

# Foreword

## Senén Florensa

President of the Executive Committee  
European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed),  
Barcelona

Upon studying the Mediterranean Region, there is unfortunately the sensation of running on a loop. The problems in the region seem to be festering and the progress made, despite being highly significant, seems small against the magnitude of some of the problems being experienced across the Mediterranean area.

Despite its major advances, the contemporary world has reached a point of uncertainty, facing major challenges in all spheres: violent conflicts, wars, indiscriminate terrorism, the effects of climate change, new types of security threats, such as cyberattacks or manipulation of public opinion, an increase in economic inequality as a result of the economic crisis, etc. Furthermore whereas in the face of such problems, the rise of xenophobic populisms and exclusionary nationalisms do not make it easy to handle these uncertainties.

The Mediterranean area must not only rise to the challenges caused by these uncertainties, but it is at the heart of a number of them. Middle East conflicts continue to be the Gordian knot of world geopolitics. The war in Syria, whose local actors keep changing position as the war develops, continues to demonstrate the geopolitical labyrinth in which world powers, regional leaders and those who aspire to become ones, make their play on a chessboard full of destruction and death. A conflict that, with the expulsion of millions of refugees from conflict zones and together with the precarious situation in Libya, has exacerbated one of the elements most difficult to manage, human movement

across the Mediterranean. Thus, every year a humanitarian crisis repeats itself, for which European countries have not succeeded in finding a solution that meets both border management criteria and the essential matter of humanitarian aid.

Hence the selection of topics for the Yearbook has become an exercise in precision, as it attempts to combine the most relevant aspects of current affairs with reflection on subjects that, although having a lower media profile, determine development in the Mediterranean Region to a large extent.

Insofar as the *Keys* section of this year's edition, the Yearbook kicks off with a topic that has unfortunately been prominent in each and every edition: conflict in the Middle East. In the 2017 edition, 100 years after the Balfour Declaration, 50 years after the Six Day War and 30 after the First Intifada, the time seems right to spotlight the Arab-Israeli conflict as the featured topic of the year, which, though it has not been gaining as much media attention due to the war in Syria, continues to be present and to determine much of the situation in the Middle East. The topic is approached from various angles, emphasizing both the internal dimension of each party and the international dimension of the conflict.

The second of this year's *Keys* focuses on the future of Europe and the challenges facing the European Union. The future of the Mediterranean Region is intrinsically linked to that of the European Union. Euro-Mediterranean relations will largely determine the future of the region, and this is why a crisis of the European project does not bode well. Regarding topics related to the EU crisis, we chose to discuss aspects such as Brexit, the rise of populisms and the refugee crisis, all factors that have shaken the European edifice. Nonetheless, these symptoms can give rise to a remedy for the EU project. Although no satisfactory solution to the refugee crisis

that is in keeping with European values has yet been found, Eurosceptic populism has threatened but failed to achieve quotas of power in the main countries of the continent. Although Brexit is certainly a failure of European integration, negotiations have, for now, been a show of unity among the rest of European countries. Seen with optimism, if countries have the political will, the EU crisis of the past few years could lend new impetus towards advancing and deepening European unity. The progression of Euro-Mediterranean relations, for its part, will depend on the role of Mediterranean European countries in the Union.

**The problems in the region seem to be festering and the progress made seems small against the magnitude of some of the problems being experienced**

The third of this year's *Keys* focuses on the debate of ideas within Islam. A debate on the future of Islam, or, in the words of some of the authors regarding the reform of Islam, which, beyond political interests, centres on the conciliation of religious tradition with the demands of modern civilization, with its values and limitations. Three articles (centring on the debate of ideas, reform theories and the singularity of Islam in Europe) analyse debates and proposals underway on reform within Islam in an extremely complex framework of relations between religion, society and politics. The result of this process will be decisive for the future of the Muslim world, prevailing over the threats embodied by both the arbitrary violence of jihadi terrorism and the most extreme fundamentalism, or the interventionism of world powers. Finally, the last *Keys* section deals with the processes of radicalization and deradicalization of youth who end up swelling the ranks of jihadi terrorism. Through two articles – one on radicalization processes in Europe, the other on deradicalization experiences in Europe and the Arab world – a highly relevant topic rooted in an underlying social problem is raised. Extremist radicalization of disoriented or rootless youth in Europe is probably just the tip of

the iceberg of a structural problem in which a multitude of factors beyond the religious ones converge, such as integration of immigrant communities, the economic crisis and youth unemployment, the lack of opportunities, growing economic inequality, poverty, education, etc. As one of the authors says, only an integral approach to the phenomenon will allow us to establish successful mechanisms of deradicalization.

Following the *Keys*, the *Dossier* section of this year's edition deals with the current geopolitical labyrinth and its effects on the Mediterranean area. Nine articles analyse in depth the role of the different actors on the geopolitical chessboard in the region.

First of all, the role of the major powers in the region is discussed: on the one hand, the first steps taken in the region by new American policy with Donald Trump in the presidency, and on the other hand, how Russia seeks to restore its sphere of influence of the Soviet era through its intervention (among other things) in support of the Bashar Al Assad regime in Syria. The role to be played by the European Union in the Mediterranean in the face of changes and the diversity of situations in the region is also analysed. The UE will have to adapt to situations in which its traditional political relations with other countries are hardly suitable.

**Middle East conflicts continue to be the Gordian knot of world geopolitics**

After this overview of the policies of the major powers, the *Dossier* focuses on regional aspects with articles on the situation in Syria and the role played by regional powers and their allies in the Middle East. The *Dossier* dedicates separate articles to the international policies of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. And lastly, it closes with two more articles, the first on the conflict in Libya seen from a regional perspective, making particular reference to the consequences for its Maghreb neighbours and for regional integration, and the second on the source of instability represented by Sahel countries in relation to terrorism, migration and other security aspects.

After the *Dossier*, the Yearbook goes on to the *Panorama* section, which offers a wide variety of brief articles that attempt to provide a general overview of the situation regarding a wide variety of topics of significance to the Mediterranean region. In this section, you will find a series of more geographically-circumscribed articles, such as those dealing with the recent changes in different Mediterranean countries or those discussing the activity of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the war in Yemen, EU-Africa relations, the rise of Salafism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and those analysing the elections in France or Italy. The second major set of articles has a sectoral focus, with economic, social and cultural topics, among which are articles on youth unemployment, investment, climate change and migration, sustainable tourism, the challenges of water in Mediterranean countries, the media's approach to refugees, cultural diplomacy, interreligious dialogue, the geopolitics of energy, the role of women in the agricultural sector, or the funding of terrorism, among others. These articles are a good example of the diverse nature of the topics dealt with in the Yearbook.

All of the above is but one of the pillars on which the Yearbook rests. Just as important as the articles are the Yearbook's *Annexes*. The chronologies, tables, charts, statistics, fact sheets or country profiles and of course, maps, are the second column on which

the Yearbook rests. The *Annexes* provide essential information on Mediterranean countries on a purely informative level to complement everything contributed by the articles or provide information on topics that the articles, for reasons of space, were unable to cover in this year's edition.

## The war in Syria continues to demonstrate the geopolitical labyrinth in which world powers, regional leaders and those who aspire to become ones, make their play on a chessboard full of destruction and death

About to reach its fifteenth edition, the *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook* continues its task of providing political, economic, social and cultural keys of the Mediterranean agenda from diverse, plural perspectives and with a broad selection of complementary data and information. It is our aim to keep this engagement with the Yearbook's readership, attempting to improve with each new edition, with the help of all of those who collaborate and contribute their knowledge to this work.