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## Finland in the Mediterranean

### Abstract

This article aims to shed light on the rich, but rather enigmatic relationship between Finland and the Mediterranean world. These interactions have been approached since Antiquity, but this paper's focus has been on 19th and 20th centuries and especially on the last three decades.

About thirty years ago, when Finland was preparing itself to join the European Union, it also had to build up a real Mediterranean policy of its own. It was in the Corfu European Council in June 1994 when the then-president realised that the country needed such a policy. Thus, in 1995, when Finland joined the EU, it also participated in the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference and signed the Barcelona Declaration that established the Barcelona Process forming the structures for European Union cooperation with the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. The participation into this structural process was felt important for Finland mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the country wanted to be a full and active member of the EU and thus contribute to every field of activity that are important for the union. Secondly, we Finns realised that if we wanted the southern European countries to understand and to cooperate with our own ambitions in the northern part of Europe, we needed to show solidarity towards the aims and needs of our southern partners in the Mediterranean. All this resulted in Finland being surprisingly active in all Euro-Mediterranean cooperation environments. This concerned not only official state activities, but also other public sectors as well as civil society actors and NGOs. These Euro-Mediterranean activities became so many and so multiform that we can deal only with a few of them here as examples.

**Keywords:** Finland, Mediterranean, Middle East, Union for Mediterranean, European Union, Security

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## **Introduction – Prelude**

For a non-coastal, Mediterranean country such as Finland, the Russian attack and the resultant war against Ukraine in February 2022 changed almost everything. This obviously prevails over official state politics and public opinion, but also does so over the atmosphere among civil societies. This, unfortunately, means a reduction of alternatives and a polarisation of our world views. We have started to look only within our own backyard and begun an internal battle that can be compared with, to use the biblical idiom, Jacob wrestling with the unknown angel. The issue was about trying to join NATO, and all other considerations, simply disappeared from Finland's scene and landscape. The very same concerns the Mediterranean world; everything else has seemed to just fade behind the horizon.

About thirty years ago, when Finland was preparing itself to join the European Union, it also had to build up a real Mediterranean policy of its own. It was in the Corfu European Council in June 1994 when the then-president realised that the country needed such a policy. Thus, in 1995, when Finland joined the EU, it also participated in the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference and signed the Barcelona Declaration that established the Barcelona Process forming the structures for European Union cooperation with the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. The participation into this structural process was felt important for Finland mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the country wanted to be a full and active member of the EU and thus contribute to every field of activity that are important for the union. Secondly, we Finns realised that if we wanted the southern European countries to understand and to cooperate with our own ambitions in the northern part of Europe, we needed to show solidarity towards the aims and needs of our southern partners in the Mediterranean.

All this resulted in Finland being surprisingly active in all Euro-Mediterranean cooperation environments. This concerned not only official state activities, but also other public sectors as well as civil society actors and NGOs. These Euro-Mediterranean activities became so many and so multiform that we can deal only with a few of them here as examples.

## **Some Preliminary Notes**

One of the first domains where Finland as a state started its cooperation with the Mediterranean world took place around environmental issues and the protection of its sea areas. Here, Finland has experience as regards

international cooperation in a Baltic Sea context dating back to the 1970s and proposed to share what it had learned with the Mediterranean. In 1997, Finland hosted the first ever Conference of the Ministers of Environment within the Barcelona Process. Two years earlier, the Barcelona Declaration, for the first time in history, mentioned the importance of civil societies in a major international treaty. The Helsinki ministerial conference in 1997 saw, for the first time, civil society representatives present in the meeting. In addition, and parallel to this ministerial meeting, there was a civil-society event where different environmental associations gathered in a common two-part seminar both in Helsinki and in Montpellier.

In practice, all this Euro-Mediterranean environmental cooperation resulted in the active participation of Finnish actors in the SMAP<sup>1</sup> that has had a leading role in the establishment of the rules of the game in this environmental domain. Two years later, an activity within the same category consisted of training for environmental journalists during the first Finnish EU Presidency in 1999. This training was provided by the TAPRI<sup>2</sup> Mediterranean Studies Project and was divided in two parts. The first part, conducted in the French language, took place in Tampere for journalists of Maghrebi countries, and the second part, conducted in English, was for journalists hailing from the Middle East, and which took place in Capri. Simultaneously, SYKE<sup>3</sup> had started a long-term activity in the Mediterranean environmental cooperation which, in the first phase, concerned the wetland areas in different parts of the Mediterranean and, in the second phase, focused on the cost of not addressing environmental pollution in the coastal areas especially in the Maghreb.

At the beginning of the new millennium, Finland started to be very active in the Euro-Mediterranean cultural cooperation and in the creation of the Anna Lindh Foundation.<sup>4</sup> Finland was the only Nordic country that was represented in the Advisory Council of this new foundation for the first ten years, and its role in the Board of Governors was remarkable from the very beginning. This was especially notable during the second Finnish EU Presidency in 2006, when the country's contribution to Euro-Mediterranean political dialogue was recognised by many partners as being the best since 1995. This was due to the devotion of Finland's diplomats in charge of the EuroMed and their willingness to listen to each of the partners. Let us also note that the first ever EuroMed Dialogue

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<sup>1</sup> SMAP, Short and Medium Term Action Plan.

<sup>2</sup> TAPRI, the Tampere Peace Research Institute, founded in 1970.

<sup>3</sup> SYKE, the Finnish Environment Institute.

<sup>4</sup> The Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, its headquarters are located in Alexandria, Egypt.

Award was bestowed upon Father Paolo dall'Oglio<sup>7</sup> in Tampere in 2006 by the Anna Lindh Foundation and by the Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja. At the same time, the “8th EuroMed Conference of Ministers for Foreign Affairs”, the “Barcelona VIII”, also took place in Tampere. In that foreign ministers’ meeting, they actually managed to reach a consensus on a final declaration for the first time since the beginning of the Barcelona Process in 1995, which had occurred over a decade before.

During the second Finnish EU Presidency in 2006, the second EuroMed Conference of the Ministers of Environment also took place, this time in Cairo. Yet another high point of that Finnish EU Presidency consisted of the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference entitled “Strengthening the Role of Women in Society”, and was held in Istanbul. The conference’s main issues were women’s economic rights, women’s political and civil rights as well as women’s cultural and information rights. This conference resulted in a follow-up process that was dedicated to the promotion of gender equality for more than a decade after the fact.

One of these follow-up events took place in Helsinki in autumn 2011, six months after the beginning of the Arab Spring and the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. The Finnish NGOs had organised an important meeting called *North to North – Women as Agents of Change*. This meeting allowed for Nordic and Mediterranean (mostly from the southern and eastern Mediterranean) civil societies to exchange ideas in a face-to-face setting for strengthening and improving the situation of women. This meeting was a good example of how the Arab Spring accelerated the direct North-North cooperation (Hynninen, 2011). In the field of civil societies, the second Finnish EU Presidency was the main promoter of the EuroMed Civil Society Forum that took place in Marrakesh in November 2006. It was the first time this forum had been realised in the southern part of the Mediterranean. Thus, it had a historical importance as it somehow also obliged the southern countries to pay attention to the civil societies and to their role in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. More generally, this strong Finnish engagement was visible also when the Barcelona process was renewed and transformed into the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in the EuroMed Summit in Paris in 2008. This notable engagement could be seen in the participation of both the President as well as the prime minister of Finland in this summit being thus the only country to do so. However, the road to that Parisian EuroMed 2008 Summit was rather complicated and difficult. Finland and Sweden had been especially put out because the original French proposition of the Union for the Mediterranean included only the immediate coastal and riverain countries. Concerning their Mediterranean activities and their Mediterranean *acquis*, Finland and

Sweden took the French proposition almost as a deliberate insult. That the Union for the Mediterranean finally consisted of all the EU Member States was so not only due to Angela Merkel but also very much to Nordic anger.

During the last decade, Finland's Euro-Mediterranean activities have maybe been less visible, but they are nonetheless solid and stable in their continuous support and participation in EuroMed processes. Let us not forget that even today it is a Finnish diplomat who is the chairperson of the body of the UfM's Senior Officials. When it comes to the Anna Lindh Foundation, this same body acts as its Board of Governors as does its chair person. In these organs both, the Senior Officials, usually experienced, senior diplomats, concentrate their efforts on strategic planning and general supervision. Concerning the Union for the Mediterranean, they are the main deciding body between ministerial conferences. Nevertheless, all these different forms of participation by the state as well as by other public and civil society actors during recent decades are only the very top of the iceberg when comparing it with the richness of Finland's heritage concerning the Mediterranean world in history and in cultural domains.

### **The Mediterranean World as a Cultural Reference for Finland**

Finland has had an especially cultural relationship, including scientific research and studies, with the Mediterranean world for over a thousand years at least, and, if we also count some Roman writers of Antiquity, even two millennia. Concerning the Arab world, we have writers such as Ibn Fadlan who met Finns and other Vikings in Russian rivers and who maybe even travelled in this Nordic corner of the world (Abu-Chacra, 2004).

The Moroccan geographer Al-Idrisi wrote about Finland and other eastern Baltic countries (Tallgren-Tuulio, Tallgren, 1930). In Finland, he most probably concentrated on Turku and Häme, mentioning those places in his Baltic geography. However, there is a possibility that he confused several names because their Arabic written forms are very difficult to interpret and so to know exactly what they indicate is challenging. Ibn Khaldun, certainly the best-known Maghrebi scholar in the Middle Ages, even describes in his world history publication *Muqaddimah* some provinces in Finland such as Turku and Häme (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). Usually, those scholars never visited Finland. Ibn Fadlan, however, may be an exception. More generally speaking, besides those eminent Arab scholars, most of the occasions of contact between Finland and the

Mediterranean world consisted of exchanges in the fields of scientific and cultural activities. As regards civil society actors, the most common entities, besides scholars, seemed to be pilgrims and sailors.

### *Scholarly Performance and Heritage*

In the late Middle Ages, Finnish pilgrims started to circulate in the Mediterranean world, most of whom headed to Santiago de Compostela, with some even previous to that having visited the Holy Land. Around the turn of the first millennium, the Christianisation of the Baltic occurred, and Scandinavian countries actually reduced their relations with the Arab world as they now concentrated on the northern shore of the Mediterranean, and on the Catholic world. The same kind of phenomenon took place at the end of the Middle Ages when the Lutheran Reform cut the Nordic contact with the Catholic world and, as a consequence, also did away with the tradition of the pilgrims wandering to the Iberian Peninsula (Hjärpe, 1993).<sup>5</sup>

The field of scientific activities concerns the natural sciences as well as human sciences – botanists, entomologists, linguistics, sociologists, anthropologists, folklorists, etc. are all counted among them. The same kind of variety is also valid as regards the cultural domains i.e., painters, writers, musicians, and composers must also be included. Let us also note that this did not concern only the Northern shore of the Mediterranean but that Finnish artists were active also in the southern and eastern shores of Mare Nostrum. There are many major studies on painters, musicians, and composers in North Africa (Rissanen, 2003; Ådahl, Wessel, 2002; Tyrväinen, 2014).

Besides a handful of Finnish scholars being active in the Mediterranean world in the Middle Ages, it was only as regards the 17th century that we can seriously speak about scientific exchange. In theory, Arabic had been taught since the foundation of the Academy of Turku, the first university in the country in 1640. In practice, it started to be taught just at the beginning of the following century (Aalto, 1971). During the two following centuries, scientific life in Finland accelerated, first in Turku, and then, after the great fire that destroyed the city in 1827, in Helsinki where the university then moved.

As far as the 18th century is concerned, one of the most interesting Finnish scholars in the Mediterranean world was Peter Forsskål, who took

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<sup>5</sup> Jan Hjärpe presents how the Christianisation of the Nordic countries also signified their perification in their relations with Mediterranean Europe. The same goes for the Reform which cut relations with Rome and other parts of the Catholic Europe.

part in a famous Danish expedition named Arabia Felix in the 1760s. The research work done by Peter Forsskål during that expedition resulted in an encyclopaedia of local flora that contained the names of plants in Latin and in Arabic, and remained an authority in that matter for more than a century (Matinolli, 1960). 19th century Finland witnessed the emergence of Fenno-Ugrian studies when Finnish linguists, anthropologists, and folklorists travelled around Karelia and even in Siberia looking for traces of any origins of the Finns and their language. This domain was scientifically and methodically very advanced and of excellent quality. At the end of the century, this experience exerted a huge influence on those who studied the Mediterranean world; they actually applied the very same rigorous approaches. In this context, we can pay attention to the scientist Theodor Schvindt, who spent the first half of his scientific career in folkloristics in Carelia and then moved to Egypt where he studied everyday life in rural areas (Haltsonen, 1947). There are several cases, including that of Theodor Schvindt, wherein one studies local life in the Middle East and pays attention to elements that were theretofore often neglected (Weir, 2012).

One of the most important and internationally-known Finnish scholars through the ages also belongs to our Mediterranean domain. Edvard Westermarck is seen as the father of sociology in Finland. Thus, Finnish sociology was born in Morocco where Edvard Westermarck spent more than nine years during a period of almost five decades. About one third of his scientific publications concerned that country where he went for the first time in 1898 (Westermarck, 1929), and to which he visited for the last time in May 1939, just four months before his death (Melasuo, 1993). Even if the theoretical framework of Edvard Westermarck is already out of mode, the documentation he collected in Morocco is of permanent value, often due to its high quality due to the rigorous, 19<sup>th</sup>-century requirements of the Fenno-Ugrian tradition. Around ten years ago, in a multidisciplinary conference concentrating on human and social science studies of northern Morocco, the attending linguists paid tribute to Westermarck, saying that it was only through the help of his notes that we today have an idea of how certain words in Berber and in local colloquial Arabic were pronounced a hundred years ago (Mezzine, Vignet-Zunz, Brigui, 2018).

For Finns, some more political-style relations with the Mediterranean world started during the First World War when we shared some common experiences with Maghrebi political activists, with both groups trying to realise their projects for the advance of independence. These activists met each other, for instance, in 1916 in La IIIe Conférence des Nationalités in

Lausanne (*Revendications des Nationalités*, 2016). The Maghrebi activists kept on publishing a more or less regular publication called the *Revue du Maghreb*. This review reported that, in the Lausanne conference in 1916, the “Finnish delegation was received with sympathy and got a lot of applause as well as a mention that the independence of their nation was desirable” (*Revue du Maghreb*, 1916).<sup>6</sup> The Mediterranean world played a role of reference for Finnish scholars until the 1950s when, little by little, the elite of the country started to turn towards the Anglo-American world that today holds a dominating position in the cultural and scientific landscape of Finland.

Nevertheless, the importance of the Mediterranean world after the Second World War can be seen in the creation and location of Finnish cultural-and-scientific institutes outside the country. Their existential specificity is that their aim is to make advancing Finnish scientific research more than distributing the glorious research achievements of Finland. The first of Finland’s foreign scientific institutes was created in Rome, Italy, in 1954, and was called Villa Lante, and the second was established in Athens, Greece, thirty years later. They were followed by Finnish Institutes in Paris 1990, the Middle East’s FIME in 1994,<sup>7</sup> and Madrid in 1996. The two institutes in Paris and in Madrid also advocate for Finnish culture at large besides their promoting of scientific research cooperation. The Ibero-American Institute, as it is called in Madrid, also covers Portugal and the entirety of Latin America. There are many other Finnish cultural-and-scientific institutes that were also created subsequently that are not located in the Mediterranean. These number 18 in total. It is worth of noting that five out of the 18 Finnish institutes are focussed on the Mediterranean world, and that they are specifically scientific-research-and-study-oriented establishments. The fact that the two aforementioned institutes located in Italy and Greece were created much earlier than the others, and that those two were located in the Mediterranean, also emphasizes the cultural importance of the Mediterranean world until the 1950s and beyond.

### *Cultural Heritage Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*

By the times of the Renaissance, and especially since the beginning of the 17th century, the Mediterranean world started to excite the Nordic imagination. One of the first rectors of the University of Uppsala even

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<sup>6</sup> The citation is translated by the author of this article.

<sup>7</sup> FIME, the Finnish Institute in the Middle East, located in Beirut. <https://www.fime.fi/en/>.



believed that Sweden was the reincarnation of the lost city of Atlantis (Melasuo, 2012; Vidal-Naquet, 2005). In Finland, and still in the first half of the 20th century, some writers depicted the Finnish as a people originally hailing from the island of Crete, or even from North Africa (Vuorio, 1931).

We have already learned how Protestant reform represented an important and rather brutal break for Finland; a cut with Rome, that is, with Catholic Europe and the Mediterranean. However, as with all the breakdowns in relations, including and especially those provoked by the Reform, they remain relative as we can see in the diverse continuation of the Nordic activities in the South (Hjärpe, 1993; Dagen, 2015).

In reality, Greek Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Church had also held an important position since the 11th century in Finland. This meant that the relationship between Finland and Constantinople (today's Istanbul), continued through history and also after Protestant reform. The position of the Orthodox Church was strengthened during the 19th century when Finland was an autonomous duchy of the Russian Tsar. Since Finland gained its independence, the Orthodox Church of the country has tried to strengthen its independence, and nowadays depends directly on Istanbul. Concerning the Orthodox tradition, Finland differs clearly from other Nordic countries. Same is valid in what comes to Judaism and Islam, we have a living but small communities of these two religions that came to Finland during the 19th century, mostly by people moving from the Russian empire. Here, Finland is also different from other Nordic countries. In a very modest way, these experiences strengthen the country's understanding of religious and cultural pluralism – at least in theory. More or less at the same time, that is, at the end of the 19th century, the contemporary relationship between the Iberian Peninsula and Finland started through Spanish activities. In the 1890s, Spain created its first consulate in Finland, and the first Spanish consul was Angel Ganivet, author of the famous *Cartas Finlandesas*, commonly read, to the author's understanding, in Spanish schools during the entirety of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it is maybe still the case today (Ganivet, 1993). *Cartas Findandesas* contains an interesting description of Finland and its distinctiveness. In spite of a Finnish translation of the book published in 1964 and a second edition published in 1993, it is actually only recently that Finns began to discover who Angel Ganivet really was. In 1998, on the hundred-year anniversary of his death, as far as the author knows, at least two scientific colloquia were organised in Finland and one in Spain, but, in reality, perhaps some more took place (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 1998).

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century started with a visit of the rather important and well-known Finnish author Joel Lehtonen (1881–1934)

to Tunisia in 1914. Travelling around the country and taking in such places as Tunis, Sfax, and Gafsa inspired Lehtonen to write the poetic account *Under the Crescent*, wherein he compared the people of his own village in faraway, rural Finland to Tunisians finding people similar all over the world (Lehtonen, 1919).<sup>8</sup> After the First World War, some Finns were present and active in the Rif War in the 1920s, a war that involved the French as much as the Spaniards against Abdelkrim and his so-called “Republic of Rif” in northern Morocco. Professor Edvard Westermarck, who was very critical towards European, and especially French colonialism, was of a consenting attitude towards the Rifians and their desire for independence. Westermarck even defended Abdelkrim in September 1925 in the Finnish press.<sup>9</sup>

The impact of Maghrebi writers in Nordic countries and in Finland is rather remarkable. One of the first was Moustafa Lachref, an Algerian diplomat and writer, who visited a conference of literature already at the end of the 1940s. He was followed by fellow countryman Mohammed Dib who is certainly the most important Maghrebi author whose literary output touches upon Nordic countries, the first of which being Finland. Since 1986, Mohammed Dib had visited Finland several times, taking part in different literature events, especially in the Lahti International Writers’ Reunion. Among his works, the most interesting certainly is his *La Trilogie Finlandaise* (1985-1994) that consists of *Les Terrasses d’Orsol* (1985), *Neiges de Marbre* (1989), and *Le Sommeil d’Eve* (1990), as well as the later *L’Infante Maure* (1994), which all deal with the Nordic world, with a special focus on Finland (Déjeux, 1983). Unfortunately, this Finnish trilogy from the pen of Mohammed Dib is hardly known in Finland, and has not even been translated into Finnish, and this represents a real loss for Finnish literary culture. Only two books by Mohammed Dib have been translated into Finnish – *La Grande Maison* (1952), and *L’Indencie* (1954). Mohammed Dib translated himself some Finnish writers’ works into French which were published in the *Revue Europe* magazine. Mohammed Dib approached the Nordic mythology with his *Le Sommeil d’Eve*, which bore striking similarities to *The Wolf’s Bride* (Sudenmorsian, 1928/1930) by Aino Kallas, a Finnish author. Aino Kallas was married to an Estonian diplomat and they spent a number of years in Rabat, and

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<sup>8</sup> Much later that is 2016 there was a half documentary, half fiction movie by *Heikki Hutu-Hiltunen* based on this book of Joel Lehtonen. In that movie Hutu-Hiltunen includes element of Finnish Civil War in 1918 and the Arab Spring in Tunisia. In 2019, there was an exhibition of Joel Lehtosen’s visit to Tunisia in the National Archives of Finland.

<sup>9</sup> Turun Sanomat, 15.9.1925.

maybe in that there was something that Mohammed Dib found familiar (Déjeux, 1991, Aïssani, 2016).

After returning to the North, Aino Kallas published at least two texts about her experiences in Morocco – *Marokon lumoissa: pieniä kirjeitä Marokosta* (Under the Charms of Morocco: Small Letters from Morocco, 1931), and *Päiväkirja vuosilta 1927–1931 (A Diary on the Years 1927–1931)* (Kallas, 1956). There are also a number of Moroccan writers who have had Nordic experiences. One of the most interesting is Abdelkébir El Khatibi,<sup>10</sup> and his text *Un été à Stockholm* (1992), wherein he tries to understand the Nordic way of living in the summer that must be rather exotic for a Maghrebian. Another Moroccan, Tahar Ben Jelloun, is certainly the most known Maghrebi writer in Nordic countries, especially in Finland, with about a dozen of his works having been translated into Finnish. Even though he has visited Finland several times, none of his books deal directly with Nordic countries. Nevertheless, he sometimes has a very critical appreciation of the Nordic societies in his numerous interviews according to different media; he once described Stockholm as a city where people do not even look each other.

If we want to understand the relations between Finland and the Mediterranean world from deeper societal perspectives, we should pay attention to the impact of tourism, mobility, and migration as well as to gastronomy. Over the last six decades, hundreds of thousands Finnish tourists have spent time in the Mediterranean, most of whom seek the sun and a more suitable climate, especially in the winters, for their holidays. They were also after a more tolerant ambiance than the Protestant North with all its societal restrictions. Unfortunately, there are no serious studies on what kind of image these tourists cultivated as regards the Mediterranean world. Nevertheless, it is obvious that these Mediterranean holidays had an impact on Finnish society (Jacobsen, 1991; Melasuo, 1995). The Arab Spring, however, had a decreasing effect on Nordic and Finnish tourism towards Northern Africa; people quickly grew afraid of the unstable situation and menacing atmosphere. However, paradoxically, the image of Northern Africa, with all those revolutions related to spring 2011, started to excite Finnish civil society, and there was a rush to show solidarity towards Tunisians and to Egyptians, as will be later detailed.

Since the 1960 onwards, migrants from Northern Africa started to move to Nordic countries including Finland. This phenomenon accelerated in 1995 when Finland and Sweden became members of the European Union, and even more in 2001 when these two countries joined the Schengen

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<sup>10</sup> Abdelkébir El Khatibi is the grandson of the president of the Republic of Riff Abdelkrim el-Khatibi in the 1920s.

area. Little by little, this started to have an impact on the populations. Finland and Sweden have rather different histories as regards this kind of mobility; Sweden has a long past of incoming strangers – mostly Finns – whereas in Finland, foreigners came much more recently. For instance, in Finland, the number of Muslims has increased spectacularly during the last five decades.

The Maghrebi-origin populations are increasingly playing the role of bridge and intermediary transport between the Mediterranean and Nordic worlds, simultaneously making life and the cultural landscape richer here in the North. This Mediterranean influence can be seen, for instance, in the domains of alimentation. In Finland, among the first so-called “ethnic” establishments were Italian and Spanish restaurants. The success of pizzerias was so important that the Finnish national pizza (with ham and pineapple) was soon invented. It is already almost three decades since the Turkish kebab replaced traditional Frankfurter and Russian meat pie in Finland. In some larger cities, there are even local producers of Algerian merguez, a spicy, red sausage. With regard to Maghrebi couscous, that early arrived in Finland, but disappeared rather quickly some forty years ago. It has made a return, and can be found in the shops, but in forms that are more adapted to local tastes. There is also a rather strong presence of more general Eastern Mediterranean cuisine in Finland, including hummus and tahini, and can be found in most supermarkets. All these cultural exchanges and human contact between the Mediterranean world and Finland are important for several reasons. Firstly, it is to do with the number of Finnish families whose grandparents and other relatives are living in Mediterranean countries, and visa versa; the number of Mediterranean families having grandchildren or cousins in Finland has significantly increased during the last half of the century. In general, concerning relations between the civil societies, these family connections represent a extremely important change. Secondly, concerning the second or third generation of Finnish citizens having Mediterranean roots, our enterprises as well as public sectors have started to mobilise these compatriots in their professional activities with the southern countries. This makes those relations more credible. More generally, an important number of Finnish citizens who have roots in the Mediterranean world have succeeded as regards their personal career in Finland. We can find them in almost all fields and all levels in the social and professional life of the country.

## Finland in the Mediterranean Today

During the nearly-three decades since the Barcelona EuroMed Conference in 1995, the Finnish interactions concerning the Mediterranean world and the cooperation with it have maybe increased in volume. Nevertheless, what is more obvious is that they have become more diverse, even versatile, and they also vary along rather short-term conjunctures.

At the beginning of this millennium, Finnish cooperation took often place together with other Nordic countries. In the South, it was the representatives of the Iberian Peninsula who were active. In this context, let us make note of two events that had a more general impact. An Iberian initiative resulted in the colloquium *European Peripheries: The Nordic Countries and the Iberian Peninsula* in 2000 in Alcalá de Hénares. This event was an extraordinary manifestation on the importance of peripheries in Europe and especially as it succeeded in including a Maghreb-based dimension (Beltrán, Maestro, Salo-Lee, 2002). This gathering in Alcalá was followed two years later by a new colloquium in Barcelona on *La cooperació regional al Baltic i a la Mediterrània*, organised by the Catalans, the Finns, and the Swedes with important Maghreb-based participation – as such, it was a real Nordic-Mediterranean meeting. Let us also not forget that, in general, the Catalans are as remarkable as the Nordics are in this field of escaping Europe (Oliván-Pena, Weltner-Puig, 2003).

About ten years later, inspired by the Arab Spring, different actors of civil society engaged rather strongly with Tunisia. A good example of this engagement has been the contribution of Finnish parliamentary parties to the *Tunisian School of Politics*,<sup>11</sup> whose aim is to perfect the performance, first of all, of young Tunisian politicians hailing from all parliamentary parties. Even the Finnish Police have been mobilised to Tunisia. Since 2014, the Finnish Police University College has participated in the formation of Tunisian police and gendarmerie (Police University College, N.D.).

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<sup>11</sup> “Tunisian School of Politics” (TSOP) is a common initiative between Centre des Études Méditerranéennes et Internationales (CEMI) in Tunis, The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), Demo Finland and Bulgarian School of Politics “Dimitry Panitza”, <http://www.cemi-tunis.org/pages/parteneriat/cole-politique-de-tunis/>, and <https://demofinland.org/en/tunisian-school-of-politics-alumni-visit-to-finland/>.

## **Finland and the Mediterranean – Common Security**

During the same year of 2011 when the Arab Spring first occurred in Tunisia and Egypt, myriad other things happened which affected Finland's relations with the Mediterranean world. The war in Libya divided the Nordic and Baltic countries. Norway and Denmark are members of NATO, and, as such, it was relatively easy for them to take part in the military campaign of the Alliance in which even Sweden, a neutral country, participated. Yet Finland, another neutral country, refused to be part of the campaign, this decision provoking a heated and highly controversial debate in the country.

Besides Finland, there were three other major Baltic Sea countries – Germany, Poland, and Russia – which did not participate in the NATO campaign against Muammar Gaddafi's Libya. Thus, the war in Libya divided the Nordic and Baltic Sea countries more than anything else had done since the end of the Cold War. All this demonstrates how the Mediterranean dimension is important to security politics in the Baltic Sea area which, of course, includes Finland. In this domain of security politics in the Mediterranean world – in the Maghreb and in the Middle East – an important yet discrete priority for Finland has been a UN project entitled, *Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction*. In October 2011, the USA, the UK, and Russia published information that Finland had been nominated as a facilitator for this project and that a conference for the establishment of this zone would take place in 2012 in Finland. However, due to the USA and Israel and their opposition to this, it was not possible. Nevertheless, the idea was not abandoned, and the preparations have been continuing in such a way that allows for rapid action as and when the moment calls for it.<sup>12</sup>

All these examples indicate that the relations of Northern Europe and Finland with the Mediterranean world have been proactive, even if they have not been ostensibly visible during the first almost-three decades of the Barcelona Process.

## **Conclusions – Our Future**

This article has aimed to shed light on the rich, but rather enigmatic relationship between Finland and the Mediterranean world. These interactions have been approached since Antiquity, but this paper's focus

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<sup>12</sup> This kind of international confidence for a Nordic country is based on long experience – more than 60 years, and on the excellent results in Finland and Sweden's peace-keeping activities in the Middle East under the auspices of the UN.

has been on 19th and 20th centuries and especially on the last three decades. Even if the purpose of our approach has been Finland, it has become increasingly obvious that the main Finnish performances and undertakings in the Mediterranean world have taken place in the context of Nordic and Baltic approaches, and today this is more the case than ever before.

Thus, in the discussion of renewing the Mediterranean policy of the EU, the Nordic approach has been sustained by Spain and the Maghrebi countries. The Maghrebi countries have especially expressed their disappointment on the actual state of affairs, and their support for the Nordic approach is based on their wish for more equality in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. These relations have sometimes, however, been rather complicated. During the Swedish EU Presidency in 2009, the European Union adopted an *EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region* (EUSBSR). Its application was supposed to be assured by the *Baltic Sea Action Group* (BSAG, N.D.). Concerning the Mediterranean world, this strategy and its action group can facilitate cooperation in several domains. In fact, the next step was taken in 2013 in Stockholm when the *Memorandum of Understanding between the Permanent International Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (PIS CBSS) and the Secretariat of the Union of the Mediterranean (UfMS)* was signed. The *raison d'être* of this agreement is to develop interactions between the two mega-regions in the economic and environmental domains. Curiously, in the text of the agreement, we can find a Nordic paternalism, a seriously shocking and visible remnant of the *Barbars del Norte*. The object of the agreement is to develop the Mediterranean peoples, and their responsibilities on the Euro-Mediterranean questions by listing, alas, only Mediterranean priorities. Good examples come entirely from the Baltic world, but nothing in the agreement implies the idea that the Nordic world could also have something to learn from the South (Melasuo, 2012; UfMS, 2013).

All the Nordic countries, except for Norway, are members of the Union for the Mediterranean. However, it is Norway that is the most active country by having a concrete project within the UfM, and the state seems to have a need to reassert its presence and its role in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Norway states clearly that the neighbours of the EU are also its neighbours and that the key element of *The Norwegian Government's Strategy for Cooperation with the EU 2014–2017*, is its cooperation with the European Union (Government.no, 2014). This polemic from almost ten years ago shows us that the Nordic countries, and maybe especially Finland, which seems to be one of the most racist countries in EU Europe (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018), have still

much to learn in order to be able to cooperate on equal bases with the Mediterranean world. Or maybe it is better to say, as Mohammed Arkoun put it when visiting Finland many years ago, that “Europe can reach her own goals only by returning to her original Mediterranean values” (Arkoun, 1990). Thus, if Europeans seriously desire to face the challenges of our time such as climate change, the Coronavirus pandemic, the war in Ukraine, globalisation etc., there is a need to further strengthen the Euro-Mediterranean community that will allow us all to continue living decent lives.

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