



The Macroregion:

An idea dictated by the speed of history



Interview with Massimo Toschi -

Councillor of the
President of the
Region of Tus-
cany for Peace,
Cooperation and
Human Rights

The extraordi- narily important Mediterranean transitory phase

What could the utility of creating a Mediterranean macroregion be today, and what are the difficulties ahead in its implementation?

Now more than before, we find ourselves in a phase of great political difficulty. In the past three years, the Union for the Mediterranean has not started to act; quite the opposite, it has been *de facto* closed down, and we now assist to a neo-nationalist withdrawal in the policies of the European States, that find it very hard to read, precisely, a Mediterranean policy. And this is a political and cultural element that, today, has a lot of weight.

All the known proposals by Prodi, for example (the Mediterranean Bank, the links between universities

of the Northern and Southern shores, with equal exchanges of students and teachers, the possibility of creating proximity ties between the European Union and the Southern shore) have not been put forward; not only, but, as I was mentioning, neo-nationalist policies have re-emerged in many States, that do not care about the Mediterranean at all.

As always, then, history amuses itself, and suddenly the Mediterranean has changed its quality: let's think about the story of Ben Ali, the story of Mubarak – actually, Mubarak more than Ben Ali, because Tunisia is certainly an important country, but it is a country that has □ million inhabitants, compared to Egypt, which has 80 million inhabitants, and also has a different political role, as it is the centre of a balance.

Starting precisely from the Mediterranean, from North Africa, a push, a drive, has started, a drive that, beginning in Tunisia and involving Maghreb countries, although with different forms, has arrived until the borders of Iran (because this is what Syria is), surprising all of us. Who would have ever thought that Mubarak would have been swept away in a week, and Ben Ali in an even shorter period of time? The West thought that, despite the authoritarian nature of these regimes, a stable authoritarian regime, with which one could interject, was still better than supporting movements of a different nature. In reality, then, young Muslims became non-violent – and this is another interesting element – and, without denying their being Muslims, they started demanding freedom and democracy, and they have, undoubtedly, changed history.

Today, we find ourselves dealing with an absence of real policies, with the Mediterranean experiencing a transition phase of extraordinary importance, and, within all this, with a war, because the war in Libya is going on; the only thing that Europe has been able to do is a war, rather than a policy, and, incidentally, with more modest results: in fact, while in Tunisia Ben Ali was ousted, in Egypt Mubarak was ousted, and the non-violent movement has spread, where the West has facilitated an opening to a military initiative, it was a disaster, and we are now, essentially, stuck. Then we can certainly say that, had we not intervened, Gheddafi would have killed millions of people, however, as of today, we do not know what we'll be able to do tomorrow.

**The challenge to build a new Mediterranean policy**

This is the picture. Within this framework, the responsibilities of the Mediterranean regions become, in some ways, even greater, because we have realised that a Mediterranean policy will not be bestowed on us, and it is as necessary as the European States are unprepared to put it in place, especially in light of the failure of the Union for the Mediterranean.

And a Mediterranean policy needs to be done in many ways, there is not just one keyboard: on the one hand, we have the European Union keyboard, then there is the keyboard of the regions, of the Mediterranean territories, not only of national governments. We must therefore, *a fortiori* in this context, (which has enormous potential, but is also a context of dramatic crisis) construct a strategy that allows even States to find again a way of realising a Mediterranean policy.

Thus, a double responsibility exists today: there is not only the responsibility of implementing a policy established by the European Union, but also the responsibility of building, of helping the European Union to rebuild a Mediterranean policy.

It is clear that the regions are located in the States, and the States are part of the European Union, and the macroregion, today, is one more challenge, namely the challenge to build, to serve as a bridge for a new Mediterranean policy that also involves the territory of the Southern shore. We cannot imagine a Western Mediterranean macroregion without imagining an initiative involving the Southern shore, we cannot think about these two things separately: firstly, because the sea compels us to think of them in an integrated way, we can also build logistic projects, or environmental projects (which are the common themes of a territory as, for example, the Western Mediterranean is), but we cannot do this without thinking about Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and therefore we must build a policy that unites.

This is undoubtedly a difficulty, because, in itself, the macroregion is not this, but we have to think about the macroregion in new terms, and with new responsibilities, with nets not only between the regions bordering the Western Mediterranean: an effective policy which does not include the regions and the territories of the Southern shore is, today, unthinkable.

All this obviously entails a set of problems, because then there is the aspect of institutional balance, which is not easily tractable. Tuscany, for example, is a region of Italy, which is an EU country: let's say that Tuscany wants to create a macroregion with Liguria, Catalunya and PACA, for example: evidently, you create an area where regional, national and EU laws all apply, and in this framework you must add a new relationship with the regions of the Southern coast, which have very different institutional settings compared to ours (perhaps only Morocco has something that may look similar), certainly in Tunisia the game is being played now, and the same goes for Egypt, because, depending on the constitutional arrangement that Egypt will give itself, the relationships will be more or less simple.

European responsibilities

So, we have a responsibility even in this game: the idea of participating in the electoral process, and in the process of institutional reform, in Tunisia (and we have discussed this also with the Italian ambassador in Tunisia) was born from this fact, because, if at the end of the path a new centralised State comes out, this will weaken the macroregion, and will weaken the framework of unity in the Mediterranean as well.

This is what is on the agenda: we can do it or not, we can be ready or not, but, if we abandon the Southern shore, also our work (although in itself the macroregion is an European macroregion, and not a macroregion including these countries) will be affected from this, because depending on the institutional outcomes of this process, the very possibility of building a macroregion will become stronger or weaker.



The choice between war and politics

How can the creation of a wider culture of the Mediterranean be helped? What can the regions do about it?

The Regions can respond to everything. If certain events occur, we can stand still, wait for the wave to pass, and hope that after its passage something will remain. But the *tsunami* shows that this policy does not work, because when the wave passes, it sweeps you away as well. So at this moment, what we to do is resuming a leading role. Of course the funds are scarce, and rarely things get done at no cost, it may also be that right now there is even less money than yesterday, but truthfully, if today the situation is this, it is because yesterday we did not think.

Now it is necessary to start from policies, and it seems to me that Enrico Rossi, President of the Region of Tuscany, is pushing in this direction, the very idea of the creation of the Office for the Mediterranean is the idea that an issue exists, and it is important to invest people and resources on this issue, because that is a crucial matter.

But everyone has to do their part: entrepreneurs should travel the world a little more, and also politics must play their game. The macroregion is a political and cultural response of the European regions, of part of the European Union, to an issue that concerns all of the European Union, because, even from an economic perspective, if the oil price increases, it increases in Lucca but it increases in Berlin as well; so Chancellor Merkel may well think about the Baltic Sea region, but the Mediterranean is more delicate than the Baltic, because in the Baltic there is no war going on, and the Mediterranean is a very complicated setting.

Either you bomb, or you pursue policies, *tertium non datur*, you cannot find a stand-by position (and Libya is surely a parable on this, but not only Libya, because in the Mediterranean, if we look at the situation from 1956 onwards, there have been countless wars, and of course the epicentre is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but let's also think about Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Iraq). There's either war, or politics. I think there should be politics.

Martina Selmi and Flavia Cori

MASSIMO TOSCHI

Massimo Toschi, Councillor of the President of the Region of Tuscany for Peace, Cooperation and Human Rights, was born in Porcari, Lucca, in 1944. Graduated at the Cattolica University in Milan, in 1980 he acquired a Ph.D. in religious history, and he taught for many years. His activity of study and research has always been linked to civil and social commitment, and in 1998 this commitment broadened to the severe crises that has devastated the Southern hemisphere. In 1998 he went to Algeria, at the height of civil war, at the invitation of the Archbishop of Algiers, and in 2000 he was in Sierra Leone, where he witnessed not only the scandal of war, but also the obscenity of child soldiers.

In 2000 he was nominated Councillor for Peace, Cooperation and Human Rights of the President of the Region Tuscany Claudio Martini, and he accomplished over forty trips in many "hot spots" of the world, from Iraq to Burkina Faso, from Israel to Palestine, from Eritrea to the Balkans, where he promoted and supported the activities of cooperation and peace of the Region of Tuscany.