

The New Mediterranean Geopolitical Framework from the EU Perspective

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The Mediterranean in 1995

When the Barcelona Process was launched in November 1995 with the Final Declaration of the first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference, the world was experiencing an unprecedented geopolitical epiphany. The end of the confrontation between the Western and Soviet-influenced blocs had led authors such as Francis Fukuyama to consider the idea of the “End of History”, as the end of the history of ideological struggles, with Western liberalism emerging as the final victor.

The fall of the Berlin Wall at the end of 1989 triggered the gradual break-up of the Soviet Bloc. The consequences were enormous. After the electoral victory of *Solidarnosc* over the Polish Communist Party in 1989 came the German reunification and the progressive political and military shift throughout central Europe. This was followed by the end of the Warsaw Pact and, finally, and as incredible as it may have seemed at the time, the dissolution of the USSR itself in December 1991. The confrontation between the blocs of the bipolar world – essentially the prevailing geopolitical system throughout the post-World War II era – was over. If there was any need for further demonstration of the unipolar nature of the new situation, Saddam Hussein’s defeat in 1991 at the hands of the United States and the UN-backed international coalition was conclusive evidence of America’s capacity and determination as a the world’s gendarme.

– In the Euro-Mediterranean world, such a staggering seismic shift in geopolitics was to have two sets of consequences.

Firstly, in the North, it brought about German reunification, after which the West began drawing the central European countries into its orbit, a process that culminated in the expansion of the EU in 2004, and its subsequent enlargements in 2007 and 2013, from 15 to 28 members. Of equal or greater importance was the progressive incorporation into NATO of these countries, beginning with Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, completed in 1999, followed by Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and the three Baltic states in 2004. Despite the creation of different NATO-Russia dialogue platforms, such as the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991, the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act in 1997 in Paris and the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council in 2002, NATO’s expansion towards the East steadily increased tensions with Russia. At its 2008 Bucharest summit, NATO’s agreement over its readiness to incorporate Georgia and Ukraine into its ranks sounded alarm bells in Putin’s Russia. This, coupled with the progress in Ukraine-EU negotiations, led to destabilization in these countries thanks to Moscow’s support of the pro-Russian separatist minorities, and Russia’s military occupation and subsequent annexation of Crimea in 2014.

In the southern Mediterranean, the collapse of the Soviet Empire spelt the end of the proxy confrontations being played out throughout the developing world between countries aligned with the USSR and allies of the United States and the West in general. In the Mediterranean, the Soviets had already been expelled from Egypt by Sadat in 1972. However, the Soviet Union’s presence and influence was maintained through its traditional allies from the “rejectionist front”, Syria in particular, and, in different

ways, such as arms sales, bilateral political pacts or political concertation in multilateral fora involving countries like Algeria, Libya, Syria, Yemen or Iraq, or backing leftist political movements in most Third-World countries.

The “hyperpuissance américaine”, as Hubert Védrine described it, and NATO’s expansion gave Western Europe a security guarantee which, although subject to American leadership, generated a sense of optimism. Its liberal democracy and market economics provided the prevailing model on the international scene, and countries in its area of influence, such as the Mediterranean, were invited to participate.

– In 1995, there were also signs that the Mediterranean’s deepest conflict might be resolved. It seemed the *Middle East Peace Process* might reap its rewards, following the Madrid Conference of 1991 and the Oslo Accords, thereby completing the Camp David Accords, already signed by Egypt and Israel in 1978, with an all-party agreement. Regrettably, however, hopes had been raised too high, as the peace leaders on both sides were assassinated by radicals from within their own camps: Anwar el-Sadat on 6 October 1981 and Isaac Rabin on 4 November 1995, weeks before the Barcelona Conference that was to launch by the Euro-Mediterranean Process.

In 1995, moderates were in power even in Afghanistan, where Ahmad Shah Massoud controlled Kabul although he was ousted by the Taliban hordes in September 1996. Al-Qaeda hitmen were later sent to the northern mountains to assassinate him on 9 September 2001, two days before the major terrorist attack on the twin towers in New York.

– The *system of Arab states*, with the Arab League set up in 1945 as a simple forum for its ministerial leaders, was characterized internally by what we would now call the *traditional authoritarian Arab state*. The creation of the modern state following independence meant that the leaders and movements that had fought against colonialism took over the positions of power after emancipation, in most cases within single-party systems. Despite the patriarchal and socially conservative mindset, which still prevailed in Arab societies, these were *secular* regimes led, or more precisely dominated, by modernizing parties that were either somewhere on the

right of the political spectrum, such as Istiqlal in Morocco or Bourghiba’s Neo Destour in Tunisia; or which leaned to the left, like the FLN in Algeria, Nasserism in Egypt and the Ba’ath parties in Syria and Iraq. In the much more conservative Bedouin lands of the Arabian Peninsula, however, the Saudi monarchy, and all others, followed Wahhabism under the impetus and control of the first King of Saudi Arabia, Abdulaziz Ibn Saud and his successors. The Saudi leaders were now custodians of Islam’s holy sites, which they had conquered in 1924, overthrowing the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein, and his son Ali, putting an end to the latter’s short-lived reign as the last King of Hejaz.

In the Arab-Mediterranean world this *traditional authoritarian Arab state*, recently established as a modern state, would undergo a series of crises arising from the frustrations of the Arab populations of the time. There were three main reasons for this: the failure to fulfil the promises of economic development following independence; the Arab defeats at the hands of Israel, in 1948, but especially in 1967 and 1973; and, finally, the breaking of promises of political, economic and social democracy, which had formed part of the imagery associated with the struggle for independence. These frustrations underlie the progressive ossification of the *traditional authoritarian Arab state*, which still prevailed in 1995 in different forms. It later suffered its final crisis with the Arab Spring, which began as a protest against Ben Ali’s regime in Tunisia at the end of 2010.

Construction and Deconstruction of the Euro-Mediterranean Dream

The Euro-Mediterranean Association or Partnership was launched in 1995, fundamentally as a policy led by the European Union and agreed upon with southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. The aim was to create an area of peace, understanding and progress around the Mediterranean Basin through the creation of a free trade zone that would mobilize the economies of the southern countries and help their modernization with an extensive programme of technical assistance and financial cooperation. It was clear that this was the ideal time to do this, especially because of the prospects of a reasonable outcome in

the Middle East. It was even said that the new Barcelona Process arose to take advantage of the "peace dividends". The most interested countries began to sign the corresponding Euromed Association Treaties with the EU, beginning with Tunisia in 1995 and Morocco in 1996.

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The Barcelona Process generated a wave of optimism, which spread with the launch of the European Commission-funded MEDA programmes, created both as a support for government policies and to stimulate civil society. Despite Libya and Syria's refusals to participate, the process continued to progress to the extent that major advances were presented at the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference held in Valencia in 2002, the second under a Spanish presidency. These were exemplified by certain singular achievements: on the multilateral and political level, with the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly; economically, with financial cooperation through the European Investment Bank's new FEMIP facility; and socio-culturally with the founding of the Anna Lindh Foundation for intercultural dialogue. The conference also reported good progress for the MEDA programmes and extensive bilateral cooperation programmes with each partner country.

It would be true to say that Khomeini's revolution in Iran in 1979 brought about a substantial shift in the geopolitical status quo with the creation of the first revolutionary Islamic state. But as early as 1980, this was brought to an abrupt standstill by the Iran-Iraq war launched by the Sunni dictator and Ba'athist leader Saddam Hussein, who received political and financial support to fight Khomeini's Shia regime from the Sunni petro-monarchies of the Gulf, particularly the Saudi monarchy. That was when the large-

scale contemporary confrontation between the Sunnis and Shiites from both sides of the Gulf began. But that war, for all its severity and the million of casualties it left on both sides, was still seen as distant from Europe and the Mediterranean. More distant still was the war in Afghanistan with the intervention of the Soviet army against the Mujahideen or Islamic guerrillas from 1978 until the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Supported at the time by the conservative monarchies of the Gulf and the United States, this was the conflict from which al-Qaeda emerged, the embryo of future international Islamist terrorism.

The terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York and on Washington on 11 September 2001 shook the world and upset the framework established in 1995. It triggered the wars first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, America's response and retaliation dubbed "the war on terror" by the neo-conservative Administration of President Bush Jr.

This marked our entry into a new world of global geopolitics. But the Euro-Mediterranean process continued to view it as something distant. It sought renewal through bilateral policies with the new European Neighbourhood Policy launched by President Prodi in 2004 and, later, with the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008, as a Euro-Mediterranean regional cooperation and agreement framework. 2011 saw the outbreak of the Arab Spring, which directly affected Euro-Mediterranean Process participating member countries, starting with Tunisia. It now became clear that geopolitical changes required serious thought concerning how the new international scene affected the global strategy of the European Union, and particularly Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

Structural Changes in Globalization

In the almost 25 years since the Barcelona Conference, the Euro-Mediterranean has undergone major changes under the influence of an accelerated globalization process.

– The first major structural change was at the level of *demography*, the predictions of which did nothing to lessen the impact. Lagging considerably behind Europe's experience of the last century and a half, the Arab-Mediterranean world is still undergoing its own

demographic transition, which is accelerated and in a relatively advanced state. At independence, fertility rates in the Arab Mediterranean world were still over seven children per woman. With improvements in sanitary conditions, nutrition and other areas, the survival rates for newborns increased, along with the life expectancy of adults. While Europe concluded its long demographic transition in the 1950s and 1960s, the Arab-Mediterranean world were still undergoing a population boom, like all Third-World countries as a whole. While the Arab world had 70 million inhabitants in 1950, in 2007 this number had reached 335 million. It is predicted that this figure will reach 500 million between 2025 and 2030, equal to the clearly stagnating EU population, where fertility rates, in general, are below 1.5 children per woman. In the Arab world, however, despite improved sanitary and environmental conditions and life expectancies lengthening throughout the 20th century, particularly in the second half, birth rates, and therefore fertility rates, only began to fall from the mid-eighties onwards. Since then, however, the decline has been considerable, with Tunisia already down to 2.01 and Morocco to 2.2 children per woman. Strangely, since 2011 there has been a slight upturn. In Egypt and throughout the Middle East the rate is still above three children per woman. But the fall in fertility rates is here such a recent phenomenon that whole generations will continue to reach adult age and, therefore, will arrive on the employment market for the next 15 years, where they face serious problems of youth unemployment.

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The good news, if the European public can believe it above the hue and cry of populist politicians, is that these demographics give rise to one of the well-known complementarities between the North and South of the Mediterranean. The North lacks

the bulging youth population of the South, so immigration can drain the excess workforce from the South and mitigate decline and aging in the European population, while at the same time contributing to paying for pensions on this continent.

In any case, the fact that within a decade the Arab countries will reach the population of the EU, with some 500 million inhabitants in the North and around the same in the South of the Mediterranean, is, in itself, a very important geopolitical change.

– From a *migration* perspective, we can add two additional phenomena to these structural demographic changes in the Euro-Mediterranean area. One, which is circumstantial, is the enormous flow of *refugees* arriving in Europe, particularly those fleeing the war in Syria. Arrivals peaked in 2015, with the arrival of 1.5 million refugees, which caused and continues to cause a tremendous furore among populist demagogue politicians, who remain agitated over a phenomenon that largely belongs to the past. This is not the case, however, with *economic migration*. Europe is facing a dramatic situation concerning people from the Sahel and the Sub-Saharan countries, where populations are being pushed into what is potentially a continuous mass exodus to flee poverty and the lack of opportunities. Europe is encountering serious difficulties in reaching agreements on migration policy, which is causing serious internal divisions and a surge of far-right, xenophobic and anti-European parties. The solution can only be to face the situation from a double perspective. Firstly, short- and medium-term measures are needed to ensure control of the EU's external borders, avoiding the growth of mafias and racketeers profiting from people-trafficking. At the same time effective humanitarian action must be taken to help refugees and migrants and promote orderly, legal immigration in accordance with distribution criteria and with the conditions in each receiving country. Secondly and most particularly there must be urgent, far-reaching long-term measures. This should be done through a policy of development cooperation aimed at raising the African countries from their poverty and helping them to build prosperous, safe and well-governed societies. Europe must prepare to invest heavily in the development of Mediterranean Partner countries and even more in Sub-Saharan countries. The European Union boasts that it is the largest development

aid donor (68 billion euros per year including the Union 20% and its Member States 80%), but the budgets the European Commission assigns to this area must be multiplied tenfold. This may seem like a lot of money, but it is undoubtedly the cheaper alternative. And the biggest challenge is not so much reaching these figures as spending the money properly for an effective and positive transformation of these countries. As we will see later, we urgently need to organize a large area of efficient economic cooperation and integration between Europe, the Mediterranean and Africa.

– The *energy change* is another of the great challenges that Europe is facing in the context of globalization. There have already been considerable changes since 1995, but the far-reaching transformations are taking place today. In the short term, again, the changes are palliative, with phenomena as game-changing as the fracking that has made the United States oil self-sufficient, or improvements to ensure supplies with the construction of alternative gas and oil pipelines from Russia, Central Asia or Africa to Europe. But further exploration into alternative energies and the change in the energy model, which is also to a certain extent social and economic, is beginning now. The end of the combustion engine in the automobile industry and transport is nearing, but the change in energy model cannot merely be a European Union policy. The situation undoubtedly requires effective multilateral action and agreed international policies in the face of what is clearly a global issue. The Mediterranean as a source of energy – both fossil fuels and alternative forms – and as a strategic transport route at global level, must play a crucial role here.

Together with the change in energy model we should also consider the attention given to environmental sustainability and climate change. The Mediterranean and its neighbouring lands form one of the planet's fragile areas. Desertification is knocking loudly on the doors of Northern Africa, while Europe is still destroying its once privileged environment. Reversing these trends will require considerable effort. Environmental sustainability, and development aid in areas of vital interest for us in the Mediterranean or Africa involves colossal expense which needs to be met collectively because future well-being for all of us depends on it. We may not be

talking about the redistribution of income or personalized social spending, but we must understand that this will also form part of our welfare state and will determine its future sustainability.

– *Technological change*, both through the digitalization of processes and the boom in communication technologies, is having a profound change on our environment. The third industrial revolution might give Europe a new role, which it lost after its traditional industries disappeared. Some of the digitalized industries and services may well come back to Europe, where there are higher education levels. Certainly, in the Europe-Mediterranean-Africa group there might be complementarities and synergies, both in terms of production and the market, with all participants reaping the benefits. A separate mention should also be made of the growing role that new communication technologies will continue to play in social, cultural and, therefore, political changes, with particular relevance, as we have already begun to see, in the Arab world after 2011. The powers that be and institutions no longer have a monopoly on communication with citizens. Today, ordinary people can talk to one another on an unprecedented scale of participation and are, more often than not, critical of the authorities rather than in agreement with them.

Finally, we should consider as a geopolitical change that particularly affects the Euro-Mediterranean area, the contemporary development and even participation in power: of political Islamism. Alongside this, although they should not be confused, is the appearance, spread and conquests of Islamist radicalism and jihadism throughout the Muslim world, which has also reached the new Islam in Europe. We will analyse these phenomena in the following headings.

Internal Changes in Europe.

– Some of the changes that have taken place or are taking place inside Europe certainly have geopolitical relevance. The first is undoubtedly the *enlargement of the EU*. The EU has more than doubled its number of member countries, thereby increasing its global influence. The 500 million citizens of the 28

EU countries today generate 24% of global GDP in current nominal terms, exceeding the 22% generated by the US; the 14%, and growing, generated by China; and the 3% generated by Russia, India or Brazil. In fact, as impressive as its military capacity, territory and ambitions may be, Russia's aggregate GDP is still 19% below Italy's. But it is clear that, in geopolitical terms, GDP is not all that matters.

On the other hand, while its enlargement has increased the EU's standing, it has also damaged its coherence and capacity for common action, as the refugee crisis, among many other episodes, has demonstrated.

– Europe is also embroiled in a *multiple crisis* making it difficult in some cases to distinguish between what is structural and what is merely circumstantial. Firstly, between 2008 and 2014 Europe underwent the biggest *economic crisis* since the post-World War II era. The crisis also highlighted the North-South differences within the community. While Germany benefited from an undervalued currency, which raised its exports, countries in the South had to make challenging internal adjustments through wage reductions and savage cuts in social spending and investment. Greece seemed, and to a large extent still seems, to be on the edge of the abyss; Portugal was financially bailed out with effective measures; and Spain and Italy managed to make last-minute adjustments, getting their economies back on track at the expense of considerable damage on a social and political level.

A deep *political crisis*, through an attack on the legitimacy of the representative democratic institutions themselves, has been the result of the deterioration of the social and economic situation. This was compounded by the refugee crisis and the wave of migrant arrivals in the tragedies of the Mediterranean, leading in turn to the emergence of right and left-wing populism.

There are right-wing, xenophobic populist parties like the Lega in Italy, the National Front (now National Rally) in France, the German Alternative für Deutschland, Jaroslaw Kaczynski's Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland, Viktor Orban's Hungarian Civic Alliance, and the FPÖ (run previously by Georg Haider and today by the Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache in Austria), which place the emphasis on

xenophobia and point to immigration as the origin of all the ills afflicting those hit by the crisis, claiming that it dilutes countries' identities and causes national decay.

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And there are outraged left-wing populist parties. Some of these are now in government, like the Italian 5 Stelle, forced into a barely credible coalition of opposing extremes with the Lega in order to rise to power. There are also parties which form parliamentary alliances with the government while also being critically opposed to it, like Podemos in Spain, or those that form a far noisier opposition. They are rebelling (or have rebelled) against the economic, political or institutional elites, and against the traditional parties, blaming them for the cuts in social policies and unemployment. Politicians from all parties without distinction spent the years of crisis claiming that all the problems and cuts were Europe's fault while at the same time claiming for themselves the credit for all the good things that happened while they were in power. As a result, euroscepticism has grown exponentially alongside a lack of confidence in the future of the EU itself. Without doubt, Europe has been greatly weakened, not only internally, but also as a model and as an international actor.

– *Brexit*, while perhaps not having the domino effect feared at the outset, and hoped for by Eurosceptics in Eastern Europe, is undoubtedly bad news. It is evidence of an alarming lack of confidence in the European project, and, with the departure of the United Kingdom, at the very least means a weakening of the European Union in global terms, economically, financially and especially in the sphere of military capacity. The result is still uncertain and, if it takes place as planned, it is not yet clear what rela-

tionship the United Kingdom will have with the EU, or what kind of bridging role it will play between Europe and the United States.

The New Geopolitical Mediterranean.

A quarter of a century after the Barcelona Conference, the Mediterranean's geopolitical landscape has undergone a far-reaching mutation whose distinguishing features need clarifying when it comes to defining policies. Looking at the focus and development of the *Global Strategy for the EU* adopted in 2016 is a good opportunity for this.

– Firstly, seen from a European perspective, it is worth making it clear from the outset that the *European Union is no longer the main actor* in the Mediterranean, nor does it dominate the situation as it once did. Particularly for countries in the southern and, to a lesser extent, the eastern Mediterranean, in 1995 there was no other economic, social and, therefore, political partner that could equal the European Union and its member countries. Particularly in the Maghreb, trade flows with Europe reached more than 70% of its external trade, leading to an acceleration in investments and even industrial relocation. Europe was the place where migrant workers were heading and from where they were sending their remittances, which for Morocco, for example, came to account for 9% of the country's GDP. Europe supplied the tourists that fed into a sector which generates so much local employment and is a significant source of revenue. To a lesser extent, that was also the reality in the Mashreq. The United States maintained a strong presence in the Mediterranean only on a strategic and military level, although its importance increased in the Middle East and the Mashreq, where its trade and investments were also much more significant. The offer of an association with the UE through the Barcelona Process was therefore hard to refuse. Today, the situation could not be more different. The EU's presence has not diminished, despite the weaknesses that plague it. Trade flows are well-maintained. But there are other games in town. The attraction of Europe is now shared with a growing financial and also ideological pull towards the Gulf. Russia has returned in force, trying to recover the legacy of the USSR. China has burst on to

the scene and even India has begun to join in. Above all, the regional powers, which rarely left home in the past, have taken on a significant role in the area of security, or, we might say, insecurity. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) with the unruly Qatar, and even Iran, which were previously far removed from the equation, have an important, albeit variable, political, economic and even military presence, in both the eastern and western Mediterranean.

As a result, euroscepticism has grown exponentially Europe has been greatly weakened, not only internally, but also as a model and as an international actor

– As for the *United States*, during Obama's presidency it was already being signalled from Washington that Europeans should be largely responsible for their own security, including its cost. President Trump has even called into question Europe's position as a US ally, which does nothing to stop him saying it should be more involved in NATO. But it seems clear that, although we are still allies, Europe needs to be increasingly capable of guaranteeing its own security. Now that there is no common Soviet enemy, whose global threat, perceived as a direct one by the Americans, was the underlying justification for the US interest in NATO, the aims of the United States are not always going to coincide with those of Europe in terms of economics, trade, politics and the military affairs. With a neighbour like Russia, which is no longer the former USSR plus the Warsaw Pact, Europe will have to relearn the classical balance of power game. Now, from a global standpoint and among the major powers, it will have to balance the scales, a role historically played by Great Britain on the continent. The EU is the world's largest economy, with 24% of global GDP, as already mentioned, and it is the biggest market, but it has to overcome its lack of internal cohesion to play its proper role, one which is increasingly essential on the world scene, primarily for the sake of its own interests. This rule should first be applied in

the Mediterranean, where the presence of its American ally is comparatively not as great in economic and trade terms. Europe will have to spend more on defence, it is true, but not on buying American weapons, as Trump would have it. Instead, it must progressively develop its own defence research and industry, creating an autonomous operating capacity while remaining a faithful NATO ally.

To a degree, President Obama had already begun the US withdrawal from the Middle East. While Russia is no longer seen as a direct and global threat by the US, it is understood that, although they support opposing sides, the US is allowing Russia to direct mediation efforts for preparing the future of Syria. This is not only the case at the Geneva talks, but also, and above all, in the Astana dialogue, launched at the end of 2016 in the capital of Kazakhstan under the auspices of Russia, Iran and Turkey following the final liberation of eastern Aleppo. The Trump Administration, on the other hand, maintains its alliance with Saudi Arabia and with Israel, which it sees as vital US foreign policy interests.

– President Putin wants to win back the former USSR's influence and role for today's *Russia*. But he has lost his empire and no longer has the territory or the resources of central Europe granted under the Warsaw Pact nor even a large part of the republics of the USSR itself. The Russian Confederation no longer includes the three Baltic states, Ukraine, Belorussia, the South Caucasus, with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, or the major oil republics of Central Asia, like the enormous, rich Kazakhstan (4.5 times the size of France), Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Kremlin's empire has lost more than 50% of its citizens and 25% of its territory, as well as its satellite countries of central Europe, which, to make matters worse, are now, like the Baltic states, NATO members. The USSR had 300 million inhabitants across 22 million sq km; Russia today has 146 million inhabitants across 17 million sq km.

But Russia remains a big country. It is the largest European country, with the population of France and Germany combined, is the biggest country in the world by landmass, almost doubling the United States and China, and is a military and nuclear power. That is to say, Europe needs to have the best possible relations with Russia and today they are

anything but good. Russia feels humiliated because it thinks that the West took advantage of its period of weakness to snatch away its empire. It accepted everything until, with Putin now in power, the West touched on Ukraine, the cradle of the Kievan Rus. For Putin, this move to include Ukraine in the EU, as a step prior to joining NATO, was intolerable and this brought about the destabilization of Ukraine and the invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Russia, therefore, has a legitimate interest in being present in the Mediterranean for strategic, economic and commercial reasons

Russia has also returned to the Mediterranean re-creating an attraction for warming waters dating from the time of the Tsars. Although complicated by the straits of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, and then Suez and Bab-el-Mandeb or Gibraltar, the Mediterranean is its year-round unobstructed access to the high seas. Russia, therefore, has a legitimate interest in being present in the Mediterranean for strategic, economic and commercial reasons. It is therefore trying to regain its old allies from the Soviet era, such as Syria, Algeria and, as far as possible, Egypt and Turkey too. It also has a strong interest in fighting jihadism and Islamic extremism through fear of a contagion effect in its Caucasian and Central Asian republics, as was clear from the bitter experience in Chechnya. For all these reasons, and to demonstrate its plans to become a great power again, Russia's involvement in the Syrian war was total, to the point of radically changing the expected outcome. It has now regained the Tartus naval base there, recovering and expanding its supply base, as outlined in the 1971 Brezhnev-EI Assad Agreement, and transforming it into a permanent naval base.

Moscow is also weaving agreements with al-Sisi's regime in Egypt, without the democratic conditionalities demanded by the Europeans and, at least until a short time ago, the Americans. Russian tourists replace fearful Europeans in the tourist markets of Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, and these countries now buy weapons from the flourishing Russian arms

industry and construct nuclear plants with Russian technology and companies.

With Turkey, a NATO country, Russia has improved its poor relations of recent years and Putin and Erdogan now support one another implicitly to remain strong with respect to Europe and NATO. Here there is also a strong presence of Russian tourists, as well as its nuclear and arms sector, putting it in a unique position as a NATO country. Supporting opposing sides in the Syrian war does not stop them from understanding one another, as long as nothing stands in the way of the Turks' top priority of controlling and neutralizing the Kurds. Even Cyprus has become a major tourist destination for Russians and an important financial centre for its millionaires and oligarchs.

– The geopolitics of the Mediterranean can no longer be understood without taking into account the already enormous and growing presence of *China*. During the Roman Empire, China was already the other great power on the other side of the planet. Scornful of the rest of the world, it built its Great Wall to keep its barbarians away from its precious civilization. Until 1830 it accounted for 30% of the world's GDP. That was when it began to decline, falling victim to ruthless foreign interference, which, after the disastrous end of Mao's "cultural revolution", left an economy in 1978 making up just 2.7% of the global GDP.

Ever since, China has recovered at a dizzying pace. Today, with a population equal to 18% of the total world population, it accounts for 14% of global GDP, as mentioned, and is planning on doubling that figure in the next decade. Geopolitically, this is the most significant statistic of the last 25 years, the global impact of which would necessarily affect the Mediterranean. China has a strategic interest in the Arab world and the Mediterranean. This is the channel that joins China's maritime route with the great European and Atlantic market. China is not only the great factory of the world, but also a major exporter and importer of raw materials, particularly oil, of which it is already the world's number one importer with 18 million barrels per day, 33% of which come from the GCC.

Since the beginning of the century, China's mission has been to become a leader in Africa and in the Arab World in terms of its economy, its political influence, its markets, as a source of raw materials and in the energy sector. Its infrastructure projects

on the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road look to Europe, the Arab world and also Africa. Its overwhelming ambitions, for which it offers all kinds of financial facilities through the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank and other channels, allow it to open up and develop China's interior (where it has a restless Muslim Uighur population) and Central Asia, while at the same time projecting and connecting the Chinese economy towards the Middle East, Europe and Africa. The Mediterranean is one of the main areas of its extremely ambitious plans for transport infrastructure development and for increasing its presence. The Port of Piraeus already belongs to China, which is also building another major maritime hub in Algeria and negotiating with Morocco to double the Tanger Med port. King Mohammed VI himself made an important state visit to China in 2016. China is already Morocco's third biggest trade partner and is well-received throughout the Arab world and Africa thanks to its policy of respect for countries' sovereignty and its refusal to interfere with internal affairs. In this regard, it sets no conditionalities, regardless of the governments in power, and never meddles in the regional conflicts of these areas of such complexity. Chinese exports to the Arab world, which stood at 10 billion dollars per year in 1990, have leapt to 220 billion in 2016 and aspires to reach 300 billion by 2024. In short, today it is already a counter-model and an alternative to the European association model, and its geopolitical weight is sure to grow along with its influence in the economy, trade and investment. 70,000 Chinese citizens are already living and working in Algeria, and similar communities are relentlessly growing in all other countries.

– The greatest geopolitical risk in the Mediterranean today is undoubtedly the *political instability and unrest* throughout the Middle East and the Arab world. The new Mediterranean geopolitical landscape is the result of that instability and unrest, influenced by a series of factors. Aside from the major world powers intervening or meddling in an attempt to take advantage of these circumstances, there are two main fault lines.

The first involves the *confrontation between an Islamic-inspired identitarian regressiveness and modernity* as forces present throughout the Arab-Muslim world, which can adopt authoritarian or democratic

forms. The crisis of the *traditional authoritarian Arab state*, which began with the Tunisian Revolution in 2011, has opened an era of transitions in the Arab world, which may be short-lived or could last several generations.

The other fault line is the *clash between the regional powers*, sometimes assisted by a world power, as they vie for power and hegemony in the area. The violent confrontations and destruction this entails is something European nations have fortunately left in their past, to such an extent that it is difficult for them to understand such motivations. Different vectors of strength overlap one another and are interwoven into each possible scenario. The two fault lines are present in every conflict. Obviously, each regional power falls somewhere along the ideological-identity spectrum, because of their convictions or to justify their confrontations in terms of ideological struggle.

– The *Saudi monarchy* claims legitimacy based on its role as Protector of the Holy Sites. It boasts of being leader of the Islamic world and the majority Sunni Arab world, sharply opposing the Islamic Republic of Iran's strong bid for the leadership of Shia Islam and hegemony in the region. The Iranian ayatollahs have always attacked the dissolute plutocrats of the Gulf and both countries are pitted against each other in all conflicts. The young Mohammed bin Salman, the first in line to the throne since 2017, as chosen by his father King Salman, has set the country on an ambitious course of renewal and affirmation with results that, for the time being, are uncertain, given the internal and external obstacles. His programme "Saudi Vision 2030" and his aggressive foreign policy had already led to purges and repression by the end of 2017, affecting even the commander of the National Guard, Prince Miteb bin Abdullah.

Besides its close alliance with the United States, which maintains a keen interest in the security of the Gulf and the stability of the oil market, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy priorities are chiefly in the Middle East and consist of its confrontation with Iran for hegemony in the region and for leadership of the entire Islamic world. Secondly, in the majority Sunni Arab world, Saudi external actions focus on seeking support for the *traditional authoritarian Arab State*. Against Iran, its results are uncertain to say the least in the wars in Yemen and Syria. The attempt to regain an influence over Iraq, offering the majority Shi-

ite government of the new President al-Abadi, who succeeded al-Maliki in 2014, an alternative to excessive dependence on Iran, complicates the country's unity considering the strong Kurdish and Sunni minority. The effects are, for the time being, limited, although it has managed to attract the influential firebrand Iraqi Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr. In Lebanon, Saudi Arabia had to agree to Saad Hariri's return to power after forcing him to resign over his government with Hezbollah in the Lebanese power balance since 2011. The ultimatum given to Qatar was, in the end, a disaster for Saudi Arabia and the GCC and has only served to push Qatar towards even closer relations with Iran. For Riyadh, Qatar has gone from the Gulf Cooperation Council to collusion with Iran and is constantly irritating the conservative authoritarian Arab governments through its al-Jazeera TV and financial influence in all political transitions. Qatar supports the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Ennahda in Tunisia, Justice and Development in Morocco and other exponents of political Islam in opposition to traditional authoritarians like el-Sisi or Western-style democratic modernists like Nidaa Tounes.

Each regional power falls somewhere along the ideological-identity spectrum, because of their convictions or to justify their confrontations in terms of ideological struggle

As Riyadh's second priority for action – seeking support for conservatives in all countries of the Arab world, thereby ensuring the maintenance of or return to the *traditional authoritarian Arab State* – Saudi Arabia gives its support, through generous funding, to el-Sisi in Egypt, General Haftar in Libya and the Jordanian and Moroccan monarchies and it maintains a relationship it pretends to be one of patronage with all other Arab countries.

– Erdogan's *Turkey* is a NATO member and officially still a candidate for the EU, with which Turkey has maintained a highly profitable Customs Union since 1995, which has been the basis for its industrial

boom. However, Erdogan's moderate Islamic AKP government has increasingly acted as an autonomous power beyond those alliances in the region's confrontations. Right from its beginnings in 2003, Erdogan's government launched a policy of "zero problems with the neighbours" and with the newly independent countries of Turkmen descent from Central Asia. It also pursues a policy of neo-Ottomanism: an exercise of soft power aimed at recovering Turkey's ascendancy over the countries of the old Ottoman Empire, which it led until 1918 as the seat of the Caliphate. When the Arab Springs broke out in 2011, Turkey presented itself as a model of Islamic democracy to be imitated in the Arab world. As such, like Qatar, it supported the political Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ennahda in Tunisia, Justice and Development in Morocco, and others. After the opposition uprising against al-Assad, it supported the arrival of jihadists of all origins into Syria through Turkey, while at the same time receiving 3.4 million refugees, for which it ensured Europe footed the bill. Its top priority is the fight against the PKK and the Kurdish movements in general, whose minority in Turkey stands at 15 to 20 million people who could feasibly back the PKK's separatist proclamations. This is the reason for Turkey's intervention in the war in Syria, attacking the pro-PKK groups fighting against the central power in Damascus in the Kurdish-controlled border areas. However, it maintains good relations with the autonomous Kurdish government in northern Iraq, which has no ties with the PKK. This has placed Turkey in an increasingly contradictory position as a NATO member and European ally which finds itself, in reality, colluding with al-Assad's regime and Russia, and, despite itself, with Iran as well. The feeling of frustration over Europe's rejection of Turkey's EU entry and the mounting disagreements with the Trump Administration and its protectionist policy simply emboldens the country to continue along the same lines.

– In general terms, it is worth distinguishing between the *unrest in the Middle East and that in the Maghreb*. The Middle East is the Gordian knot of global unrest. All internal conflicts there are rapidly internationalized through intervention and meddling by regional and some of the World powers, thus far the US and Russia. North Africa is increasingly distant from those focuses of unrest and the vital interests of its stakeholders, which means there is im-

measurably less penetration and meddling by external powers when conflicts break out there.

– In *Egypt*, Obama and the EU itself pushed President Mubarak into leaving power. The result was a victory for the Muslim Brotherhood, who had Qatari and Turkish support and lukewarm backing from the US and Europe, which looked the other way when General al-Sisi snatched power, taking a counter-revolutionary step that was praised and politically and financially supported by Saudi Arabia and the GCC. The outcome was a return to the Mubarak system of the hardened *traditional authoritarian Arab state*, outlawing the Muslim Brotherhood as terrorists, along with practically the entire opposition. The EU and US complaints over violations of human rights have simply helped Russia to return to the country from which it was expelled by Sadat and where it has now military facilities, sells arms and is building a nuclear plant. Tourists are beginning to flock back to the Nile and Egypt has returned to its daily difficulties of overpopulation and a lack of development and modernization.

– The situation in *Libya* is very different. After the implosion of the state and the chaos and division of the country following NATO's attack and the hunt for Gaddafi, structural destabilization has become the backdrop to a relatively low-intensity conflict. The supposed control of the UN-recognized Tripoli government and that of General Hafter in Benghazi hide the simple reality of an absence of government in all areas. The dominant tribal, militia and criminal groups in the different regions carry out all kinds of trafficking and activities, regardless of whether they are illegal or are simply aimed at survival. One of the trafficking activities which is of particular concern to Europe, besides arms trafficking, is clandestine migration, the trafficking of human beings. However, it seems that the Libyans themselves, with support from the US airforce and help from the Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt in support of General Hafter, have been able to defeat ISIS's attempts to install a new jihadist emirate in Libya. This has now been pushed into the Sahel belt, where state structures are even more fragile than the armed groups in Libya. The UN and its mediator Ghassan Salameh are working to find consensus for a national government and democratic transition. However, their efforts are doomed to fail as, in the confusion of the widespread *low-intensity* chaos, no armed group is

willing to facilitate this change and, in so doing, transfer and lose the power they enjoy today in their fiefs. The only consensus that exists concerns the distribution of oil revenues, surprisingly, through the same and unique Central Bank.

– The countries of the central Maghreb are further from the hornet's nest of the Middle East and closer to Europe. Here, *Tunisia* is the only country in the Arab world which, after the 2011 revolution, is still advancing in its democratic transition, despite economic difficulties and a population that will only become increasingly disgruntled if the situation does not improve. In the first democratic elections, victory went to the moderate Islamist party Ennahda, with major economic support from Qatar and, to a certain extent, Turkey's political backing. However, the government's inexperience, mounting instability and al-Sisi's *coup d'état* in Egypt prompted it to step down. The writing of a democratic and secular constitution, under intense pressure from a coalition of civil society groups pushing for consensus and stability, earned the latter the Nobel Peace Prize. The modernizing, neo-Bourguibist party Nidaa Tounes won the next presidential and parliamentary elections, governing in coalition with Ennahda itself. While retaining its Arab and Muslim identity, its fundamental aim is to gain a new status of economic association and integration with the European Union which allows it to stabilize the country and make economic progress, despite the destabilization risk stemming from the chaos in neighbouring Libya. This is the European Union's big chance to show how its external action and aid can be effective, -call it what you may, association, neighbourhood policy, etc., while also enjoying the support of the entire international community. If they cannot achieve success in Tunisia, it would be an irreparable historical failure for Europe and the entire Arab world.

– *Algeria* today has two fundamental features: it is a rich *rentier* state thanks to oil and gas, and remains stable in political stagnation, largely due to the traumatic recent memory of the brutal and indiscriminate jihadist terrorism that rose to unprecedented levels in the nineties. It was therefore immune to the Arab Spring uprisings and could finance social and political peace in a society that would, under no circumstance, risk entering another period of violence. Under such conditions, the regime established by the FLN and the army almost 60 years ago contin-

ues to perpetuate itself, as does President Abdelaziz, who was a minister in the first government of independent Algeria in 1962 and Foreign Affairs Minister from 1963 to 1979, and who, after his country's various twists and turns, has been the President of the Republic since 1999. From a security perspective, aside from the risks of internal destabilization, which is unlikely in a state as strong and financially rich as Algeria, its concerns centre on the control of its immense territory, which stretches deep into the Sahara right up to the Sahel belt. These concerns are all the greater today shared by all states in the area and the international community. Algeria's rivalry with Morocco for hegemony in the Maghreb has prompted it to keep its land border with this country closed and is crucial for keeping the conflict in the Western Sahara alive through Algerian support for the SADR in Tindouf.

Tunisia is the European Union's big chance to show how its external action and aid can be effective

– *Morocco* is the only country in the Arab world that was not swallowed up by the Ottoman Empire and it has retained its status as a Sultanate or independent Muslim kingdom in different forms since time immemorial. Together with Tunisia, it is the Mediterranean partner country that maintains the closest relations with the EU. From a socioeconomic point of view, after a long period of instability under Hassan II, the country has steadily progressed, particularly thanks to a policy of modernization undertaken following the coronation of the new monarch Mohammed VI in 1999. But the pace of progress has been insufficient for the plethora of young people arriving on the job market and to narrow the notorious gap with the other side of the Strait.

Like Tunisia, most of its trade, investment flow, tourists or emigrant workers' remittances comes from Europe. It actually officially requested entry to the EU under Hassan II, which was, of course, impossible from the outset for simple reasons of geography. As an independent country it has always kept itself in the Western orbit and is party to America's oldest standing treaty, a country with which it main-

tains excellent political, trade and military relations. In any case it understandably aspires to having a privileged relationship with the EU. This is one of the central planks of the countries strategy, along with its fundamental political relationships with the Arab countries and its recent policy of rapprochement with the rest of Africa, where it hopes to become an economic, political and trading partner and serve as a bridge to Europe. The Alawite monarchy, as the supreme religious authority, maintains the country's unity and stability, which is only threatened if socio-economic tensions rise or if the monarchy's great drive to recover the country's territorial integrity in the Sahara were to fail.

From a security point of view, Morocco's greatest concern stems from a lack of a decisive international solution to the Western Sahara conflict. Morocco occupies and administers this region, but the Sahwaris of the Polisario Front lay claim to it from Tindouf, with support from Algeria and part of the international community. Jihadist terrorism and instability in the Sahel are the other big concern, although the army and police are readily able to carry out their constitutional duty.

What EU Strategy for the Mediterranean?

The renewal of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy in 2017 and the prior approval of the EU's new Global Strategy in 2016 have provided key moments for reflection on the European approach to the complicated Mediterranean area. The conclusions have not been revolutionary, but they have been substantial, albeit insufficiently applied. From the point of view of cooperation and the application of the association treaties, there have been no radical changes, but some relevant criteria have been introduced, in particular, a greater degree of realism in allowing positive or negative discrimination in cooperation with partner countries. This is based on their level of commitment to the values and reforms that underlie the entire Euro-Mediterranean project, as well as their alignment with EU interests, such as respect for human rights and democracy, but also in areas like migration control or participation in peace efforts. There has been an increase, although pitifully insufficient, in the resources available for the neighbourhood policy. A clear distinction is made between the different pol-

icies applied by the partner countries, but not enough and lacking the decisive support that countries at a key moment of their transition, in association with Europe, should be receiving, as is the case with Morocco, and especially Tunisia.

From a geopolitical viewpoint and one more directly related with security, Europe is still a dwarf in military terms. It is true, however, that the initial steps have been taken to perhaps overcome that situation one day and finally create a European Defence Community, which has been an unrealized dream since the 1940s. A joint command centre has been set up in Brussels for training missions, a European Defence Fund has been created to invest 1.5 billion euros a year in research and the defence industry, which will be consolidated in the next Multiannual Financial Framework, and, above all, after establishing a first EU military intervention force, the Permanent Structured Cooperation on Defence has been launched to strengthen cooperation between interested Member States. Ultimately, although the percentage increase from zero to one is infinite, it is practically nothing in comparison with the challenges the EU has to face. The EU is still a specialist in "soft power", although, despite its efforts, this is on a scale insufficient for the magnitude of the challenges to which it must rise. Not long ago, Federica Mogherini herself pointed out that "the state of the world today is a state of chaos: a confused proliferation of crises where conflict and confrontation seem to prevail over rationality". It is true, as she points out, that, thanks to the strength of its values, and to its economic and political capacity, "the EU is today the point of reference for all those that are investing in peace, multilateralism, free and fair trade, sustainable development, the fight against climate change, human rights and democracy, social economy – in a rules-based global order". But all that is clearly insufficient in view of the EU's need to deal with the chaos arriving on our doorsteps and which, in different ways, is making its way into our society. Europe faces a demanding task ahead for many years to come: to build and protect an area of peace and shared progress around the Mediterranean – a Euro-Mediterranean Area of Economic Integration – including furthermore the rest of the African continent as privileged partners in a greater area of Euro-African Association.