

# What Future for the Mediterranean?

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The Mediterranean Sea has historically been dominated by changing powers that have turned the common origins of the countries of this area into points of confrontation and separation. The vast cultural and natural heritage of the Mediterranean region must not continue to be dominated by the conflicts devastating it (the clearest of which is between Israel and Palestine), above all because this heritage is a legacy that must be handed down to future generations. Thus, we need to encourage a new citizenry capable of creating a participatory and responsible democracy. In this way, a new United Nations system could be established that would facilitate meeting and harmony between peoples and cultures. The priorities of this “new beginning” that can be created by global awareness are clear: food, access to drinking water, health services, environmental care, education and peace.

*“Here is the almost infinite sea  
That keeps the secret of everything.”*

The *Mare Nostrum*, located in the north of the south and the south of the north. In-between water, *media-terrania*, sea between two lands, united by the bonds of water that are generally gentler than the bonds of earth. “Our” sea, belonging to all those living on its shores, is not what it should be because it has not been what it should have been: an area of confluence, of harmony, of plied blue waters fertilised by the peace of olive trees. And, all too frequently, it has not been the *Mare Nostrum* but rather the *Mare Vestrum*. The sea dominated by the powers at each historical moment.

The surrounding civilisations have made a formidable contribution to humankind from

the Mediterranean: Egypt, Greece, Rome, Arab and Ottoman Islam, Spain, France... “The branches quarrel while the roots intertwine,” says a wise African proverb. The same thing happens with the Mediterranean countries, as they have common origins, with mutual influences, although they have differed since to the point of confrontation instead of meeting.

The Mediterranean area is a vast cultural, natural and intangible heritage that, over the centuries, has influenced very distant hemispheres of the planet. The Mediterranean is a source of cultures, languages, beliefs, philosophy, music, visual arts, expression, and communication of feelings, thoughts and emotions.

Knowledge of this great diversity of cultural identities will help us to better understand each of the paths that foster the memory of the past and the invention of the future, to come together to promote and safeguard them.

As I said on a previous occasion at the European Institute of the Mediterranean,<sup>1</sup> two aspects must be emphasised to protect and promote heritage:

- Cooperation between travel agencies is needed to include cultural heritage in tours and destinations so that in the short term it has the same power of attraction and protection achieved by natural heritage sites;
- The role of the forum “Media Facing Tensions and Transitions in the Mediterranean” with the following main actions: creation of Mediterranean media forums, networks and observatories, training courses, and so on.

All of this has made possible a series of transformations driven from the Mediterranean, from the lessons taught to us every day by its waves, which should help shape many power structures, reconsider many ethical, political and economic concepts, and redirect many current trends throughout the world. Indeed, it is essential, now that we have so many media outlets, that we do not overlook the “experiences” of the Mediterranean Sea.

We frequently wax lyrical about the friendliest images of the multiple countries that make up this authentic cradle of civilisations today. But we also need to draw attention to those aspects that must now be quickly overcome. The most obvious is the conflict between Israel and Palestine, which is a real offence after so many decades of always basing possible solutions on force rather than on dialogue, on wealth rather than on equal dignity. This must now become a

protest by the people, a clamour by all human beings who, for the first time in history, can freely express themselves thanks to modern communication technologies. “All human beings are equal in dignity”: only in this way, if the majority of humankind believes, will we be able to resolve these situations that must not go on offending the sensibility of citizens all over the world. The solutions cannot be put off. The solutions exist.

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I had the occasion to experience meetings at very close hand between the president of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Yasser Arafat, and the president of Israel, Simon Peres, when Israel’s representative in the meetings to implement the Oslo Accords was Isaac Rabin. Everything was almost agreed... when a bullet cut short the life of the man who was convinced that the only solution for Israel and Palestine was absolute coexistence of the two states, of the citizens of Palestine and Israel. A few years earlier, another shot had ended the life of Rais Anwar Sadat, and the Mediterranean today is once again more frontier than gateway. Indeed, after so many years of Israel not fulfilling the United Nations resolutions, the conciliation that Rabin dreamed of is still being blocked. Everything that happened recently in Lampedusa, in Ceuta and in Melilla, as well as the endless fragile boats crossing the Strait, shows how far immigrants risk their lives because they come from places where they would lose it anyway. It is tragic proof that the system hailed as “globalising” has turned out to be restrictive. This problem is not solved with fences, railing and concertina wire but with

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1. International Seminar on Managing and Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Mediterranean (Barcelona, IEMed, 2009).



Renovation work underway on a building in the “casbah” area of Nablus, Palestine (EU/Neighbourhood Info Centre).

development aid. This was the fundamental idea of the plan designed by the president of the United States Franklin Delano Roosevelt after the Second World War: to promote comprehensive, endogenous, sustainable and human development to achieve real cooperation.

So it is urgent to leave aside the prisms of money and greed and navigate, against the wind, to the coasts of fraternity, as stated, let us never forget, by the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In this common destiny, from which no one is excluded – it is currently estimated that no more than 18 to 20% of the inhabitants of the Earth live in the prosperous neighbourhood of the global village –, it is fundamental for all of us to know how to share with others not only tangible goods but knowledge and experiences. This is the intellectual and moral solidarity so

lucidly established by the UNESCO Constitution.

Southern European countries have suffered most from the neoliberal system, which in the eighties replaced ethical values with those of the market, democratic multilateralism with plutocratic oligarchic groups. The world must be guided – as astutely established by the preamble to the UNESCO Constitution – by “democratic principles” which every day remind us all that harmonious coexistence and a dignified life are rights inherent to the human species.

Therefore, the solution lies in genuine democratisation at a world, regional, local and personal level. Europe needs to be remade, so that it is not only a monetary union, the resulting confusion of which we have already seen, but an economic and political union. An active

citizenry would have made it possible to go from an economy of war, speculation and production offshoring to an economy of sustainable global development (renewable energies; production of food by agriculture, aquaculture and biotechnology; obtaining water through solar thermal energy for desalinisation; health, with special attention to neurodegenerative diseases typical of greater longevity; environmental protection; electric transport; ecological homes...). I already warned, in 2009, that radical changes are now possible and that civil society, which has within its reach the means to participate virtually, will not tolerate for long the collective shame of the deaths of over 60,000 people every day from starvation, many of them boys and girls under five, while over 3,500 million dollars is invested in weapons and military spending.

Therefore, it is imperative to re-found a United Nations to ensure the application of the holistic vision of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who, together with the UN, set up a range of agencies and organisations on work, health, education, science and culture, food, childhood, development, and so on. A United Nations system in which all countries can participate and not just some, so that they decide (in weighted voting but without a veto) the rules that must guide the whole of humankind. As well established by the Charter of the United Nations: "We, the peoples [...] determine to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." It is indeed the peoples who manage to save succeeding generations from war and adopt the supreme commitment to them.

This is exactly what we need today: for the peoples, and not the states or governments, to decide. In other words, that they are authentic democracies and that governments and states reliably represent the citizens, from whom all power must emanate. What must they decide? To avoid war. To build peace. We unfortunately continue to apply the perverse adage of "if

you want peace, prepare for war." Peace has actually been more like a pause between two wars. Absolute male power has dominated since the dawn of time, so that the vast majority of human beings have been invisible, submissive, silent, terrified. Now the great transition consists of passing from subjects to citizens, from spectators to actors, from anonymous to identifiable. All human beings must live in a democratic context, which allows them to fully exercise the distinctive and exclusive faculties of the human species. Only in this way, with a re-founded United Nations, with a General Assembly with 50% state representation and another 50% civil society representation, with a Security Council, an Environmental Council and a Socioeconomic Council... only in this way could trafficking be terminated which, at a supranational scale, is a real affront to the ethical principles that were clearly evident in Mediterranean waters, and takes place with impunity (trafficking in drugs, arms, patents, people!) because there are no institutions that can quickly and efficiently establish the rules of international law.

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A United Nations system with moral authority and the necessary personal, technical and financial means would permit the coordination and rapid use of the latest technological advances against natural or manmade catastrophes; immediate intervention in cases of mass violation of human rights (as in Cambodia or Uganda) or in the absence of interlocutors (warlords, as in Somalia); the resolution of conflicts by diplomacy or, when necessary, by the Blue Helmets (Syria); the ability to avoid loutish acts characteristic of military hegemony (such as the invasion of Iraq in 2003); the

strengthening of security in the global fight against terrorism, ensuring the appropriate redirection to democratic behaviour when violence prevails or there are coups (Egypt, Ukraine...) that include the use of mercenaries, etc. Democracy and law are, in this context, two key words, two core components of the Mediterranean.

Thus, this multilateralism would be capable of ensuring planetary justice, facilitating meeting and harmony not only between all the peoples and cultures of the Mediterranean, but in the whole world. Only in this way, concerning ourselves less with Mars and more with the Earth, would we fulfil our responsibility to future generations. Only in this way would the human species be capable of inventing its future and effecting the coming historical turning point thanks, precisely, to these fundamental concepts that, to a large extent, have their origin in the *Mare Nostrum*.

Taking care of the quality of the sea, which occupies over 70% of the Earth's surface, means taking care of the quality of the air because, as is well known, greenhouse gas emissions, especially carbon dioxide, are neutralised thanks to the regenerative capacity of the chlorophyll, present in the phytoplankton of the oceans, which constitutes over 80% of the "lungs" of the Earth. It is intolerable that oil tankers wash cracking waste in the waters of the sea instead of doing so in the appropriate port facilities, because they leave a monolayer of several square kilometres that asphyxiates the phytoplankton, which affects this capacity to eliminate gases whose accumulation is slowly bringing about a climate change which might be the great catalyst for the deterioration of the Earth's habitability.

We are, even though it may not be recognised by some of the most obstinate at present, in the Anthropocene. Therefore, the quality of the environment depends not only on the number of human beings, but on the activities

they carry out, and can change environmental conditions to irreversible extremes. We have to be watchers of tomorrow to abandon a short-term vision and look to the Earth, its inhabitants, the future as a whole, to realise that "the unborn are already looking at us," in the words of Jacques Yves Cousteau, a great friend of the sea. We have a responsibility to the young, to the coming generations and the permanent memory of the future, which will be their present.

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The Mediterranean represents the whole sea. "Each one in their sea, aware that there is only one sea," wrote Santiago Genovés. From the Mediterranean we realise, we become aware that, in this "new beginning" that global awareness will soon make possible, the priorities on a world scale must be – it is worth repeating – food, access to drinking water, health services, environmental care, education and peace. It is desirable for intercultural dialogue to bring together not only the people of the two shores, but those who inhabit the adjacent countries, so that – progressively and thanks to the feeling that it is necessary to invent the future for the Earth as a whole, for all its inhabitants – this dialogue manages to overcome the inertia and conserve what must be conserved while changing what must be changed. Evolution – which began, precisely, in marine water – is the best strategy to follow. If there is no evolution, there is involution and revolution. Revolution, which is almost always accompanied by violence, forms part of the "secrets" so stealthily kept by the Mediterranean waters. The difference between evolution and revolution is the "r" in responsibility.

We must come together. We must meet, dialogue, find motives for reconciliation and alliance, so that the so yearned for peace becomes a reality, identifying and learning the lessons that the Mediterranean Sea offers us. Now, as it is at last possible to participate in events virtually, the voice of the world will replace force with words. Greater gender equality is an essential component of this pressing and profound change required by humankind. The Arab Spring began thanks the voice of Tunisian citizens, the majority young women. From the Mediterranean, free expression spread to the whole world. From the Mediterranean must come peace after so much confrontation.

The lessons of the sea of the old continent must be learnt for the “new beginning”. The ethical references must be very clear in our firmament because, as the old sea proverb goes, “there are only good winds for those who know where they are heading.” The future is what matters. The future of the Mediterranean Sea will depend on the tenacity of those living on its shores to cease violence, lower the flags of war, talk to, understand and respect each other. The future is yet to be determined. That is our hope: designing a future that finally matches human dignity. The Mediterranean today can be, if we observe it carefully and admire its historical path, a beacon to illuminate the courses of tomorrow.