

Foreword

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There's an old "Chinese" curse that goes "may you live in interesting times"... As the editors of a yearbook on the Mediterranean area, we certainly cannot complain of living in times that are not "interesting." However, lest we forget that times can always be more "interesting," fate had a world pandemic kept in store for us that has turned the world as we knew it upside down.

The unstoppable spread of infections, restrictions on movement, border closures, widespread confinements, shortages in medical equipment, paralysis across much of the economy, plummeting air traffic and tourism, cancellation of shows or major (and minor) sporting events..., are just some of the consequences of the pandemic (beyond those strictly related to health in the form of infections and, tragically, deaths). With the end of the pandemic still not in sight, there is no doubt that the effects on the economy are devastating: unprecedented falls in GDP, rising unemployment, sectors which have seen their turnovers slashed to a minimum. Tourism is a clear example of the latter, a sector that is so vital for the world's number one tourist destination, the Mediterranean area, which has been dragged through a crisis it will find hard to recover from until the situation is normalized. The pandemic has laid bare and magnified inequalities, preying on the most vulnerable, but it has also shown how working together and solidarity are the best recipes for getting through this crisis. The European Union's agreements on how to tackle both the crisis and the recovery from it, despite the efforts and negotiations they have demanded, show us the path

to follow. However, from a Mediterranean viewpoint, the Union should not limit itself to internal policy. The coronavirus crisis could serve as the opportunity for the European Union to recover its leading role in the Mediterranean area and move forward together with its southern neighbours along the road to recovery.

Our editorial team has had to reformulate the content of this Yearbook with every twist and turn, thanks to an event that not only conditions the region's evolution, but also affects all areas of Mediterranean society, across the board. It was therefore decided that for the year marking 25 years of the Barcelona Process, the *Dossier* would be focused on rethinking Euro-Mediterranean relations with the appearance of this unexpected visitor: the pandemic. The *Dossier*, therefore, is focused on analysing the perspectives of Euromed relations in times of the coronavirus through the prisms of different themes. Geopolitics, economics, authoritarianism, gender, migration, relations with sub-Saharan Africa, new technologies or the role of the UfM or subnational cooperation are some of the Euro-Mediterranean topics addressed in this year's *Dossier* (as well as the pandemic's corresponding impact).

The *Dossier* aims to convey the idea that reflecting on the future of Euro-Mediterranean relations, which was to be central to this anniversary year, is, now and for the near future, impossible without taking into account the context of the "new normality" that the coronavirus has imposed upon us.

As well as conditioning the content of this year's *Dossier*, the Covid-19 pandemic also has an inevitable place in the Yearbook's other articles, since authors were asked to include the pandemic's implications for their different specialist areas. So, throughout, the Yearbook offers a transversal vision of the effects of the pandemic, rather than reducing it to a limited series of articles.

The selection of this year's themes for the *Keys* section is a combination of topical issues and longer-standing themes, all of which will have an impact on the future of the Mediterranean area. The first chapter of this section is focused on the popular mobilizations that have taken place in recent times in certain countries in the region. These are analysed from two perspectives: firstly, the transnational nature of these movements and their connection with the mobilizations of the last decade in the Arab world; and secondly, the role of the military in the different regimes' responses to the protests that have brought together large parts of these countries' societies.

The second chapter of *Keys* focuses on climate change in the Mediterranean, following on from the UfM report. Three articles analyse different areas affected by climate change in the Mediterranean: firstly, the environmental risks and extreme weather phenomena that climate change is causing now and will cause in the near future. Secondly, since the effects of climate change and dangers it poses for the future of humanity are not confined to environmental and meteorological risks, the other two articles in this chapter are focused on analysing its economic effects and the geopolitical impact it has as a driver of conflict.

Another of the *Keys* of this edition is the issue of Europe's relations with Africa; relations in which the Mediterranean area plays a decisive role. This theme is addressed in the Yearbook through two articles: one centred on the EU's strategy in Africa, the high hopes for which at the year's beginning were later curbed by the pandemic. Nonetheless, Africa's strategic importance for Europe remains a strong incentive for the EU to continue to follow a proactive strategy. The other article in the chapter is focused on the Maghreb's role in sub-Saharan Africa and the need for the Maghreb countries' foreign policies to look increasingly southwards, making this region both a nexus and vital piece in EU-Africa relations.

Finally, the last of this edition's *Keys* is focused on a recurrent theme in the Mediterranean Yearbook: the status quo of the conflicts in the region and their geopolitical context. Analysed in this edition, and sadly in every Yearbook in recent years, is firstly, the conflict in Syria, both in terms of its internal development and in the different spheres of geopolitical influence that affect it; and secondly, the conflict in Libya, the development of its internal conflict and role of the

different foreign powers at play. Lastly, recent tensions between Iran and the United States are examined, along with the role played by the Gulf countries in this regard. The Trump Administration's return to viewing Iran as a major threat in the region and the military escalation, which seemed at times to be a forerunner of armed conflict, have led to a geopolitical map of side-taking and alliances, fueling the long-lived precariousness of the region's stability.

The section of short articles, *Panorama*, offers, as it does in each edition, a general mosaic of some of the most relevant themes in the Mediterranean area. In its first part, structured geographically, besides the traditional articles on the recent evolution of southern Mediterranean countries, are articles on the presence of China and the Gulf countries in the Balkans; the Mediterranean policies of France or the United States; the effect of Brexit on the United Kingdom's diplomatic movements in the region and an analysis of the situation of the largely forgotten conflict in Yemen.

Noteworthy among the articles in the second part, structured by sector, are those focused on the prevention of violence, gender inequality in the labour market, the management of migration and the importance of emigrant remittances in the economies of emigration countries. This section offers a wide variety of themes, ranging from the presence of microplastics in the Mediterranean Sea and the conflicts stemming from gas in the eastern Mediterranean to the region's demographic challenges and the presence of Arab cinema in Europe.

Lastly, mention should be made to the Yearbook's *Annexes*, comprising chronologies, statistics and maps, which provide a wealth of information and serve as the perfect complement to the analysis offered in the articles. The resources present in these *Annexes* form the foundations on which the Yearbook is based. Their continuity and exhaustive nature makes this corpus of information essential for anyone approaching an analysis of the region.

Before ending this presentation, I would like to thank all those that have made a new edition of the Yearbook possible in such precarious times, from the members of the Yearbook's Advisory Council and the authors, to the IEMed team, translators, correctors and layout editors. Thank you to all those who have overcome the uncertainty of these times to ensure readers can lay their hands on yet another edition of the IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook.