

Research Article

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean: Evaluation of Its Work and Challenges

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Abstract

This research aims to evaluate the works and challenges of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM). The Union for the Mediterranean and The Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean are the two most important regional cooperation tools in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The origin of the Euro-Mediterranean commitment to cooperate is "The Barcelona Process", an initiative launched in 1995 to promote cooperation and dialogue between the European Union (EU) and countries in the Mediterranean region.

To achieve the evaluation of its work, we study the political recommendations that have been made in the plenary sessions of the PA-UfM in the period 2014-2024; we have studied the agenda of the Spanish rotating presidency of the PA-UfM; and evaluated the results of the Conferences of Presidents of the PA-UfM member parliaments (Summit of Speakers).

The methodology of this study is quantitative, and it combines techniques of analysis of content, the technique of the participant observation and study case.

Keywords: *Alzheimer's disease, Family caregiver, Lived experience, Caregiving relationship*

Introduction

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean is the parliamentary debate forum for the representatives of the parliaments of the 42 states that make up the Union for the Mediterranean. Since the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean (2008), this alliance between the member states of the European Union and 16 States on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean have wanted to have a parliamentary dimension that would give continuity to the regional integration project that defined in the Barcelona Process established in 1995. The initial form of inter-parliamentary cooperation was the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum, which was first convened in 1998. Delegates from the European Parliament and the national parliaments of the EU Members and Southern Mediterranean partners attended this forum. The European Parliament initiated the Forum's conversion into a genuine Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) through a resolution. In 2002, the fifth Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Foreign Ministers in Valencia approved this resolution. Following, the EMPA's inaugural sitting was held in Greece in March 2004. At the sixth plenary session, held in Amman in March 2010, EMPA's name was changed to Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM (PA-UfM). This name emphasizes the PA-UfM's unique role as the parliamentary body of the UfM, with a focus on democratic control and its consultative role.

Methodology

The methodology of this research is quantitative. It combines

techniques of analysis of content, the technique of the participant observation because one of the two authors was a member of the PA-UfM, and study case, focusing specifically in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study are the followings:

H1. Final recommendations (2014-2024) of the plenary session of PAUFM are sensitive to the geopolitics of the moment rather than long-term strategic lines.

H2. As for the agenda of the Spanish presidency, it tends to give continuity to the Moroccan agenda for the points of contact between the two countries regarding the issue of regular and irregular immigration.

H3. The Summit of speakers should be a structured forum to define the work of the parliamentary assembly during a certain period of time.

Theoretical and Contextual Framework

The Euro-Mediterranean Region and its Partnership

The Mediterranean has traditionally been a regional meeting point for state and interstate actors who, despite sharing problems, strengths, and weaknesses, do not share rhythms of political, economic and social development. It is precisely the desire to share and collaborate between these various actors at the regional level that the Barcelona

Process (1995) launched the Euro-Mediterranean partnership project. The European Council noted in Lisbon in June 1992 that, like the Middle East, the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean were crucial to the EU's security and social stability [1].

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, also known as the *Barcelona Process*, is a cooperative framework that aims to promote stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean region. It was launched in 1995 in Barcelona, Spain, by the European Union (EU) and 12 Mediterranean countries: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestinian Authorities, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey [2].

The partnership [3] was based on three main pillars:

1. **Political and Security Dialogue:** This pillar focuses on promoting peace, stability, and security in the region through political dialogue and cooperation on issues such as conflict prevention, counterterrorism, and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
2. **Economic and Financial Partnership:** this pillar aims to enhance economic integration and development in the region by promoting trade liberalization, investment, and economic reforms. It includes initiatives such as the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EUROMED FTA) and financial assistance programs.
3. **Social, Cultural, and Human Partnership:** this pillar aims to foster mutual understanding, dialogue, and cooperation among peoples and cultures of the Euro-Mediterranean region. It includes initiatives to promote cultural exchange, education, civil society participation, and human rights.

Over the years, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has faced challenges, including political tensions, economic disparities, and security threats [4]. However, it remains an important framework for promoting cooperation and addressing common challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and especially after the institutionalization process that entails the foundation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM).

Some authors have discussed whether the institutionalization strategies of a regional partnership such as the Euro-Mediterranean are effective if they are not accompanied by agreed policy declarations and the focus of the respective problems of the northern and southern countries with solutions that come directly from the affected countries [5-7]

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is an intergovernmental organisation that brings together 43 countries to strengthen regional cooperation and dialogue through specific projects and initiatives that address inclusive and sustainable development (Esseghir & Haouaoui Khouni, 2014), stability and integration in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was launched at the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean in 2008. As a direct continuation of the Barcelona Process (1995), the launch of the UfM in 2008 was

the reflection of its member states who shared political commitment to enhance the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

It was in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership meeting of foreign ministers, held in Valencia on 22–23 April 2002, that it was decided 'to recommend the creation of a Euro-Med Parliamentary Assembly', which will only include members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and parliamentarians from the southern shores

The organization has always undertaken a diverse range of projects and initiatives to promote inclusive regional sustainable development and integration [8]. The main focus is on women's rights, job creation, fostering cross-country connectivity efforts and addressing environmental and climate emergencies. It also prioritizes grant schemes and programmes to encourage entrepreneurship and job opportunities for young people, recognizing their crucial role in shaping the region's future [9].

The headquarters of the UfM is in BCN and its 43 member states are the followings: Albania, Algeria, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Libya, Luxemburg, Malta, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, The Netherlands, North Macedonia, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

Regarding the structure of the UfM we should mention [10]:

Senior Officials

the Member States meet on a regular basis at the level of Senior Officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The Senior Officials Meetings (SOM) provide the framework to discuss the current regional context, coordinate the work of the UfM Secretariat and endorse new development projects to which the UfM label is given.

The Co-Presidency

The UfM works on the basis of the principle of co-ownership. So do, and since 2012, there is a Northern and Southern co-presidency.

Secretariat

It was established in 2010 in Barcelona. It is the first permanent structure dedicated to the implementation of this partnership. It ensures operational follow-up of the regional priorities and supports the implementation of region-wide cooperation projects and initiatives.

Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM (PA-UfM)

It is considered the parliamentary body of the UfM, although it has its all functioning process ad total autonomy.

The methodology of work used by the UfM is based on three main tools: policy (building common thematic agendas), platforms (fostering regional dialogue) and projects (translating the policy dimension into tangible impact).

The Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM (PA-UfM)

As mentioned above, since the creation of the UfM it was clear that the unique way of creating an effective and real regional integration process, was with a parliamentary assembly. The initial form of inter-parliamentary cooperation was the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum, which was first convened in 1998. Delegates from the European Parliament and the national parliaments of the EU Members and Southern Mediterranean partners attended this forum.

The European Parliament initiated the Forum's conversion into a genuine Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) through a resolution. In 2002, the fifth Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Foreign Ministers in Valencia approved this resolution. Following, the EMPA's inaugural sitting was held in Greece in March 2004. At the sixth plenary session, held in Amman in March 2010, EMPA's name was changed to Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM (PA-UfM). This name emphasizes the PA-UfM's unique role as the parliamentary body of the UfM, with a focus on democratic control and its consultative role.

The following countries have parliamentarians in the PA-UfM: Albania, Algeria, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, The Netherlands, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey

Considering its functions the PA-UfM provides parliamentary impetus, input and support for the consolidation and development of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership; It expresses its views on all issues relating to the Partnership, including the implementation of the association agreements; and finally adopts resolutions or recommendations, which are not legally binding, addressed to the UfM and its members.

Regarding the structure we should mention:

Assembly

Plenary Session

The meeting of all the parliamentarians which represent their respective countries.

Standing Committees

The PA-UfM has five standing committees which indicate the focus areas of the Parliamentary Assembly. These committees are responsible for monitoring their respective thematic areas of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership and meet at least once a year. Each committee consists of 56 members, of which 28 are from the Mediterranean partner countries, 19 are from EU national Parliaments, and nine are members of the European Parliament. Each parliamentary committee elects a chairperson and three vice-chairpersons that serve a two-year term.

Working Groups

There are currently two working groups. On the one hand, "The

Working Group on Financing of the Assembly and Revision of the Rules of Procedure" which discusses and revises the PA-UfM Rules of procedures and financial regulation. On the other one, "The Working Group on the post-Covid economy in the Mediterranean" which works systematically analysing the post covid situation in the Mediterranean region.

Permanent Secretariat

It assists the Assembly and its bodies in the preparation, proper management, and follow-up of their work. It is coordinated and managed by the Secretary-General. Its headquarters is in Rome.

Bureau

It is responsible for coordinating the work of the Assembly. It is the body responsible to represent the Assembly for matters regarding relations with the other institutions. The Bureau of the PA-UfM consists of four members appointed for a four-year mandate: two appointed by the Southern Mediterranean partner countries, one appointed by the EU national parliaments and one appointed by the European Parliament. The European Parliament is a permanent member of the Bureau.

Presidency

The Assembly shall be chaired by one of the members of the Bureau, in rotation and on an annual basis, thus ensuring parity and alternate South/North presidencies. The three other members of the Bureau shall be Vice-Presidents.

The Summit of Speakers

The Speakers of Parliament of each member country of the PA-UfM gather annually for the Summit of Speakers.

As a north- south forum, the Assembly brings together 44 parliaments -- the 43 parliaments of the countries in the Union for the Mediterranean, and the European Parliament. The Assembly consists of 278 members:

138 Members come from the northern shore of the Mediterranean, made up of 49 members from the European Parliament and 81 members from the EU's 27 national parliaments (three members per country) and 8 members from the four European Mediterranean partner countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Monaco and Montenegro, with two members each).

140 members represent the southern shore: 130 members from the ten founding Mediterranean partners (13 members per parliament) and 10 members from the Mauritanian parliament.

Study Case

As mentioned before, the Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM was a crucial tool to work effectively for a real regional cooperation. In this investigation we wanted to focus specifically in three main aspects to qualify PA-UfM as an effective tool: the final political recommendations from plenary sessions; the agenda of the Spanish presidency of the PA-UfM; the Summit of Speakers.

Final Recommendations from Plenary Sessions

In this section we want to study the final recommendations from the plenary sessions in the period 2014-2024. Each plenary session makes generally three types of recommendations: political, economic, and cultural. Those that are approved are incorporated into the “final recommendations” document that concludes each plenary session. Moreover, every plenary session is focused in one thematic issue.

Note the Assembly decides by consensus. The quorum is the majority of the delegations plus one within each of the two components of the Assembly, that is, the European and Mediterranean components. Alternatively, when it is not possible for the Assembly to adopt its decisions by consensus, it will adopt its decisions by a qualified majority of at least 2/3 of the votes of the members present from each of the two shores of the Mediterranean, in the presence of at least half plus one of the members of both components of the Assembly. Although the resolutions of the Assembly are not legally binding they are politically valuable.

It should be noted that the plenary meetings that were held in the period studied (2014-2024) were eight. More specifically, the annual meeting scheduled for 2020 in Antalya (Turkey) had to be cancelled due to the pandemic and was held on December 3 and 4, 2021 in Brussels under the presidency of the European Parliament. Little news was recorded about this meeting even under the impact of the health crisis. In 2022 and 2023, plenary sessions of the PA-UfM were not held due to the impact of the global health crisis caused by the Covid-19 virus.

In the next figure you can find a summary of the most important political recommendations from plenary sessions of the PA-UfM:

Plenary session	Place	Thematic issue	Political recommendations
10 th	Amman 2014	corruption in Europe and the southern Mediterranean countries post-2011	Tackling corruption and facilitating asset recovery.
11 th	Lisbon 2015	Human Rights, migrations, and terrorism	- Promoting human rights - Securing the safety of migrants in the Mediterranean - Fighting against terrorism - creation of a special internet platform for 'Euro-Mediterranean inter-parliamentary cooperation'
12 th	Tangier 2016	building a better intercultural Mediterranean anchorage for shared development in terms of peace and security and for sustainable development that takes into consideration climate change and protection of the environment in the Mediterranean.	-stability and security. -Condemns terrorism and violent extremism. -Refugees and conflicts: Syria, Iraq and Libya -Support the establishment of the Government of National Unity in Libya as the sole legitimate government. -Concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt and calls on Egyptian authorities to respect their obligations.

13 th	Rome 2017	Employment in the EM area, in a context of sustainable development	Concern about a lack of a global and effective strategic line. It invites us to analyse successes and failures nine years after the constitution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean. -Stability and security of the Mediterranean. -Firmly condemns all terrorist acts that represent a common threat to both shores of the Mediterranean. - improve the governance of the UfM by holding annually in Barcelona a 'Regional UfM Forum' -Collective response to Migration. -encourage the revival of regional integration in the Southern Mediterranean, in particular the Arab Maghreb Union. -Improve the social integration and employability of young people. -Water supplies: Gaza desalination plant project, project to decontaminate Lake Bizerte in Tunisia and the European Investment Bank's recent support, worth 70 million euros, for the EuroMediterranean University
14 th	Cairo 2018	countering terrorism in EM region	-combating terrorism and preventing violent extremism. -Condemning all sorts of violence and terrorism acts. -Urges the UfM member states to strengthen judicial and police cooperation and the exchange of data and information in the field of combating terrorism. - permanent network for exchange of information and best practices between anti-terrorist partner centres in the Mediterranean countries. -combating the trafficking of weapons. - UfM member states to improve the monitoring of suspicious financial movements - the urgent need to improve young people's social integration and employability
15 th	Strasbourg 2019	The challenges of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean	-shared management of the migration phenomenon and therefore greater cooperation and solidarity among the countries involved. -addressing the root causes of migration, hence the need to provide young people with adequate training. -the fight against traffickers and the importance of rescues at sea. -the impact of migrants and refugees on host societies. -awareness of the impact of migration on the countries of the southern shore, which from transit countries have become countries of arrival. -Palestinian refugees who have been living outside their country for seventy years.

16 th	Antalya 2020. Postponed until December 2021 due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.	Multiculturalism and xenophobia.	COVID-19 pandemic, regional conflicts, migration, jobs opportunities and education.
16 th bis	On-line February 2021	The fight against climate change in the Mediterranean Region	Global joint approach at an Euro-Mediterranean level to common challenge. Adoption of the New Agenda for the Mediterranean. Renewed partnership with the Southern Mediterranean countries
17 th	Rabat 2024	The Rabat Spirit	-condemned violence in Gaza and West Bank, insisting on a need of a ceasefire. -Reactivate Israeli-Palestinian peace process. -Threat of terrorist groups taking advantage of instability in some areas of the Mediterranean region. -Climate change, health security, migration issues and human trafficking

Source: own elaboration based on data available in www.paumf.org

From the analysis of the contents of the resolutions and political recommendations of the PA-UfM plenary sessions analyzed, we can highlight:

- There is not a multi-year work plan that defines a coherence or common thread in the work of the plenary sessions analyzed.
- The topics discussed and the resolutions approved were raised each year in the light of current political, economic and social issues. Prevailing: fight against corruption, fight against terrorism, legal migration policies, human rights, climate change, impact of the Covid-19 virus pandemic, education, job opportunities, human trafficking, and rescues of migrants at sea, judicial and police cooperation between Member States. It is detected that the topics discussed in a plenary session do not have follow-up or evaluation in the following plenary session.
- Current political issues and regional crises prevail in the resolutions depending on the years. Thus, in the years analyzed there were statements about the hope for political changes in the region (in reference to the so-called Arab Spring), concern about the deterioration of human rights in Egypt, a call for support for the Government of the National Union of Libya, concern for refugees from Syria, Iraq and Libya, reactivation of the Israel-Palestine conflict following the Hamas terrorist attacks on the Israeli population on October 7, 2023 and the subsequent Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip.
- In the various plenary sessions of the PA-UfM, concern has been expressed about the lack of a global and effective strategic line in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly. Thus, in the 2017 plenary session, the criticism was expressed explicitly and in the following terms:

“Concern about a lack of a global and effective strategic line. It invites us to analyze successes and failures nine years after the constitution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean.”

- For a better governance of the UfM, in 2017 the plenary session proposed and supported the holding of an annual meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Member States in Barcelona under the format of “Regional UfM Forum”. Without replacing the meetings of Heads of State and Government, this new form of governance was intended to streamline dialogue between the parts and the decision-makers. In recent years, the highest and most operational level of meeting of the Governments of the Member States occurs through the annual ministerial meetings held annually in the month of November in Barcelona. To date, eight UfM Regional Forums have been held.
- The “south-south” regional integration of the Mediterranean has been another of the lines on which the plenary sessions have repeatedly positioned themselves. Today, the “south-south” integration of the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean is in a phase of paralysis.
- In some cases, the PA-UfM has stopped supporting specific development projects of some member states such as water supplies, Gaza desalination plant project, the project to decontaminate Lake Bizerte in Tunisia and the European Investment Bank’s recent support, for the Euro-Mediterranean University). Given the distrust of diligent and compliant use of public funds allocated to the projects, the Parliamentary Assembly has appointed reporters to study and monitor the projects. These types of speakers in some UfM projects are the maximum expression of the “parliamentaryization” of the decisions made by an eminently intergovernmental policy.

The Agenda of the Spanish Presidency of the PA-UfM

Initially, the presidency of the *Congreso de los Diputados*, which is also the presidency of the *Cortes Generales* (joint meeting of the Congress of Deputies and the Senate), should chair the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean in the period 2022-2023. This was publicly announced in July 2020 under the presidency of Meritxell Batet. According to the rotation criteria between countries in the north and south of the Mediterranean, the president of the *Congreso de los Diputados* is part of the bureau of the PA-UfM in the period 2020-2024. Due to the health crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic and a long cycle of repeating general elections between 2019 and 2023, the Spanish presidency of the PA-UfM was postponed until early 2024. This meant that the previous presidency of the president of the Moroccan Parliament, Rachid Talbi El Alami, extended his mandate beyond the planned deadlines.

Francina Armengol, the president of *Congreso de los Diputados* since August 17, 2023, assumed the presidency of the PA-UfM on February 16, 2024 in Rabat at the closing of the 17th Plenary Session of the PA-UfM. President Armengol assumed her position for a period of one year. In President Armengol’s speech before the plenary session of the UfM meeting in Rabat, she highlighted the priorities of her presidency: “the need to establish peace, reduce economic disparities

between the North and the South, fight against climate change and better manage the migration issue”. On the same day, February 16, 2024, the president of *Congreso de los Diputados* published a message on social network X in the following terms:

“It is an honor to assume the presidency of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean, a great opportunity to continue strengthening ties of international cooperation in the region. We work as a network for a peaceful Mediterranean that protects human rights and guarantees equal opportunities for all people, wherever they are born and wherever they live. Thank you for the welcome and for passing the baton, Rachid Talbi Alami”.

At the time of writing this research, three months after the assumption of the presidency, there is no reference to the Spanish rotating presidency of the PA-UfM either on the PA-UfM website or on the Spanish Parliament website. At this point, the poor political momentum that has so far been given to the rotating Spanish presidency of the PA-UfM must be highlighted. It should be noted that on June 6-9, 2024, elections to the European Parliament will be held in the different member states of the European Union. This will mean a paralysis of the European Parliament’s involvement in the PA-UfM for a period of several months. Until the new European Parliament is formed and its 720 members take office, and the parliamentary delegations are formed, the PA-UfM will remain inactive. All of this could lead to the celebration of the next plenary session of the PA-UfM until autumn. This should not be an excuse for the priorities of the Spanish presidency and for not updating the public information of the respective websites of the PA-UfM and *Congreso de los Diputados*.

The Summit of Speakers

The Speakers of Parliament of each member country of the PA-UfM meet annually for the Summit of Speakers. Although the availability of the information is very poor, here we expose some information of the last Summit of Speakers:

Speakers summit	Date and place	Thematic issue	Comments and main conclusions
1 st	Amman, 2014	Corruption in Europe and the southern Mediterranean countries post-2011	Document not available.
2 nd	Lisbon 2015	Human Rights, migrations and terrorism	Document not available.
3 th	Tangier 2016	Building a better intercultural Mediterranean anchorage for shared development in terms of peace and security and for sustainable development.	Document not available.
4 th	Rome, 2017	Employment in the EM area, in a context of sustainable development	Document not available.
5 th	Cairo (Egypt), 2018	Countering terrorism in EM region	Document not available.

6 th	Strasbourg, 2019,	Challenges of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean	Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament, and Dimitris Avramopoulos, EU Commissioner for Migration attended the Summit. They underlined the importance to address current migration challenges with a joint Euro-Mediterranean approach. -The resulting resolution of the Summit did not include any reference to the Global Compact for Migration, adopted at the end of 2018. This followed the line of dissonances within EU member states, which was particularly visible during EU-LAS Ministerial meeting on Foreign Affairs on February 4, 2019 in which Hungary’s veto did not allow for a common European position on migration.
7 th	Brussels, videoconference, 2021	Fight against climate change in the Mediterranean region	-It was adopted a declaration taking stock of some of the most pressing consequences of global warming and a changing environment on both shores of the Mediterranean. -Singularly, a member of the Delegation of the Croatian Parliament to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean and envoy of the Speaker of Parliament Marko Pavić participated at the Summit.
8 th	Rabat, 2024	The Rabat Spirit	The declaration includes: -A call for giving to the economic dimension to priority. -A call for a greater commitment of the PA-UfM member states with enforcing policy coordination between them. -A condemn of violence in Gaza and West Bank, insisting on a need of a ceasefire. -Reactivate Israeli-Palestinian peace process. -Threat of terrorist groups taking advantage of instability in some areas of the Mediterranean region. -Climate change, health security, migration issues and human trafficking

Source: own elaboration based on data available in www.paumf.org

From the analysis of the data presented in the table above, we see that the lack of searchable data is evident, a fact that has not allowed us to do a more exhaustive analysis of the content of the “Summit of Speakers”. In any case, and considering the little information we have, the “Summit of Speakers” positions itself on the same topics that were discussed in the plenary session but making statements with a more institutional tone.

In any case, the formula of the annual “Summit of Speakers” meeting of the member parliaments of an international parliamentary assembly, is a common practice that improves the coordination mechanisms and the political momentum of the parliamentary dimension of the international organization. In this sense, it is worth pointing out other already consolidated experiences such as the meeting of presidents of parliaments of the member states of the Council of Europe. These meetings have been held since 1975 and the meeting takes place every two years, alternating a meeting in Strasbourg, headquarters of the Council of Europe, and a meeting in the capital of the State that at that time held the presidency of the Council of Ministers of the international pan-european organization. The Conference of speakers of the EU Parliaments (EUSC) is another stable coordination platform between the presidents of the national parliaments of the EU member states. Detailed information on the documentation and conclusions of each conference of presidents of the EU member states is found in the European Parliament’s database. It should be noted that all members of the EUSC are also members of the conference of presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean. The conference of presidents of the member states of the European Economic Communities (precursor of the EU) met for the first time in Italy, specifically in Rome, on January 11, 1963. The next meeting took place ten years later in France, at the Paris meeting of 1973. Meetings took place in 1975 until 1978. The 1980 meeting was not held and since 1981 and without interruption there has been an annual meeting of presidents of parliaments of the Member States.

These meetings have a permanent secretariat based on the respective international organizations, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, and a thread of continuity and coherence can be seen in their work.

Conclusions and Hypothesis Validation

Conclusions

Since the creation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean in March 2004 in Athens, it has become a new forum for parliamentary dialogue involving the parliamentary delegations of all EU Member States and the member states of the UfM of its southern shore. It is the only international parliamentary forum where parliamentary delegations from Israel and Palestine have historically met. Their work has contributed to deepening a common Euro-Mediterranean policy.

Despite this, the approaches and expectations of the parliamentary delegations have been divergent at various times. While for the parliaments of the Member States of the European Union it is basically a forum for debate on the EU’s neighbourhood policy with its southern border, for the countries of North Africa and the Middle East it has been considered as the forum for debate on a regional integration policy. It is worth remembering that before the existence of the UfM, the Barcelona Process of 1995 promoted a regional integration policy in areas such as the economy, education or free trade that only involved states with territories bathed by the Mediterranean Sea. This divergence of expectations and the desire to integrate countries

from central and northern Europe into the PA-UfM has braked the rhythm of the regional integration that marked the Barcelona Process. The level of collaboration and parliamentary discussion with the countries of the EU’s eastern partnership has never reached the level of institutionality of the UfM.

From the analysis of the PA-UfM plenary sessions held in the period 2014-2024, we can conclude that:

- There is a no consistent and evaluable multiannual work program that has allowed relevant progress in the work of Euro-Mediterranean parliamentary diplomacy.
- The political pronouncements of each plenary session are often related to crisis situations in one of the Member States or geopolitical situations that mark the political agenda of the moment.
- The main aspects addressed in the years analysed are: fight against corruption, fight against terrorism, legal migration policies, human rights, climate change, impact of the Covid-19 virus pandemic, education, job opportunities, human trafficking, rescues of migrants at sea and judicial and police cooperation between Member States.
- The UfM parliamentary assembly itself has been aware of its crisis of consistency and structuring of its work when in one of its resolutions from the Rome session of 2017 it expressed its “concern about the lack of a strategic and global line of work” in their jobs.
- The Parliamentary Assembly promoted in a resolution of its 2017 plenary session the celebration of the annual meeting of the “Regional UfM Forum”. This represents the annual meeting in November of each year in Barcelona of the ministers of Foreign Affairs of the different member states. It is a space for political promotion of the Euro-Mediterranean agenda in the absence of meetings of Heads of State and Government initially provided for in the institutional design of the UfM.
- The permanent Secretary General of the UfM and its deputy secretaries regularly participate in the plenary sessions of the PA-UfM to report on the sectorial policies they promote to comply with intergovernmental agreements.
- The PA-UfM took a step forward in its consolidation as a forum for monitoring and controlling the policies of the Secretariat and intergovernmental conferences, when in 2017 created the figure of rapporteurs to monitor sectorial policies developed with public funds from the EU and to avoid potential bad practices. This is one of the most outstanding exercises of parliamentary control and accounting of the UfM that the PA-UfM has achieved.

The access to information, accounting, and transparency regarding the work of the PA-UfM has much room for improvement. Several public documents are not available on the PA-UfM website and the website itself is not updated regarding the rotating presidency of the PA-UfM. The Permanent Secretariat of the PA-UfM is based in Rome and according to the information provided by the official

website, the position of Secretary General has been vacant since June 2021. Precisely, the news of a vacancy notice of the PA-UfM remains on the official website so, with no news saying that the position has been filled. The lack of dynamization of the work by the secretariat can explain the lack of information and impetus in the works of the organisation.

As mentioned, the Spanish rotating presidency of the PA-UfM was assumed by the president of the *Congreso de los Diputados*, Francina Armengol, on February 16, 2024. Beyond the political declaration made by the new president on the day of her election, there is no information about the priorities of the presidency neither on the PA-UfM website (which still announces the February 2024 meeting) nor on the website of the *Congreso de los Diputados* and its sections dedicated to the presidency or international affairs. With the elections to the European Parliament taking place from June 6 to 9, 2024, it is foreseeable that the new delegation of Members of the European Parliament to the PA-UfM will not be appointed until autumn 2024, which means that a few months of inactivity for the PA-UfM are expected. Initially, it was planned that the presidency of *Congreso de los Diputados* would assume the rotating presidency of the PA-UfM in the period 2022-2023, but due to the institutional paralysis caused by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the situation of early elections in Spain in 2023, the Spanish presidency was not assumed until February 2024. Meanwhile, the presidency of the Moroccan parliament did extend beyond its natural term.

The conference of presidents of parliaments of the Member States of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (Summit of Speakers) has been held since 2014 and met uninterruptedly from 2014 to 2019. The year 2020 was not held due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The year 2021 was carried out electronically and did not meet again until February 2024. The conference of presidents of the parliaments of the member states of the PA-UfM is an instrument of coordination and political impetus for the parliamentary dimension of the work of the Union for the Mediterranean. It is worth highlighting the analysis of the conferences studied and the contents of their statements:

- The mere fact of the meeting of the presidents of the PA-UfM member states already represents a positive framework for promoting the parliamentary dimension of the UfM. However, a long-term work plan that coordinates the work of the different rotating presidencies cannot be identified.
- The vacancy in the position of general secretary of the PA-UfM since 2021 has undoubtedly had an impact on the coordination capacity and political momentum of the Summit of Speakers meetings.
- Access to information on the resolutions of Summit of Speakers meetings is not available on the PA-UfM website or on the website of the European Parliament in their editions from 2014 to 2018. Only content from the years 2019, 2021 and 2024 are available.
- Other meetings of presidents of Parliaments of Member States of international organizations demonstrate more systematized

practices and a multi-year work program. Thus, the conference of presidents of parliaments of Member States of the Council of Europe, which has been held biannually since 1979, and the conference of presidents of the Member States of the EU, which has been held annually since 1981, are two examples of consolidated and well-structured meetings. Considering that the presidents of the parliaments of the EU Member States are also members of the PA-UfM Summit of Speakers, the good practices of the meeting of EU presidents could serve as a basis for increasing the organization, visibility, planning and monitoring of the Summits of Speakers.

Validation of Hypothesis

Considering the information and analysis offered in this research and regarding the hypothesis previously mentioned, we consider we can validate H1 and partially validate H2 and H3.

- H1. Final political recommendations (2014-2024) of the plenary session of PA-UfM are sensitive to the geopolitics of the moment rather than long-term strategic lines. We consider that we can validate this hypothesis after analysing the contents of the political recommendations of the Plenary sessions. Issues such as political statements about terrorist attacks and regional conflicts are typical. It is difficult to find any ambitious and long-term plan approved by the Assembly in the years studied.
- H2. As for the agenda of the Spanish presidency, it tends to give continuity to the Moroccan agenda for the points of contact between the two countries regarding the issue of regular and irregular immigration. We consider that the lack of information about Spanish presidency of PA-UfM don't allow us to validate the hypothesis, however, looking at the bilateral political positions of Spain and Morocco in the field of immigration, a shared agenda can be detected between them.

H3. The Summit of speakers should be a structured forum to define the work of the parliamentary assembly during a certain period of time. We consider that this hypothesis can be partly validated due to the lack of information available about the "Summit of Speakers", but also due to the lack of internal structuring of these meetings at the highest level between the speakers of the respective state parliaments members.

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