

UNDERSTANDING IPALMO

By Gianni De Michelis

IPALMO is an internationalist institute created in the early 1970s with a mission that corresponded to the world at that time, namely to inform Italy on the realities of the world's political, economic and cultural landscape with particular attention to North-South development and cooperation. Among other things, the institute hosted the discussion and ultimately the advancement of the law on development cooperation that Italy adopted 1987.

The world has become a place of multi-polar order and the Institute's priorities have changed accordingly. In particular, the economic and financial crisis of 2008 accelerated shifts in the world order, reordering any number of strategic priorities. As a result, the Institute has decided to focus on what it considers the fundamental challenge facing Italy and Europe in coming years, namely the making of an integrated Euro-Mediterranean order that can organize and to plan out its own development. Such a "zone" should be competitive with similar ones that have emerged and grown into potency elsewhere, for example East Asia based around China, Latin America based around Brazil, South Asia based around India.

Such a project faces well-known geopolitical problems that have long existed in what's known as the "enlarged Mediterranean." They include the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but more centrally the dialect dividing two civilizations. The Christian approach dominates the European world while the Islamic one prevails in the nations of the Middle East and North Africa.

The opportunities, meanwhile, are linked to the presence of whole regional populations that have yet to fulfill their growth trajectory and to a concentration of energy resources that could prove decisive for the advance of economic growth.

Among the leading nations of the pre-1989-1991 period and the order they represented (an order that actually extended 500 years prior to 1992), an effort was made to link the pre-Berlin Wall fall state of affairs with the realities that arose as an immediate result. The Treaty of Maastricht was the practical result of such efforts, which took place mostly between 1990 and 1991.

European divisions were dramatically reduced and the ensuing integration process was compelled to transform what I call "Carolingian" reality, namely a Europe circumscribed by Iron Curtain realities, into a unification process based instead on pan-European characteristics. Movement toward such unification necessarily called on the Western European development model to absorb and incorporate the nations of Eastern Europe, until recently weaned on a Soviet model incompatible with the longstanding Western ways.

The Maastricht Treaty laid out the guidelines for Europe's forward motion and opened to the door to the goal of enlargement, which at the time wasn't fully understood.

The first step in this enlargement process was the entrance of East Germany into the European Community, which was also the premise for German unification. These extraordinary events took place immediately before Maastricht and acted as a precursor for broader expansion. The addition of 10 more countries saw the ushering in of the current European Union, in essence a pan-European Union. This also marked

institutional strengthening of EU governance and helped ensure that in economic unity became political.

This territory became the groundwork for a series of more uncertain steps that followed. I'm thinking of the Amsterdam Treaty, the Treaty of Nice, the failed call to ratify a so-called European Constitution, and the final approval of the Lisbon Treaty, which is the most significant recent positive step.

But it was monetary union — the introduction of the euro — that ushered in the necessary common ground, eventually becoming the foundation of new global governance and a new global order. A document released by the Central Bank of China in 2009 has made it increasingly clear how the world's financial dossiers have begun to overlap, becoming centralized. This in turn should permit a convergence of all players based on a pattern of multilateral governance in a world that by all objective measure is now multi-polar.

IPALMO began forging plans and assembling documentation based on this new reality. It prepared a report for the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry (submitted in December 2008, ahead of the G8 summit in L'Aquila), which stressed the centrality of a single global monetary dossier. It admittedly went unheeded. Once again at the behest of the Foreign Affairs Ministry and "Promos" (the Euro-Mediterranean Forum, held in Milan on July 20-21, 2009), IPALMO readied a report detailing the broader Euro-Mediterranean dimension of European development policy. Still another document, once again regarding the contours of European strategies, was prepared for the Forum of Latin America Countries (held on Dec. 2-3, 2009, also in Milan).

The effort was to document European strategy not only in Mediterranean-specific terms but also in ones tied to what we choose to call "the transatlantic axis," which makes room for the role of Latin America.

These are the ingredients around which we hope to start a rich and ongoing debate. We at IPALMO don't expect this debate to be either exhaustive or all-encompassing, but we do wish to nurture it. Toward that end, this site and my own blog (which you'll find on the home page) hopes to generate not only reader responses and reactions, but also criticism and counter-proposals among those — perhaps a minority today, but most certainly a majority tomorrow — who understand that the issues put on the table here are the ones on which the future, and those of our communities and country, will soon depend.