mediterranean future, the realm where policies are supposed to respond to worries about the Turkish competition against the Italian producers of olive oil machinery or invent new ad hoc parameters to exclude southern and eastern shore olive oils from the European market means missing the implication of the intellectual and empirical challenges that the contemporary world economy imposes on the Mediterranean.

To make the Mediterranean an interface-scale among local systems, i.e. a space where places search for a joint strategy toward the outside, we do not need *more* policies but *new* policies: the transformation should be qualitative and not just quantitative. In addition, this point of view evokes the role the EU and European countries might and should play in the making of such a Mediterranean scale that meets its populations’ needs.

Figure 1 – Total ODA (commitments) toward the scales of analysis – share

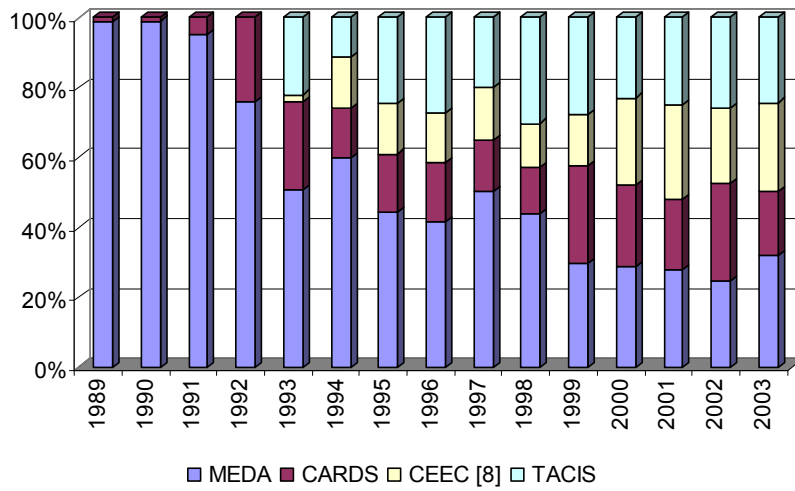


Figure 2 – ODA dynamics (commitments) toward the scales of analysis – million dollar

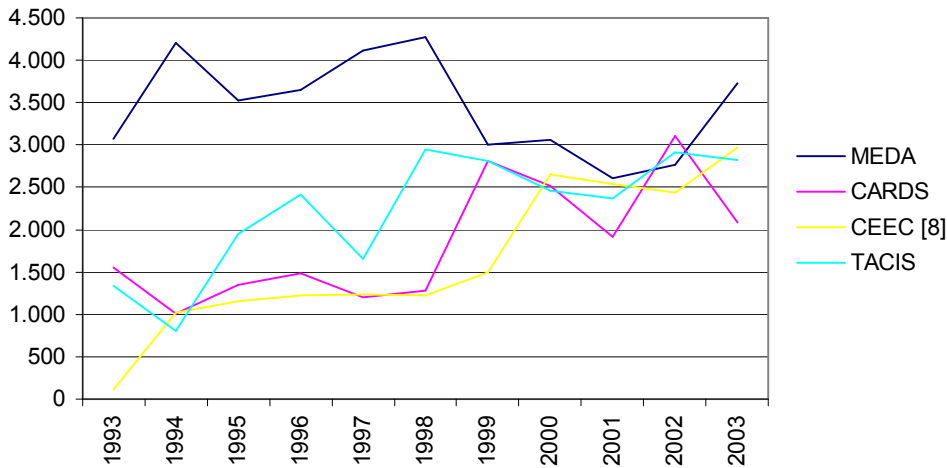


Figure 3 – Mediterranean versus Eastern Europe (payments) – million dollars

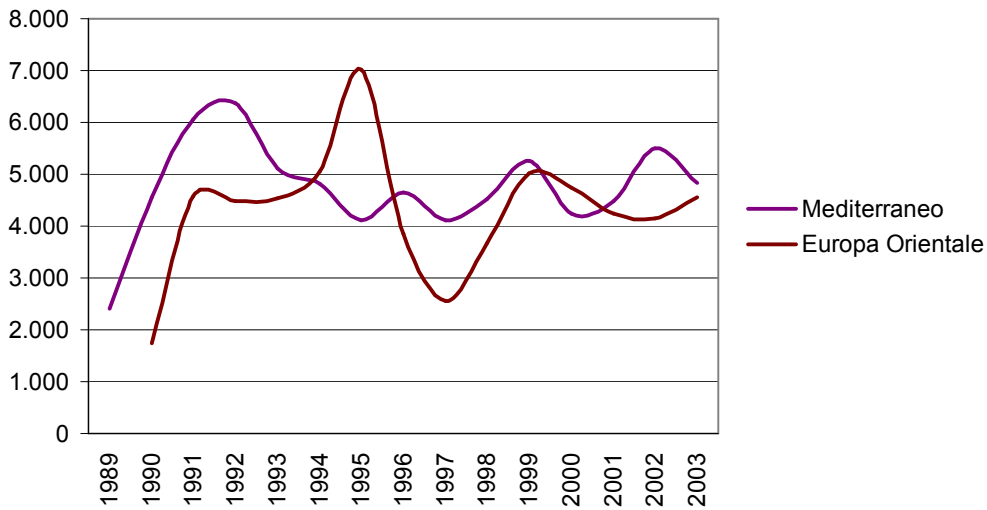


Figure 4 – The European Union politics of scale (payments) – million dollars

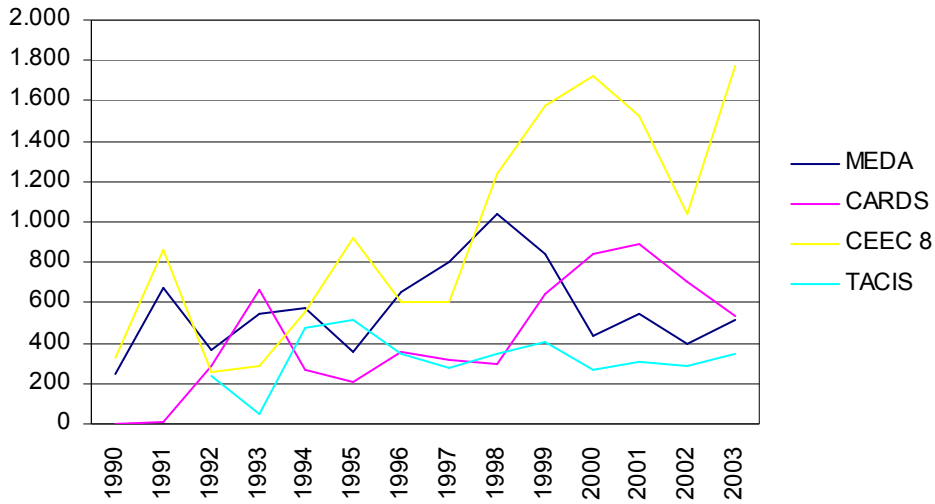


Figure 5 – The UE15 countries politics of scale (payments) – million dollars

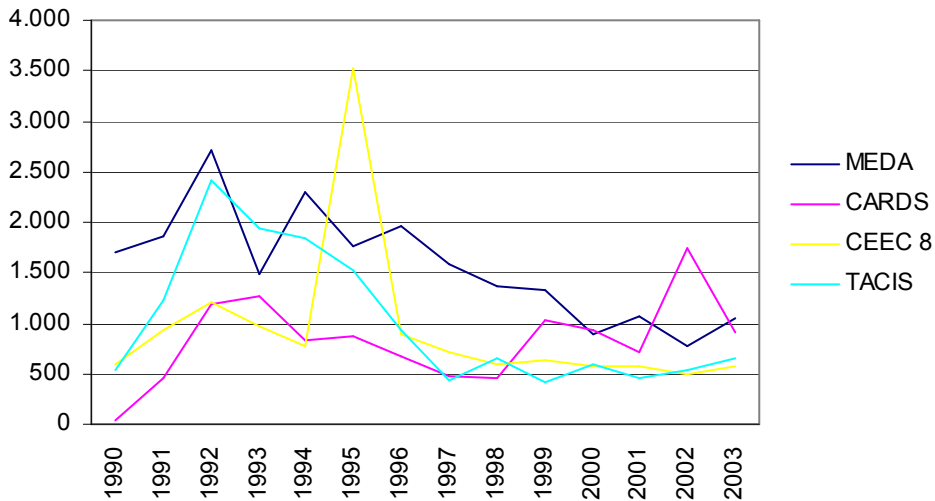


Figure 6 – The US politics of scale of (payments) – million dollars

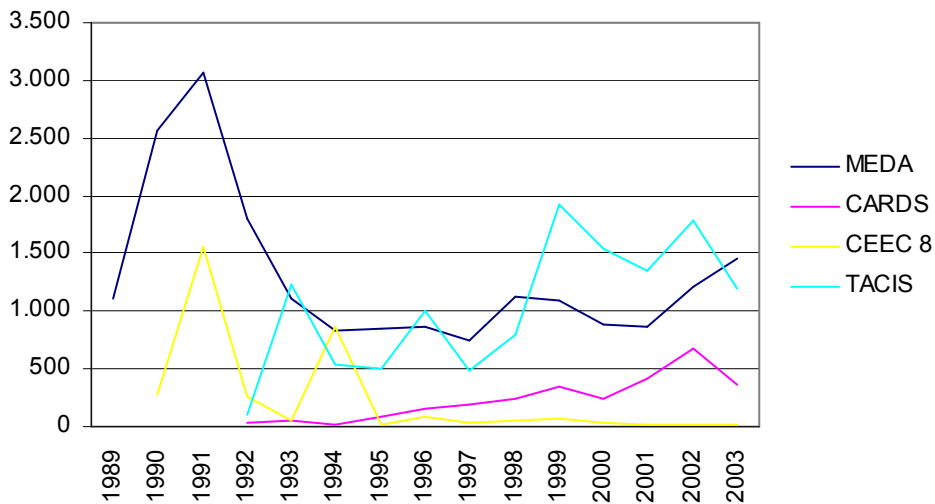


Figure 7 – US policies in the Middle East and Mediterranean policies (commitments) – million dollars

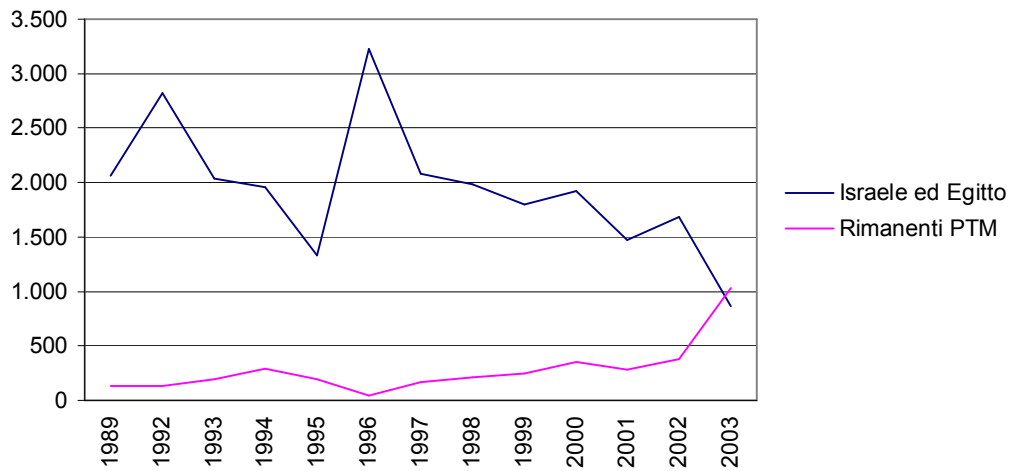


Figure 8 – The relationship between regional cooperation and bilateral cooperation in MEDA program – million euros.

