

# EUROPA BOTTOM-UP

ARBEITSPAPIERE ZUR EUROPÄISCHEN ZIVILGESELLSCHAFT / EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY WORKING PAPERS

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(EDS.)

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## EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

TALKING, LEARNING, WORKING, AND LIVING TOGETHER

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A Conference at Villa Vigoni, Lovenno di Menaggio, Italy  
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## **From the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership towards a Geopolitics of the Wider Euro-Mediterranean Area as a ‘Functional Space’<sup>4</sup>**

By Bernd Thum

In a lecture given in 2013 in Dehli Pascal Lamy, formerly Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), said: “Geopolitics is back”. He was calling for a “multi-lateral rule making” in consideration of the interests of all partners in the framework of a – so again his formulation – “functional international order”. In this sense I would like to talk about the Mediterranean, precisely about the Euro-Mediterranean area as a ‘functional space’.

I propose to distinguish between ‘classic’ geopolitics on the one hand and ‘new’ multilateral, cooperative geopolitics on the other hand. Classic geopolitics is a political concept and a political reality: They are unilateral, aimed at enforcing only own interests and they are ‘objectivist’, i.e. they understand other countries, societies and cultures only as objects for the own interest-based action, while the ‘new’ geopolitics are multilateral, cooperative, non-objectivist and respect existing functional structures.

The remainder of this exposé is structured as follows:

1. The concept of a ‘functional space’ and its relevance for a multilateral, cooperative and non-objectivist geopolitics
2. The Mediterranean area as an object of ‘classic’ and perhaps ‘post-classic’ geopolitics
3. How can the wider Euro-Mediterranean area, from Dublin to Damascus, from the Niger to the North Cape, be perceived as a functional space? Some social, economic and cultural references
4. Which geopolitics should be proposed for the wider Euro-Mediterranean area?

In times of tensions and conflicts that currently exist in and around the Mediterranean, it is difficult to conceive the Euro-Mediterranean area as a ‘functional space’. But as the references in step 3 will show this term seems legitimate. The present paper is directed to support the emergence of a habitus aimed at perceiving the world in the north and south of the Mediterranean as a structured whole as well as to make a contribution to fostering a geopolitical

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<sup>4</sup>This is a shortened English version of an article by the author: Bernd Thum: Eine Geopolitik funktionaler Räume. Der erweiterte Euro-Mediterrane Raum als Beispiel. In: WIKA-Report 2 (2014), Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, S. 17-35, [http://issuu.com/conbrioverlag/docs/wika-report\\_band2?e=4067582/10417523](http://issuu.com/conbrioverlag/docs/wika-report_band2?e=4067582/10417523).

horizon which allows orientation towards a holistic strategic action in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The concept of a 'geopolitics of functional spaces' should help to do so.

### **1. The concept of a 'functional space' and its relevance for a multilateral, cooperative and non-objectivist geopolitics**

A geographically defined space is not necessarily identical to a 'functional space'. Not physical features such as oceans or mountains, not biological features, such as the dissemination of the olive tree, not climatic similarities, not political boundaries determine the extent and the nature of the functional space, but the intensification, densification of communications, interactions and interrelations through the exchange of material and immaterial goods, through cooperation and collaboration, as well as an at least partially common perception of the area and its history. Even conflicts can be an indication of the existence of a functional space. A functional space is defined by the "quality of action" (as Hannah Arendt said) and therefore by thinking, acting and communicating human beings. Its boundaries are not abstract lines, they evolve and change with the intensity of mutual relations between the actors in culture (even in cultural conflicts), economy, personal encounters (migration, mobility) and long-term, sustainable mutual interests. 'Functional' areas are not least part of the collective experience, individual beliefs and public discourse. The concept of a 'functional space' thus also includes socio-spatial aspects, where social, economic, but also cultural and "symbolic capital" in terms of Pierre Bourdieu plays an important role.

Functional spaces should not be confused with cultural areas. Not 'cultures' define them, although – due to the intensified communications and interactions – certain cultural patterns as well as contents of knowledge are evolving throughout history and continue to emerge in a functional space. But with its web of relations the functional space spans across the cultural areas which belong to it.

### **2. The Mediterranean area as an object of 'classic' and perhaps 'post-classic' geopolitics**

The Mediterranean area is a severely suffering object of 'classic' geopolitics.

Are there other forms than the unilateral 'objectivist' access that are closely related to classic geopolitics? There is the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), a coalition of 43 countries of the European Union and the 'Arab World' plus Turkey and Israel. This relationship provides at least a chance of a multilateral partnership policy – even if this opportunity is hardly noticed. However, both the status and the practice of the Union open our eyes to a spatial structure, which extends beyond the Mediterranean in the classic sense, i.e. the area of the

Mediterranean Sea and its coastal countries and landscapes, namely northwards to Scandinavia, in a westward direction to the Atlantic states of Europe, eastwardly to the countries of the Levant, and in a southward direction to the Saharan regions. This is the wider Euro-Mediterranean area.

Are we living in the Union for the Mediterranean in a geographical-political entity that is defined only by national borders? Yes, in a certain sense, but the Mediterranean area, extended and in part politically structured by the Union for the Mediterranean from Dublin to Damascus, from the southern, Saharan border of Algeria to the North Cape, is not only what a superficial view of the Union and a shallow understanding of politics suggest. It is not only a political space in the strict sense of the word, but also a space that is shaped by high mutual, albeit asymmetrical interdependence, by high mobility and migration, and by dense communications (even about cultural orientations and values) as well as a in parts common, though culturally specific knowledge. This area is a common, albeit conflictual, space of social, political, economic and above all cultural topics. The Union for the Mediterranean opens up the classic Mediterranean area, but, alas, imperfectly, because parts of this area, from which significant energies emanate, are not included. I am thinking about Saharan and Sahel Africa, which are closely linked to the classic Mediterranean area and to Europe, by history, language, culture, education, energy potential, migration as well as security issues. Many, if not the majority of migrants today come from Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa countries.

For all this reasons I would like to call the area from Dublin to Damascus, from the Niger to the North Cape a 'functional space'. I think new geopolitics should take this term into account. Concerning the geopolitical status of the Union for the Mediterranean this status can no longer be called 'classic', for in this union you will find elements of a multilateral structure, a way of thinking in terms of partnership and – at least in the rhetoric of the Constitutive Act – the consideration of functional structures. Notwithstanding that the new 'geopolitics of functional spaces' is not yet implemented in the Union for the Mediterranean, maybe one could talk of it at least as an example of 'post-classic' geopolitics.

Europe must ask itself what the common Euro-Mediterranean area from Dublin to Damascus, from the Niger to the North Cape strategically and geopolitically means beyond the traditional support activities in the framework of foreign aid. 'Strategically' does not (only) mean militarily, but also culturally, economically, demographically... So in this context 'strategically' means in another more sophisticated sense 'politically'.

The question we should ask ourselves again and again is: What's politics? In our context, politics should not be understood as day-to-day politics, not even as a method of enforcement of specific interests and power structures. Just as the

word 'politics' is used here in this paper, it is based on the origin of the word as well as the concept of the 'Polis', the association of citizens in ancient Greece. The task of the polis was the regulation of public life by a community of the free and the equal, with its own laws and institutions. Politics is understood in this paper as a way of thinking and acting, which is aimed at the production, the safeguarding and the development of a lasting, sustainable ordering of societies.

Strategically, it is therefore important to find and to realize in and for the wider Mediterranean area – the Euro-Mediterranean space within the scope, which is outlined in this paper – a just, lasting and sustainable ordering of human and social life.

### **3. How can the wider Euro-Mediterranean area – from Dublin to Damascus, from the Niger to the North Cape – be perceived as a functional space? Some social, economic and cultural references**

Usually, first we think about the social, economic and – in a narrow sense – political factors of the Euro-Mediterranean area, but – according to the structure of a functional space of intensified relations – we must take cultural factors into account, too. As social and economic factors are to be mentioned – below I list some examples and key words:

1. The presence of a large diaspora of people from the south in the northern countries of the area. This means an intensive transfer of persons, knowledge, material goods and money.
2. The energy supply, i.e. the dependence of the north from the south in the age of fossil fuels as well as the energy needs of the south in the future. Due to political tensions in Eastern Europe, the interest in oil and gas from the south will increase. The energy factor is closely linked with environmental and climate factors.
3. Demographic trends, directly related with youth unemployment and migration – the latter being characterized by unfortunately increasingly dramatic dimensions. Given the declining number of the working-age population in the north there are new opportunities.
4. Security issues due to social instability. They force the north and the south not only to collaborative, jointly organized security structures of the classic type, but also to work together on issues like unemployment, fighting against corruption, the socio-cultural significance of religion as well as conceptions of statehood.
5. Mutual economic interests. Those have intensified in Europe because of the higher economic growth rates in the south. The south benefits from the Mediterranean tourism, which recovers again despite the crisis, as well as from the re-location of production units.

I come now to some cultural factors that constitute the functional wider Euro-Mediterranean area:

1. The regions of the wider Euro-Mediterranean area have a common history in many areas.
2. The Euro-Mediterranean area was a colonial space coined by European powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Consequently, the countries of this region have a partially common heritage of 'modern' cultural knowledge. In North Africa, in the Sahara region and in parts of sub-Saharan Africa the French language plays a central role as a second language. The economic and intellectual elites communicate in French. 85% of French-speaking world's population in 2050 will be Africans.
3. The dynamic Euro-Mediterranean Area has its epicenter in the 'classic' Mediterranean area, with its historic civilizations, its monotheistic religions, and its cultural encounters between the North and the South, the East and the West. Indeed, spiritual energies which can be found in the cultural manifestations, political concepts, religious discourses and specific forms of life radiate still as a cultural impact to all areas of the Wider Euro-Mediterranean Area.
4. As I have mentioned above, even cultural conflicts can constitute a functional space. Political Islam is actually, in many respects, a part of Europe. Conversely, enlightenment and other discourses of the North – such as secularism, identitarianism, rationalism, technicism, hedonism etc. – are a part of the Arab and African world. There they astonish the Europeans often with extremely sharp contours.
5. There is a strong, emotive charisma of mutual attraction. To name just one example: The home ownership of thousands of Europeans in the Medina of Marrakech shows how Europeans try to turn their dream of the 'Orient' into reality. In the South, despite all criticism, there is a fascination with Europe, which refers primarily to freer forms of life.

#### **4. Which geopolitics should be proposed for the Wider Euro-Mediterranean Area?**

'Geopolitics of functional spaces' requires a constant effort to identify the functional interplay of actions and actors and to make them the basis of political thought and action. This should be done in the sense of the ancient Greek 'Polis', as we understand it, in form of an association of free and equal citizens and a just and sustainable ordering of coexistence and living together.

However, also functional spaces need institutions. 'Geopolitics of functional spaces' should seek them, but they must not become autonomous structures of power.

In 2005 the Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo), a network of Euro-Mediterranean think tanks, has proposed a concept which should be developed further. The concept does not refer to all states of the wider Euro-Mediterranean area. Rather, it is based on a variable geometry of this area aimed to create a “common frame, a joint work and cooperation platform”, giving a “horizon” to the policy of at least some countries in the region, including Europe. The authors of the concept insist on the “multilateral” character of the structure. “Key concepts” are: “access, participation and solidarity”. One of the authors, Andreu Bassols, Director General of the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) in Barcelona, wrote: “The triple aspect of access to Europe, participation in certain policy areas and institutions, but also the dimension of solidarity, together with concrete and substantial political action should be the basic structure of a close relationship with the countries of the Southern Mediterranean [...]”<sup>5</sup>. I think that we could start with a variable geometry with a community of states which – in consideration of their cultural traditions – accomplish certain standards of democracy, separation of powers and the rule of law and human rights – the latter in a trans-cultural interpretation.

In addition, the wider Euro-Mediterranean area as a functional space needs also a symbolic capital. The semantic potential of this area should be identified, further developed and systematically disseminated to the public. This includes not only the classic cultural heritage of Europe, but also that of the Arab- and African-Islamic World. This common and at the same time diverse cultural heritage should be integrated in significant parts in a Euro-Mediterranean knowledge space.<sup>6</sup> In addition it can merge into a common narrative. This is not possible without an intensive cross-cultural dialogue, without a resolute review and reorganization of knowledge, without a new way of thinking and talking in new terms, no without substantial values which need to be carefully identified. No less important are friendship and trust.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Andreu Bassols: L'Europe et les (r)évolutions arabes. In: Bernd Thum (Dir.): Au tournant d'une époque – L'Europe, la Méditerranée et le monde arabe (2013). Stuttgart: Institut fuer Auslandsbeziehungen, S. 18, French: [http://www.ifa.de/fileadmin/pdf/edition/zeitenwende\\_fr.pdf](http://www.ifa.de/fileadmin/pdf/edition/zeitenwende_fr.pdf) / German: <http://www.ifa.de/fileadmin/pdf/edition/zeitenwende.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> This is what the Foundation Euro-Mediterranean Knowledge Space (Stiftung Wissensraum Europa-Mittelmeer – WEM), which was founded in October 2010 at the National Library in Rabat, Morocco, tries to realize. Its objective is not only the exchange of knowledge between the north and the south, but a partial integration of knowledge, the dissemination of this knowledge the public as well as the creation of a new narrative (<http://www.wem-fondation.org> / Short introduction in English: [http://www.wissensraum-mittelmeer.org/mediapool/94/948361/data/WEM\\_Darstellung\\_engl\\_11-2-14.pdf](http://www.wissensraum-mittelmeer.org/mediapool/94/948361/data/WEM_Darstellung_engl_11-2-14.pdf)).

<sup>7</sup> Concerning the very important role of cultural policy in a “Geopolitics of functional spaces” see the German basis text of this paper as indicated in Note 5.