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Foreword

Senén Florensa
President of the Executive Committee,
European Institute of the Mediterranean, Barcelona

A year ago, we began this introduction by commenting on how the pandemic had completely transformed the state of affairs in the world in general and in the Mediterranean in particular. We found ourselves in a situation of maximum health pressure and devastating economic and social consequences, with, according to most analysts, uncertain prospects that did not augur well for a rapid recovery.

Today, although we are still in a pandemic, we face the future with more optimism. An unprecedented economic and scientific effort is allowing mass vaccination of the population and although the new variants show that the fight against the pandemic must remain an absolute priority, the health risk of the new waves has been considerably reduced by the vaccine. We said a year ago that the pandemic is hitting the most vulnerable and that in the face of a global challenge, the European response could not remain within its borders. The pace of vaccination in neighbouring countries is slower, and without global mass vaccination, the chances of leaving the pandemic behind and undertaking economic and social recovery in the Euro-Mediterranean area will be very limited.

We mustn’t forget that inequality was already a central element of the global crisis looming over our region before the pandemic exacerbated it both internally and between countries. Unequal capacity to handle the recovery can be an even more important factor of inequality and it is fundamental for the region’s development to try to avoid this. We therefore believe that the European Union’s titanic effort to tackle recovery must also be reflected in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and regaining a leading role in the region.

The European Union was already redefining its policy priorities in the face of global challenges before the pandemic, and with the pandemic, they have become the roadmap for achieving not only rapid but also long-term sustainable economic recovery. Hence, we begin the Keys section of the yearbook with an analysis of these new European policy priorities and their impact on the Euro-Mediterranean dimension. Five articles analyse not only the renewed partnership with the Mediterranean countries, but also how the green transition, the strengthening of the social dimension, the renewed focus on competitiveness and employment, and the digital agenda will impact or be applied in relations with the Mediterranean partner countries. These new policies offer great potential for building new areas of cooperation, and real opportunities for sustainable development – not only in the Euro-Mediterranean region but also extending these advances to other regions in the enlarged neighbourhood – will depend on their implementation.

The second of this issue’s Keys focuses on analysing the geopolitical position of world powers in the Mediterranean arena. This section deals with the new US Administration and its influence on America’s position in North Africa and the Middle East; the continued expansion of Russia’s influence in the Mediterranean under Putin and its capacity to maintain this influence; the recent increase of China’s presence in the region, originally through economic investments and the Belt & Road initiative, but which has been extended to aspects of security, culture or in the context of the pandemic, health, in what has come to be known as “vaccine diplomacy”. Another element addressed in the second key issue of the yearbook is the so-called “normalization” of some Arab States with Israel and the regional consequences of these agreements.

The third of the Keys focuses on geopolitical tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey’s position. Natural gas reserves found in the Eastern Mediterranean have become a source of conflict and a key element in Turkey’s expansive foreign policy in the wider region, with Turkish involvement in the conflicts in
Libya and Syria. Although geopolitical tensions seem to have eased in recent times, it seems clear that the future EU-Turkey relationship will be reshaped by numerous divergences and Turkey’s ability to maintain constant tension will determine future geopolitical movements in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Finally, the last of this issue’s Keys is devoted to a recurring theme in the Mediterranean Yearbook and an essential one in Euro-Mediterranean relations: migration.

Three articles analyse the EU’s latest proposals on asylum and migration and their impact on Mediterranean countries; the instrumentalization of migration in Euro-Mediterranean relations and the demands of the EU’s neighbouring countries; and finally, the impact of the pandemic on the evolution of migratory flows in the Mediterranean.

The Dossier in this issue of the Yearbook is devoted to the situation of the region in times of multiple crises. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted and aggravated several pre-existing vulnerabilities in the area, on both the economic and political levels, as well as the human and social dimensions. The Dossier attempts to analyse the different aspects of the crises underlying the one caused by the pandemic, not only from the point of view of the risks and dangers they entail, but also the opportunities and hopes for change that this point in time represents. This is why the variety of articles in the Dossier address this situation from multiple perspectives: on the one hand, the analysis of the authoritarian and/or populist drift in some Mediterranean countries, together with the capacity and resilience of the political activism that is expressing social malaise and leading social mobilizations in Arab countries; certain, more economic aspects are also addressed, such as the growing public debt on both shores of the Mediterranean or the vulnerability of supply chains revealed by the pandemic and the opportunity to redefine them; the inequality that already existed but which the pandemic has magnified as a hotspot for recovery and development in the region; or the generation gap and the role of youth in the recovery. The Mediterranean area is experiencing multi-level crises with extremely high risks, but which also represent a pivotal time for the region’s future development. These are the moments that must be seized to change the paradigm and turn Euro-Mediterranean cooperation around, to focus on new priorities and take advantage of the opportunities for change that are opening up for the future.

As in every edition, the short articles in the Panorama section present a general mosaic of some of the most relevant issues in the Mediterranean area. Its first part, structured geographically, displays the traditional articles on recent developments in the southern Mediterranean countries, including, to name but a few, the article on the extremely serious situation in Lebanon and the addition, as of this year, of an article on Mauritania. This section also contains articles on non-European geopolitical actors in the Balkans, the thirty years since the 5+5 Dialogue and the relationship between the United States and Iran.

The second part, structured by sector, covers a wide range of topics. Among its articles are those dedicated to the use of artificial intelligence in armed conflicts, the widespread unemployment in the region, digital education and the impact of the pandemic on health systems in the Mediterranean. This section reflects the firm desire to incorporate a broad range of topics into the Yearbook that will allow us to report on the maximum number of issues relevant to the future of the region. This is why you will find articles ranging from aquaculture in the Mediterranean Sea or the future of mass tourism to cultural relations or Arab public opinion on the Abraham Accords.

Last but not least, the Yearbook’s Annexes should also be mentioned. Chronologies, statistics and maps supply a huge amount of information that represents the other side of the knowledge provided by the articles. The elements compiled in these annexes are the Yearbook’s basic heritage. The annexes in the present edition contain a wealth of information for those wishing to see a snapshot of the region, but their continuity (together with that of the Yearbook itself) also offers an essential product for understanding the evolution of the Euro-Mediterranean space.

And finally, yet another year, I would like to thank all those who have made a new edition of the Yearbook possible. Maintaining the continuity of a work of this nature is no easy task. From the members of the Yearbook’s Advisory Board who lay the cornerstone, to the authors who offer the best of their knowledge to build this unique construction, to the IEMed team, translators, proofreaders and layout designers who make this idea a reality, thanks to all of them we are able to offer readers a new edition of the IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook.
When viewed from the vantage point of Classical Antiquity, what seems most striking about our enchanted part of the world is the fact that there once existed a coessentially Mediterranean culture, which was evidently capable of making our world a better place through the promotion of humanism and the spreading of such values as solidarity, empathy and egalitarianism. This Mediterranean morale is one of the most pronounced icons of a Mediterranean identity that, time after time, came to shape the contours of our world: the high priests of Thebes, Knossos and Hattusa, the Purple Traders of Phoenicia, the natural philosophers of Miletus, the playwrights of Athens, the orators of Rome, the intellectuals of Alexandria, the translators of Toledo and Palermo, the scholars of Constantinople and Fes, the troubadours of Provence, the merchants of Venice and Dubrovnik, the sages of Damascus and Oran, the Renaissance humanists, the pioneers of the Scientific Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment all held high the torch of dialogue, exchange and progress, before passing it down to us.

But it is not this morale alone that defines the Mediterranean imperative; there is also our resilience and capacity for recovery and regeneration. This is another Mediterranean trademark, the blueprints for which can be found following episodes like the natural disaster that wiped out the Minoan Civilization, the Invasions of the Sea Peoples and the Plague that hit Europe in the 14th century. We have always emerged as victors when faced with the most trying of adversities, and this too is a torch we must hold high and a message of hope at a time when there are worrisome clocks ticking for our region: accelerating climate change, environmental degradation, aggravated socioeconomic disparities, de facto digital disruption with dehumanizing effects and new silicon curtains, persisting economic fragmentation, an eroding Lebensraum, and a pandemic that seems to herald an age of anxiety. How can history repeat itself in our favour? How can we be catalysts and agents of change in today’s troubled world and how should we navigate its “liquid modernity”? How can we mobilize our resources, capacities and allies to once again overcome adversity and avoid a pyrrhic victory? These, and other concerns, have lain at the heart of the raison d’être of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) since it was launched in 2008, building on the noble acquis of the 1995 Barcelona Process.

The tried and trusted Mediterranean ethos of value co-creation is ever present in the UfM’s modus operandi and its multistakeholder approach, as it strives to promote integration in a highly fragmented region where waves of Euroscepticism, Afro-pessimism and destabilizing subjectivities and cognitive injustices concerning the Mediterranean region have come to threaten the shared vision of building a common area of peace, stability, security and prosperity for the peoples of the Euro-Mediterranean region. These all broke on the hard rock of development cooperation and a common political will, inspired by the conviction that the magnitude of the current regional challenges calls for an orchestrated regional response.

Ancient African wisdom tells us that if you want to go fast, you go alone; but if you want to go far, you go together. The Union for the Mediterranean, like any other organization, cannot go far in realizing its objectives without going together, hand-in-hand, with a broad array of cooperation and development state.
and non-state actors, interlocutors, partners and stakeholders, which together form its extended ecosystem. Whether through bilateral, multilateral, South-South or triangular cooperation, we have been actively engaging with our partners in promoting cooperation and integration in our part of the world, which, unfortunately, features the lowest levels of economic integration on the planet.

In the aftermath of the humanitarian and socioeconomic disruptions provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become ever more evident that enhanced integration is a pressing need, and that it is no longer a matter of choice, but rather a precondition for a timely response to challenges in the region. In this spirit, the first edition of the UfM Progress Report on Regional Integration, issued in May 2021, proved to be more than just a mapping exercise or a point of departure: it yielded surprising statistics and concrete, action-oriented and evidence-based policy recommendations in five domains of integration that are of paramount importance for the region, namely: trade, financial markets, infrastructure, movement of people and research and higher education. The path ahead to fulfil these recommendations passes through closer collaboration and synchronization with governments, public and private sector companies and support organizations, development cooperation agencies, social partners, civil society organizations, universities and research institutes, regional and international organizations, and – of course – think (and do) tanks like the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), which has been fostering effective cooperation and partnerships between the two shores of the Mediterranean for over three decades now.

Finally, the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, through its dedicated team, its extended ecosystem, its convening power, its know-how and its expertise will always stand ready and determined to join, accompany and leverage all meaningful regional efforts in its areas of priority, honouring its role as a unique platform for dialogue and as a regional chapter of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and always aiming to fulfill the legitimate aspirations of the peoples on both shores of the Mediterranean: it is precisely the region’s human and natural assets that underpin our commitment to a better future.
Keys
The Externalization of EU Policies in the Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood: The Potential Impact of the New Mediterranean Agenda

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In September 2020, in her Letter of Intent, Ursula von der Leyen introduced the Joint Communication on a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood as a “major initiative” of her European Commission. The initiative was then framed by the leaders of the European Union (EU) during the December 2020 European Council. The Southern Neighbourhood is the third issue addressed in its conclusions. To divide the Mediterranean into different geographical administrative silos is not new. In this context, the “Southern Neighbourhood” terminology allows for the differentiation of specific objectives, priorities and provisional financial allocations for the “eastern” and “southern” neighbourhoods that share the same earmarked financial envelope of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – “Global Europe.”

The externalization of EU policies is at the core of the 2021 “New Mediterranean Agenda.” In order to evaluate how it will further develop this externalization, a first part of this article will analyze its genesis and main characteristics. The second will concentrate on the issue of the externalization of EU policies in the Mediterranean at large.

The Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A New Agenda for the Mediterranean: Another EU-Centric Initiative?

In the December 2020 European Council conclusions, the “Mediterranean” and the Barcelona process rhetoric was used to legitimize an EU initiative...
based on the above-mentioned proposal and official position and the provisions of the financial regulation adopted in June 2021 by the EU Council and European Parliament.\(^7\)

The EU leaders carefully framed the approach, insisting that the “work will be guided” by its own “Strategic Agenda 2019-2024” as well as the “key principles of our neighbourhood policy, and supported by effective use of all our instruments.”\(^8\) adding that they “will develop a new Agenda for the Mediterranean based on shared priorities and a focus on specific Mediterranean responses and close cooperation.” Shared priorities do not mean necessarily mutually agreed priorities. One of the issues of the ENP was precisely that the ownership of the policy by the partners was limited, and the ENP’s 2015 evaluation was quite negative in this regard.\(^9\)

The “strategic agenda 2019-2024,” adopted by the European Council on 20 June 2019, sets out the four priorities, providing “guidance for the work programmes of other EU institutions”: i) protecting citizens and freedoms; ii) developing a strong and vibrant economic base; iii) building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe; iv) promoting European interests and values on the global stage.\(^10\) So, when the same leaders stated, in December 2020, that: a “democratic, more stable, greener and more prosperous Southern Neighborhood is a strategic priority for the EU,” this was actually an amalgamation of the three general objectives of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): prosperity, stability and security, reinforced by the 2011 and the 2015 ENP reviews that focused on the consequences of first, the so-called Arab Spring and second, the migration crisis and the impact of the war in Syria and Iraq.\(^11\) In fact, from 2021 on, the EU leaders want to continue to “strengthen the resilience” of economies and societies and preserve “collective security,” while addressing the “mobility and migration” challenge. What is new then? First of all, the context of course. The need to “jointly fight the COVID-19 pandemic” is obvious. The EU leaders are promoting an “Agenda for the Mediterranean” with a “focus on specific Mediterranean responses and close cooperation in areas such as environment, connectivity, education and culture, and natural resources.” The leaders, while referring to the upcoming Joint Communication, stressed that it should be “based on an upgraded and intensified political dialogue” and lead to “reinforced cooperation” to tackle “common challenges” and “take advantage of shared opportunities.” Upgraded means generally more summits, but in this case, it is also about sectoral ministerial meetings. The use of partnership vocabulary contrasts with the next item devoted to Libya, which clearly reflects the principled pragmatism approach. Here the leaders wrote that the “EU recalls the offer to support the Libyan Coast Guard through training and monitoring, as well as the provision of equipment and vessels.” All in all, an approach based on EU interests, something normal at the level of the consensus-based European Council guidelines.

The Joint Communication: “Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood, A new Agenda for the Mediterranean,” published in February 2021\(^12\) proposed achieving, in the framework of the ENP, a “new, ambitious and innovative Agenda for the Mediterranean.” This agenda will draw “for the first time on the full EU toolbox and the ground-breaking opportunities of the twin green and digital transitions.” The aim is to “realize the untapped potential of our shared region.” The beneficiaries are clearly identified: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. In other words, the southern Mediterranean region\(^13\) excludes Turkey, which is not covered by the ENP and does not benefit from the NDICI. Nevertheless, Turkey re-

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\(^{8}\) Emphasis added.


\(^{11}\) See our contributions in previous editions of this yearbook.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 1.
mains in a customs union with the EU and on the pre-accession track. This means a permanent update of its regulations and legislation at a limited cost. To be part of the EU Customs Union generates economic gains that are crucial for Turkey and other Mediterranean Partner Countries that concluded Free Trade Agreements with Turkey; pre-accession being of course the strongest vehicle for the “internalization” of EU policies.

What is new in this Mediterranean Agenda is mainly that the focus will be on the EU’s “strategic priorities of green and digital transition” with an emphasis on reforms related to “governance and the rule of law,” and “macroeconomic stability.”

Oliver Varhelyi, the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, while introducing the Agenda, stated that, in order to “mitigate the dire impact of the COVID-19 pandemic,” there was a need to “support resilient, inclusive, sustainable and connected economies.” He insisted on the need to “creatively develop our priorities and match them with the tools that can make a difference on the ground to promote prosperity and stability on both sides of the Mediterranean.” This reflects the fact that the EU budgetary financial envelope remains limited. The green and digital transformation, the importance of “diversified, shorter value chains and the focus on inclusive sustainable growth,” but also the need to promote “private investment and advance economic and governance reforms,” were also put forward. Regarding Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) one should recall the problem of the Barcelona method: the EU can only help to create better conditions for potential FDI that does not necessarily come from EU investors.

The February 2021 Joint Communication defined more precisely the main characteristics and priorities of the new agenda as it:

i) offers “opportunities for new partnerships on the strategic priorities of green and digital transition”;

ii) is “based on the conviction that sustainable prosperity and resilience can only be built in strong partnership across the Mediterranean”;

iv) “proposes a range of actions” along five “key policy areas: 1) Human development, good governance and the rule of law; 2) Strengthen resilience, build prosperity and seize the digital transition; 3) Peace and security; 4) Migration and mobility; 5) Green transition: climate resilience, energy and environment”;

vi) is supported by an “Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Southern neighbours,” that includes a series of “preliminary flagship investments and projects” financed under the NDICI; the plan’s objective being to help partners in their “recovery efforts, contribute to increase competitiveness and support sustainable and inclusive growth”;

v) is based on “common values and dialogue, and progress on our shared socio-economic and political agenda, including on reforms in areas such as governance and the rule of law, and macroeconomic stability and the business environment” and aims for a “green, digital, resilient” and “just recovery.”

In sum, what is new in this Mediterranean Agenda is mainly that, with the implementation of the NDICI, the focus will be on the EU’s “strategic priorities of green and digital transition” with an emphasis on reforms related to “governance and the rule of law,” and “macroeconomic stability” to reinforce “sustainable prosperity and resilience,” as well as the “business environment.” The agenda will be perceived as EU-centric, so the reinforcement of the social dimension of the partnership and of the role of (and support to) civil society is key. However, until now, the participation of Civil Society Organizations has led to mixed results.

The Impact of the Externalization of EU Policies in the Mediterranean

The externalization of EU policies is far from new in the Mediterranean. One must recall for instance that when the EEC Treaty was signed in Rome in 1957, Algeria was still “French Algeria” and a specific article (227) was inserted in the Treaty to apply its provisions to Algeria with regard to agriculture, competition rules or the liberalization of services. Declarations of intent were also inserted for Libya, Morocco and Tunisia with the aim of concluding future Economic Association Conventions. The two next generations of association agreements in the 1960s and 1970s, plus the 1975 trade agreement with Israel, consolidated the approach. The “traditional flows” of trade and the “sensitivity” of some agricultural products were taken into consideration to preserve the interests of the Member States through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), launched at the beginning of the 1960s. This was reinforced in the Mediterranean with the successive enlargement waves of 1973 and especially the Mediterranean waves in 1981 (Greece) and 1986 (Portugal and Spain) and by the single market in December 1992. Also to be noted, is that at the end of the 1980s, the EEC became food self-sufficient. The trade relations with the “Mediterranean Third Countries” followed the same trade patterns from the 1970s until the 1990s. The creation of the WTO in 1994, and the fact that the Uruguay Round negotiations ended with the creation of a new worldwide Dispute Settlement Mechanism with compulsory jurisdiction, changed the rules of the game. The incompatibility of the 1970s agreements with GATT/WTO multilateral rules promoted the negotiation of free trade areas within the framework of new Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements (EMAAs), which were compatible with the multilateral rules.

Developing the external dimension of relatively new EU policies will definitively impact the “Euro-Mediterranean dimension,” which is supposed to be revived, being an EU initiative and not a Euro-Mediterranean one, even if some UfM meetings were held in Barcelona at the end of 2020. The external dimension of the EU’s internal policies was already largely extended by the ENP. The first sketch of the ENP in 2002 already referred to “approximation and/or harmonization of legislation and progressive extension of relevant EU policies.” The Commission then proposed in 2004 the “prospect of a stake in the EU’s internal market and further integration and liberalization to promote the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital (four freedoms),” which created confusion. What is in fact more an extension of the EU’s internal market does not include the four freedoms as such, even for the eastern neighbours. This is also the case at the level of the non-EU members of the European Economic Area. In other words, for example, the externalization of the area of freedom, security and justice (AFSJ) would exclude freedom and perhaps justice if we took into consideration the sometimes dramatic consequences of the externalization of border controls. After the “stake in the internal market,” the 2006 Commission’s Communication defined the programme for an “economic integration” that “should go beyond free trade in goods and services” to also include “behind the border” issues: “addressing non-tariff barriers.” The goal is to achieve:

“comprehensive convergence in trade and regulatory areas (such as technical norms and standards, sanitary and phytosanitary rules, competition policy, enterprise competitiveness, innovation and industrial policy, research cooperation, intellectual property rights, trade facilitation customs

17 And this until the 1962 Evian agreements that led to its independence.
19 See Petersmann, Ernst-Ulrich, The GATT/WTO Dispute Settlement System, Kluwer Law, The Hague 1997, 345 p. According to the WTO it is one of the “most active international dispute settlement mechanisms in the world. Since 1995, 603 disputes have been brought to the WTO and over 350 rulings have been issued,” WTO General Secretariat, Dispute Settlement, Geneva, July 2021, www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/dispu_e.htm
measures and administrative capacity in the area of rules of origin, good governance in the tax area, company law, public procurement and financial services)."

Of course, this “stake in the internal market” means, in fact, an extension of the internal market, using the single market methodology.\(^{23}\) With the ENP, the programme’s priorities were included at bilateral level in the Action Plans, which were progressively replaced by association agendas and other Partnership priorities. The implementation of the Action Plans “particularly on regulatory areas,” was designed to prepare the ground for a “new generation of deep and comprehensive free trade agreements” (DCFTAs) and this with “all ENP partners.” However, the legal design is in fact quite different for the eastern partners. Their old partnership and cooperation agreements, which were not preferential trade agreements, were replaced by new association agreements (AAs) including DCFTAs (AA-DCFTAs). These agreements are of a new generation and include detailed provisions in many policy areas, including Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). For the MPCs it is the sectoral agreements approach that has been followed, as it is the “existing Mediterranean FTAs” that had to be “expanded accordingly, to other regulatory areas." The “longer-term vision of an economic community” between the EU and its partners was then put forward and named: “Neighbourhood Economic Community” (NEC). The NEC would include the “application of shared regulatory frameworks and improved market access for goods and services among ENP partners," but also "appropriate institutional arrangements such as dispute settlement mechanisms.” While Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine all concluded AA-DCFTAs, this is not the case for Morocco and Tunisia, which never finalized the negotiations,\(^{24}\) or Egypt and Jordan, where negotiations never even got off the ground.

The impact of the of EU’s internal policies is limited within the EMAAs for one main reason: contrary to the three DCFTAs with the eastern partners, the EMAAs were concluded quite a long time ago – some time before the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty – and designed for the EMP, not the ENP. Before the pandemic, the freezing of the DFCTA negotiations with Morocco and then Tunisia was due to a number of reasons, mainly of a political nature. But one must remember that this reluctance to go further in terms of economic integration is due to the cost of the reforms, which is not compensated by an EU accession and therefore implies a loss of sovereignty.

Developing the external dimension of relatively new EU policies will definitively impact the “Euro-Mediterranean dimension,” which is supposed to be revived, being an EU initiative and not a Euro-Mediterranean one

A modernization of the old EMAAs is thus an important medium-term objective. For the time being and in the short term, the priorities are at trade level: food security and the resilience of supply chains, linked to fears of a resurgence of protectionism. As argued by Sebastien Miroudot, on the one hand, the “overlap between the debate on the resilience of supply chains and the debate on protectionism and economic nationalism” is an opportunity to propose "new ways of addressing concerns about globalization.” On the other hand, the "reshoring debate focuses on resilient value chains for developed countries and does not take into account developing and emerging economies.”\(^{25}\) In the statement of the UfM

\(^{23}\) In 1985, the white paper on “Completing the Internal Market” included a programme of hundreds of legislative measures with a timetable for the unification of the markets of the Member States. The objective was to abolish, by the end of 1992, all remaining Non-Tariff Barriers to trade. Interestingly, the white paper provided the foundations for the Single European Act (SEA), which first introduced an environmental dimension into the EEC Treaty. See: Completing the Internal Market: White Paper from the Commission to the European Council (Milan, 28-29 June 1985), June 1985, COM(85) 310.

\(^{24}\) For the mandate, see: 3136th EU Council meeting, Foreign Affairs – Trade, Geneva, 14 December 2011, p. 8.

\(^{25}\) Adding that: “These countries would not only lose some economic activity if reshoring was the new normal, but would also face a more difficult access to essential goods when they are produced by Multinational Enterprises from developed countries.” Miroudot, Sebastien “Reshaping the policy debate on the implications of COVID-19 for global supply chains,” Journal of International Business Policy, October 2020, Vol. 3, pp. 430-442.
Trade Conference of November 2020, the ministers “supported the views of the WTO, WHO, FAO and G20,” calling on the “need to ensure a continued flow of vital medical supplies and equipment, critical agri-food products, and other goods and services across borders” for the “health and well-being of their people and the viabilities of their economies,” and to ensure the “availability and accessibility of essential medical supplies and pharmaceuticals at affordable prices, on an equitable basis.” However, they also clearly stated that “emergency trade measures” have to be “targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary.” These measures “should not create unnecessary barriers to trade or disruption to global supply chains, and must be consistent with WTO rules.”

As far as the eight EMAAs are concerned, the ministers highlighted the need to:

i) better “utilize the available opportunities” and increase “trade and regional connectivity”;

ii) conclude and make operational the “protocols on dispute settlement mechanisms”;

iii) modernize the EMAAs to “enhance integration with the EU market, through mutual market access opportunities,” and the “alignment of standards” and strengthen “environment-related provisions” considering a “dedicated chapter on trade and sustainable development, as well as to deepen the commitments on key rules governing trade policy”;

iv) take “better advantage of the 21st-century trade in services”;

v) foster “new trade linkages between the Euro-Mediterranean region and African countries,” to “attract more trade and investment and further develop regional value chains”;

vi) reinforce cooperation to integrate the “Euro-Mediterranean market for industrial products,” by continuing “regulatory approximation, including the modernization of quality infrastructure” and developing support for “capacity building”;

vii) strengthen “quality infrastructures” and “export potential”;

viii) develop “capacity building” for “sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements” as this is “paramount in view of achieving deeper standards alignment”;

ix) protect “Intellectual Property Rights” against piracy and counterfeiting as “powerful tools for trade and development,” and because their protection encourages “research and development, innovation, culture” and FDI;

x) modernize “rules of origin in the context of the Regional Convention on Pan-Euro-Mediterranean Preferential Rules (PEM Convention)” to “facilitate trade among participating countries and enable their companies to further integrate within regional value chains.”

The themes are not new but the articulation with the current objectives of recovery and the way the EU intends to react to the pandemic, using its networks of external agreements and its internal and external policies, is the main objective. The themes are not new but the articulation with the current objectives of recovery and the way the EU in-


27 Also “Ministers welcomed the EU and its partners’ strategy to tackle the impact of COVID-19, acting as ‘Team Europe,’ as well as the EC financial support package of over €48.8 billion which provides immediate support for health systems at the bilateral and the regional levels, as well as medium to long-term assistance for the region’s socio-economic recovery, especially for the most vulnerable.”

28 The Ministers also welcomed the entry into force of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

29 The Ministers noted that “the UfM Secretariat and the German development agency GIZ, supported by the German Federal Government, organized trainings and technical assistance for ministries, customs authorities and businesses on the PEM rules of origin, in order to enhance the capacities of those actors and thereby increase the benefits of the respective trade agreements.”
tends to react to the pandemic, using its networks of external agreements and its internal and external policies, is the main objective. Also of interest, is that the Joint Communication mentioned that countries who do not want to conclude an "agreement on conformity assessment and acceptance (ACAA)," whose goal is “full alignment,” could implement “domestic regulatory reforms, including elements of legislative alignment between different regulatory systems in the region.” This sort of flexibility is indeed necessary. Beyond those mainly economic and trade aspects linked to the developments of the EU’s internal market, other policies are to be taken into consideration. It is not possible in this article to detail each and every one of them, but the most important are the following EU policies: environmental, energy, immigration (at large: the external dimension of the Freedom, Security & Justice area), cultural, research and health policies. Neither should one forget the external dimension of the CFSP (including the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)), which promotes the alignment of ENP partners on CFSP declarations, and participation in the EU’s ESDP operations and missions. EU Regional Policy is also very important, and programmes like INTERREG are now exported to the MPCs after the development of a cross-border cooperation programme under the ENP. All of this contributes, together with capacity-building assistance and programmes like SIGMA or the TAIEX instrument, to exporting EU norms, standards, regulations, procedures, programmes and modes of governance.

**Conclusion**

The reinforcement of the externalization of EU policies in the southern Mediterranean is not necessarily a bad thing in the current context. On the contrary, it is obvious that the EU is in fact much better equipped to face all the consequences of the pandemic. The problem is that the MPCs do not necessarily have the capabilities to use this potential. Capacity building and temporary legal/regulatory flexibilities are, therefore, absolutely essential. The stake in the Internal Market means an extension of the latter, without access to decision making and only limited access to decision shaping via the participation in EU programmes and agencies. Until now this participation has been limited and should be facilitated and adapted to the MPCs. Above all, in the short term, it is essential that focus be placed on the emergencies: food security and health, poverty and human rights. Resilience is the only way. The Secretary General of the United Nations, in the 2021 Global Report on Food Crises, stressed that the “number of people facing acute food insecurity and requiring urgent food, nutrition and livelihoods assistance is on the rise. Conflict is the main reason, combined with climate disruption and economic shocks, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Conflict and hunger are mutually reinforcing.” And he added that “addressing hunger is a foundation for stability and peace.” Exporting elements of the CAP that led to the EU’s food self-sufficiency today, and to butter mountains and milk lakes in the 1980s, should be food for thought for the next Euromed gatherings.

A credible new Mediterranean Agenda must seek solidarity and mutual understanding, not just the externalization of border controls or the stabilization of regimes that torture and kill human rights defenders. The EU must not lose its moral compass and prepare a long-term and inclusive pan-Euro-Mediterranean integration strategy.

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30 The Interreg Euro-MED Programme 2021-2027 "gathers 13 European countries from the northern shore of the Mediterranean" and it "supports projects developing innovative concepts and practices and promoting a reasonable use of resources,” see: https://interreg-med.eu/
The global health crisis that erupted in 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic temporarily overlaid the ongoing global environmental crisis caused by climate change. However, as countries around the world battled to keep the virus under control and their economies afloat, the state of climate emergency became more conspicuous, with the widespread realization that current pledges under the Paris Agreement will do little to prevent global temperatures from rising above the 2°C threshold. Therefore, a gradual consensus has been emerging around the idea that these two major global crises need to be solved hand in hand, and that their solution requires, first and foremost, the transition to low-carbon energy systems. On the one hand, averting the most catastrophic consequences of climate change can only be achieved if the world sets a course towards carbon neutrality by the middle of the century. On the other hand, for post-pandemic recovery plans to succeed, they need to be attuned to the “fourth industrial revolution,” based on new digital and energy technologies.

In this context, the green transition figures prominently in the EU's Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood adopted in February 2021. Progress towards decarbonization is regarded as a prerequisite to attaining many other goals, such as helping to “mitigate risks to human lives and livelihoods and promote sustainable development, job creation and transition to high value sectors” (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). This is certainly not the first time that the EU has put forward ambitious energy cooperation plans with its southern neighbours. At the turn of the 2000s, the European Commission set the vision for an integrated Euro-Mediterranean energy market through the so-called Euro-Mediterranean electricity and gas rings. The objective of large-scale deployment of renewable energy and South-North green electricity exports was also behind landmark initiatives such as the Mediterranean Solar Plan and Desertec, launched at the end of the 2000s. However, all these initiatives bore little fruit and were widely criticized for being EU-centric and unrealistic, given the manifold economic and (geo)political barriers.

This relatively underwhelming track record in Euromed energy cooperation begs the question of whether anything is different this time around, and, if so, what? In other words, is the renovated focus on the green transition another EU-centred agenda or a shared policy paradigm? To assess these questions, this article reviews recent developments, reflecting on the new spaces for convergence created by the twin health and climate crises, but also on the new sources of divergence that the transition to a post-pandemic and post-carbon world foreshadows.

**New Spaces for Convergence**

**A Growing Climate Ambition**

The deep economic and societal changes required to effect the green energy transition demand strong political will and trust in international cooperation. Just a decade ago, such preconditions were largely missing.

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1 For overviews of Euromed energy cooperation prior to 2020, see e.g. Escribano (2015), Herranz-Surrallés (2018), Proedrou (2019), Rubino (2020), and Tagliapietra and Zachmann (2016).
In Europe, the economic downturn following the 2008 global financial crisis and the political fiasco of the 2009 world climate summit in Copenhagen led to a moderation of the EU’s ambition in its 2030 climate and energy targets. The EU’s energy diplomacy was largely decoupled from climate objectives, by focusing on securing new gas supply routes, given the high oil prices and tense geopolitical relations with the main gas supplier, Russia. Consequently, the EU’s energy agenda for the Southern Neighbourhood also became dominated by energy security concerns and the new gas finds in the eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, supply shortages in southern Mediterranean countries prompted an increase in coal consumption in Egypt, for example, or the construction of three new coal-fired plants in Morocco.

This situation contrasts with the dominant discourse at the turn of the 2020s. In the EU, the rising prominence of climate activism, particularly amongst youth organizations, and the growing competitiveness of renewable energy sources have progressively led to a new consensus for more ambitious climate and energy targets. Accordingly, by 2018, the EU raised its 2030 targets and adopted landmark environmental measures, such as the ban on subsidies to the coal industry. Soon thereafter, the new von der Leyen Commission set the high goal of turning Europe into the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050. To that aim, it adopted the European Green Deal (EGD) initiative – an ambitious plan to mainstream energy and climate goals into all sectors of the EU economy as well as into its foreign policy engagements.

A growing climate ambition has also gradually settled in the southern Mediterranean, with the realization that this part of the world will be one of the worst-hit by the consequences of climate change. Almost all countries in the region have issued emissions reduction pledges in the framework of the Paris Agreement, even if the highest reduction targets are conditional on receiving aid and technical assistance (see Table 1). Most countries have also adopted ambitious renewable energy targets. Morocco stands out with its plans to produce more than 50 percent of its electricity from renewables by 2030, which is nearly the same target as the EU. The ambition is also high amongst fossil fuel rich countries, with Algeria and Egypt planning to achieve the greening of 30 and 42 percent of their electricity mixes, respectively. Similarly remarkable is the progress made by several countries in the region, most notably Morocco, Egypt and Jordan, in reducing fossil fuel subsidies, one of the main drivers of wasteful consumption and a massive fiscal burden, which still impairs both the energy transition and post-pandemic recovery plans. All in all, therefore, the current situation offers a greater window of opportunity for cooperating in climate action measures and green growth strategies than was the case a decade ago.

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2 See the Keys section on Climate Change in the Mediterranean in the IEmed Mediterranean Yearbook 2020 (www.iemed.org/med-yearbook/iemed-mediterranean-yearbook-2020/).

3 According to the IEA subsidies tracker (www.iea.org/topics/energy-subsidies), in 2020, Algeria and Egypt ranked 6th and 7th in the list of countries with the highest fossil fuel subsidies in absolute numbers, with over USD 5bn, and Libya the first in relative terms (17.5% of the GDP) (see also table 2). For an overview of the recent evolution of policies on fossil fuel subsidies in the region, see Walsh and Boys (2020).
**Upgraded Potential for Green Investment and Finance**

Despite growing climate ambitions, the investment gap to achieve the 2030 renewable energy targets in the southern Mediterranean remains sobering: USD 16bn a year, about 30 percent more than the investment that was flowing into the region before the Covid-19 crisis (IEA, 2021). The investment gap became even wider as a result of the pandemic, as 2020 brought a sharp decrease in energy investment, which reached its lowest level in over a decade (Ibid. p. 49). In this context, the EU’s recent commitment to increase support for sustainable finance and discontinue assistance to fossil fuel projects brings new opportunities. The concrete impact is still difficult to gauge, given the early stage in the programming of the new *Global Europe* financial instrument (also known as the *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument* or NDICI), but some trends are noticeable.

On the one hand, the overall assistance for the neighbourhood is set to increase by 25 percent, from EUR 17bn (2014-2020) to EUR 22bn (2021-2027), of which one quarter should be earmarked to support climate objectives. Admittedly, EU energy funding in the southern Mediterranean during the 2014-2020 period was already concentrated on renewable energy and energy efficiency projects (see Chart 1). Yet, the investment facility still included 15 percent of funding for gas infrastructure, which should now be redirected to decarbonization goals. Funding for the electricity market and interconnection projects will now also require the clear goal of promoting the green electricity trade.

On the other hand, the key priorities of the upgraded investment facility, through the *European Fund for Sustainable Development* (EFSD+) and the *External Action Guarantee* (EAG) are also sustainable growth and climate resilience.⁴ To seize this opportunity in the Southern Neighbourhood, the EU envisages a regional initiative to be set up on sustainable finance, together with international financial institutions, to support large-scale investment in the production of renewables and green hydrogen (European Commission & High Representative, 2021: 20). Funding for strategic energy projects could also flow from the EUR 5.8bn funds earmarked for energy within the *Connecting Europe Facility 2.0*, though so far the track record for including cross-border projects with the Southern Neighbourhood is not encouraging.⁵

The current situation offers a greater window of opportunity for cooperating in climate action measures and green growth strategies than was the case a decade ago.

**The Promise of Hydrogen Cooperation**

Prospects for intensified energy cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region are also reinvigorated by the development of green hydrogen, a zero carbon fuel produced via the electrolysis of water using renewable energy. The large-scale production of hydrogen and its transport via pipelines could become a viable option to decarbonize the transport sector, as well as energy-intensive industries. With this goal in mind, the first priority listed in the EU’s *Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood* is the “massive deployment of renewable energy and clean hydrogen production, contributing to the aspiration to have at least 40 Gigawatts of electrolyser capacity in the EU Neighbourhood by 2030” (European Commission & High Representative, 2021: 19). Such plans are highly uncertain, as South-North trade of hydrogen is still a distant perspective and could experience the same barriers as the trade in green electricity, not least the lack of interconnections between the southern and northern Mediterranean rims, as well as within the EU (cf. Escribano, 2021). However, despite viability concerns, hydrogen cooperation projects in the region are starting to mushroom. Morocco figures prominently in the emerging hydrogen scene, with its ambition to become a hydrogen

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⁴ Together with the contribution from the *European Recovery Fund*, the NDICI investment facility should lever about EUR 130bn for projects promoting the Sustainable Development Goals, including access to sustainable energy.

⁵ For example, the Tunisia-Italy ELMED interconnection, despite having been awarded the label of Project of Common Interest, has so far failed to obtain the grants of the Connecting Europe Facility which would be necessary to finance the project.
hub and a leading global hydrogen producer.\(^6\) To that aim, Morocco has set up a National Commission of Hydrogen, adopted a national hydrogen roadmap and launched a hydrogen research and industrial cluster.\(^7\) Several EU Member States have also established bilateral hydrogen partnerships, most notably the “hydrogen alliances” between Germany and Morocco and Tunisia, respectively. The Germany-Morocco alliance is the most advanced, with a contribution of EUR 90 million for the development of an industrial plant for green hydrogen and other climate-neutral fuels (KfW, 2020). At the regional level, the platform that advanced Desertec in the 2000s launched the MENA Hydrogen Alliance in 2020, bringing together private and public actors to produce joint studies and support pilot projects. Therefore, despite all the uncertainties surrounding hydrogen, the private sector’s considerable political ambition and interest anticipates a new dynamic area of Euromed energy cooperation.

**New Sources of Divergence**

*The Geopoliticization of the Green Transition*

Although the energy transition could bring with it a “peace dividend” through the reduction of external dependencies and resource conflicts, it could also become a source of new tensions, such as heightened technological competition, trade wars, new supply risks derived from the scarcity of critical materials or exposure to cyberattacks on digitalized energy systems (cf. Vakulchuk et al. 2019). In recent times, the energy transition has already become a relevant dimension of global power rivalries, particularly in view of China’s rise. The European Green Deal and associated green industrial policy are explicitly aimed at promoting the EU’s leadership in green technologies in a context of global power shifts. Therefore, the growing attention to the geopolitical aspects of the energy transition seems to

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\(^6\) Some sources point to goals of supplying between 4 and 8 percent of global hydrogen demand (e.g. “Hydrogène vert: Le Maroc pose les jalons d’une nouvelle industrie énergétique.” *Aujourd’hui le Maroc*, 27.08.2020).

follow on from the wider “geopoliticization” trends observed in external economic policy, meaning that trade and investment issues have become more embedded in international power rivalries (Meunier and Nicolaïdis, 2019: 107).

In this scenario, the danger is that the European Green Deal remains inward-looking and defensive, focused exclusively on fostering the EU’s competitiveness and autonomy. For example, the EU has recently launched the European Raw Materials Alliance (ERMA) and the European Clean Hydrogen Alliance (Ech2a) to boost the EU’s leadership and reduce vulnerabilities in supply chains in critical raw materials and hydrogen. Membership in these alliances is restricted, particularly in Ech2a, which can only be joined by public and private actors from the EU and a limited range of associated countries (members of EFTA, Western Balkans and Eastern Neighbourhood countries.) The EU’s focus on promoting its own technology could also be detrimental to win-win investment projects in the southern Mediterranean, which should be accompanied by technology transfers and promote local employment and expertise. The EU’s goal of strategic autonomy in green technologies could also disrupt the international trade networks that have contributed to the fast development and worldwide diffusion of green technologies over the past decade (Goldthau and Hughes, 2020). Therefore, the geopoliticization and even securitization of renewable energies could have the countereffect of slowing down the green transition.

**Economic and Normative Competition**

As part of its ambition to lead the green tech revolution, the EU aspires to become a global standard setter in sustainable energy. In its conclusions on the external dimension of the European Green Deal, the Council set the goal of supporting “the uptake of the EU’s energy acquis, rules and standards, as well as furthering energy market integration and interconnectivity in line with the European Green Deal, particularly within the EU’s neighbourhood” (Council of the EU, 2021: 11). However, the EU is not the only game in town as an energy transition model. Other actors such as China and the Gulf countries have also become relevant actors in the energy sectors of the southern Mediterranean countries, both as sources of green finance and investment, and as energy transition role models.

Morocco and Egypt exemplify these trends. For example, the USD 1bn Moroccan Energy Development Fund, which helped launch Morocco’s renewable energy programme in the late 2000s, was mostly sourced by donations from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The Saudi company ACWA was chosen to operate the Moroccan NOOR 1 concentrated solar power plant under a power purchase agreement valued at USD 900 million. In turn, China invested around USD 2 billion in solar energy projects, including in the construction of NOOR 2 and 3. Egypt, as an official member of the Chinese-sponsored Belt and Road Initiative, has also been the recipient of substantial foreign investment, including in the renewable energy sector. For instance, in 2018 and 2020 the China Gezhouba group gained contracts to construct the Benban solar park, including 32 solar power plants and, in collaboration with the Saudi ACWA, several wind power plants with a value of USD 260 million.8

The EU’s attempts to “export” its liberal market approach to developing renewable energy technologies and electricity markets is thus challenged by alternative models, such as, for example, China’s success in developing and exporting its green technology via central planning and state-owned companies. Other countries in the region are also sources of best practices and have ambitions to become regional leaders. For example, the United Arab Emirates claims to be a “leader by example” and a “standard-bearer for developing countries” in renewable energy development (Weatherby et al., 2018). In the southern Mediterranean, Morocco is also promoting itself as a model for developing countries, given its successful electrification programme (Ministère de l’Énergie, des Mines et de l’Environnement, 2021). In this context, the EU might face additional difficulties for squaring its goal of greater regional energy integration and green trade with the existence of a variety of instruments and regulatory models.

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8 Investment data was retrieved from the Zephyr database, the China Global Investment Tracker and ACWA website.
**Carbon Barriers**

The European Green Deal has revamped concerns over carbon leakage, namely the risk that production sites progressively concentrate in countries with more relaxed climate regulations. To prevent this phenomenon, the EU is planning to introduce a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which would tax carbon-intensive products imported into the EU. The environmental logic behind the CBAM is to contribute to reducing global CO₂ emissions by incentivizing other countries to adopt carbon pricing mechanisms comparable to those of the EU. However, from the perspective of the EU’s trading partners, this strategy of negative incentives could be seen as a coercive and illegitimate attempt by the EU to export its environmental regulations. Moreover, the CBAM is sometimes also explicitly justified in terms of avoiding competitive disadvantages for EU producers. For example, in its Hydrogen Strategy, the European Commission mentions carbon leakage as a risk for the EU’s production of green hydrogen, which could be tackled via the CBAM (European Commission, 2020: 13). This might leave the EU exposed to accusations of green protectionism, particularly by neighbouring countries, which are highly dependent on exports to the EU.

Following the Commission’s proposal, leaked in June 2021, the CBAM would cover imports of electricity, iron, steel, cement, aluminium and some fertilizers, with the possibility of an extension to additional sectors at a later stage. Egypt and Algeria, as significant exporters of fertilizers, aluminium and steel to the EU, would be amongst the 15 countries most affected by the CBAM (Cornago and Lowe, 2021: 2). Morocco could also be affected when it comes to trade in electricity. The CBAM was actually demanded by Spain to prevent carbon leakage occurring from Spain’s imports of coal-based electricity from Morocco. No wonder, therefore, that the CBAM has raised concerns, including in neighbouring countries. For example, a paper from a Morocco-based think-tank claims that the CBAM would be unfair, as the certification procedure would increase the administrative costs for small and medium sized companies, and that it would be based on the questionable assumption that developing countries show less commitment to reducing carbon emissions than developed ones (Dadush, 2021).

**Instability in Petrostates**

The EU’s ambition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 is premised on a radical transformation of the energy mix, bringing the share of renewable energy from the current 20% to about 35% by 2030 and 65% by 2050 (European Commission, 2020b: 55). This planned phasing out of fossil fuels, particularly from 2030 onwards, will have an impact on the southern Mediterranean hydrocarbon-dependent economies, most notably Libya and Algeria, and to a lesser extent Egypt (see Table 2). The unprecedented collapse of oil prices in 2020 as a result of both the sharp decrease in demand and the lack of coordination amongst producers was a wake-up call for what awaits fossil fuel producers in the post-carbon era. The socioeconomic and political consequences of the energy transition for oil-based economies is therefore a new source of instability in Euromed relations. The conundrum for hydrocarbon producers in the coming years is how to accelerate economic diversification in the context of a severely constrained fiscal space. The decline in oil prices since the mid-2010s had already resulted in high budget deficits. For example, since 2014, Algeria’s deficit has remained at over 10 percent and financed mostly from the national oil fund, which was largely depleted by 2017 (IMF, 2018). The situation thus contrasts with other fossil fuel producers in the Gulf, with much larger reserves and powerful sovereign wealth funds. For the

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<th>TABLE 2</th>
<th>Economic Indicators in Fossil Fuel Rich Countries of the Southern Mediterranean</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fossil fuel exports (％ of total exports, 2018)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fossil fuel exports to the EU (％ of total fossil fuel exports, 2018)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>92</td>
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southern Mediterranean hydrocarbon producers, the energy transition could also aggravate the already staggeringly high youth unemployment levels (see Table 2), unless there is parallel progress made in terms of the labour transition, through investments in education and re-skilling workers currently employed in the hydrocarbon sector. Next to economic indicators, the political climate in oil-dependent countries has also deteriorated, with a worsening of human rights and democracy indexes,\(^9\) which makes major reforms less likely.

The EU has only adopted “just transition” projects for the energy community partners in the Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood. Similar initiatives could be envisaged for the fossil fuel dependent southern neighbours.

The EU’s energy cooperation and financial assistance has so far not sufficiently factored in the growing struggles of petrostates. Algeria, Egypt and Libya have been the countries in the Southern Neighbourhood that have received least EU assistance over the past decade, and energy cooperation has focused mostly on assisting the hydrocarbon sector.\(^10\)

Internally, the EU has acknowledged the distributional consequences of the energy transition by adopting a Just Transition Fund, sourced with EUR 17.5bn, under the motto of “not leaving anyone behind.” Externally, the EU has only adopted “just transition” projects for the energy community partners in the Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood. Similar initiatives could be envisaged for the fossil fuel dependent southern neighbours, together with a reinforced dialogue on energy demand projections and resource governance.

**Conclusion**

The confluence of the Covid-19 and climate crises has increased the relevance of the energy transition, as a unique opportunity to “build back better.” This is also visible in Euro-Mediterranean energy relations, heralding a change of paradigm, which places the energy transition and climate change at the centre of post-pandemic recovery strategies. These shared policy goals open new spaces of cooperation compared to previous Euromed energy relations, which often hinged on the idea of market integration as an end in itself, rather than as an instrument for sustainable development. However, a “policy paradigm” encompasses not only the goals, but also the type of instruments needed to attain them. In that regard, the sources of divergence remain paramount. If the new instruments of the European Green Deal diplomacy concentrate exclusively on opening new markets for European businesses and keeping up the EU’s position in the global green tech race, Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the green transition could become hostage to the same criticism of EU-centrism as previous initiatives. At the same time, if the energy transition in the southern Mediterranean countries is not accompanied by wider political reforms, the abundance of renewable energy resources could end up replicating the economic and democratic pitfalls of hydrocarbon-based rentier states. In sum, while the green transition offers a new positive agenda for Euro-Mediterranean relations, it does not yet amount to the paradigm shift required for effecting a *just* energy transition.

**References**


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\(^9\) In comparison to 2017, the 2020 indexes for political rights and civil liberties decreased three points in Algeria, five points in Egypt and four points in Libya (see [freedomhouse.org](http://freedomhouse.org)).

\(^10\) In percentage of GDP, Algeria, Egypt and Libya received about 2-3% in assistance from the EU, compared to the more than 10% for Lebanon and Morocco and 20% for Tunisia and Syria (EU Aid Explorer data, in Dabrowski and Domínguez-Jiménez, 2021: 21).


In February 2021, the European Commission published its trade policy review (TPR) aimed at having an open, sustainable and assertive trade policy. This TPR identified six main areas that are indispensable to achieving the EU’s objectives in the medium term, namely: reforming the WTO; supporting the green transition and promoting responsible and sustainable value chains; supporting the digital transition and trade in services; strengthening the EU’s regulatory impact; strengthening the EU’s partnerships with neighbouring enlargement countries and Africa; and strengthening the EU’s focus on the implementation and enforcement of trade agreements and ensuring a level playing field. Ultimately, these objectives should improve the current scheme of the different association agreements (AAs) that have been signed since the 1990s. More particularly, they should: improve the EU’s investment structure in partner countries; boost these countries’ export competitiveness; and make trade more inclusive by creating more jobs.

These AAs were mainly focused on tariff removal, without really addressing non-tariff measures and the nexus between trade and industrial policies. This is why such agreements led broadly to a significant liberalization with a tangible deep integration between the two shores of the Mediterranean. Moreover, as argued by Aboushady et al. (2018), cooperation between the shores of the Mediterranean was more focused on stability, peace and security rather than improving the structure of exports and boosting industrial policies. This is why neither exports of these countries nor their foreign direct investment (FDI) structure have changed two decades after signing these AAs.

Against this background, the objective of this article is twofold. First, it provides an overview of the current AAs and their effect on trade and investment. Second, it analyses to what extent the new objectives can address the main drawbacks of the AAs. The remainder of the article is as follows: first, a brief overview of the main trade agreements on the South Shore of the Mediterranean is presented; the next section presents the main challenges facing these association agreements; and the last section concludes and provides some policy recommendations for moving forwards.

An Overview of Euro-Mediterranean Integration

In 1995, the Barcelona Process was launched with the aim of strengthening the political, economic and cultural relations between Europe and the southern Mediterranean countries. In this context, the EU signed several AAs with countries of the South Shore, as shown in Table 3. This article focuses chiefly on Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, given that Palestine’s AA is interim and Syria’s never entered into force. As these AAs focused primarily on tariff liberalization, we first analyse the structure and recent evolution of merchandise trade. Furthermore, we examine bilateral trade in services and foreign direct investment between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Table 4 presents the recent evolution of exports and imports between the EU27 and South-Med. Three aspects are worth mentioning. First, these countries are net importers from the EU27, which always have
a positive trade balance with these countries. Second, both exports and imports of the EU27 to and from these countries have decreased with the pandemic, which affected demand in the countries of destination (lower incomes decreasing the demand for imports coming from the EU) and supply in countries of origin (social distancing measures reducing the supply of exports coming from the EU). Third, there is considerable heterogeneity across South-Med countries in terms of the value of exports and imports with Morocco, Israel, Egypt and Algeria being the most important destinations of EU products and smaller countries (Lebanon, Jordan and Tunisia) with lower values of trade flows.

Yet, this aggregation hides a lot of heterogeneity at the sectoral level. Chart 2 shows the trade balance between the EU27 and South-Med countries for the main traded sectors. The positive trade balance of the EU holds for most of the products, with the exception of fuel and mining with Algeria, Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Israel, chemicals with Israel, and agriculture and food with both Morocco and Tunisia. Charts 3 and 4, however, show the share of these sectors for our countries of interest. EU imports from Algeria are chiefly dominated by oil (95% of Algeria’s merchandise exports to the EU27).
holds also for Egypt, since 41% of its exports to the EU are concentrated in fuel and mining, followed by chemicals and food. Jordan and Israel export mainly chemicals to the EU (39% and 42% of their merchandise exports to the EU). Finally, Morocco and Tunisia are rather different since the EU27 import machinery and equipment from both countries (39% and 38%), followed by food from Morocco (19%) and textiles and ready-made garments from Tunisia (22%).
Yet, Chart 4 shows that exports of the EU to these countries are mainly machinery and transport equipment (on average 30% of total exports to these countries), followed by chemicals, and food and raw materials. Obviously, this shows to what extent, with the exception of Tunisia and Morocco, most of the South-Med exports to the EU are somewhat concentrated in traditional sectors, confirming the fact that these AAs did not help South-Med countries upgrade their exports of more complex products.
While, at the goods level, the EU27 have a positive trade balance with South-Med, for services, the picture is slightly different. Indeed, the EU has a negative trade balance with Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia in services and a positive one with Algeria, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon. Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia primarily export tourism and telecommunication services to the EU. However, it is important to note that, while these services are labour-intensive, they are very sensitive to external shocks, especially tourism, which was negatively affected by the pandemic in these countries (see Chart 6).

Finally, at the FDI level, the EU is a net investor in these countries, except Lebanon and Israel. It is important to note also that most of this FDI is concentrated either in services or in the oil sector with a negligible share in the manufacturing sector. This structure has three main implications. First, given that oil is capital intensive, it does not generate jobs. Second, since this sector is rather extractive, it does not lead to technology transfer or to the improvement of manufactured products. Third, since this sector relies on oil extraction (which has a low value added), there is no room for developing a value chain, especially with small and medium enterprises (Zaki, 2021). Moreover, and as mentioned previously, while the service sector is labour-intensive, it remains relatively protected and regulated in these countries, as confirmed by Chart 8, which shows that MENA countries in general have a higher service trade restrictiveness index compared to other emerging regions.

In a nutshell, the EU’s AAs with South-Med countries did not succeed in helping the latter upgrade their exports, which remained relatively concentrated in traditional sectors. This trend has been exacerbated by the FDI structure, which was focused largely on oil and services, with a negligible share in the manufacturing sector. Thus, the next section analyzes the main factors holding back integration.

What Is at Stake?

Costly Non-Tariff Measures

As previously mentioned, the AAs focused primarily on tariff liberalization, while neither non-tariff measures nor standards related to services were taken into consideration. This is why one of the factors that affects exports originating from South-Med countries is the protectionist effect of non-tariff measures. Chart 9 compares three indices across the main players on a global level, namely, China, the EU and the US, for the most important non-tariff measures, which are sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures and technical barriers to trade (TBT). SPS refers to biosecurity measures that are applied to pro-
CHART 8  
**Service Trade Restrictiveness Index – 2014**

![Service Trade Restrictiveness Index – 2014](chart8.png)

Source: Author’s own work, based on data of Jafari et Tarr (2014).
Note: The STRI index ranges from 0 to 100, 100 being completely closed to foreign competition.

CHART 9  
**Non-tariff Measures Indices – 2017**

![Non-tariff Measures Indices – 2017](chart9.png)

Source: Author’s own work, based on the UNCTAD dataset (2017).
Note: The frequency index (Fi) captures the share of products of country i covered by NTMs. (i) Coverage ratio is the share of trade subject to NTMs for country i (or for a region), or a group of products. (ii) Prevalence counts how many measures apply to a given product. (iii) Coverage ratios and frequency indexes range between 0 and 1. The higher the index, the higher the incidence of non-tariff measures.
tect human, animal or plant life or health from risks arising from pests, diseases, additives, toxins and contaminants in imported products. TBT are measures adopted by governments establishing product requirements, such as human health and safety, environmental protection, consumer information or quality. Chart 9 shows that the EU has the highest SPS prevalence score, which counts how many measures apply to a given product, compared to China and the USA. For TBT, this index is high but slightly lower than that of China. Moreover, 90% of EU trade is subject to TBT measures. Obviously, with complex and costly NTMs, exports from South-Med are not likely to comply with EU standards. This is why helping these countries comply with such measures is crucial to helping them upgrade and increase their exports (Augier and Gasiorek, 2013).

**Low Level of GVCs**

Because of the concentration of FDI in oil and primary sectors, EU investments did not help South-Med countries integrate into global and regional value chains (Aboushady and Zaki, 2021). Indeed, Chart 10 shows that the trade-related global value chains did not significantly change between 2010 and 2018 for all countries, while, in theory, South-Med should have experienced an increase in such trade given their integration with the EU. Chart 11, which compares the share of foreign and domestic value added, confirms this finding since the foreign component in the total value added is rather low in most of the countries, except Israel.

At the social level, these different developments led to mostly capital intensive, jobless exports. Moreover, female employment is also a serious component of socio-economic development, and was little addressed by the EU-Middle East Partnership (Aboushady and Zaki, 2021).

**The Way Forward**

In order to address these different drawbacks, the new strategy proposed by the EU Commission presents a new opportunity for the two shores of the Mediterranean to deepen their integration. More specifically, the aforementioned six objectives should: improve the investment structure of the EU in partner countries; boost their export competitiveness; and make trade more inclusive by creating more jobs. Table 5 summarizes how each measure proposed in the TPR can help to achieve such objectives.
TABLE 5  
Towards a Renewed Integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investment</th>
<th>Competitiveness</th>
<th>Jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reforming the WTO</td>
<td>Making the agreement on Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMS) more effective. Indeed, Shah (2017) shows that TRIMS have a significant positive effect on inward investment.</td>
<td>Restoring a fully-functioning WTO dispute settlement that will help South-Med have a credible stance for disputes that might erode their competitiveness because of unfair practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the green transition and promoting responsible and sustainable value chains</td>
<td>More investments in the manufacturing sector than in primary or oil sectors.</td>
<td>Therefore, more GVCs or regional value chains will be created increasing the competitiveness of exports coming from South-Med countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the digital transition and trade in services</td>
<td>More EU-funded investment to improve the digital infrastructure of South-Med countries.</td>
<td>With the reliance of the manufacturing sector on services, such investments will improve the competitiveness of the manufacturing sector (Karam and Zaki, 2020).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening the EU’s regulatory impact</td>
<td>Helping countries reform their institutions, address non-tariff measures, and reduce the institutional gap between EU and South Med countries</td>
<td>Institutions are key to upgrade exports. Karam and Zaki (2019) show that high value added manufacturing products appear to be more sensitive to the institutional gap than low value added products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening the EU’s partnerships with neighbouring enlargement countries and Africa</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Working on more harmonization and collaboration between AAs and other free trade areas, especially the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) to avoid any trade diversion because of different standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening the EU’s focus on implementation and enforcement of trade agreements and ensuring a level playing field</td>
<td>Deepening the agreement by addressing NTMs and developing regional value chains with South-Med countries will boost investment in these countries.</td>
<td>Given that NTMs are the most important impediment to exports of South-Med countries, if they are addressed, the competitiveness of these countries will increase.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To conclude, while the EU’s AAs helped countries to trade in goods, several reforms are needed from the EU’s perspective to improve investment, competitiveness and job creation. Yet, from the South-Med side, improving the investment climate is a must in order to encourage more FDI in the manufacturing sector in general, and in high added-value sectors in particular. Second, more focus on SMEs is needed in order to generate more jobs. Finally, having a clear industrial strategy linked to trade policy is vital to increase the positive effect of trade policy.

References


Strengthening the Social Dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership through Social Economy Enterprises: Lending Meaning to the “People-Centred” Approach

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Introduction

The social, economic and environmental challenges shared by the 800 million inhabitants of the Euro-Mediterranean region highlight the fact that we are undergoing a process of major transformations that have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the European Union, the new Commission chaired by Ursula von der Leyen has been building a socio-economic agenda since the beginning of its mandate that prioritizes economic growth, not as an end in itself, but as an economy that “must work for the people and the planet.” This change of perspective is marked by “climate and environmental concerns, technological progress and demographic change” which “are set to transform our societies profoundly. The European Union and its Member States must now respond to these structural shifts with a new growth model that will respect the limitations on our natural resources and ensure job creation and lasting prosperity for the future.” (“Annual Strategy for Sustainable Growth 2020.” COM(2019) 650 final). To achieve these goals, it is necessary to generate an ecosystem fostering the development of actors, such as social economy enterprises, which contribute to generating economic growth that ensures a more equitable distribution of wealth and improves life opportunities for everyone.

As outlined on the following pages, Europe and the Mediterranean are working on policies promoting such a business model because the social economy is at the forefront of this paradigm shift – in the Mediterranean as well – since it provides a “new balance between economic efficiency and social and environmental resilience” (Report of the UN Secretary-General: “Socially Just Transition to Sustainable Development: The Role of Digital Technologies in Social Development and Well-Being for All,” November 2021). The social economy plays a key role in building a fairer Euro-Mediterranean Partnership because “thanks to its business models that put people and the planet at their core, the social economy holds potential to address many societal challenges and increases our society’s resilience in times of crises.” (Joint Communication of the European Commission: “Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood,” JOIN (2021) 2 final. February 2021).

The Social Economy: A Business Reality in the Euro-Mediterranean Region at the Service of the People

The social economy is an indispensable actor for sustaining the cornerstone on which the EU is pivoting its New Agenda for the Mediterranean, which focuses on stimulating “long-term sustainable socio-economic recovery and job creation in the Southern Neighbourhood” (“Council Conclusions on a Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood: A New Agenda for the Mediterranean.” April 2021). The social economy is a leading economic and social reality throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region, with more than 3.2 million enterprises and or-
organisations of all sizes across all sectors, employing more than 15 million people. It represents 8% of the GDP of the European Union, a percentage that rises to 10% in countries such as France or Spain where more than 43,000 social economy enterprises and entities generate more than 2.2 million direct and indirect jobs. More and more governments and international institutions are recognizing their potential to generate wealth, employment stability, social and territorial cohesion and inclusive development, especially in times of crisis such as the current one.

The social economy is a leading economic and social reality throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region, with more than 3.2 million enterprises and organizations of all sizes across all sectors, employing more than 15 million people.

The EU and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) are firmly committed to this business model. In 2015, the Council of the European Union defined the social economy as a key driver of economic and social development in Europe (Council Conclusions, 7 December 2015). A few years later, this recognition would also be taken up by the bodies responsible for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership at the highest level. In 2019, the Ministries of Labour and Employment of the 43 UfM member States emphasized the economic, social and environmental value of the social economy, especially for generating sustainable employment and inclusive economic growth in the region (Ministerial Declaration of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Employment and Labour Ministers, 2-3 April 2019, Cascais, Portugal).

Values and Principles Shared Across the Entire Mediterranean Social Economy

The declarations of the EU Council and the UfM are two important milestones that consolidate and lend visibility to the social economy, which is developing in all the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region into a rich diversity of business and organizational forms that reflect shared principles and values. The social economy is a business model based on values of participation, solidarity, innovation and collective ownership and initiative. It does not aim to maximize economic profit, but rather is the instrument or means guaranteeing achievement of the social goals shaping the actions of these companies and organizations, lending priority to people over capital. Spain, which is a country with an institutional and legal environment propitious to this business model, was the first EU and UfM member state to pass a Social Economy Law in 2011 (Law 5/2011 of 29 March). This law establishes that the social economy includes “cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations and associations that carry out economic activity, employee-owned companies, labour insertion companies [i.e. firms hiring marginalized collectives and integrating them into the marketplace], special employment centres, fishermen’s guilds, agricultural processing companies and unique entities created by specific regulations that are governed by the principles” of the social economy, which the Law also defines.

The Social Economy: Leading the Way to a Sustainable Recovery in the Mediterranean

These values and principles have enabled the social economy to resist and grow even during the difficult periods of recent years (the economic and COVID crises) in many North and South Mediterranean territories by placing people at the centre of its activities, demonstrating that economic efficiency and social and environmental commitment are not only compatible, but can go perfectly hand in hand. They are “companies with a soul” that provide viable alternatives through a business model with a long history but tremendously young in spirit due to the connection of its values with the concerns of a new generation that suffers from job insecurity while demanding a more responsible economy, solidarity and, in short, an economy at the service of the collective or general interest.

The social economy has generated and maintained quality jobs, especially through collective entrepreneurship and the reinforcement of the industrial fabric throughout the Mediterranean region. It is providing
innovative solutions to facilitate access to the labour market for vulnerable groups and to save thousands of jobs and businesses at risk of closure by transforming them into cooperatives or worker-owned companies, a model that is producing excellent results in countries such as Spain, France and Italy.

It is a driver of a citizen-led green transition. The potential of renewable energy production cooperatives or social economy enterprises in the circular economy, in sustainable agriculture or in access to decent and affordable housing is growing every day.

The social economy is in a position to rise to the demographic challenge by fixing population at the local level and especially by boosting rural economies.

It has been in the most difficult moments of the pandemic that the social economy has shown its values of solidarity by being at the forefront in tackling the health crisis, caring for those most in need and ensuring access to basic social products and services.

Advancing towards a Working Agenda for the Social Economy between Europe and the Mediterranean

A shared concept and agenda in favour of the social economy is taking shape across the Mediterranean region. The Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries have regulatory and institutional environments for the promotion of the social economy that are themselves global benchmarks.

The Spanish Social Economy Law 5/2011 has been followed by others such as those adopted by Portugal in 2013, France in 2014, Greece in 2016 or Tunisia in June 2020. Morocco is working on a draft law and, like Spain, has ministerial departments and specific strategies for the promotion of the social economy. In fact, the governments of the two countries have signed collaboration agreements in the sphere of the social economy.

Co-operation in the area of the social economy has grown exponentially among the EU Member States. Since at the end of 2015, the governments of six European countries (Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, France, Italy and Luxembourg) decided to create a Monitoring Committee to promote policies in favour of the Social Economy within the framework of the European Social Economy Conference organized by the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union, there are now 20 governments of EU Member States working to lend greater visibility to the social economy in Europe. As a result of the summit organized in December 2020 in the city of Toledo (Spain) by this committee, under the presidency of the Government of Spain and with the participation of Yolanda Díaz, the Spanish Minister of Labour and Social Economy, Nicolas Schmit, the European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, and Ángel Gurría, the OECD Secretary-General, among other authorities, the 20 European governments adopted the declaration “The Social and Solidarity Economy as a key driver for an inclusive and sustainable future,” which was followed up in July 2021 with the declaration “Towards a European Action Plan for a Social Economy” fostering the role of the social economy incongruence with the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The Social Economy: A History of Success in the European Union

The social economy has been closely linked to the history of the European Union since its birth. The Treaties establishing the then European Economic Community recognized cooperatives as one of the business models existing in the Union. Over the years, the European Institutions and Member States have been supporting the social economy thanks to its weight and important presence in society, as it currently comprises over 2.8 million social economy enterprises and employs around 14 million people.

Alongside the measures that have been implemented specifically for co-operatives, mutual societies, foundations or, more recently, social enterprises, the EU has been building up an “acquis” of recognition and measures in favour of the development of the social economy as a whole, which is now at the heart of the EU’s main policy initiatives.

From 2020 to the present, the European Commission has included the social economy in its main communications in areas such as the European Circular Economy Action Plan, the Industrial and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise (SME) Strategy, the initiatives for equality and against discrimination of the Roma and of LGTBIQ people, or the new European consumer agenda, among others.

Its weight and relevance have made it a central player in EU flagship and structural initiatives for re-launch-
ing economies and in the manner of materializing new forms of long-term economy, promoting inclusive and sustainable models and facilitating business recovery. The Next Generation Funds that the EU has designed for its post-pandemic rescue plan specifically prioritize the social economy within the most ambitious strategy ever adopted by Europe to generate smart, sustainable and inclusive growth based on quality employment, productivity, competitiveness and industrialization, fostering digitalization, innovation and research and the green transition to clean energy to achieve a climate-neutral Europe by 2050. (Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility). Countries such as Spain or France have included the social economy among the priorities of their national recovery and resilience plans to implement the recovery funds. Furthermore, the social economy forms part of the EU’s initiatives to promote change in its production model, such as the European Pact for Skills, for the continuous training of workers, dedicating Industrial Ecosystem No. 14 to promoting entrepreneurship in the social economy. Another of the most ambitious policies of the European Union, the European Pillar of Social Rights, has the priority of promoting new social economy opportunities through a specific European Action Plan to tap into its potential “to create quality jobs and contribute to fair, sustainable and inclusive growth” (Communication from the Commission: “The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan” COM(2021) 102 final. March 2021).

Towards a European Policy for the Social Economy

The social economy has been and is definitively on the agenda of the current European Commission since its constitution at the end of 2019. In February of the following year, the Commission already included the adoption of an Action Plan for the social economy as a central part of its "Fair Economy Package," which aims to achieve its policy objective for 2019-2024, "an economy that works for people." The 2021 European Commission Work Programme expressly foresees the development of this action plan by year’s end. Social economy Europe, as the highest representative organization of the social economy in the EU, is the entity promoting the adoption of a European Action Plan for this business model. It is working closely with the European Commission, the European Parliament, its Social Economy Intergroup and the Member States committed to promoting the social economy, as well as the members of the Luxembourg Declaration Monitoring Committee, the Commission’s Expert Group on Social Economy and Social Enterprises (GECES), the European Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC) and the European Committee of the Regions in all the milestones that are shaping the development of this plan.

Social economy Europe has developed proposals for this Action Plan organized around 7 priorities and 51 measures (SEE Policy Paper: “Co-designing the Action Plan for the Social Economy,” March 2021) focusing on three main objectives:

1. Unlocking the full potential of the social economy for successful implementation of EU socio-economic and recovery policies as outlined above. These are enterprises operating in all economic sectors and comprising a significant part of the European socio-economic landscape (more than 10% of all enterprises in the EU). Therefore, EU institutions, Member States and all public authorities must take into account the social economy in designing their socio-economic policies, in particular those aiming at social and economic reconstruction in line with the 2030 Agenda.
2. Fostering the convergence and co-ordination of the different public authorities involved in the promotion of the social economy by defining strategic objectives at the EU level.
3. Fostering an ecosystem that facilitates the growth of the social economy in Europe, enhancing its contributions to key EU objectives, including its external dimension, and in particular in Euro-Mediterranean co-operation.

A European Action Plan Promoting Euro-Mediterranean Co-operation in the Sphere of the Social Economy

CEPES (the Spanish Social Economy Business Confederation), Social Economy Europe and the
Euro-Mediterranean Social Economy Network (ESMED Network) as the highest representative organization of the Euro-Mediterranean Social Economy, together with the UfM Secretariat, have drawn up a roadmap with proposals to foster the social economy after the Pandemic (“Outcome Document of the Key Messages: UfM Online Workshop on ‘Social Economy and the Post-Pandemic Recovery: Challenges and Prospects’,” June 2020). The central thrust of these proposals is aimed at launching an ambitious Euro-Mediterranean co-operation initiative to strengthen the social economy as a key agent for social and economic reconstruction. This initiative revolves around the following priorities:

— Ensuring the continuity of social economy jobs and entities, especially through financial instruments, by applying guarantees and facilitating access to funds with little or no interest rates.
— Consolidating a financial ecosystem favourable to the social economy, including reinforcing existing initiatives.
— Accelerating the digitalization process of social economy enterprises in all sectors.
— Promoting their development in emerging and innovative sectors, such as the blue economy, those related to the green transition and others contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
— Boosting value chains among social economy enterprises through greater business and trade cooperation between social economy organizations and enterprises, at both the national and Euro-Mediterranean levels.
— In countries where they do not exist, encouraging the adoption of legislative frameworks that lend the sector legal security and promote public policies in favour of the social economy.
— Strengthening incubators, development poles and clusters with the aim of consolidating and increasing support and advisory services for social economy entrepreneurs.
— Increasing the visibility of social economy enterprises and entities and their values and business models, especially throughout the education system, from school to university as well as in vocational training systems.
— Stepping up the role of the representative organizations of the social economy at the national and Euro-Mediterranean levels as interlocutors with the public authorities in order to adopt effective measures and initiatives fostering the contribution of the social economy to the economic and social recovery of the region.

All these proposals have been addressed to the European Commission in order to integrate them into the future chapter of the European Social Economy Action Plan devoted to the reinforcement of the external dimension of the EU, which also covers the Mediterranean.

The integration of this ambitious initiative involving the European Institutions and the North and South Mediterranean governments into the future action plan will be a step forward towards unleashing the full potential of the social economy to make the Mediterranean a true area of shared prosperity where no one is left behind.

Bibliography


Applying Europe’s Digital Agenda in Mediterranean Partner Countries: Opportunities and Pitfalls

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When the EU launched its new digital agenda in February 2020 and announced its determination to make this Europe’s “Digital Decade,” it also proclaimed its ambition (EC, 2020) to promote its human-centric European model around the world, particularly in its neighbourhood. A key instrument in this regard is the Digital for Development (D4D) Hub, launched in December 2020 with the aim of coordinating digital initiatives by EU Member States.

This goal is particularly relevant in the EU’s Mediterranean Partner Countries, which are part of the Southern Neighbourhood, as the European Commission in February 2021 established a new Agenda for the Mediterranean (EC, HR/VP, 2021), which lists harnessing the digital transition as one of its key policy areas. With the exception of Israel, all of the Southern Neighbourhood countries suffer from high levels of youth unemployment and brain drain. Like other parts of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the EU’s Mediterranean Partner Countries experienced an economic downturn due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which highlighted the need for a more inclusive digital transformation that creates economic opportunities.

This paper will explore how Europe’s Digital for Development agenda can help push forward the digital transformation process in Mediterranean Partner Countries, analysing opportunities for the EU and partner countries and highlighting potential pitfalls.

The Challenges in Digital Transformation in Mediterranean Partner Countries

The EU’s digital agenda and focus on digital development in its foreign policy can play a crucial role in ensuring that the digital transformation process in Mediterranean Partner Countries is inclusive and does not widen existing inequalities. The ten partner countries in the EU’s Southern Neighbourhood Partnership – cooperation with the Syrian authorities remains suspended – are at different stages of digital development, but have over the past few years managed to improve connectivity, albeit often in unequal terms. According to the telecommunications industry organization GSMA (2020), in the entire Middle East and North Africa region, the number of mobile internet connections reached 260 million in 2019. However, improvements to connectivity have occurred unevenly, and a significant urban-rural gap persists (see Chart 12). With the exception of Lebanon and Israel-Palestine, all Southern Neighbourhood countries have significant mobile internet coverage gaps, particularly a problem in geographically large countries like Algeria, Libya and to a lesser extent Egypt. The fact that a steady connection to high-speed internet is not available outside of major population centres negatively impacts the ability of rural populations to gain the necessary digital skills to participate in the region’s growing digital economy.

Another significant challenge the EU can help address is the growing digital gender gap, as girls and women over the past years have become less likely to be able to use the Internet than men, according to GSMA data (see Table 6). While 47% of the female population was using the Internet in 2019, in the
same year 61% of the male population did so in Arab states, according to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU, 2020). This gap in part stems from women in the region having, on average, less disposable income (UN/ESCWA, 2020), and male family members in patriarchal societies having preference for using the family computer or mobile phone. According to the Mobile Gender Gap Report 2021 (GSMA, 2021), 63 million women in the MENA region did not use mobile internet in 2020 and 23 million women did not own a mobile phone.1 As the Covid-19 pandemic-related school closures have shown, a large percentage of children of both genders in lower-income families suffer from a lack of access to end devices like computers or tablets and are not able to access the Internet. For example, a World Bank report (2021) estimated that around 60% of students in Lebanon do not have a computer or have to share it with at least three family members, and only 50% of students are connected to online learning. Southern Neighbourhood countries have implemented various measures to improve internet access for students, for example by increasing the amount of data that can be bought for a certain price, but affordability remains a key issue. This helps explain the persistent, significant usage gap of 47% in the MENA region, as people living in areas covered by mobile internet providers are not using the Internet.

The teaching of digital skills in public education lags behind, due to the lack of resources – end devices and programmes – for training teachers in the latest IT-skills.

Another issue that has a negative impact on digital transformation in the Southern Neighbourhood is the mismatch between the skills provided by the education system and the skills needed by employers. In particular, the teaching of digital skills in public education lags behind, due to the lack of resources – end devices and programmes – for training teachers in the latest IT-skills. A lack of (advanced) digital and problem-solving skills due to a focus on memorization in the education system also hinders the promotion of innovation in science and business, which regional governments hope to rely on to boost their economies.

In relation to this, some Mediterranean Partner Countries have made progress in improving how easy it is to do business, as measured by the World Bank’s Doing Business Index (World Bank Group, 2019b), which evaluates business regulations. Tunisia, for example, ranks 19th out of 190 countries and territories when it comes to starting a business, while Jordan obtained 4th place in the category of getting credit. However, with the exception of Israel, Southern Neighbourhood countries overall rank poorly in the index, with Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria ranking below 100th place, Israel (35) and Morocco (53) being the highest ranked. Many received poor results when it comes to the ease of starting a business – a key factor to turn in-

1 GSMA defines mobile ownership as “having sole or main use of a SIM card (or a mobile phone that does not require a SIM), and using it at least once a month.” The numbers apply to adults aged 18+.
novation into economic growth – resolving insolvency and enforcing contracts. These factors negatively impact the further development of entrepreneurship in the region and prevent digital transformation from fulfilling its full economic potential in Mediterranean Partner Countries. In this regard, the Joint Communication on the renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood, establishing a new Agenda for the Mediterranean, lists a “renewed commitment to improving the business climate” as “essential” to attract investors and increase trade.

**The EU’s Role in Supporting Digital Transformation in Mediterranean Partner Countries**

As part of its digital agenda and the D4D framework, the EU can help tackle the abovementioned issues in several ways, lending financial and advisory support in the fields of digital skills, internet access for vulnerable populations and regulation (see Chart 13). By channelling policies through the recently established D4D Hub, the EU can ensure that digital initiatives of European actors are carried out in a coordinated fashion. The Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours, as proposed in the new Agenda for the Mediterranean, can be a key instrument to fund the initiatives outlined below. In the Joint Communication, the European Commission proposed mobilizing up to €30 billion in public and private investments in the Southern Neighbourhood, part of it under the Neighbourhood and Development and International Cooperation Instrument.

In the area of skills development, through the D4D Hub and the Economic and Investment Plan, the EU can mobilize resources to help address the digital gender gap. This can be done by financially and logistically supporting digital skills workshops aimed at girls and women, as well as other vulnerable groups, helping to provide them with a safe learning environment. EU funding can help scale existing smaller digital skills development initiatives by providing funding that can be used to offer free classes and transport for people living in remote areas, where a fee-based funding model is not suitable. Similar support can also be used to help bridge the urban-rural divide when it comes to internet access and digital skills. Beyond training sessions, funding by the EU and other international donors can be used to support low-cost or free internet cafes and co-working spaces that host digital skills sessions. Such initiatives present great opportunities for partnering with the private sector, as the establishment of the Orange Digital Centre, jointly set up by German development organization GIZ and telecommunications company Orange Middle East & Africa, has shown. At the time of writing, Orange Digital Centres were operating (GIZ, 2021) in Tunisia, Ethiopia and Senegal and are scheduled to open in at least two more Southern Neighbourhood countries, Jordan and Morocco, before the end of 2021. The centres aim to give at least 20,000 young people digital skills free of charge, which boost their employment prospects. By supporting similar public-private partnership projects, the EU can play a crucial role in addressing the skills mismatch and support the creation of employment opportunities for the southern Mediterranean’s large youth population.

To aid skills development, the EU should initiate more partnerships to establish vocational training sites, which could offer short- and medium-term courses in digital upskilling, particularly for young people, thus countering the currently high levels of brain drain. The EU should also support Southern Neighbourhood countries in their efforts to more closely align their qualification frameworks with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in order to boost cross-border mobility. A pilot programme is currently underway with Morocco.

In order to boost the nascent digital economy and innovation in Mediterranean Partner Countries, the EU should support setting up innovation hubs that are linked with partner organizations in Europe, including private sector companies. These innovation hubs can host start-ups and provide training programmes for the local population. EU funding, coupled with specific targets on gender equality, for example via the European Innovation Council, can also be used to address the fact that female entrepreneurs in the Southern Neighbourhood have less access to funding than their male counterparts (Atlantic Council, 2021).

To foster innovation, knowledge exchange between the EU and the Southern Neighbourhood needs to be improved, for example, by establishing more centres where academia and private sector actors from
both shores can work together and exchange ideas. In a similar vein, enabling more exchange programmes for researchers and digital startup entrepreneurs in Mediterranean Partner Countries can strengthen the North-South knowledge exchange and thus aid the growth of the southern Mediterranean’s digital economy. As noted in the new Agenda for the Mediterranean, diaspora communities should be used “more actively, in order to transfer competencies, know-how and technologies and contribute to the creation of business links between the EU and southern partners.” Increased access to the Internet provides a range of new opportunities to engage the diaspora and allows them to transfer competencies more easily while being abroad.

In order for innovation to have a direct positive impact on economic growth in the Southern Neighbourhood, regulation needs to be more directly tailored to enabling the establishment and growth of SMEs and digital start-ups, starting with a quick process to register a new business. The EU can lend its regulatory expertise to help initiate reforms in this area.

The EU should also support Southern Neighbourhood countries in their efforts to more closely align their qualification frameworks with the European Qualifications Framework in order to boost cross-border mobility.

A key tool in the EU’s Digital for Development strategy is the African-European Digital Innovation Bridge (AEDIB), which aims to establish Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH) in every country in the region and promote intercontinental dialogue between African and European innovators and policymakers. An example at Member State level, which could serve as a model, is Germany’s Make-IT in Africa initiative, centred around strengthening Africa’s digital ecosystem in collaboration with European private sector companies by creating better access to markets, skills and finance for African entrepreneurs.

While monitoring AEDIB’s progress, the EU should consider establishing similar linkages with non-African Southern Neighbourhood countries to allow entrepreneurs and researchers there to profit from a continuous knowledge exchange with their European peers.

**CHART 13** Key Areas in Which the EU Can Offer Support

Digital skills

Digital transformation

Internet access

Regulation

**What Can the EU Gain from Promoting Its Digital Agenda in Med Partner Countries?**

The EU has not only touted the new digital agenda as a way to bolster digitalization at home, but also as a means to promote its human-centric and rights-oriented approach to digital development globally. This is especially important in the Southern Neighbourhood where digital rights are increasingly under threat by the authorities, as several countries have used digital surveillance tools to control and suppress the population. By promoting its digital agenda in Mediterranean Partner Countries, the EU can increasingly establish itself as a major actor in the digital development space, countering China’s efforts to promote its restrictive internet governance model in the Southern Neighbourhood and beyond.
Supporting the digital transformation process in Southern Neighbourhood countries, as outlined above, also corresponds with the EU’s goal to improve the quality of life for people in the region and ensure that the post-Covid-19 economic recovery leaves no one behind, as outlined in the new Agenda for the Mediterranean. It is also connected to the EU’s support for the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, in whose attainment the ICT sector will play a crucial role.

Increased access to the Internet and a nascent digital economy in Southern Neighbourhood countries hold great economic potential. The Covid-19 pandemic heightened this potential and highlighted the urgent need to upgrade the region’s digital infrastructure. A 2018 World Bank study (WB, 2018), for example, concluded that improving broadband access in the MENA region had a short-term positive effect on job creation. Another recent study (Internet Society, 2020) estimated that a one-percent increase in fixed broadband increased GDP by 0.08 percent and a one-percent increase in mobile broadband increased GDP by 0.15 percent. While the digital economy in the Southern Neighbourhood will not be able to provide enough jobs to absorb the large number of people currently – and in the future – seeking jobs, the digital startup ecosystem can provide high-quality private sector jobs, which are often lacking in partner countries where the state remains the main employer. By supporting a growing digital economy, the EU can thus help address the issue of high youth unemployment, especially among graduates, and counter the brain drain that has resulted from a lack of economic opportunities. Furthermore, by providing financial, logistical and regulatory support to the digital ecosystem in partner countries, the EU is contributing to the growth of the private sector in the southern Mediterranean, which in turn could bolster private sector job creation and ease the burden of the state in dealing with mass unemployment.

In the medium and long term, support for digital skills development and the digital economy could also bring benefits for EU-based companies, as they could hire more IT workers based in Southern Neighbourhood countries, for example to outsource certain back-end IT processes. Support for the digital startup ecosystem in partner countries can spur innovation on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Through its support for digital transformation in the Southern Neighbourhood, the EU can help reset the power imbalance between North and South that has held back deeper economic and political integration, as exemplified by a failure to forge Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreements.

A focus on creating economic opportunities is also linked to the issue of migration, as many of the region’s youth, more than ten years after the start of the Arab uprisings, do not see a future in their country. According to the Annual ASDA'A BCW Arab Youth Survey, 42% of interviewees have considered emigrating to another country, naming economic reasons as the key factor. The dire economic situation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic will add to the migration pressure. In its Joint Communication on the renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood, the European Commission stresses that its Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours is aimed at creating jobs and opportunities, and “will contribute to reducing factors that lead to irregular migration.”

Through its support for digital transformation in the Southern Neighbourhood the EU can help reset the power imbalance between North and South that has held back deeper economic and political integration, as exemplified by a failure to forge Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreements with countries like Tunisia. However, such a reset can only be realized with a focus on co-ownership and the full support of Mediterranean Partner Countries.

Potential Pitfalls and Challenges Ahead

There are several potential pitfalls and challenges ahead when it comes to applying the EU’s digital agenda in Mediterranean Partner Countries.

A major challenge relates to the democratic deficits in several Mediterranean Partner Countries, as gov-
ernments view digitalization predominantly through the lens of security and surveillance instead of democratization, human rights and economic development. According to the Freedom on the Net 2020 report (Freedom House, 2020), none of the Mediterranean Partner Countries ranked by Freedom House – Algeria, Israel and Palestine were not included – were ranked as free, with most of them classified as partly free. Tunisia scored the highest with 64 out of 100 points. Egypt was ranked as not free with a score of 26 points, being named as one of the countries with the biggest five-year declines in internet freedom. In light of these developments, there is a danger that EU support for digital development could allow certain partner governments to increase the suppression and surveillance of their populations. In its engagements with Southern Neighbourhood governments, the EU needs to not only promote its human- and rights-centric approach, but continuously monitor how its financial, logistical and regulatory support for digital transformation affects people’s rights on- and offline.

Another key issue concerns the need for wider reform in Mediterranean Partner Countries. While partner governments have, to varying degrees, laid out digital transformation plans, it is key for both sides to ensure that this transformation process goes beyond digitalizing government services or improving internet access. In order for digitalization in the Southern Neighbourhood to realize its full potential in terms of driving economic growth, there needs to be a deeper transformation that involves reforms in the education sector, better regulations for starting and running a business (crucially involving a reform of bankruptcy laws), and a new commitment by private sector actors in Southern Neighbourhood countries to invest in skills development in order to address the skills mismatch.

In order for the EU-Southern Neighbourhood Partnership to succeed, this cooperation cannot be guided by a top-down approach led and imposed by the EU, which would only cement pre-existing inequalities between North and South in the digital realm. Despite the EU’s large economic clout, this new partnership and digital transformation process needs to be jointly led and have the full support from Mediterranean partner governments as well as civil society, the private sector and the general population. One of the ways this can be achieved is through joint ownership of projects that are co-financed and through the use of forums like the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

What is more, close coordination is required between EU policies and those of Member States supporting digital transformation in the region, e.g. through Team Europe Initiatives and collaboration with the UfM. Beyond the provision of funds, Member States should be continuously briefed on the European Commission’s dialogues with Mediterranean Partner Countries, and should be able to observe meetings that would enable them to more efficiently coordinate national policies.

**Conclusion**

The application of the EU’s digital agenda in Mediterranean Partner Countries can be an important tool to drive the socio-economic recovery process in the Southern Neighbourhood, especially as the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformation plans in the region. As part of its new Agenda for the Mediterranean, the EU should use a large part of the funds in the Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours to invest in the digital transformation process.

Beyond the provision of funds, Member States should be continuously briefed on the European Commission’s dialogues with Mediterranean Partner Countries, and should be able to observe meetings that would enable them to more efficiently coordinate national policies.

Going forward, it is key that cooperation with Southern Neighbourhood countries is based on an equal partnership, characterized by co-ownership of key initiatives. An important aspect of a successful partnership is a collaborative multi-stakeholder approach that allows all participants to have a say. Equally im-
important is that the application of the EU’s digital agenda in Mediterranean Partner Countries simultaneously focuses on short-term measures and wider, long-term reforms in skills development and business regulation.

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Joseph Biden won the White House at a time of acute crisis both domestically and globally. Domestically, his administration faced a triple crisis at the levels of public health, economic contraction and violent political division; globally it faced a set of alliances in disarray after the Trump Administration, a pressing global pandemic, a looming climate crisis and challenges from a rising Chinese giant and a resurgent Russia.

“Restoring America’s Global Standing” is the seventh and last of the White House’s declared key priorities. This is a reversal of Trump’s transactional approach to foreign relations, but rather reflects an attempt to restore the position the US enjoyed through its alliances in Europe and Asia, and through its influential positions in global institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF and other international institutions; it also includes an insistence on “championing America’s values and human rights.” Biden also sees a fundamental connection between domestic and foreign policy, in that he believes that “equipping the American middle class to succeed in a global economy” is the best way to ensure America’s future standing in the world and respond to China’s growth-fuelled international influence.

Multilateralism is certainly part and parcel of Biden’s approach to foreign policy. He understands that US influence is greatly enhanced both by its wide networks of alliances and partnerships around the world, but also by its support for a rules-based international order – an order that it had a strong hand in shaping in the aftermath of World War II. And he has chosen a foreign policy, national security and intelligence team that shares this more traditional pre-Trump view of America’s global power.

The Biden Administration does not have a clear or articulated “Mediterranean policy,” at least – to be fair – not yet. This is partly because the Mediterranean is not a high priority for this new administration, which would demand the President’s overall attention, but rather it falls between several state department and defence department regional bureaus – e.g. Europe, Near East and Africa for the State Department, and EUCOM, CENTCOM and AFRICOM for the Pentagon – and it is impacted by various and often disconnected policy baskets.

Outlines of a policy must be pieced together from US interests and policy with regard to the various countries and issue areas that are present in and around the Mediterranean Sea. And this includes US policy toward Europe and the EU, relations with Greece and Turkey, the crises in Syria, Lebanon and Israel-Palestine, relations with Egypt, the civil war in Libya, democratic transition in Tunisia, relations with Algeria, and the question of Morocco and the Western Sahara. This comes in addition to great power competition with Russia, with its hard power presence in the Mediterranean, thanks to the country’s interventions in Syria and Libya, and a growing naval presence; and competition with China whose soft power through investment, trade and infrastructure has gained it great influence in many economies and ports around this inner sea.

In this essay, I will look at US policy in the Mediterranean region through the lens of the various US interests that policymakers pursue when dealing with countries and issues around this region. Indeed, US officials have several US interests in mind when they craft policy toward this region. I mention these interests below, although not strictly ranked by priority as they weigh differently in different countries.
US Interests that Inform Policy toward the Mediterranean Region:

1. Restoring strong relations with European allies, and helping Europe maintain or enhance its security, stability and prosperity.
2. Pushing back on rival great powers Russia and China, whether that relates to their influence in Europe or their growing influence along the Mediterranean's eastern and southern shores.
3. Countering the threat of terrorism, which remains serious and pressing in parts of the eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and the Sahel.
4. Containing the nuclear and conventional threat from Iran both to the US and Israel, a threat that is present – at least in its conventional asymmetric form – on the shores of the Mediterranean through Iranian-backed groups in Syria, Lebanon and Gaza.
5. Maintaining the free flow of maritime trade, which applies mainly to the key artery of the Suez Canal.
6. Supporting the security and prosperity of Israel.
7. Shaping policy in favour of democratization, human rights and a rules-based international order; this partly as an overall principle shaped by internal American politics, but also as part of a neo-Cold War perspective to push back on the authoritarian models of Russia and China and leverage the demands for more freedom and democracy among many populations in this region, as witnessed by the Arab Spring and recent large protest movements in Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan and Algeria.

How These Interests Play out in Policymaking

Standing with Europe and Countering Rival Great Powers

Shoring up Europe and countering rival great powers (interests 1 and 2) drive several US policies in the region. Most notably this is seen in the US's position in favour of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), which links Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority to ensure that East Med gas gets to Europe through a consortium of US allies and friends, and thus counters Russia's attempts to monopolize energy supplies to Europe. The US congress passed the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Pact in December of 2019, which aims to strengthen cooperation between Greece, Cyprus and Israel and increase American engagement in the eastern Mediterranean. The legislation authorizes new security assistance for Greece and Cyprus – lifting the arms embargo on Cyprus in the process – and authorizes the establishment of a US-Eastern Mediterranean Energy Centre. The US has since started participating in the trilateral Greece-Cyprus-Israel partnership through the US Secretary of State, thus making it a "3+1" process. It is important to note that the US has encouraged steps by this eastern Mediterranean partnership to build clean and green energy into this new energy infrastructure as well; this aligns with the Biden Administration's global goal of fighting climate change and promoting energy transition.

Standing by its European allies also influences US policy toward the refugee and migration question across the Mediterranean. Migrants from Middle East war zones or Africa do not directly impact the US, as there are both natural and policy barriers largely preventing their arrival on American shores – America's migration and refugee problems come from Central America across its southern land border –, but the US is concerned about preventing a repeat of the large-scale refugee flows from Middle East war zones that happened in 2015, and appreciates the strategic risk to its European allies from unfettered migration from North Africa to Europe or from Sub-Saharan Africa, via North Africa, to Europe. The 2015 crisis weakened the European Union and contributed to Brexit and the rise of illiberal political movements in Europe, which undervalued the transatlantic relationship and in some cases expressed proximity to President Putin and his brand of cultural nationalism.

This concern also partly informs US policy toward Syria, where the US is eager to prevent another round of fighting that would drive millions of Syrians into Turkey and possibly Europe. It also informs US policy toward Turkey, where the US has to tread carefully with President Erdogan, as it understands that he controls the spigot of Syrian refugees flowing, or not, into Europe. This concern has also recently informed US policy toward Lebanon, where a risk of total collapse there could also see Lebanese and
Syrian refugees crossing by boat into Cyprus and heading west. It is also in US policymakers’ minds as they increase their engagement, along with their European allies, to stabilize the situation in Libya.

Pushing back on great power rivals, Russia and China, which is identified as interest 2 in the listing above, informs US policy throughout the Mediterranean region. The US has accepted as a fait accompli the Russian presence in Syria, and actually sees it as a potential counterweight to Iran and its proxies there, and a potential stabilizing force. But the US looks with serious alarm at Russia’s growing presence in Libya, and this is also driving US policy toward that country. The Biden Administration participated in the Second Berlin Conference on Libya in June 2021, which led to an agreement to hold fresh elections in December of this year, and included affirmations that both Russian—and Turkish-backed mercenary groups needed to leave the country. Countering Russia has also been a major point of contention with Turkey, where the latter’s purchase of Russian S-400 air defence systems brought about strong objections and grave concerns in Washington and led to Turkish exclusion from the F35 and Patriot missile programmes.

In naval matters, Russia has secured its only Mediterranean repair and replenishment presence in the Syrian port of Tartus, which supports the Russian warships based in the Black Sea. US and Russian navies have almost come to blows in the Black Sea, and Russia is gradually trying to increase its naval presence in the Mediterranean. But that presence, while strong in the Black Sea, is of only limited scope and concern in the Mediterranean from a US perspective, at least so far.

With regard to China, the US is concerned about the influence and leverage that China is accumulating through its Belt and Road Initiative and its deep pockets. This is a concern on both northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. China has set up a $10-billion fund for Greece¹ and already controls one tenth of Europe’s port capacity.² It has also developed deep economic and infrastructure relations in North Africa—Egypt, Algeria and Morocco—running into billions of dollars. The US does not have the public funds to counter China’s BRI, nor does it have a legitimate pathway to prevent friends and allies from making deals and taking investment from China. Nor has this growing economic presence led—at least yet—to a direct national security challenge to the US. That high level of concern certainly exists with regard to Chinese threats further east in Taiwan and the South China Sea; but in the Mediterranean those kinds of security and defence concerns are seen as still very much in the future, not the present. The Biden Administration is trying to counter China’s economic and investment enticements by abandoning Trump’s combative what’s-in-it-for-America bilateral trade relations with friends and allies, and reviving the pathway of encouraging accommodative trade relations, supporting US-EU trade relations and continuing to encourage American businesses to invest abroad.

Pushing back on great power rivals, Russia and China, informs US policy throughout the Mediterranean region. The US looks with serious alarm at Russia’s growing presence in Libya, and this is also driving US policy toward that country.

The push back against Russia and China also has a political component. The Biden Administration narrowly escaped a collapse of democracy and transition to authoritarianism at home during the historic 6 January attack on the US Capitol to reverse the results of a presidential election. His team is also well aware that liberal democracy is under threat in Europe and largely in retreat in the Middle East and North Africa. This is partly due to the political repercussions of unfettered globalization and misguided policy decisions in the West, but they are also aware that a resurgent Russia and a globally rising China now provide a powerful example to leaders and some populations in the region and around the world that autocracy works, while democracy falters and stumbles, even in its modern home of origin, the

¹ www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-china-shipping/china-to-double-investment-fund-for-greek-shipping-idUSTRE7242AB20110305
Counterterrorism was an area of common concern between the Trump and Biden administrations and will continue to be so regardless of who wins the White House in 2024.

United States. To a leader of the Cold War generation like Biden, this contest for hearts and minds and between two political ways of life tracks with some of the ideological battles – at that time with a broader communist or socialist ideal, not the current authoritarian-capitalist ideal presented by Russia and China – between a US-led West and an authoritarian East.

This US perspective is partly seen in US policy toward the Balkans as well as the Black Sea region. Western European countries have largely held as functioning democracies, despite Brexit, and despite the rise to power of illiberal parties in some countries, but Russia and China have gained serious inroads and democracy has suffered more fundamental setbacks in some of the countries of the Balkans and Black Sea region. The US is aware that these regions are an important buffer for western Europe, and unless the US helps Europe push back in support of democratic institutions and against greater Russian and Chinese influence, the threats to western Europe could eventually increase.

**The Terrorist Challenge**

Counterterrorism groups remains a primary concern of US defence and security officials when looking at this region. This applies primarily to the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, although US officials support their European counterparts in their efforts to contain homegrown terrorism in Europe. But CT (counterterrorism) is a main driver of US policy in Syria, for example, where the US maintains forces, primarily to keep an eye on ISIS and al-Qaeda and a few smaller terrorist groups that survive there and that continue to pose a direct threat to the US homeland. It also drove the US (and allies) military action in Libya in 2015 to help local forces defeat an ISIS presence there.

CT concerns undergird strong security partnerships between the US and many countries of the MENA region, such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Lebanon; CT is, of course, a key component of its relations with NATO allies in southern Europe as well. The terrorist threat does not only emanate from the civil wars of Syria and Libya, but is also a US concern throughout the unstable Sahel region. CT was an area of common concern between the Trump and Biden administrations and will continue to be so regardless of who wins the White House in 2024.

**Countering Iran**

The fourth US interest identified above – countering the nuclear and conventional threat from Iran – is a main driver of US Middle East policy, and hence impacts policy at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Bringing back the US into the nuclear deal that was struck in 2015 is a primary goal of President Biden, who was part of the White House that signed that deal. And continuing to counter and contain Iran and its proxies – including in Syria and Lebanon, on the Mediterranean's eastern shores – is an enduring US interest. This is so partly because of direct US national security concerns about the threat they might pose to US interests in the region or to the US mainland, but also as part of America's concern for Israel's security. This also enters into the US's calculations with regard to their presence in Syria, and also explains their long term support for the Lebanese army and the survival of a very precarious Lebanese State, and their support for the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which have helped maintain basic calm along the Lebanese-Israeli border for the past 15 years.

**Trade Routes**

Maintaining the free flow of maritime trade in the Mediterranean region is part of a global interest to maintain global trade and transport. The Suez Canal has been, since its construction in the 19th century, the primary – and often contested – choke point for that trade and transport. The world, and the US, got a strong reminder of the importance of that canal when the giant Ever Given container ship blocked the canal for six days in March of this year, disrupting an estimated $9 billion dollars of goods every day. The two assets that underpin enduring US-Egyptian relations, despite deep differences between the two
countries, are Egypt’s peace treaty with Israel and Egypt’s sovereignty over one of the most important international canals in the world. Of course, this US interest in maintaining maritime trade routes also informs its deployments in the Persian Gulf and Bab-el-Mandeb, the southern entrance of the Red Sea, but those are further afield.

Commitment to Israel

Of course, the US has a special relationship with Israel and factors in basic concerns for its security and prosperity into US Middle East policy. We have already mentioned how this concern informs its policy toward Iran and its proxies in Syria and Lebanon, and how it informs US support for Israel’s energy cooperation with Cyprus and Greece, and the steadiness of US relations with Egypt. A new factor in this area have been the Abraham Accords, concluded during the Trump Administration. These started as normalization agreements with the Gulf states of the UAE and Bahrain. But they were followed by an agreement between Morocco and Israel. The quid pro quo for Morocco was the Trump Administration’s recognition of Moroccan claims to the Western Sahara. This quid ran counter to previous US policy and whether or not the Biden Administration would uphold it was an open question. After some initially mixed signals, the Biden Administration – placing the benefits of the deal for Israel over the administration’s insistence on a return to a rules-based international order – informed Rabat that Biden would not reverse the previous administration’s position. The Biden Administration supports the Abraham Accords and will work to bring other parties to the table. Saudi Arabia is the big prize, but unlikely as long as King Salman is alive or in office. In the meantime, the US will encourage the consolidation of economic, political and security relations between the recent signatories in Israel and will urge older signatories, such as Egypt and Jordan, to follow the UAE example and turn their cold peace with Israel into warmer and deeper economic and people-to-people ties.

Democracy

The final interest mentioned in the Introduction – support for democracy, human rights and a rules-based order – is not just a talking point for the Biden Administration. As mentioned previously, the administration recognizes the real threat to these values both at home in the US and around the world, as Russia and China champion an alternative model. We’ve seen how this concern manifests itself in America’s support for its western European democratic partners, and its contestation of political space in the Balkans and Black Sea. Indeed, Biden hosted the first Democracy Summit in Copenhagen in May of this year. This concern also partly informs US policy toward the Middle East and North Africa.

While other more pressing interests, such as all those mentioned above, often take precedence over this concern for democracy and human rights, we are seeing this concern inform policy toward a struggling democratic transition country such as Tunisia, but also in pushback against Erdogan’s authoritarianism in Turkey, the US’s refusal to engage with Assad’s Syria, and a resumption of relations with and support for the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. It also partly informs US policy in two very troubled and struggling semi-democratic experiments in Lebanon and Iraq.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

As seen above, US policy toward the Mediterranean region is informed by a number of interests – sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting. There is also not a unified or integrated US “Mediterranean policy,” but rather a collection of US policies toward individual countries and issues in this region that, grouped together, can provide the outlines of what we might call America’s Mediterranean policy. US policy toward the Eastern Med energy cooperation involving a number of its allies and partners comes closest to identifying a clearly “Mediterranean” policy. Of course, the Biden Administration is still in its first few months in office, many positions remain vacant and many policy conversations have not taken place – whether within the administration itself, or between the administration and partners around the Mediterranean. So maybe the currently fuzzy outline of a US “Mediterranean” policy, might yet emerge clearer and more strategically thought-through in the months ahead.
The Geopolitical Chessboard in the Mediterranean: Ten Years After the Arab Spring

Normalization of Arab Countries with Israel: Regional Geopolitical Aspects of the Agreements

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The recent clashes in Jerusalem between Palestinians and Israelis have served as a reminder of a stark reality. The normalization of relations between certain Arab states and Israel does not change the fact that it is Palestinians, not other Arabs, who are living under occupation and with whom Israel has to come to terms. Israel’s agreements with the Arab states might have served many other purposes, but so far they have not focused on trying to advance peacemaking in the region. In fact there is a credible argument that those deals, unintentionally perhaps, have only served to hamper peace.

The Trump Administration pushed through a plan that it mislabeled as the “Deal of the Century.” This was a scheme designed to meet the needs of Israel and give formal cover to the annexation of 30% of the West Bank, in contravention of international law and without the participation of Palestinians. The aim of reaching a durable solution to the Arab- Israeli conflict that meets the minimum needs of the Palestinians seemed not to be of relevance.

In all four cases the normalization agreements – between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan – appeared largely to be tools to appease the Trump Administration so that it would acquiesce on issues that had nothing to do with peacemaking. The UAE succeeded in securing an arms deal with the United States to provide it with F-35 advanced air fighters. Sudan was removed from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Morocco received US recognition of its sovereign claim over the Western Sahara. And both Bahrain and the UAE prioritized their cooperation with Israel to contain Iran’s regional influence over attempts to advance peace with the Palestinians. The question of peace is hardly mentioned in any of the agreements – if it is mentioned at all.

The West has hailed these agreements as breakthroughs in a region where peace has been elusive. However, will the agreements help to establish peace in the region? If they will, then this should be celebrated. But what if they will not? Let us examine these agreements’ geopolitical implications.

One direct result of these agreements is that they have given Israel the false impression that it does not need to come to terms with the Palestinians with whom it shares the same land, if it is able to forge agreements with the rest of the region. In other words, if there was an incentive for Israel to try to reach a settlement with the Palestinians, that incentive has now been undermined. Israel today feels that it can have its cake and eat it too.

In 2002, the Arab world felt that Palestinians were unable to reach an agreement with Israel on their own. The Arabs realized that Israel wanted security and an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict, but that it would not surrender the land it had occupied in 1967 to achieve peace merely with the Palestinians. That is when they introduced a novel idea. The Arabs would offer Israel total peace – with every Arab state – in return for total withdrawal from occupied territories belonging to the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon. The Arab world believed it was extending an offer that Israel could not refuse: peace agreements with every Arab country, collective security arrangements, an agreed solution to the refugee issue and an end to all claims. This was not just land for peace, but total land for total peace.
If Israel was not interested in that offer in 2002, it has even less of an incentive to be interested today. Its agreements with the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco violated the spirit and letter of the Arab Peace Initiative in two main ways. First, the Arab consensus, a key incentive of the initiative, was fractured. Second, the four states effectively abandoned the principle of land for peace. If the international community is interested in a two-state solution that could meet the aspirations of both Palestinians and Israelis, then it should have another look at the agreements before hailing them as instruments that advance peacemaking. Instead, they have rendered a two-state solution nearly impossible. By applauding the agreements as a breakthrough for peace, the international community has contributed to the delusion that one can achieve peace when no peace exists between the occupier and the occupied.

All four Arab countries have argued that the normalization agreements with Israel serve as levers of influence with the Israeli government to entice it to reach a solution with the Palestinians. They also point out that the agreements show the Israeli public the virtues of being more flexible on withdrawing from occupied territories and establishing a Palestinian state. But the record suggests otherwise. Egypt, the largest Arab country, signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, and Jordan, the country with the largest number of Palestinian refugees, signed a similar agreement in 1994. Despite the heavy references in both documents to the principle of land for peace and the need for Israel to withdraw from occupied territory, that never materialized. Moreover, in the last four decades, the attitude of successive Israeli governments and the Israeli public toward peace with the Palestinians has hardened. The peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan had little effect in making Israel more flexible when it comes to peace with the Palestinians.

In short, peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan failed to moderate the Israeli position. On the contrary, Israel has adopted positions that are more intransigent than when peace agreements were reached with the two Arab countries. It is unclear, therefore, why or how the more recent normalization agreements with the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco can advance the cause of peace.

By applauding the agreements as a breakthrough for peace, the international community has contributed to the delusion that one can achieve peace when no peace exists between the occupier and the occupied.

Of course, the four agreements are a reality today. Significant numbers of people in some or all of these countries might push their governments to adopt a slower pace of normalization with Israel, just as the Egyptian and Jordanian publics did. So, what does all this mean, if coupled by the lack of any negotiating process since 2015, when the then-US Secretary of State John Kerry abandoned his efforts to bring Israelis and Palestinians together?

It means, first, that the Arab Peace Initiative is dead. Without the consensus of all Arab states that gave it significant moral power, without Israel’s will to engage, and without an Arab leader today able to rally all Arab states around the idea of a peace settlement with Israel, the initiative has lost all its appeal. The Arab world’s attempt to change the goalposts and offer Israel regional peace and security arrangements has fallen on deaf ears, and the conflict has gone back to its core Palestinian and Israeli elements.
Another casualty of the four agreements is the death of the two-state solution. The international community has tried valiantly to arrive at such a solution in recent decades. The two-state paradigm, based on separation between the Israeli and Palestinian communities and negotiations over core final-status issues, was logical and addressed the central needs of the two sides. Starting in 1991, there were a number of attempts at getting the two sides to negotiate an acceptable outcome – in Madrid, Oslo, Camp David, Taba and Annapolis. The parties or mediators proposed many plans: the Clinton parameters, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Middle East Roadmap, among others. In the end, the separation paradigm did not work, largely because Israel insisted on populating the occupied territories with settlers and refused to acknowledge the plight of Palestinian refugees or address it in any meaningful way. Israel has created facts on the ground in opposition to the separation principle, clearly signalling that its intention has never been to withdraw from the territories that it occupied in 1967.

Today, the two communities are so intertwined that separation has become almost impossible. With over 700,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, we are approaching a number equivalent to a quarter of the West Bank’s population – a figure that keeps increasing. Yet the international community has clung to the old separation paradigm, refusing to acknowledge the changing reality on the ground. It has been unable, or unwilling, to put forward any new plans to bring that paradigm into the present. The result today is disjointed Palestinian enclaves encircled by 10-metre-high cement walls and razor wires, while Jewish-only settlements expand around them.¹

This reality has been tolerated by the international community ever since the Madrid peace process was initiated in 1991, in the hope that by some miracle a two-state solution might materialize. That has not happened. In fact, the four normalization agreements have encouraged Israel to keep the remaining occupied Arab territories for itself, and have moved it further away from any intent to arrive at a solution.

The Need for a New Rights-Based Approach

Israel has not been held accountable for violating international law. It has continued to expand settlements with impunity, while the international community has done nothing to stop this, even as it has continued to pay lip service to a two-state solution. Without a credible plan to bring about a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it may soon be too late to do so.

Meanwhile, the rights of Palestinians under occupation have been relegated to the sidelines in the hope that a two-state solution to the conflict might make the question moot. No more. After 30 years, it is obvious that Israel is unwilling to accept a viable Palestinian state and is intent on holding to as much of the occupied territories as possible. As the possibility of a viable Palestinian state disappears, Palestinians under occupation will increasingly demand that their rights be respected by the international community. If Palestinians cannot have their own state, it is only natural that they will shift toward demanding equal rights in the territories in which they live.

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In fact, such a shift is already occurring. A Carnegie Endowment study in 2017 found that Palestinian activists were increasingly focused on securing legal protections through documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Their focus was no longer on the shape of a solution that was increasingly devoid of substance.²

The situation today, if it persists, has moved away from a two-state solution to accepting the reality of

one state, in which two separate and unequal legal regimes exist for Israelis and Palestinians. This is the textbook definition of apartheid. The international community, in being passive in pushing more forcefully for a genuine and fair two-state solution, has made this one-state alternative a reality. The matter that it will have to address, therefore, will be the kind of one-state solution it is willing to accept – a democratic state or an apartheid system.

Is this overdramatizing the issue? Hardly. A recent poll conducted by prominent researchers Shibley Telhami of the University of Maryland and Marc Lynch of George Washington University came up with the same conclusion. They surveyed 521 experts on the region, 71% of them based in the United States and the rest living elsewhere. Among the issues covered were the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Arab Spring uprisings.

Perhaps the most striking takeaway was how the experts saw the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A majority, 52%, said that a two-state solution was no longer viable, while 42% said it was achievable, but not within the next decade. The more important finding was how the mostly US-based experts viewed the political situation in Israel and the occupied territories. A full 59% described the status quo there as being that of a one-state reality akin to apartheid, while only 7% described it as a one-state reality with inequality that could not be compared to apartheid. When asked about the most likely scenario if a two-state solution were no longer possible, 77% of the respondents predicted a one-state reality akin to apartheid.³

The normalization agreements with Israel were undoubtedly meant to further the interests of the four countries that signed them. The Arab states in no way sought the reinforcement of an apartheid system. But the agreements, coupled with the death of the two-state solution, became a prime example of the law of unintended consequences. Regional cooperation between Israel and the Arab world, if it is not part of a viable solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, could have disastrous consequences.

The international community should have no illusions about the future. By paying lip service to a two-state solution but doing nothing to make it possible, it has helped to kill prospects for such a solution. And by ignoring the rights of Palestinians under occupation, it is pushing the Palestinians to demand the world’s attention in defence of such rights. The international community will not be able to say no to a Palestinian state and no to equal rights indefinitely. That would be tantamount to saying yes to apartheid. The international community will soon have to face this dilemma.

The term apartheid has been avoided by most states, but the failure to produce a two-state solution has led many people and organizations to realize that the description is perfectly accurate. In rapid succession, the largest Israeli human rights organization, B’Tselem, published a report in January 2021 under the title, “A Regime of Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This Is Apartheid.”⁴ The report accused Israel not only of apartheid against Palestinians under occupation, but also against Palestinian citizens of Israel. In April, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, one of the world’s most respected thinktanks, published a report urging the Biden Administration to adopt a rights-based approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict and referred to Israel’s apartheid practices.⁵ Soon after, Human Rights Watch issued a report as well, accusing Israel of practicing apartheid.⁶

This trend will increase with time. Normalization should not come at the expense of peacemaking, nor should it lead to the unintended consequence of making peace more unlikely. Either the international community is serious about coming to a durable solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or it will have to deal with problems far worse than the occupation.

³ LYNCH, MARC and TELHAMI, Shibley, “Here’s how experts on the Middle East see the region’s key issues,” Project on Middle East Political Science, Feb 2021, https://pomeps.org/heres-how-experts-on-the-middle-east-see-the-regions-key-issues-our-new-survey-finds
⁴ www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid
Thirty years ago, when the Cold War was still going strong, news that Moscow’s forces had intervened militarily in both Syria and Libya would have spread panic throughout the Mediterranean and the Middle East, as well as the United States. The assumption would have been that whatever Moscow said it was doing in these countries, its success there would be followed by Soviet moves aimed at threatening or even overthrowing other governments in the region. Now, however, Russia’s ongoing military involvement in Syria since 2015 and that of Russian private military forces in Libya since 2018 are seen quite differently. While many governments do not welcome it, in neither Syria nor Libya is Russia’s military presence seen as a direct threat to neighbouring governments. Indeed, there are some American allies in the region – including Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – which would prefer Russian forces to remain in Syria, since they do not want Iran and its allies to be the dominant external forces there. And in Libya, some of America’s allies – including Egypt, the UAE and even France at times – have joined Russia in supporting General Khalifa Haftar.

Compared to Russia’s image as being, at best, a regional power operating in the former Soviet space, which prevailed under Yeltsin in the 1990s and even under Putin before the beginning of Moscow’s intervention in Syria in 2015, Moscow’s relative success with supporting its allies in both Syria and Libya since then has helped restore Russia’s image as a great power in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, as well as globally. But far beyond this, Putin has succeeded in establishing good working relations with virtually every government in the Mediterranean and the Middle East – something that the Soviet leaders before Gorbachev did not accomplish (although, admittedly, this was something that they were not always attempting to accomplish).

**Moscow’s Successes**

Russia’s diplomatic success in the region has been due, at least in part, to Putin’s willingness to work with all governments in the Mediterranean and Middle East. It is hardly surprising, of course, that Putin has good relations with the region’s most anti-American governments, Syria and Iran – though Moscow’s having good relations with Tehran is something of an achievement, considering that the Soviets had very poor relations with the Islamic Republic for a decade after the 1979 revolution. While there are important irritants in the Russian-Iranian relationship, Moscow and Tehran are united in their perception of both the United States and Sunni jihadist groups, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, as common adversaries, and in their support of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria (which they see as important for thwarting both American and Sunni jihadist ambitions). The al-Assad regime’s dependence on Russian military support for its very survival, of course, underlies the Russian-Syrian relationship.

Especially remarkable, though, has been the development of close ties between Russia and Turkey. Building on the increasing Russian-Turkish economic ties that had developed before he came into power, Putin took advantage of Turkish resentment toward the West on various issues (including the lack
of progress toward Turkey’s long-awaited EU accession; American support for the Kurds, first in Iraq and later in Syria; America’s refusal to extradite Erdogan’s rival, Fethullah Gulen, from the US to Turkey; and Erdogan’s belief that the US and other Western governments supported the unsuccessful 2016 coup attempt against him). The recent Russian sale of S-400 air defence missile systems to Turkey has upset Washington so much that it has decided not to sell the new F-35 fighter aircraft to Turkey, and has even imposed economic sanctions on Ankara – which responded by doubling down and signing an agreement to purchase additional Russian S-400s in August 2020. Moreover, the Russian-Turkish (or more accurately, the Putin-Erdogan) relationship has survived not only the severe downturn that occurred after Turkish forces shot down a Russian military aircraft in the vicinity of the Syrian-Turkish border in 2015, but also their support for opposing sides in the conflicts in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Putin began work on improving Russia’s ties with the Mubarak regime in Egypt in the early 2000s and was discomfited by its downfall. Even so, Moscow maintained good relations with Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Morsi, who was elected to power in 2012, but welcomed his overthrow and replacement by General Abdul Fattah al-Sisi in 2013. When the Obama Administration cut back on US arms sales to Egypt as a way of expressing its disapproval of al-Sisi’s overthrow of a democratically elected government, Putin stepped in with an offer to sell Russian arms to Cairo. Russian-Egyptian ties have been close ever since.

Russia’s relations with Israel have grown remarkably friendly, especially between Putin and Netanyahu, who have spoken both face to face and over the phone on numerous occasions. In addition to intelligence cooperation between them, Israel became an important source of military technology for Moscow. Although no agreement was publicly announced, an understanding appears to have been reached at the time of the 2008 Russian-Georgian War, whereby Israel ended its military cooperation with Georgia in exchange for an unspecified degree of Russian restraint in arming Syria and Iran with weaponry that could threaten Israel. Indeed, while Moscow has sold S-400 air defence missiles to Turkey and discussed the possibility of selling them to Saudi Arabia and Qatar, so far it has only sold the less advanced S-300 system to Iran – and only then after a lengthy delay between 2010, when then President Medvedev suspended the sale at the behest of the US and Israel, and 2015 when President Putin lifted the suspension after Iran agreed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Furthermore, after the Russian military intervention in Syria began in 2015, Russia and Israel reportedly came to an understanding about deconfliction, whereby Moscow does not interfere in Israeli attacks on Iranian and Hezbollah forces in Syria, and Israel does not attack Russian or other targets there that are of particular concern to Moscow.

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Similarly, Moscow now has good relations with all the Arab Gulf states, including those most anxious about Iran: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain. The richest Arab Gulf states – Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar – have also become important sources of investment for Russia. In addition, the UAE has been a large-scale buyer of Russian weaponry. Through the OPEC+ format, Moscow and Riyadh have become important partners in the oil market. While their collaboration broke down spectacularly in March 2020 when Riyadh responded to Moscow’s unwillingness to abide by OPEC+ production limits by flooding the market with Saudi oil, they were able to restore cooperation shortly thereafter.

In Iraq, Moscow maintains good relations both with the Baghdad government and with the Kurdish Regional Government in Erbil. Russian petroleum firms operate in both areas. Moscow and Khartoum recently signed an agreement allowing Russia to have naval facilities at Port Sudan on the Red Sea. Moscow has especially good relations with Algeria (which is one of the largest buyers of Russian weap-
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onry), but also has good relations with its rival, Morocco, and with Tunisia.

Russian businesses and other figures close to the Kremlin reportedly maintain large financial interests in Cyprus, where Russian naval vessels have been making regular port calls since 2015. Although Moscow has given support to influential anti-NATO and anti-EU political parties in several countries on the European side of the Mediterranean (including Italy, Greece, France and Spain), Moscow also has relatively good relations with all these governments – which are notably less enthusiastic about maintaining economic sanctions on Ukraine as both the US and certain other European governments have been. Indeed, Greece, Italy and France are large-scale importers of Russian natural gas.

**Why Putin Is Seen as a Partner**

As a result of all this activity, Russian influence in the Mediterranean and Middle East has grown strong under Putin. This state of affairs, it must be noted, has not just come about because Putin has pursued it, but because governments and other actors in the region all find Russia to be a desirable partner. There are several reasons for this.

Putin’s willingness to work with all governments provides an incentive – and in some cases, an imperative – for all governments to work with him. While many do not like the al-Assad regime in Syria, Putin’s dogged support for it compared to America’s reputation for not protecting its allies from being ousted (including the Shah of Iran in 1979 and Mubarak in Egypt in 2011) has earned the respect of Washington’s authoritarian allies in the region, who fear that the US will not support them either in a crisis. Indeed, their fears that American and European criticism of their human rights records will provoke or exacerbate internal crises for them, making Putin an attractive partner for the region’s authoritarian and illiberal democratic regimes

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Signalling what they either want or do not want from Washington and Brussels, though, are not the only reasons why governments in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern region cooperate with Russia. Some countries, dependent on natural gas imports, buy large quantities from Russia partly to avoid total dependence on Middle Eastern suppliers, whose reliability has been cause for their concern in the past. For those interested in building their atomic energy capacity, Russia is far more willing and able to supply reactors than Western sources. And, as indicated earlier, Russia does not tie arms sales to human rights concerns, as Western governments sometimes do.

Russian willingness to work with all parties in the region creates a strong incentive even for US allies to work with Russia when Moscow supports one or more of their adversaries. No state likes it when an external great power supports a nearby rival, but
Russia’s willingness to work with everyone allows the negative impact of this to be lessened to some degree. For example, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE – which both fear Iranian intentions toward them – have sought to compensate for Russian support of Tehran through trading with and investing in Russia to a greater degree than Iran, with all the limits imposed by various Western-backed economic sanctions. Similarly, Israel’s engagement in security and economic cooperation with Moscow, despite its support for the Jewish State’s nemesis, Iran, has resulted in the Russian-Israeli deconfliction agreement, under which Moscow does not prevent Israeli attacks on Iranian and Hezbollah targets. Iran, of course, is not pleased that Russia is cooperating with its regional rivals. But, as Moscow is well aware, Tehran does not have an alternative external power to replace Russia with, since it is strongly at odds with the US, and neither Europe nor China will back Iran in its rivalries with its neighbours. Tehran, then, has had to accept Moscow’s cooperation with Iran’s rivals in order to continue receiving what support Moscow is willing to offer the Islamic Republic.

Moscow’s willingness to work with opposing sides, however, is not limited to the rivalries between Iran and its adversaries. In the dispute between Qatar, on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt, on the other, Moscow has allowed itself to be courted by both sides (thus garnering investment funds from Qatar and the UAE in particular). While Moscow works closely with Israel, it also has good relations with the two main Palestinian movements, Fatah and Hamas (but does not support either of them in ways that threaten the Jewish State). Despite Moscow’s encouragement of Turkish animosity toward America and Europe, Moscow and Ankara have supported opposing sides in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh. Indeed, the more strained Turkey’s relations with the West have become, the less Moscow has to fear that Russian support for Turkey’s rivals will result in Ankara resuming close ties with the West. While Moscow has intervened in support of the Assad regime in Syria and General Haftar in Libya, Russia has also cooperated to some extent with at least some of their respective rivals – the Syrian Kurds and the Government of National Accord. In the ongoing conflict in Yemen, Moscow has good relations with the Iranian-backed Houthis in the north, the Saudi-backed Yemeni government in the centre, and the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council in the south.

Moscow even touts its ability to work with all sides as not only putting it in a strong position to help resolve conflicts, but to do so more effectively than the US, which cannot or will not talk to certain parties.

Moscow’s Limits

Yet, despite the many reasons why countries in the Mediterranean and Middle East have cooperated with Russia, there are also several factors at work that limit Moscow’s influence in the region. First and foremost is that despite all expressions of either fear or hope that the US is withdrawing from the region, it has remained present. Middle Eastern actors fearing Iran may see cooperation with Russia as an important way of keeping Moscow’s collaboration with Tehran at bay, but they are not going to give up their security cooperation with the US, as long as it is willing to help defend them against Iran. Similarly, just because several European countries in the Mediterranean buy large quantities of Russian gas and are less concerned by what Russia does in Ukraine than some other European countries, does not mean that they wish to give up their close security and economic ties with Washington either. Furthermore, for all Moscow’s claims that it is in a better position to mediate between the many op-
posing parties, it has not actually done much more than arrange tactical ceasefires in Syria, where surrounded Assad regime opponents were allowed to leave for Idlib. Moscow has not even been able to get Assad to make any concessions that might possibly result in some opposition groups being co-opted into supporting his regime. And for all Donald Trump’s counterproductive statements and actions that alienated many in the region, his administration was able to broker the Abraham Accords (normalization agreements between Israel on the one hand and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco on the other). The revelations by Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif in a leaked audiotape that Moscow sought to work with his rival, Islamic Revolutionary Guards General Soleimani, to block the implementation of the Iranian nuclear accord in 2015, indicates that the Kremlin is fearful that any progress toward an Iranian-American rapprochement would limit Russia’s influence in Tehran.

Despite their differences and disagreements with Washington and with Brussels, none – not even Syria and Iran – wishes to rely solely on Russia

In addition, Chinese influence in the Mediterranean and Middle East has also been growing. Indeed, Beijing’s economic influence has already grown much stronger than Russia’s influence there. While Russia seeks to make money from the region, mainly by exporting to and obtaining investments from rich countries there, China can afford both to import much more from the region and to invest in it. In other words, Beijing has the capacity to exercise far greater economic influence in the Mediterranean and the Middle East than Moscow does. But as China’s establishment of a naval base in Djibouti shows, Beijing’s interest in the region may not just be limited to the economic realm. In addition, even if (as some argue) the US is less focused on Europe, the Middle East and even Russia, due to Washington’s increased focus on China, increased Chinese involvement in the Mediterranean and the Middle East is likely to result in continued or even increased American interest in the region, as well as regional interest in US protection.

It should also be noted that Russian behaviour in the region can be self-limiting. Moscow’s close ties to Tehran may make it imperative for Iran’s rivals to engage with Moscow in order to limit Russian support for Iran, but the continued strength of the Russian-Iranian relationship also means Iran’s rivals cannot trust Moscow enough to rely solely on Russia, and not on Washington as well. Although Moscow denied any involvement, the Russian-backed coup attempt in Montenegro in 2016 was a warning to all that Russian interference in other countries’ internal affairs might not always be limited to propaganda campaigns (the continuation of which does not bode well for continued good relations with Russia either). Finally, Moscow’s ability to maintain good relations with Turkey’s anti-Western leader, Erdogan, while having sharp differences with him over regional conflicts might be subject to breakdown. While Putin has been indulgent in the face of Turkish support for groups fighting Russian-backed forces in Syria and Libya, his tolerance for Turkish involvement in the Armenian-Azerbaijan dispute and support for Ukraine may be more limited.

Conclusion

Thus, while Russian influence in the Mediterranean and Middle East has expanded greatly under Putin, Moscow may find it difficult not only to further its influence there, but also even to hold onto what influence it has. Ultimately, Putin’s success has depended not just on his own actions, but also on the willingness of governments and other actors in the region to cooperate with Moscow. Mediterranean and Middle Eastern governments have all shown that they want to cooperate with Russia for their own individual reasons, despite US concerns. But those that cooperate with Russia have also sought cooperation with the economically more powerful China too. And, despite their differences and disagreements with Washington and (especially in the case of certain southern European governments) with Brussels, none – not even Syria and Iran – wishes to rely solely on Russia. Russia under Putin,
then, has once again become a great power in the Mediterranean and Middle East, but is unlikely to become the predominant one there.

Bibliography


China’s Interests in the Middle East and North Africa

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The Middle East and North Africa is a “penetrated region,” where China is a relative latecomer, arriving at a time when the end of the Cold War and the consequent “unipolar moment” of the US have been followed by the complex, complicated and still ongoing transition to a post-American regional order. While the US, in spite of its declared aim to turn away from and pay less attention to the MENA region, cannot disengage from it, other external actors, among them China, but also Russia, the EU and potentially others, too, are increasingly formulating interests of their own. Thus, the Middle East and North Africa region has become a “proxy stage,” where China has to articulate its interests not only vis-à-vis the United States, but also against – or eventually in cooperation with – other external actors.

This goes hand in hand with a new regional order in the making, in which how the final balance of power is going to stabilize is still not clear. The order among the Arab states has undergone a profound change: former Arab nationalist and/or socialist leaders (Egypt, Iraq, Syria), due to different reasons, have weakened; the Arab unity front has split, due to its inability to successfully represent rare, all-Arab consensus interests on the international fora (Palestine, concern over Israel’s nuclear capability); Gulf Arab states have started to intervene in the political and security processes of other Arab states on the basis of their financial support. Different capabilities, political systems, threats such as migration, terrorism, or the Israeli and/or Iranian nuclear programme, have further accentuated the increasingly divergent developments in the Arab states. This became evident in the Arab Spring and the fight against the Islamic State, but also in the sub-regionalization of Arab attention: the Maghreb increasingly turning towards the Sahel, Egypt’s focus on the Nile valley and the Gulf (some Arab Gulf states) coming closer to Israel, while at the same time in a “Cold War” with Iran. In parallel, an increasingly assertive Turkey presents a military and ideological/religious challenge. Israel is quietly and slowly trying to integrate in the region and, with US support, has concluded the Abraham Accords with several Arab states. Iran, in spite of the harshest sanctions ever, is affirming its regional power status and has established an allied network of non-state actors.

This fragmentation of the region suits China’s tendency to not perceive the Middle East and North Africa as one unit, and fits its practice of maintaining bilateral relations with the regional states, instead of a regional approach.

Chinese Relations in the Middle East and North Africa

The Middle East and North Africa has traditionally been outside of China’s sphere of interest – rather, based on the ancient Chinese world view of concentric circles, it has been the western hinterland to its western periphery. Geographical distance, loose historical contacts, social, cultural and linguistic differences, etc, have all contributed to this perception. Consequently, the rapidly developing, wide variety of relations China has established throughout the MENA region are relatively new. They also reflect both the international context and China’s inner developments, and thus may be very different from
country to country regarding their underlying basis, scope and extent. While the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” formulated by Chinese premier Zhou Enlai are valid to this day, especially non-intervention and non-interference, the earliest relations were concluded on the platform of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), with China’s non-aligned status, communist internationalism and the rejection of imperialism as the underlying ideological common ground. The first diplomatic relations were established with Egypt in 1956, followed by Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, North Yemen, Syria and Sudan in the same year; then by Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya and Tunisia, all of which became members of the NAM in the 1960s. These principles defined China’s stance towards two of the main developments in the MENA region at the time: decolonization and the Arab-Israeli wars. In the early 1980s, upon Deng Xiaoping’s reform and opening-up policy, China started to look for new partners who could satisfy the rapidly increasing need for energy resources, and hence the states of the Persian Gulf came into China’s focus of attention. Securing stable and continuous supplies then became and has remained a top priority on China’s foreign and security policy agenda. Although Deng Xiaoping’s “low profile” policy still seems valid, at least to a certain extent in China’s MENA relations, the new policy launched by Xi Jinping brings China “closer to centre stage and makes greater contributions to mankind.”

This Chinese evolution, based on and backed up by rapid Chinese economic growth, resulted in – among others – an enhanced self-confidence, a new economic outreach to wider regions and to a Chinese presence farther away from China’s traditional neighbourhood. The “pivot to Asia” announced by President Barack Obama, the “looking to the east” policies both in Europe and the MENA region, as well as the increasing reluctance of Western states to get involved in the transition and conflicts of the MENA region was the context to China’s “march west” policy and the consequent launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013.

The Belt and Road Initiative

While originally the Belt and Road Initiative (Silk Road; One Belt, One Road; BRI) was launched to connect China to Europe, both over land and over sea, it practically avoided, or rather left the Middle East and North Africa untouched (Land routes included Iran and Turkey, while the maritime route was planned to pass the Red Sea from the Bab el-Mandeb to the Suez Canal, but with relatively little attention in the original plans to littoral states). By 2021, however, most of the states of the region have been included in some way in the project, many out of their own initiative. China’s relations to the countries in the Middle East and North Africa, consequently, are very different in content, make up a hierarchical order with several different “partnerships,” and, due to the evolving nature of the BRI, are in a state of continuous change.

The BRI especially focuses on the development of infrastructure, providing for and enhancing connectivity, including ports, roads and railways. Its implementation entails Chinese capital and loans, Chinese technology, Chinese companies and even Chinese labour, raising tensions in some places and contributing to local development in others. (It should be noted, however, that the BRI is complemented by other connectivity projects with Chinese participation, e.g. the String of Pearls, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, CPEC.)

The hierarchy of the relations builds up within three main categories (or levels): strategic partnerships, comprehensive strategic partnerships and potential partnerships. Besides these, specific partnerships can also be concluded. It is indicative that China has “comprehensive strategic partnerships” with Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and “strategic partnerships” with eight others. With Turkey, China has concluded a specific “comprehensive cooperative partnership,” and with Israel a “comprehensive innovative partnership.” (It should be noted, however, that these relationships are not alliances, as, historically, China shies away from concluding alliances.)

The China-Iran Deal

In March 2021, the news of a 25-year, 400-bn US$ China-Iran cooperation agreement made the headlines. The agreement was signed during a visit to Tehran by China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and from the Iranian side by Ali Larijani, personally appointed to the task by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali
Khamenei. While no details have officially been published, leaked information reveals agreements on energy, infrastructure, economic, trade and military cooperation (joint naval exercises have been held before), which includes the fight against terrorism and extremism in the region. It is still unlikely that China would sell Iran military equipment of strategic significance before the nuclear negotiations come to a conclusion, in spite of the fact that the arms embargo imposed on Iran in the JCPOA terminated in 2020.

The increasing reluctance of Western states to get involved in the transition and conflicts of the MENA region was the context to China’s “march west” policy and the consequent launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013.

Even with the wide-scale and intensive cooperation between the two states foreseen in the deal, it seems more like a complement to the “comprehensive strategic partnership” agreement concluded in 2016, than anything substantially new. As such, it also remains to be seen if, when implemented, it exceeds the other “comprehensive strategic partnerships” China concluded with Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It should be noted, however, that, besides the international debate, the deal has become the target of fierce criticism within Iran as well: many claimed that against US and Western hostility, Iran should turn east; others warned that the Islamic Republic should not give up its sovereignty and become subservient to China.

China’s Security and Military Engagement

China’s presence in the Middle East and North Africa has increasingly been analysed in the context of US-China competition, usually maintaining that China eventually would (or would want to) take over the US’s position, but noting that for the time being China seems happy to let the US be the security provider in the region. China’s security engagement in the region now and in the near future is limited, and seems to hold that “development comes before security in promoting stability.” This is the result of several different factors, besides the principles of non-interference and non-intervention, including economic needs and China’s military capabilities, which limit the country’s military power projection to its immediate neighbourhood. However, most analyses contemplate that the defence of Chinese interests, investment and Chinese labour (human capital) will, sooner or later, make it necessary to further expand Chinese security and military engagement. The undergoing development of Chinese military capabilities (blue-water navy, 5th generation tactical aircraft, longer range planes) suggests that such a scenario in the mid to long term cannot be ruled out, and the first Chinese military base in the region, in Djibouti, is often described as a step in this direction.

Chinese security engagement in the region so far has been manifest in non-military activities such as arms trade, evacuation of citizens, humanitarian relief, search and rescue operations, peacekeeping and conflict prevention missions – and as such, China is presenting itself as the responsible global power, supporting the multilateral character of the international order. Although China is now the second largest arms producer and the fifth largest exporter globally, its share in the arms trade to the Middle East and North Africa is relatively limited as the bulk of its arms exports (82%) is directed to Asia.

China’s participation in UN peacekeeping missions, especially from the beginning of the 2000s, has increased, providing some 2,500 troops and police officers, of which in 2020 approximately 800 troops were serving in Sudan (Darfur) and Lebanon. In addition, China’s participation in anti-piracy operations, to protect merchant vessels from pirates in the Gulf of Aden, has been an especially noteworthy element, because China’s deployment of some ten thousand navy personnel from 2008 onwards marked the first time naval forces had operated beyond China’s immediate maritime periphery for extended durations.

Chinese Soft Power: Culture and Vaccine Diplomacy

The MENA region has historically been more accustomed to Western cultural norms and values, making
China somewhat disadvantaged in its dealings with the region. In spite of the increasing awareness of China and its role, mostly in the context of the expanding Belt and Road Initiative, the appeal of Chinese soft power among the public in the MENA region has remained relatively limited. Yet, the physical presence of Chinese people, either as workers on BRI-related projects or as students, is increasingly visible, albeit potentially very different from country to country. (The biggest community lives in the UAE, which has a Chinese population of around 300,000.)

Another factor increasing Chinese visibility in the MENA region has been the growth of Chinese tourism to the region, in spite of the fact that the Middle East and North Africa was not among the top ten tourist destinations for the Chinese (before the pandemic). Chinese soft power activities have included the establishment of Confucius Institutes in the MENA region (in 2020 there were 23 of them altogether) to promote Chinese culture, and China has offered a wide range of scholarships for students to carry out their studies in China.

With its indigenous vaccines developed, China has launched a successful vaccine diplomacy campaign towards, among others, the MENA region.

The COVID-19 pandemic, by the very fact that it originated from China, had a direct negative impact on China’s image in the MENA region, to the extent that there was perceivable resentment against Chinese communities living in the region. Indirectly, the pandemic and the consequent lockdowns and travel restrictions affected Chinese tourism to the Middle East and North Africa, and also had an impact, albeit as yet unclear, on student movements and probably on the operation of the Confucius Institutes as well. Yet, with its indigenous vaccines developed, China has launched a successful vaccine diplomacy campaign towards, among others, the Middle East and North Africa (in which Russia, and potentially others as well, has become a competitor). The Health Silk Road originally proposed by China in 2017 has thus materialized as a complement to the BRI, with vaccine diplomacy as its most accentuated element.

Yet, China’s reputation and perception in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the wider Islamic world, has been tested in recent years, over the situation of the Muslim Uighur minority in China. While commonly conceptualized by China as an “Islamic threat” and a “case of terrorism,” bearing in mind all BRI tracks cut through mostly Muslim countries (or countries with sizeable Muslim communities), the Uighur question carries a huge potential for disruption. Yet, MENA states (except for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan) have, as a rule, kept a low profile when Chinese treatment of its Uighur citizens has been widely presented in the international media, and even blocked a Western motion at the UN calling for China to let independent international observers visit the Xinjiang region.

**China in the UN Security Council Rotating Presidency**

In May 2021, China took over the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council. This role gave China the chance to portray itself as a responsible superpower and helped promote China’s vision of multilateralism. China, with no colonizing past, but instead a victim of colonization itself (“century of humiliation”), to this day positions itself as a developing state and has advocated the reform of the UN Security Council to change the uneven representation of Western states there. Chinese competence, however, was put to the test when, in May 2021, the Hamas/Palestinian-Israel conflict hit the UN Security Council agenda and demanded urgent action.

**The Hamas/Palestinian-Israel Conflict**

China’s support of the Palestinians reaches back to the Cold War and its support of national liberation movements. China abstained from voting on the UN Partition Plan on Palestine and supported the Palestinian right of return. In 1988, together with the socialist countries, it also recognized the declaration of the State of Palestine. China-Israel diplomatic relations, however, were only established in 1992, in spite of the fact that in the MENA region, Israel was the first country to recognize the People’s Republic.
of China in 1950. As a consequence, in recent decades, China has been among the very few countries to maintain good relations with both the Palestinians and Israel. This policy of “not taking sides” was challenged by the Hamas-Israel confrontation.

In spite of the fact that the eleven-day-long rocket exchange and aerial operations between Hamas (from the Gaza Strip) and Israel looked as if it was “business as usual” (in spite of the fact that the last such confrontation took place in 2014), many things have changed in the background: 1. A political crisis is prevailing both in Israel and among the Palestinians; 2. Israel’s Arab citizens stood up together with the Arab residents in Jerusalem and the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; 3. There has been a shift in the global perception of the Palestinian cause, especially in the US, where domestic developments over Floyd George last year have changed the US public’s perception of civilian resistance, and where a group of Democratic Congressmen and women started to push President Joe Biden over his human rights programme; 4. All this put the Palestinian issue back on the international agenda, from where it had practically disappeared, and forced China, in its position as the President of the UN Security Council, to act.

The crisis between Israel and Hamas provided China with the opportunity to not only present itself as a non-biased mediator, but, at the same time, portray the United States as a biased actor, bringing a different context and interpretation to the issue. The importance of both dimensions (China as a responsible global power in its role as the President of the UN Security Council and China-US competition) was reflected by the fact that – following two rounds of consultations – the open debate on The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question was chaired by Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who put forward China’s four-point proposal on the settlement. While the content was not new (the proposal was in fact a repetition of similar former calls) and generally reflected the international consensus, it seemed to again confirm China’s general non-aligned position. It called for a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders (“a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state… with East Jerusalem as the capital, to achieve the harmonious existence of the Arab and Jewish nations and lasting peace in the Middle East”), the condemnation of human rights violations and mediated negotiations, to which China offered its services. Wang also called for the immediate cessation of military actions, the lifting of the Gaza Strip’s blockade and delivery of humanitarian aid. Yet, when Wang named Israel (“Israel must exercise restraint in particular”), but did not mention the rockets fired from the Gaza Strip to Israel, China’s position as an unbiased neutral mediator was brought into question both by Israel and the United States.

When the United States blocked the joint resolution, China took its chance to criticize the “only country” responsible for the failure, and accused the United States for its one-sided support to Israel and for disregarding the humanitarian concerns in Gaza. With that, China also tried to divert political and media attention away from criticism over its treatment of its Uighur minority in Xinjiang.

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The direct and indirect consequences of China’s role are yet to be seen. Nevertheless, China’s position, based on the international consensus of recent decades, seems to be a suitable foreign policy tool to maintain the balance between China’s relations with both Israel and the Arab states. This, in turn, will serve China’s position well both in the context of US-China relations and, more specifically, in the Middle East and North Africa.

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Since late 2019, relations between the European Union and Turkey have gone through a rough patch and have only marginally improved in early 2021. The list of divergences is very long and diversified, with obvious linkages to domestic politics on both sides. The uncertainties surrounding the future of Turkey’s economy, rule-of-law architecture and domestic political climate make the search for a “positive agenda” with Europe a drawn out endeavor. This article aims to provide a realistic assessment of the path ahead for the two sides. Confronted with Turkey’s assertive, fluctuating and often self-contradicting foreign policy narratives, the European Union will have to surmount its own internal divergences and to coordinate more closely with the United States in its search for a path forward with Ankara.

A Turbulent 18 Months

From the maritime boundaries agreement signed with Libya’s then Government of National Accord on 28 November 2019 to the presidential statement labelling Europe “an open-air prison” for Muslims on 12 May 2021, the list of Ankara’s assertive foreign policy actions and statements is substantial. To put it mildly, this foreign policy has not been perceived as constructive by European leaders. Taken together, and not necessarily as part of a comprehensive strategy, these actions and statements resulted in creating a tangible gap between Ankara and the rest of the Western community. The most serious challenges to the EU-Turkey relationship involved the following activities:

- Challenging the EU’s sovereignty in February 2020 through a paramilitary operation on the land border with Greece, where 1,000 riot police escorted some 6-7,000 non-Syrian migrants bussed in from Istanbul toward the border fence;
- Unilaterally disrupting the established maritime boundaries through research and drilling activities in the eastern Mediterranean and delineating new boundaries between Turkey and Libya, while promoting a “Blue Homeland” doctrine borrowed from retired military officers. These actions directly targeted the interests of Greece and the Republic of Cyprus and involved substantial naval forces, leading to one major incident at sea between a Greek and a Turkish frigate in August 2020;
- Launching a military operation in western Libya (then controlled by the Government of National Accord) under a military cooperation agreement signed alongside the maritime boundaries agreement, providing assistance and training through the deployment of Turkish forces, and delivering equipment. The latter activity was in contradiction with Turkey’s commitments at the January 2020 Berlin Conference on Libya, while promoting a “Blue Homeland” doctrine borrowed from retired military officers. These actions directly targeted the interests of Greece and the Republic of Cyprus and involved substantial naval forces, leading to one major incident at sea between a Greek and a Turkish frigate in August 2020;
man, Greek and Italian frigates enforcing the embargo under NATO and EU naval operations;
— Declaring the UN-led process toward a comprehensive settlement on the island of Cyprus obsolete and promoting a “two-state solution”\(^2\) in contradiction with the relevant UN Security Council Resolution;
— Opting for a strategic cooperation with Russia on missile defence with the purchase and deployment of S400 missile systems, as well as facilitating Russia’s military operations in Syria and Libya by granting it overflight rights over Anatolia;
— Verbally attacking the leaders of Germany ("Nazis") and France (the "mental health" incident) in a rarely seen display of personal hostility at the highest level. This strategy also involved routine interference in the domestic politics of the two countries, most recently with the 12 May 2021 presidential statement.\(^3\)

Overall, the European Union, despite visible internal divisions, reacted with firmness and showed solidarity with both Cyprus and Greece, while considering an array of possible sanctions against Turkey. It also supported a military deconfliction process between Greece and Turkey within NATO, as well as the notion of a conditional and reversible opening toward Turkey. On the whole, Turkey’s display of military and paramilitary force didn’t achieve the proclaimed objectives, and challenges to legal boundaries are still unresolved.

The 3 November 2020 election of Joe Biden as the President of the United States was a game changer for Turkey’s leadership, as it upended the personal relationship between his predecessor and Turkey’s President. It also restored a cohesive relationship between Washington on the one hand and NATO and the EU on the other, thereby limiting the opportunities for Ankara to play transatlantic partners off against one another.

However, the sudden flurry of pro-US and pro-EU statements emanating from Ankara in November 2020 struck few American and European minds given the abrupt reversal in tone and substance. The prevailing analysis in Western capitals is that Ankara’s assertive foreign policy initiatives of 2020 and the aggressive tone of statements at the highest level are closely linked to a difficult domestic political situation. They illustrate, primarily, the vulnerable and uncertain future of Turkey’s economy,\(^4\) a tense domestic political climate and a fractured rule-of-law architecture. As a result, the credibility of such pro-US and pro-EU statements is minimal.

On the whole, the “phased, proportional and reversible” European Council opening\(^5\) made on 25 March 2021 by the EU toward Turkey has not yet resulted in major progress in any of the relationship’s specific segments. The “sofagate” protocol incident of 7 April 2021 had no impact on the substantive discussions, and merely masked the deep divergences between the EU and Turkey on a way forward. While discussions are already underway regarding an extension of the March 2016 agreement on assistance to Syrian refugees in Turkey, all the other topics of a potential “positive agenda” stumble on the dramatic decline of rule of law in Turkey. Significantly, even the most positively-minded EU member governments face strong opposition from their parliaments. This is particularly true within the German Bundestag and, at EU level, the European Parliament.

**Back to Basics**

While it is hazardous to predict the future of the EU-Turkey relationship at the time of writing, it is useful to go back to basics, i.e. to list the eight domains constituting the skeleton of any future relationship (further assistance to Syrian refugees is not discussed here, since contacts are currently underway between the EU and Turkey).

**Fixing the Turkey-NATO Relationship**

Although European leaders have, so far, happily left the S400 missile conundrum to successive US


presidents, they cannot avoid the discussion any longer, for two reasons. First, the bond between Washington and European leaders (EU and non-EU) has been rekindled and has given rise to multiple, close consultations on an array of subjects. Turkey's situation in NATO being one of them. Second, the perceived personal affinity between former President Trump on the one hand and his Russian and Turkish counterparts on the other has vanished.

The prevailing analysis in Western capitals is that Ankara's assertive foreign policy initiatives of 2020 and the aggressive tone of statements at the highest level are closely linked to a difficult domestic political situation. But the ensuing situation is far bigger than a personal relationship. By striking a deal on missile procurement from Russia, Turkey has brought about a major game changer in the security domain. It has upset key parameters of NATO's defence architecture for Europe by reorganizing its air force into two distinct subsets, one integrated into NATO and the other dependent upon Russian maintenance and (ultimately) access. In addition, by providing the Russian air force with overflight rights, Ankara is facilitating Moscow's operations in both Syria and Libya, a unilateral move unexpected from a NATO member. This parallel military connection with Moscow has created an issue of trust within NATO, and is bound to influence future relations between Turkey and the rest of the Alliance.

In response to Russia's perceived "threat from NATO," members of the transatlantic alliance will inevitably need to factor in this new situation. The affirmation by the Turkish Minister of Defence that S400 missiles "are not a threat to anybody" (sic) is hardly likely to reassure fellow NATO members, since the essence of deploying a missile defence system is precisely to display a credible threat.

**Striking a Deal on Maritime Boundaries with Greece?**

The ongoing negotiations are bilateral in essence, with Greece able to count on EU solidarity. Discussions may focus on one major point (the Kastellorizo maritime boundaries) or on a much wider set of issues (as proposed by Turkey). But not even the background to the discussion has been settled, i.e. Greece insisting on basing it on the Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a legal instrument not recognized by Turkey. Whatever the scope of the discussions, what was made clear in 2020 by the EU is that military threats, however useful on Turkey's domestic political scene, cannot lead to a resolution of divergences.

**The False Battle of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum**

An Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum was established in January 2020 between Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine, and formalized in September 2020. The European Union and the United States are permanent observers. The move was perceived as hostile to Turkey, and Ankara forcefully objected. Apart from the diplomatic choreography, the stated objective of the EastMed Forum is the creation of a gas pipeline between Israel's offshore gas fields, Cyprus and the EU. This is, however, a distant and increasingly problematic project. Overall, gas demand in western Europe is on the decline due to a) a lower energy demand linked to the pandemic-induced recession; b) plans for the greening of the EU economy; and c) the competition from liquefied natural gas (LNG), which is in abundant supply and able to respond flexibly to a hard-to-forecast demand. None of these factors favour a new gas pipeline with a cost in the region of $10 billion and a timeline of around 10 years. Ultimately, the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, as diplomatically unpleasant for Turkey as it may be, is

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unlikely to constitute a major impediment to the country’s energy policy. It might, however, turn into a more complicated subject area due to the events in Gaza, Turkey’s reaction to them and Israel’s relationship with Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.

A Two-state Solution on Cyprus?

Following the election of Ersin Tatar as “President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus,” an entity only recognized by Turkey, Ankara has insistently promoted a new formula as the only viable solution for the island, i.e. a “two-state solution.” This formula contradicts all efforts within the United Nations and is opposed by the EU, the UK and the US.

Yet, Turkey’s position constitutes a carefully chosen topic for litigation with the European Union as a political trump card for Ankara’s leadership, which can easily be transformed into a major crisis at any time, based on its massive military deployment in northern Cyprus and the strong relationship with a pro-Ankara Turkish Cypriot leadership. Here again, the linkages with domestic politics are obvious and the current alliance between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) results in a harsher position on the future of northern Cyprus.

Facilitating a UN-led Process in Libya

Turkey’s motives for restoring a strong relationship with Libya are many: recouping business contracts lost in the 2011 revolution; a redesigned set of maritime boundaries (as part of its eastern Mediterranean strategy) in exchange for a military cooperation agreement (training, advising, sale of equipment); and a sense of expansionism anchored in early 20th-century events.

Simultaneously, Ankara wants to be at the forefront of the diplomatic process aimed at restoring peace and stability in Libya, a process spearheaded by Germany (Berlin Conference in January 2020), the United States and the United Nations.

However, the multilateral process includes an arms sale embargo on all parties to the Libyan conflict, which (from open sources) Turkey has violated on multiple occasions, while arguing that its arms deliveries are part of an official deal with a UN-recognized government (the November 2019 security agreement with the then Government of National Accord). The current inclusive government has openly requested the end of arms sales, while UN Security Council Resolution 2570 (2021)7 strongly urges the withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries.

Going forward, Libya’s internal dynamics will be the key for future relations with Turkey. Strong international support for a post-election government (December 2021) will depend upon a strict application of Libyan commitments toward stability and security sector reform. External actors will have to comply with international commitments in order to consolidate the country’s stability.

Russia’s position in the multilateral process, as well as Egypt’s and the United Arab Emirates’ positions, will have an influence on Ankara’s ultimate position.

Revamping Trade Relations, Yes but…

The much-touted modernization of the EU-Turkey Customs Union of 1995 clearly constitutes a potential source of mutual benefits, given the intensity of current trade, technology and investment relations. Mechanisms to resolve litigations and the inclusion of trade in services are some of the possible improvements.

Content-wise, the technical negotiation is not difficult to imagine. Much more problematic is the notion of a “level playing field,” which is the basis of a com-

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plete trade integration mechanism such as a customs union. This, in turn, raises a number of rule-of-law issues, especially concerning the equity of treatment of foreign companies in a country where the judiciary is notoriously politicized. More generally, a customs union assumes a degree of consistency of economic policies among the partners, which is far from being the case today.

Ultimately, the possibility of starting the difficult negotiation toward a modernized customs union will be hampered by the dramatic decline of Turkey’s rule-of-law architecture in recent years. It is hard to detect a positive will in the national parliaments of EU countries and in the European Parliament.

**Toning down Personalized Attacks**

The obvious perception among European Council members is that a more moderate language from Ankara’s leadership (President, Foreign Minister, Defence Minister, key presidential advisers) would go a long way in facilitating a resumption of a normal relationship between the EU and Turkey. But adversarial narratives seem to be a deliberate choice and a seemingly useful communication device on the domestic political scene.

In this context, Ankara needs to properly weigh up the negative consequences of such attacks on a) the country’s economy and b) its diplomatic standing. More importantly, the temptation to interfere in the domestic politics of EU countries hosting a substantial Turkish community is certainly not conducive to improved relations.

**The Human Rights Situation**

Ultimately, human rights are the main drivers of Turkey’s relationship with the European Union. This basic political reality is clearly not part of the calculus of the Turkish leadership. To put it bluntly, Ankara’s prevailing assumption is that economic relations and the internal political situation are two different things, i.e. business is business and political dissent is “terrorism.” Respecting human rights and the rule of law are not key drivers of today’s leadership in Turkey.

In the EU, however, the political reality is radically different, meaning that reinstating rule of law in Turkey and developing a strong EU-Turkey relationship go hand in hand, as illustrated by the strong majority vote in the European Parliament on 19 May in favour of the 2021 Report on Turkey. In the current political context, visible improvements in Turkey’s human rights situation may be largely incompatible with its leadership’s political choices, but they will ultimately remain decisive for the country’s business and international relations. At one stage or the other, a choice will have to be made.

Overall, the eight abovementioned topics constitute a very long list of grievances and divergences between Turkey and the EU, some of them including the United States. They can hardly be construed as forming a consistent strategy, although there are linkages between some of them (e.g. maritime boundaries with Libya and EastMed). Several of these topics follow their own logic and are likely to be dealt with separately. It is therefore useful to ascertain which ones stand a chance of making progress in a reasonable time frame.

**What Is on the Cards and What Isn’t**

Making recommendations in a volatile political, economic and social context does not make great sense, since so much depends on Turkey’s economic and social outlook. Instead, a close observation of current discussions within the European Union’s capitals and institutions provides a sense of what can be expected in the short and medium term and what cannot:

— An extension of the agreement on assistance to Syrian refugees in Turkey is probable, as it is in the interest of the EU and because Turkey’s financial burden is severe.
— Adjustments within NATO are inevitable, if only to limit the risks posed by Turkey’s acquisition of Russian missile defence systems and to preserve the possibility of a return, at some later stage, to a normal relationship with Ankara.

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— Launching negotiations toward a modernized Custom Union is a distinct possibility, but it will need serious progress in terms of restoring rule of law, not just on emblematic cases, but also on the fundamental requirements for the judiciary, the media, civil society and women’s rights.

— Maritime boundaries will continue to be discussed bilaterally between Greece and Turkey, with the support of the EU, and will prioritize the resolution of current imbalances in access to eastern Mediterranean waters east of Rhodes and Crete.

— Given the past and present excesses in Turkey’s narratives, it is likely that, on the whole, European Council leaders will want to practice a degree of social distancing with Turkey’s leadership, and to prevent Turkish interference in their own internal debates.

On the negative side, it seems likely that a number of pre-existing and recent initiatives are bound to remain idle for the time being:

— Accession negotiations will be left to one side because of the total incompatibility between EU standards and Turkey’s new constitutional architecture and political practice.

— Visa liberalization will continue to stumble on the incompatibility of Turkey’s anti-terror law with EU standards, and only limited advances can possibly be expected for specific segments of the population, such as students, cultural actors and business people.

— An Eastern Mediterranean Conference is unlikely to get off the ground in the shape proposed by Turkey, i.e. with the full participation of all partners Turkey considers relevant, meaning the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (or TRNC). Inclusive participation in such a conference would in any case raise a number of diplomatic issues (will the Republic of Cyprus agree to sit at the table with the “TRNC” as a full participant? Are the governments of the Republic of Cyprus and Syria acceptable participants for Turkey? Will Egypt agree to sit at the table with Turkey in the absence of a normalization of relations?).

It may be true that Turkey is now set on a different course and doesn’t want to be exclusively tied to the Western world any longer

The future relationship between the European Union and Turkey is hard to forecast given the high number of divergences, many of which illustrate the radically different choices made by Ankara in terms of governance. It may be true, as some analysts have argued, that Turkey is now set on a different course and doesn’t want to be exclusively tied to the Western world any longer. The next question is whether the Turkish economy can prosper within the context of a permanently disruptive policy vis-à-vis Europe. Time will tell.
After a year of heightened geopolitical tension in the eastern Mediterranean during 2020, the first six months of 2021 have witnessed a diplomatic momentum toward a regionwide détente. New political and economic conditions gave rise to a series of concurrent Turkish diplomatic overtures to Egypt, Israel, and Greece, respectively. There is now a window of opportunity to reset the eastern Mediterranean’s contentious energy relations in a manner that could offer the region a new strategic equilibrium. While the marketing of eastern Mediterranean natural gas as liquified natural gas (LNG) contributed greatly to the escalation of tensions in the region from 2015 to 2020, the current multilateral, LNG-marketing framework provides a potential platform to develop meaningful energy cooperation between Turkey and its eastern Mediterranean neighbours. The incorporation of Turkey into the marketing of eastern Mediterranean energy would ameliorate a significant grievance and create greater stakeholder interest in an equitable resolution of longstanding territorial sovereignty disputes between Greece, Cyprus and Turkey.

The 2021 Inflection Point in Eastern Mediterranean Energy Geopolitics

From 2015 to 2020, the eastern Mediterranean’s offshore natural gas resources transformed the territorial sovereignty disputes between Greece, Cyprus and Turkey from being primarily a local concern to becoming the pivot around which wider conflicts involving Europe and the Middle East and North Africa region began to revolve. The transformation was kick-started by Eni’s August 2015 discovery of the Zohr natural gas field off the coast of Egypt, the eastern Mediterranean’s largest natural gas find. Heavily involved in eastern Mediterranean energy exploration and production, the Italian energy major is also the lead operator in Cyprus’s natural gas development and the lead stakeholder in one of Egypt’s two liquefaction plants. Following Eni’s Zohr find, the company began promoting a plan to pool Cypriot, Egyptian and Israeli gas and use Egypt’s liquefaction facilities to cost-effectively market the region’s gas to Europe as LNG (Stefanini, 2016). Commercially sensible from Eni’s point of view, the plan was a geopolitical timebomb on account of its exclusion of Turkey from the marketing of eastern Mediterranean gas, undermining Ankara’s own ambition to use its pipeline infrastructure to become an energy hub for Middle Eastern and Caspian Basin natural gas to reach Europe. Ankara further objected to the ongoing exclusion of Turkish Cypriots in the northern half of the ethnically divided island from the development of Cyprus’s offshore natural gas, despite being the legal co-owners of Cyprus’s natural resources. Finding no diplomatic recourse, as early 2018 gas discoveries in Cyprus accelerated the implementation of the Egypt-based LNG marketing scheme, Turkey opted for gunboat diplomacy to express its displeasure. Ankara began its coercive foreign policy posture with a February 2018 naval action to block an Eni drill ship from reaching its intended

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drill site in Cypriot waters, forcing the company to withdraw the vessel.

Turkey’s gunboat diplomacy in the eastern Mediterranean also reflected a larger policy shift in Ankara that started two years earlier in 2016. While Turkey originally sought to expand its regional influence with a soft power policy dubbed “Zero problems with neighbours” that emphasized “political dialogue, economic interdependence and cultural harmony” (Republic of Turkey, 2011), Ankara abandoned that policy in favour of “coercive diplomacy,” prioritizing the use of hard power instruments and the development of forward bases to expand Turkey’s influence abroad. Curtailing Egypt’s regional influence, as well as that of its close partner the United Arab Emirates (UAE), formed one of the main objectives of Turkey’s use of hard power.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s strong backing of the Muslim Brotherhood set Ankara and Cairo on a collision course following the Egyptian army’s 2013 ouster of the short-lived Muslim Brotherhood-led government, and former General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s 2014 election as Egypt’s president. Cairo expelled Turkey’s ambassador while Ankara declared Egypt’s ambassador persona non grata. Turkey provided refuge for high level Muslim Brotherhood members to continue their activities. The acrimonious rupture in relations between Ankara and Cairo led to a widening geopolitical split. The two countries provided military backing to opposing sides in Libya’s civil war. Concerned about the threat of Turkey’s rising influence in the region, Egypt initiated a process of developing strategically significant, tri-lateral economic and security cooperation with Greece and Cyprus. The LNG marketing scheme formed one part of Cairo’s larger regional approach. In this context, Ankara viewed the LNG marketing scheme as part and parcel of a growing multinational effort at containment, and Turkey engaged in a series of acts of gunboat diplomacy from 2018-2020 in the eastern Mediterranean to attempt to counteract that development (Tanchum, 2020a). Contrary to Ankara’s desired outcome, the actions served to push Cyprus, Egypt, Israel and Greece into closer coordination. Turkey became even more severely constrained in its ability to defend its interests by a common front composed of the region’s current natural gas producers and Greece. The alignment created a set of interlinked security partnerships that has been increasingly supported by Italy, France and the United States, each of whom has significant economic investments in eastern Mediterranean gas.

To mitigate its risks after the 2018 run-in with the Turkish navy, Eni partnered with France’s energy giant TOTAL in all of its operations in Cyprus. Turkey subsequently sent four of its own exploration and drill ships, along with their naval escorts, to disputed waters around Cyprus throughout 2018 and 2019. France consequently deepened its naval cooperation with Cyprus and Greece. France also enjoys significant security partnerships with Turkey’s Middle Eastern rivals, Egypt and the UAE, being Egypt’s third largest weapons supplier and maintaining a naval base in the UAE. As part of France’s larger competition with Turkey for influence in Africa, France cooperated with both in support of the forces of General Khalifa Haftar in eastern Libya against the western Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) supported by Ankara.

**Curtailing Egypt’s regional influence formed one of the main objectives of Turkey’s use of hard power**

Confronting an alignment of European and Middle Eastern actors, Turkey viewed its future political and economic influence across the entire Mediterranean region as being at stake. Multilateral energy cooperation among Turkey’s regional antagonists was formalized with the 2020 inauguration of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), an international organization for developing the region’s natural gas, founded by Italy, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan. France was subsequently admitted as a member in the Cairo-headquartered EMGF in March 2021 with the US granted permanent observer member status. Turkey remains excluded from the so-called OPEC of eastern Mediterranean gas.

Seeking to break its isolation, Turkey concluded a maritime boundary agreement in late 2019 with the GNA government in Tripoli and intervened militarily on its behalf, successfully reversing the course of the Libyan civil war by June 2020. Turkey’s Libya intervention was also part of Ankara’s larger programme
to develop forward bases in Africa, the goals of which included offsetting Egypt’s regional power. In September 2017, Turkey opened a base in Mogadishu, Somalia, close to the Gulf of Aden, the eastern entry into the Red Sea corridor. Two months after Turkey opened its Mogadishu base, Ankara attempted to challenge Egypt’s Red Sea dominance in the heart of the corridor by acquiring Sudan’s Suakin Port for the construction of a dual-use civilian and naval facility (Tanchum, 2020b). Turkey’s efforts to secure the port for its navy were thwarted by the April 2019 ousting of President Omar al-Bashir, an ally of Turkey. The end of the Sudanese strongman’s 30-year rule gave rise to a new government financially backed by Egypt’s Emirati and Saudi partners to the amount of $3 billion.

Turkey recouped its strategic losses in Sudan with its Libyan intervention, which resulted in Turkey having a naval presence in the GNA coastal stronghold of Misrata and a Turkish air force presence at the re-captured al-Watiyeh air base, located 27 km from the Tunisian border. After two years of unsuccessful gunboat diplomacy around Cyprus’s waters and buoyed by its success in Libya, Turkey pushed the envelope in early August 2020 by extending its maritime tactics against fellow NATO member Greece. Ankara sent an exploration vessel, escorted by a group of five naval warships, to the contested waters near the Greek island of Kastellorizo, which is at the heart of the Greece-Turkey maritime boundary dispute. Turkey’s action led to a full-blown stand-off between the Hellenic and Turkish navies in late August 2020. At the height of the tensions, the Egyptian Navy and the UAE Air Force conducted concurrent joint exercises with the Hellenic Navy and Air Force, respectively, in the eastern Mediterranean as a show of support for Greece.

The striking demonstration of Middle Eastern solidarity with Greece caught Ankara off guard and was soon followed by the 15 September 2020 signing of the “Abraham Accords,” normalizing relations between the UAE and Israel, profoundly reshaping the eastern Mediterranean—Middle Eastern strategic architecture. For eastern Mediterranean energy geopolitics, the capstone to these 2020 turning point events was the 21 February 2021 visit to Israel by Egypt’s Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, Tarek El Molla. In the first public visit to Israel by a senior Egyptian government official in five years, El Molla’s discussions with his Israeli counterpart Yuval Steinitz sent a strong signal that, bolstered by Israel’s 2020 normalization of relations with the UAE and three other Arab countries, Egypt’s energy relationship with Israel would form a solid foundation for multilateral energy cooperation in the eastern Mediterranean through the EMGF framework.

As Ankara pursues its strategic goal of transforming Turkey into an interregional power that can set the terms for a new pattern of connectivity between Europe, Africa and Asia (Tanchum, 2020b), Turkey has realized the ineluctable need to recalibrate its policy toward its eastern Mediterranean neighbours to ease its isolation. Throughout spring 2021, Turkey has made a series of diplomatic overtures to Egypt that resulted in the early May visit to Cairo by Turkey’s Deputy Foreign Minister and other Turkish officials (Daily Sabah, 2021a). Although the Cairo normalization talks were still at an exploratory stage, the breakthrough meeting was the first visit by a senior Turkish delegation since 2013.

Parallel efforts between Turkey and Israel resulted in Turkey’s 23 April 2021 issuing of an invitation to Energy Minister Steinitz to participate in Ankara’s June 2021 Antalya Diplomacy Forum (HDN, 2021a). Steinitz’s 2017 visit to Turkey was the last visit by a senior Israeli official. The Turkish invitation to the Israeli Energy Minister just one month after El Molla’s visit to Israel reflects Turkey’s desire to find a new pathway towards eastern Mediterranean energy cooperation. Although Ankara rescinded its invitation to Steinitz in response to Israel’s strikes on Gaza during the 10-21 May war between Israel and Hamas, Turkey’s underlying motivations for rapprochement with Israel remain. The 2021 Gaza War further highlighted Turkey’s need for rapprochement with Israel as Ankara remained on the sidelines of regional events, while Egypt played a central role in brokering an Israel-Hamas ceasefire in close cooperation with the United States. A change
of government in Israel (at the time of writing, Israel’s opposition parties have signed a coalition agreement enabling them to form a new government) could be utilized by Ankara as an opportunity to put Turkey-Israel relations on a new footing.

During spring 2021, Ankara has been concurrently engaged in substantive dialogue with Athens through both senior diplomatic and military channels. Despite the challenges, the ongoing dialogue resulted in Turkey’s Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu visiting Athens on 31 May 2021 for a summit with his Greek counterpart Nikos Dendias in which the two announced a 25-item cooperation agreement between Turkey and Greece. Designed to improve relations, Turkey agreed to new forms of cooperation in the fields of trade, environment, tourism and energy (HDN, 2021). Although the details remain to be released, the change in tone in Ankara’s approach with the major eastern Mediterranean regional powers, as well as the concrete efforts to enhance cooperation in commerce and energy, have created a conducive environment for the comprehensive incorporation of Turkey in the development and marketing of eastern Mediterranean natural gas as LNG.

The Mediterranean Market as the Mechanism for Eastern Mediterranean Energy Cooperation

The Egypt-based LNG scheme still remains the most feasible option to market eastern Mediterranean gas in the 2020s and beyond. However, the plan’s originally intended market is not viable. Most proposals for marketing eastern Mediterranean gas are anchored in the unfounded assumption that the EU27 constitutes the market area for eastern Mediterranean natural gas. This assumption originated in the geopolitical objective of relieving Europe’s inordinate reliance on Russian natural gas exports, and has engendered a misplaced focus on the EU27 energy market. The proposed 1,250-km, undersea East Med Pipeline to transport gas from Israel, Cyprus and Egypt via Greece to the European Union, which is commercially unviable because of its European end-market destination, bears witness to the persistence of this obsolete paradigm. The eastern Mediterranean’s anticipated surplus supply is not sufficiently large to warrant investment in such large-scale pipeline infrastructure to transport gas to major EU27 markets.

The market for eastern Mediterranean natural gas is not Europe, but rather the nations around the entire Mediterranean Basin, including Turkey. Between 2020 and 2040, the Mediterranean Basin will experience demand growth for natural gas, driven by the non-EU nations along its southern and eastern rims. The collective growth in gas demand in these areas will be a robust 3.2%, outpacing the 0.3% annual growth rate in the EU-nations of the northern Mediterranean rim (OME, 2018). The timeline for reaching the 2040 demand estimate is unlikely to be significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although estimates for the pace of post-COVID-19 demand recovery vary, the International Energy Agency estimated that global energy demand will recover to its 2019 level sometime between 2023 and 2025 (IEA, 2020). The rapid rise of commodity prices during spring 2021 suggests that a very early time frame for demand recovery is likely.

The market for eastern Mediterranean natural gas is not Europe, but rather the nations around the entire Mediterranean Basin, including Turkey.
and would have a competitive advantage in transportation costs over non-Mediterranean suppliers.

Conclusion

In addition to 2020’s transformative geopolitical developments, Turkey announced the discovery of its own natural gas reserves off its Black Sea coast. Turkey’s Sarakaya gas field contains an estimated 405 bcm, a volume roughly equivalent to eight years of Turkey’s domestic demand (Daily Sabah, 2021b). The initial output, expected in 2023, is only 5-10 bcm annually, representing 10-20% of Turkey’s gas demand. Turkey becoming a natural gas producer in its own right helps reframe the circumstances for Turkey’s admission as a member of the EMGF. Turkey has underutilized gas storage facilities that could be efficiently incorporated into the Mediterranean-wide marketing and delivery of eastern Mediterranean gas through Turkey’s EMGF participation. Turkey’s meaningful involvement in LNG marketing to the Mediterranean Basin would help the market function more efficiently while replacing geopolitical antagonisms with stakeholder cooperation.

Turkey’s recent overtures to Egypt, Israel and Greece provide a window of opportunity to find a pathway for Turkey to participate in the marketing of eastern Mediterranean gas under the rubric of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum. The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is well-positioned to play a constructive role to help facilitate this outcome, as the UfM is a forum to which all the concerned European and Middle Eastern parties already belong. Defining a pathway for Turkey to participate in the marketing of eastern Mediterranean natural gas would remove a significant grievance that has torpedoed progress toward a negotiated settlement of the Greece-Turkey maritime boundary dispute and the Cyprus problem. The replacement of grievances with stakeholder interests in energy cooperation could provide added inducement for all sides to find negotiated solutions to both these enduring disputes.

References


In September 2020, the EU Commission tried again on the issue of immigration and asylum, publishing a new package of proposals on asylum and (non-EU) migration. This consisted of proposals for legislation, some "soft law," attempts to relaunch talks on stalled proposals and plans for future measures. The following summarizes the new proposals, then examines some of the possible impacts on the Mediterranean region.

Background

A first phase of legislation to create a “Common European Asylum System” was passed between 2003 and 2005, followed by a second phase between 2010 and 2013. Currently, the legislation consists of: a) the Qualification Directive, which defines when people are entitled to refugee status (based on the UN Refugee Convention) or subsidiary protection status, and what rights they have; b) the Dublin III Regulation, which allocates responsibility for an asylum seeker between Member States; c) the Eurodac Regulation, which facilitates the Dublin system by setting up a database of fingerprints of asylum seekers and people who cross the external border without authorization; d) the Asylum Procedures Directive, which sets out the procedural rules governing asylum applications, such as personal interviews and appeals; e) the Reception Conditions Directive, which sets out standards on the living conditions of asylum seekers, such as rules on housing and welfare; and f) the Asylum Agency Regulation, which set up an EU agency (EASO) to support Member States’ processing of asylum applications.

The EU also has legislation on other aspects of migration: (short-term) visas, border controls, irregular migration, and legal migration – much of which has connections with the asylum legislation, and all of which was covered in some form by the September 2020 package. For visas, the main legislation is the visa list Regulation (setting out which non-EU countries’ citizens are subject to a short-term visa requirement, or exempt from it), alongside the visa code (defining the criteria to obtain a short-term Schengen visa, allowing travel between all Schengen states).

For border controls, the main legislation is the Schengen Borders Code, setting out the rules on crossing external borders and the circumstances in which Schengen states can reinstate controls on internal
borders, along with the Frontex Regulation, setting up an EU border agency to assist Member States.

The EU’s response to the perceived refugee “crisis” was both short-term and long-term. In the short term, in 2015 the EU adopted temporary laws, in theory relocating some asylum seekers from Italy and Greece to other Member States.

For irregular migration, the main legislation is the Return Directive, which the Commission proposed to amend in 2018. As for legal migration, the main legislation on admission of non-EU workers is the single permit Directive (setting out a common process and rights for workers, but not regulating admission); the Blue Card Directive (on highly skilled migrants); the seasonal workers’ Directive; and the Directive on intra-corporate transferees.

The EU also has legislation on: non-EU students, researchers and trainees; non-EU family reunion, and on long-term resident non-EU citizens. In 2016, the Commission had proposed revising the Blue Card Directive, but that proposal had still not been agreed at the time the 2020 Migration Pact was tabled.

Ireland and Denmark opted out of most of these laws, some of asylum laws applying to Ireland, and Denmark being covered by the Schengen and Dublin rules. There are also several non-EU countries associated with Schengen and Dublin (Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein).

### The Refugee “Crisis”

The EU’s response to the perceived refugee “crisis” was both short-term and long-term. In the short term, in 2015 the EU adopted temporary laws, in theory relocating some asylum seekers from Italy and Greece to other Member States. A legal challenge to one of these laws failed, but, in practice, Member States accepted few relocations anyway. Although the CJEU subsequently ruled that several Member States had breached their legal obligations, by then it was a moot point.

Longer term, the Commission proposed overhauls of the law in 2016: a) a Qualification Regulation further harmonizing the law on refugee and subsidiary protection status; b) a revised Dublin Regulation, which would have set up a system of relocation of asylum seekers for future crises; c) a revised Eurodac Regulation, to take much more data from asylum seekers and other migrants; d) an Asylum Procedures Regulation, further harmonizing the procedural law on asylum applications; e) a revised Reception Conditions Directive; f) a revised Asylum Agency Regulation, giving the agency more powers; and g) a new Resettlement Regulation, setting out a framework of admitting refugees directly from non-EU countries.
However, discussions on these proposals eventually ground to a halt – hence the eventual attempt to re-launch the process in September 2020. In particular, although the EU Council Presidency and the European Parliament (EP) reached a provisional agreement on the proposals on qualification, reception conditions and resettlement in June 2018, Member States refused to support the Presidency’s deal and the European Parliament refused to renegotiate.

On the asylum agency, the EP and Council agreed on the revised law in 2017, but the Commission proposed an amendment in 2018 to give the agency more powers; the Council could not agree on this. On Eurodac, the EP and Council only partly agreed on a text. On the procedures Regulation, the Council largely agreed its position, except on border procedures; on Dublin there was never much prospect of agreement because of the controversy over relocating asylum seekers. (For either proposal, a difficult negotiation with the European Parliament lay ahead).

In other areas too, the legislative process was difficult: the Council and EP gave up negotiating amendments to the Blue Card Directive, and the EP had not yet agreed a position on the Returns Directive. Having said that, the EU has been able to agree legislation giving more powers to Frontex, as well as new laws on EU migration databases, in the last few years.

The Attempted Relaunch

The Commission’s proposed Pact on Asylum and Migration did not restart the whole process from scratch. On qualification, reception conditions, resettlement, the asylum agency, the returns Directive and the Blue Card Directive, it invited the Council and Parliament to resume negotiations. But it tried to unblock the talks as a whole by tabling two amended legislative proposals and three new legislative proposals, focusing on the issues of border procedures and relocation of asylum seekers.

Screening at the Border

These revised proposals start with a new proposal for screening asylum seekers at the border, which would apply to all non-EU citizens who cross an external border without authorization, who apply for asylum while being checked at the border (without meeting the conditions for legal entry), or who are disembarked after a search and rescue operation. During the screening, these non-EU citizens are not allowed to enter the territory of a Member State, unless it becomes clear that they meet the criteria for entry. The screening at the border should take no longer than 5 days, with an extra 5 days in the event of a huge influx.

The 2020 proposal additionally provides for interoperability with other EU migration databases, taking of personal data during the screening process, including more data on the migration status of each person, and expressly applying the law to those disembarked after a search and rescue operation.

At the end of the screening, the migrant is channelled either into the expulsion process (if no asylum claim has been made and the migrant does not meet the
conditions for entry) or, if an asylum claim is made, into the asylum process – with an indication of whether the claim should be fast-tracked or not. To ensure human rights protection, there must be independent monitoring to address allegations of non-compliance with human rights. These allegations might concern breaches of EU or international law, national law on detention, access to the asylum procedure, or non-refoulement (the ban on sending people to an unsafe country). Migrants must be informed about the process and relevant EU immigration and data protection law. There is no provision for judicial review of the outcome of the screening process, although there would be review as part of the next step (asylum or return).

Asylum Procedures

The revised proposal for an asylum procedures Regulation would leave in place most of the Commission’s 2016 proposal to amend the law, adding some additional specific proposals for amendments, which either link back to the screening proposal or aim to fast-track decisions and expulsions more generally. The latter rules comprise a new border expulsion procedure, simultaneous expulsion and asylum decisions, fast-tracked decisions in the event of an asylum seeker coming from a country with a low recognition rate, a single level of appeal for some cases, and a short time limit to appeal for many cases.

Eurodac

The revised proposal for Eurodac would build upon the 2016 proposal, which was already far-reaching: extending Eurodac to include not only fingerprints, but also photos and other personal data; reducing the age of those covered by Eurodac from 14 to 6; removing the time limits and the restrictions on using the fingerprints taken from persons who had crossed the border irregularly; and creating a new obligation to collect data of all irregular migrants over the age of six (currently fingerprint data for this group cannot be stored, but can be checked, as an option, against the data on asylum seekers and irregular border crossers). The 2020 proposal additionally provides for interoperability with other EU migration databases, taking of personal data during the screening process, including more data on the migration status of each person, and expressly applying the law to those disembarked after a search and rescue operation.

Dublin Rules on Asylum Responsibility

A new proposal for asylum management would replace the Dublin regulation (meaning that the Commission withdrew its 2016 proposal to replace that Regulation). The 2016 proposal would have created a “bottleneck” in the Member State of entry, requiring that state to examine first whether many of the grounds for removing an asylum-seeker to a non-EU country apply before considering whether another Member State might be responsible for the application (because the asylum seeker’s family live there, for instance). It would also have imposed obligations directly on asylum seekers to cooperate with the process, rather than only regulate relations between Member States. These obligations would have been enforced by punishing asylum seekers who disobeyed: removing their reception conditions (apart from emergency health care); fast-tracking their substantive asylum applications; refusing to consider new evidence from them; and continuing the asylum application process in their absence. Also, the 2016 proposal would have tackled the vexed issue of disproportionate allocation of responsibility for asylum seekers, by setting up an automated system determining how many asylum seekers each Member State “should” have based on their size and GDP. If a Member State were responsible for excessive numbers of applicants, Member States which were receiving lower numbers would have to take more to help out. If they refused, they would have to pay €250,000 per applicant.

The 2020 proposal drops some of the controversial proposals from 2016, including the “bottleneck” in the Member State of entry (the current rule, giving Member States an option to decide if a non-EU country is responsible for the application on narrower grounds than in the 2016 proposal, would still ap-

However, the 2020 proposal also retains parts of the 2016 proposal, including the obligations for asylum seekers (redrafted slightly), some of the punishments for non-compliant asylum seekers (the cut-off for considering evidence would remain, as would the loss of benefits, except for those necessary to ensure a basic standard of living), and some curtailment of judicial review (the grounds would still be limited; the time limit to appeal would be 14 days; courts would not have a strict deadline to decide; suspensive effect would not apply in all cases); and the reduced time limits for detention.

The proposal tries to solve the underlying issue of disproportionate allocation of asylum seekers by means of a menu of “solidarity contributions”: relocation of asylum seekers; relocation of refugees; “return sponsorship”; or support for “capacity building” in the Member State (or a non-EU country) facing migratory pressure. Note that “return sponsorship” comes with a ticking clock: if the persons concerned are not expelled within eight months, the sponsoring Member State must accept them on its territory.

Other Measures

The 2020 package also includes a proposed Regulation on crisis management, which replaces a Directive on temporary protection adopted back in 2001, but which was never used in practice. There are also several “soft law” measures: a Recommendation on asylum crisis management; a Recommendation on resettlement and humanitarian admission; a Recommendation on cooperation between Member States on private search and rescue operations; and guidance on the applicability of EU law on migrant smuggling.

There are longer-term plans on legal migration, including not only relaunching discussions on the amendment of the Blue Card Directive, but also future proposals for amendments to the single permit and long-term residence laws.

Developments in Practice

In the nine months since the Commission tabled its proposals, two measures have been agreed. First of all, the EP and the Council agreed on the reform to the EU Blue Card proposal, after a compromise on whether parallel national schemes will still exist: they can continue, but only if many of their benefits also apply to Blue Card holders. Secondly, Member States agreed to detach the proposed legislation on the EU asylum agency from the other asylum proposals, and it was quickly agreed between the EP and the Council. Talks continue on the other proposals. In other developments, the Commission has proposed a new Regulation concerning surveillance of Member States’ application of the Schengen acquis, and the EU institutions have agreed on major changes to the Visa Information System.

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42 See the judgments in Cases C-179/11, CIMADE, ECLI:EU:C:2012:594 and C-233/18, Haqbin, ECLI:EU:C:2019:956.
48 OJ 2020, C 323/1.
51 Council document 7708/19, 22 March 2019.
52 COM (2021) 278, 2 June 2021.
53 Council document PE-CONS 44/21, 7 July 2021.
Comments

It remains to be seen whether the attempt to re-launch reforms to EU immigration and asylum law will be successful, beyond the agreements on the Blue Card and the EU asylum agency in spring 2021. The Blue Card reforms are likely to lead to at least a modest increase in the numbers of highly skilled workers moving to and staying in the EU, including from Mediterranean states.

What impact would the other measures have? Taken together, the proposals on asylum procedures, screening, and the returns Directive would likely mean, if adopted, that there will be a greater number of fast-track refusals of entry and of asylum applications, with more limited appeal rights than at present. There will likely be an attempt to push back against this, through national courts, the CJEU and the European Court of Human Rights. Even if the new laws survive these challenges and result in more fast-track decision making in practice, an increased rate of issuing expulsion decisions and asylum refusals means nothing in practice without countries of origin or transit willing to accept back the persons concerned. The advocates of Brexit are also discovering this, now that they have achieved their objective of leaving the EU.

The countries likely to be particularly impacted by an increased return rate may well be the EU’s neighbours, in the Western Balkans, the Eastern Neighbourhood and around the Mediterranean. Although the latter two groups of countries have largely signed readmission treaties with the EU, which also apply to non-citizens of the parties who have travelled across them, most southern and eastern Mediterranean states have not signed such treaties – other than Turkey.

Refusing more applications quickly without an increased capacity for removals may have several different consequences. One — again paralleled by plans in Brexit Britain — is increased detention. On that point, the reception conditions proposal would add a new ground for detention, while the proposal to amend the return Directive proposal would inevitably increase detention due to curtailing voluntary departure (despite the Commission’s false claim in its new communication that its 2018 proposal is “promoting” voluntary return).

Another consequence is finding a way to encourage non-EU countries to take back more people, without dropping the visa requirement that applies to most Mediterranean (and sub-Saharan African) states — as that has been the incentive to sign up to readmission treaties with the EU for some nearby states. An alternative, less far-reaching approach is readmission in return for visa facilitation (i.e., the fast-tracked issue of visas, for lower application fees). Some EU neighbours have been willing to sign up to such a package, but not all.

An increased rate of issuing expulsion decisions and asylum refusals means nothing in practice without countries of origin or transit willing to accept back the persons concerned.

In light of this deadlock, the EU has acted unilaterally: the recent amendments to the visa code, which was mentioned above, contain both “carrots” and “sticks” for countries which do not cooperate with the EU on readmission. In the event of non-cooperation, as regards readmission, the EU can punish countries with slower issue of visas and higher fees; in the event of satisfactory cooperation, it can facilitate the issue of visas, without the need for a treaty to that effect. With movement of travellers sharply reduced due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is too early to tell whether this change in the law is effective at achieving its objectives. Whether the EU goes as far as the UK government plans to go — possibly suspending visa applications entirely for certain countries in the event of non-cooperation — would depend on whether the political willingness is there to amend the visa code again to this end.
The Instrumentalization of Migration in the Euro-Mediterranean Area: Between Past and Present

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More than fifteen years ago, I published an article in the 2005 IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook in which I examined the ways in which the EU and its Member States were cooperating with non-EU countries in the Mediterranean region to control migration and the EU’s external borders. The paper aimed to show that unprecedented patterns of interdependence were emerging, with implications for future cooperation on migration governance in the Euro-Mediterranean area. At that time, externalization was a recurrent analytical framework in academia to describe the EU’s attempt “to engage sending and transit countries in strengthening border controls, combating illegal entry, migrant smuggling and trafficking, or readmitting migrants who have crossed into the EU illegally.” Indeed, externalization was deeply rooted in the EU’s external action, especially since the EU’s ambitious commitment to strengthening the Common European Asylum System and mobilizing non-EU countries in the “fight against irregular migration,” readmission, and reinforced border controls, and, more intensely, after the adoption of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004. However, when analysing the perceptible empowerment of some non-EU countries in their interactions with the EU and its Member States, the reference to externalization and its analytical framework showed its own limits. Various bilateral and multilateral dialogues supported by regional consultations on migration matters were regularly organized with a view to laying the groundwork for common principles to deal with “migration management.” Their rationale was guided by the need to reach a consensus which, beyond the asymmetries that typically characterize states’ preferences and contingencies, would reduce uncertainties, while ensuring a modicum of cooperation (be it effective or not) on migration and border management with non-EU countries.

Preparedness to Talk vs Consensus

In European policy circles, the predominant vision was that formal commitments expressed in ENP action plans would gradually consolidate patterns of cooperation at bilateral and supranational levels. Recurrence of informal consultations played a key role in the diffusion of practices, norms and policies from the EU to its neighbourhood. Repetition was also a core ingredient to instil in the minds of stakeholders a sense of meaningfulness to their engagement in

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the “joint management of international migration.” Also, informality and the reinforced centrality of the state and its law-enforcement agencies in migration talks were critical to all actors involved, be they European or non-European. Various third countries in the southern Mediterranean were proactively involved in such informal consultations, showing their willingness, if not preparedness, to open informal talks on migration governance.

However, despite the manifest preparedness of various non-EU countries, such regular and informal talks found their own limits. First, it quickly turned out that the EU and its Member States were pushing their own views and vested interests while jeopardizing any genuine discursive interaction aimed at achieving a “reasoned consensus.”4 The latter, as defined by Thomas Risse, is contingent on three preconditions: 1. the ability to understand and factor the contingencies and subjectivities of the partners involved; 2. the legitimation of a common system of norms and rules; and 3. the fact that actors involved in the consultations are recognized as equals. To be sure, none of these preconditions were met. Moreover, non-EU countries are not necessarily passive recipients vis-à-vis the diffusion of norms, practices and policies imported from abroad. Non-EU countries may be prone to dialogue through consultations on migration governance with their European counterparts without, however, reaching a “reasoned consensus,”5 let alone building trust, especially when southern Mediterranean countries were looking suspiciously at the EU’s eastern enlargement process, while expressing their concerns over its potential consequences for development aid and foreign direct investments in North African industrial sectors.

**Empowerment and Disclosed Representation**

Additionally, non-EU countries started to (re-)construct their own national interests.5 Firstly, they became aware of their empowered position vis-à-vis the EU and its Member States in the “fight against irregular migration.” Secondly, they started to close and defend their own representation of what cooperation on migration governance would entail. It is through this double articulation (empowerment and disclosed representation) that regional consultations on migration governance in the Euro-Mediterranean area have unfolded since the mid-2000s. In other words, not only did southern Mediterranean countries open communicative channels with their European counterparts, they also expressed their own visions as applied to migration governance, while capitalizing on their empowered position. True, their empowerment resulted from the emergence of unprecedented patterns of interdependence in the field of migration and border controls. True also, their empowerment resulted in the skilful ability to defend their own preferences and contingencies, be they connected with migration matters or not.

**The Drive for Informalization**

Invariably, this empowerment generated additional uncertainties to which the EU and its Member States have been obliged to respond. To do so, their responses converged towards the gradual flexibilization of their patterns of cooperation on migration governance with non-EU countries. Heightened uncertainties in their bilateral cooperation on migration governance certainly explained the drive for informalization, given its lower costs and also because it allowed “adjustment in the face of international uncertainty without dismantling cooperation.”6 A modicum of cooperation, be it effective or not, had to be preserved at all costs.

At a bilateral level, some Mediterranean EU Member States (e.g. France, Greece, Italy and Spain) already excelled in this flexible modus operandi, with a view to addressing non-EU countries’ empowered agency and exigencies. Long before the EU, various Member States had realized that migration governance was (and still is) inextricably based on asymmetric patterns of cooperation, as well as unequal costs and benefits, that codified their interactions with non-EU countries in the Mediterranean and in Africa.7 They learned that

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migration governance is inseparable from the articulation of an array of interests and incentives, both material (military assistance, technical equipment, financial support) and immaterial (regime legitimacy, strategic alliances, territorial integrity), which may motivate the engagement of non-EU countries.

Not only did southern Mediterranean countries open communicative channels with their European counterparts, they also expressed their own visions as applied to migration governance, while capitalizing on their empowered position

At a supranational level, before the EU’s drive for informalization, it was initially stuck on its normative approach to migration governance. Indeed, its action was mainly oriented towards repeated calls on non-EU countries to comply with their commitments and international obligations under public international law, especially with regard to readmission and the fight against human-trafficking. For example, when the area of justice, freedom and security was established following the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam, the European Commission adopted a strictly legalistic approach to readmission based on the oft-cited reference to states’ obligation “under customary international law” to accept the readmission of their own nationals. This obligation, skillfully constructed during the late 1990s, has had, since then, a decisive epistemic impact on the scholarship, especially among lawyers. This constructed normative framework coincided with the intensification of cooperation on justice and home affairs and migration management with third countries. Readmission became a pivotal element of the joint management of migration flows, especially with reference to the “fight against irregular migration,” as well as a major cross-over issue in various internal and external policy domains. Their detailed analysis would go beyond the scope of this study. It is, however, important to stress that such developments, driven by an extraordinary sense of normative and bureaucratic rationality, contributed to the growing visibility of readmission in migration talks, especially in the external relations of the EU and its Member States. These developments were also conducive to strong expectations on the part of some EU Member States who, on various occasions, criticized the slow progress in the negotiations initiated by the European Commission in the field of readmission. The European Commission was called to deliver promptly. In an attempt to respond to such domestic challenges and to safeguard its credibility in dealing with irregular migration, the Commission expressed its intention to “broker a deal” in the framework of the Global Approach to Migration (GAM), with a view to

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11 “Experiences have demonstrated that to broker a deal the EU needs to offer something in return. In their bilateral readmission negotiations Member States are also increasingly offering other forms of support and assistance to third countries to facilitate the conclusion of such agreements, and the possibilities of applying this wider approach at EU level should be explored.” See European Commission, The Global Approach to Migration One Year On: Towards a Comprehensive European Migration Policy, COM(2006) 735 final, p. 9.
facilitating the conclusion of EU readmission agreements with third countries, while learning from the bilateral experiences of EU Member States. This statement did mark a watershed in the EU approach to negotiations on readmission, for it revealed the growing awareness on the part of the European Commission that its role as leader in the EU-wide readmission policy could be jeopardized should no new compromise be found.

Various Member States learned that migration governance is inseparable from the articulation of an array of interests and incentives, both material and immaterial, which may motivate the engagement of non-EU countries.

However, despite its official claim to draw on bilateral experiences, the EU continued to rely on conditionality12 in its cooperation on readmission, whereas most EU Member States had a different approach to it. Actually, as mentioned earlier, EU Member States have often used material and non-material incentives, not conditionalitys, in order to ensure the cooperation of third countries on migration management issues, including reinforced border controls and readmission. Material incentives include the conclusion of financial protocols to support foreign direct investments and job-creating activities in third countries’ labour markets. Also, technical equipment and capacity-building programmes aimed at upgrading their law-enforcement bodies are part of the incentives. Non-material incentives refer to strategic alliances aimed at reinforcing the international recognition of the political leadership of a cooperative third country or at defending its voice in the international community. At a bilateral level, the use of incentives (not coercive conditionality) has been motivated by the perceptible empowerment of some third countries as a result of their proactive involvement in the reinforced control of the EU’s external borders. For example, some Member States have experienced in their bilateral interactions with third countries located in the Mediterranean that the latter were prone to capitalize on crucial issue areas (the fight against international terrorism, intelligence cooperation, energy security, border controls, to name but a few) to defend their own interests and priorities. In other words, not only did some Mediterranean third countries become empowered, but their capacity to use their own leverage on their European counterparts was already a common practice, though subtly performed. The instrumentalization of migration for political and diplomatic purposes is not uncommon in the history of international relations. The matter is well-documented in the academic literature.13

Empowerment and Instrumentalization

To give a recent illustration of this instrumentalization, the mobility partnership (MP) that Morocco signed in June 2013 is inseparable from the attempt to legitimize its de facto presence in Western Sahara. Morocco skilfully linked the negotiations of its MP with the prior conclusion in March 2012 of an exchange of letters between the European Union and the Kingdom of Morocco concerning reciprocal liberalization measures on agricultural products, processed agricultural products, fish and fishery products (henceforth Fisheries Partnership Agreement – FPA). The FPA raised a lot of controversies in the EU owing to its geographical scope covering the territory and waters off the coasts of Western Sa-

12 On how conditionality has been ambiguously framed in the external relations of the EU, see Nora El QADIM, “Lutte contre l’immigration irrégulière et conditionnalité de l’aide au développement.” Migrations Société 2018/1, n° 171, p. 109-125.

hara. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia-el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (henceforth Polisario Front) brought a legal action before the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), in November 2012, against the Council of the European Union for “breaching the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people and [for] encouraging the policy of annexation followed by the Kingdom of Morocco.” It is important to highlight that the signing of the MP with Morocco preceded the final judgement of the CJEU regarding the FPA and its compliance with international law. These chronological developments speak volumes about the guarantees that were offered at that time to Morocco regarding the seamless implementation of the FPA, despite the legal action taken by the Polisario Front. In February 2019, after years of legal disputes at the CJEU, the FPA entered into force with the full support of the European External Action Service, the European Commission and the approval of the European Parliament. Moreover, bilateral relations between Spain and Morocco were quickly reinvigorated following the official visits of King Felipe VI and King Mohammed VI to Rabat and Madrid, respectively, and the conclusion of 11 cross-sectoral bilateral agreements. It is worth noting that years of legal disputes between the Council of the European Union and the Polisario Front have not only “shed light on the European Union’s paradoxical position on the conflict in Western Sahara [where] economic and geopolitical interests prevail over the application of European and international law.” Such legal and policy developments have also contributed to constructing a sort of community of interests detailed above. Moreover, there is a déjà-vu in the diplomatic pressures exerted by Morocco on Spain, although such pressures have been more explicit than ever. Perhaps, explicitness is the only new element that today characterizes the ability of non-EU countries to exert their own leverage in migration management matters with a view to shaping the behaviour of their European counterparts. That said, the visible tensions that recently affected the relations between Spain and Morocco cannot be simply dismissed as the result of so-called “blackmail,” as reported by the media.

Reportedly facilitated by the Moroccan border police, thousands of migrants crossed the border. Morocco was accused of blackmailing Spain for having accepted the hospitalization of the Polisario Front leader Brahim Ghali on its territory. This form of explicit retaliation against an EU Member State was arguably predictable, if we take into consideration the constructed community of interests detailed above. Moreover, there is a déjà-vu in the diplomatic pressures exerted by Morocco on Spain, although such pressures have been more explicit than ever. Perhaps, explicitness is the only new element that today characterizes the ability of non-EU countries to exert their own leverage in migration management matters with a view to shaping the behaviour of their European counterparts. That said, the visible tensions that recently affected the relations between Spain and Morocco cannot be simply dismissed as the result of so-called “blackmail,” as reported by the media.

The instrumentalization of migration for political and diplomatic purposes is not uncommon in the history of international relations

Behind the public coverage of the Ceuta case lies a highly sensitive factor that risks creating additional tensions between Morocco and the EU. Soon the CJEU will have to pronounce itself on another legal action brought by the Polisario Front following the entry into force of the February 2019 FPA. This action was brought against the Council of the European Union on 23 June 2020. Among many other pleas, it is aimed at denouncing the Council’s decision dated 28 January 2019, relating to the entry

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15 This is not the place to delve into the technical and legal details of this controversial ruling by the CJEU. Ángela Suárez-Collado and Davide Contini argue that “the Court used a counterfactual legal analysis that did not take into account the practice of the agreement, but rather the theory on which it was based.” see Ángela Suárez-Collado and Davide Contini (2021) “The European Court of Justice on the EU-Morocco agricultural and fisheries agreements: an analysis of the legal proceedings and consequences for the actors involved.” The Journal of North African Studies, doi: 10.1080/13629387.2021.1917122
17 Suárez-Collado and Davide Contini, op. cit. p. 16.
into force of the FPA, which, in the opinion of the applicant, “denies the existence of the Sahrawi people by using the expression ‘the people concerned’ and organizes, without the consent of the Sahrawi people, the exploitation of its resources.” By all accounts, the FPA-Western Sahara saga is far from being over. In the meantime, there is no question that Morocco is intent on showing its European counterparts that it remains vigilant on this pending case. Moreover, Morocco expects that the community of interests (unimpaired by the recent Ceuta events) will once again bear its fruits.

An Unsettling Sense of Déjà-vu

To date, patterns of interdependence have developed, despite the contrasting vested interests or the asymmetric costs and benefits that have constantly characterized the so-called “joint management of migration” in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The examples mentioned above show that informalization does not necessarily result from the need to make cooperation on migration governance more responsive to uncertainties. Rather, it may also result from the need to accommodate empowered third countries’ preferences and exigencies in a context marked by strong patterns of interdependence between EU and non-EU countries. Over the last twenty years, the EU and its Member States have witnessed the ability of some non-EU countries to buttress their own position in the field of migration governance with a view to defending their preferences and interests, be they connected with migration matters or not.

In other words, both the EU and its Member States have become receptive to forms of reverse diffusion, including the subjectivities and claims of their own Mediterranean neighbours. Ironically, those who claimed (and were expected) to act as socializers in the framework of recurrent regional consultative processes on migration and border controls – namely, those who were supposed to lead the consultations, provide guidelines and transfer norms values and practices to recipient non-EU countries – have turned out to be constrained by the expectations and reverse conditionalities of the latter. Manifestly, there is no stable point from which to analyse socialization in international systems, for both socializers and socializers may play interchangeable roles.19 The drive for informalization in dealing with migration governance, in the broadest sense, constitutes a good indicator of how the EU and its Member States have, as it were, accommodated, if not internalized the preferences and subjectivities of some strategic Mediterranean non-EU countries.

Over the last twenty years, the EU and its Member States have witnessed the ability of some non-EU countries to buttress their own position in the field of migration governance with a view to defending their preferences and interests, be they connected with migration matters or not.

Though not fully studied in academia, reverse diffusion is perhaps as old as the externalization of migration controls. Empowerment of non-EU countries, reinforced interdependence, reciprocal patterns of socialization and reverse conditionalities all intersect to delimit a complex international system where diffusion is far from being unidirectional. What happened in Ceuta, a few months ago, generates more of an unsettling sense of déjà-vu than a surprise. Indeed, third countries’ intentions to exert pressure on their European counterparts by using the migration variable are not uncommon. Rather, as explained in this article, what is unprecedented is the explicitness of their intentions to instrumentalize migration. Today, Pandora’s box is wide open and no one knows how to close it.

Dossier: The Mediterranean in Times of Multi-level Crisis: Pandemics, Mobilizations and Hopes for Change
Social Unrest, Crises Aggravated by the Pandemic and Pending Revolutions in Arab Countries

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The 22 Arab countries are very different from one another and each has great internal contrasts. However, together they form the most unequal region in the world (Assouad, 2020). The human development levels of most of their 435 million inhabitants are considerably below their countries’ potential, taking into account their material and human resources, their geographical position and their connections to the rest of the world. This underperformance has been consistent in comparison with other regions of the world since the 1980s (UNDP, 2016).

It is difficult to measure real levels of social unrest in authoritarian political systems, where opacity reigns and freedom of expression is scarce. However, two dynamics serve as a thermometer: 1) social protests motivated by economic and political demands, and 2) the repression exercised by regimes in various ways (intimidation, violence, abuse of the judicial system, stifling of freedom of expression, control of public spaces and cyberspace, etc.). Judging from the above, social unrest has continued to grow throughout the Arab region over the last decade, primarily affecting the most populous countries. Protests, riots, repression and authoritarianism indicate that the relationship between most Arab states and their citizens continues to deteriorate, despite the image of stability the former seek to project.

The anti-authoritarian uprisings that swept the region in two waves (2011 and 2019) brought to light the limitations of regimes seeking to impose a model of authoritarian stability, as well as the inability of opposition social and political actors to offer viable alternatives for governance. In the midst of this struggle between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary currents, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, which has been shaking Arab countries since March 2020. In the first year and a half of the pandemic, it has proven to be an aggravator of problems and a multiplier of conflicts in the Arab region, which is likely to further destabilize this already volatile part of the world.

Another Lost Decade for the Arabs (2010-2020)

The second decade of the 21st century could have seen Arab countries take off towards development and democracy, but it did not. It began in the southern and eastern Mediterranean with a wave of revolts – starting in Tunisia in late 2010 – that sought to reform political systems and transform the region. Millions of Arab citizens aspired to have well-governed states with separation of powers and opportunities to prosper. In the wake of the “Arab Spring,” many believed that they could live with freedom, rights and dignity in their own countries. Those aspirations have yet to be realized. Instead, a sense of failure and growing frustration has set in. At the regional level, the setbacks in terms of freedoms and equality are greater than the advances.

While some were quick to write off the Arab Spring as dead within a few years of its emergence, the region saw a second wave of social mobilizations in 2019, with crowds of citizens once again mobilizing peacefully in the streets and squares of their countries to demand an end to their undemocratic systems of government (Hernando de Larramendi, 2020). In Algeria and Sudan, millions of people demonstrated against regimes dominated by the
military and opaque powers, while in Lebanon and Iraq they demonstrated against sectarian power-sharing systems considered by many to be corrupt and inefficient.

In the wake of the “Arab Spring,” many believed that they could live with freedom, rights and dignity in their own countries. Instead, a sense of failure and growing frustration has set in

Despite the differences between countries, the triggers of the protests have had much in common. Citizens mobilized to protest against deteriorating living conditions and the ineffectiveness of states unable to fulfill their functions and provide services and opportunities. The demands focused on ending economic orders and political regimes that allow a small ruling elite to live ostentatiously at the expense of the rest of the population. These regimes, clinging to power by all means, are reneging on the “social contracts” they imposed decades ago. Rampant corruption, relentless population growth, the depletion of the hydrocarbon-based rentier model, the lack of substantial reforms, armed conflicts and geopolitical shocks are leading to the increasing erosion of economic security and the deterioration of social protection systems in most Arab societies.

For decades, several Arab countries have behaved as rentier states. Their economies depend mainly on hydrocarbons (oil and gas), the financial and real estate sectors, remittances, foreign aid or a combination of these sources of income. These countries have lacked inclusive institutions for the redistribution of such revenue, leaving them in the hands of hereditary dynasties or institutions controlled exclusively by political elites and their allies in the private sector and in security and defence. Arab governments have used the income obtained to create public employment and fund obsolete education and health systems, in exchange for demanding submission from the citizenry.

The fall in oil prices since 2014 is threatening the governance model that underpins the power of several Arab regimes. With less disposable income, rulers can no longer afford to continue financing bloated budgets, co-opting elites, buying social peace through aid and subsidies, and delaying deep reforms of political systems sine die. These constraints, coupled with demographic growth, are making it much more difficult for regimes to fulfill their part of the “social contract,” which is eroding their main source of legitimacy. According to various projections, this scenario will not be temporary, as hydrocarbon prices are not expected to return to pre-2014 levels (Muasher, 2018).

The Great Pandemic Shock (2020-2021)

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global health emergency for the new coronavirus in January 2020 – upgraded to pandemic status two months later – the world has been monitoring the present and future consequences at all levels, its foreseeable duration, and what the recovery from the multiple crises generated by the pandemic will look like. Since the pandemic was declared, most Arab governments have imposed measures to limit mobility and contain the spread of infection (e.g. by closing borders, cancelling flights and travel, confining people to their homes, closing schools and places of worship, suspending work permits for foreigners and repatriating tourists to their countries of origin). Some regimes, especially monarchies, reacted swiftly, given the prospect that a health system collapse could seriously challenge the paternalistic figure of the head of state.

In some cases, confinement measures and curfews were drastic during the first few months, allowing some countries to dodge the first waves of the pandemic that hit other regions of the world, including nearby countries such as Iran, Italy and Spain. The imposition of tough preventive measures proved effective in the short term, although it came at a high

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1 The concept of economic rent in the context of the Arab region refers to “external rent” (mainly from the sale of hydrocarbons), as well as “strategic rent” (in the form of economic aid due to the geo-strategic value of certain countries) and “regulatory rent” (when regimes give privileges to protect the economic interests of the elites that maintain them) (Cammett et al., 2015).
economic and social cost in the form of lost income, job destruction and increased economic precariousness for many citizens. The spread of the coronavirus worsened in several countries in the region following the relaxation of restrictions from autumn 2020, and especially during 2021, increasing pressure on health systems and delaying economic recovery in these countries. Despite the great differences between Arab states in terms of their health systems, public service delivery capacity and material resources, the entire region was ill-prepared to deal with a pandemic such as the one caused by the SARS-CoV-2. It should be recalled that the COVID-19 pandemic swept the world at a time when the entire Arab region was under great pressure of various kinds (Amirah-Fernández, 2020).

Rulers can no longer afford to continue financing bloated budgets, co-opting elites, buying social peace through aid and subsidies, and delaying deep reforms of political systems *sine die*

At present, it is difficult to accurately measure the dimensions of the pandemic shocks in Arab countries, starting with the health consequences. Most of these countries do not provide easily accessible recent or historical data on the number of deaths (coronavirus or otherwise). Levels of diagnostic testing in most countries – especially in the most populous ones – are very low compared to other regions of the world. By the summer of 2021, some countries (e.g. Oman, Lebanon and Egypt) had stopped publishing new infection diagnostic test data. Three countries (Syria, Algeria and Yemen) have consistently lacked testing data during the course of the pandemic (World Bank, 2021). All of the above indicates that the Arab region as a whole faces a challenge of efficiency and transparency, both in the availability of data and in assessing the authorities’ response to the crises caused by the pandemic.

Vaccination against COVID-19 is proving very uneven among Arab countries. According to the World Bank, by early August 2021, some states with small populations and high purchasing power such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain had vaccinated about 70% of their populations. However, the four most populous Arab countries (Egypt, Sudan, Algeria and Iraq, which together account for 53% of the Arab population) had administered some dose of anti-COVID-19 vaccines to less than 2% of their citizens by the same date. In between these extremes are countries that have vaccinated between 20% and 30% of their nationals, such as Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Jordan (World Bank, 2021). Vaccination data in the Arab region still fall far short of what is needed to achieve herd immunity, especially after the appearance of more contagious variants of the coronavirus.

An immediate consequence of the emergence of the pandemic in the spring of 2020 was the suspension, due to health measures, of the broad social mobilizations that were taking place at the time in countries such as Lebanon, Iraq and Algeria. In the Algerian case, the popular mobilization (known as *Hirak*) had been peacefully protesting for 56 weeks, demanding profound reforms to build a secular state with separation of powers and good governance. The various regimes have taken advantage of this situation to divide the protest movements and increase repression against social actors demanding change. However, the appearance of calm in Arab countries from the outbreak of the pandemic until the summer of 2021 may be deceptive. As poverty, inequality and economic insecurity increase in these countries, it is not implausible to imagine that signs of social discontent and challenges to maintaining regime stability will grow stronger.

**Some Economic and Social Consequences**

The spread of COVID-19, its mortality rates and the economic and social costs associated with the pandemic are very difficult to measure when there is little diagnostic testing for infection, data are hidden and transparency in governance is lacking. Official indicators available for Arab countries should therefore be treated with great caution. Indeed, the Arab region has long suffered from “data deprivation,”
The pandemic hit an Arab region whose economies were already suffering from signs of stagnation and macroeconomic fragility during the second half of the 2010s. The effects of containment measures were compounded by the disruption of supply chains and a severe drop in tourism revenues and remittances from expatriate populations. The temporary collapse of oil prices in the spring of 2020 set off alarm bells in a region highly dependent on oil revenues. Although prices have recovered to pre-pandemic levels, uncertainties remain about the global economic recovery and the impact of the disruptions caused by the pandemic on the growing fiscal and macroeconomic imbalances in the Arab region as a whole.

According to the World Bank, expected economic losses due to the pandemic have increased since March 2020 in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), reaching a 7.2% drop in regional GDP in early July 2021 compared to 2019. The largest fall is projected for developing, oil-exporting countries (7.7% lower than December 2019 forecasts), followed by Gulf Cooperation Council members (7.3%) and developing oil importers (6.0%). These GDP declines can be interpreted as the expected macroeconomic costs of the COVID-19 pandemic and lower oil prices compared to the 2019 GDP. The most extreme case is Lebanon, where the cumulative fall in GDP expected in 2021 would be equivalent to 26.6% of that of 2019 in a context of economic and political collapse.

In addition, according to the data available for 2021, the economic recovery in the Arab countries will not be V-shaped, so the GDP losses that occurred during 2020 are not expected to be recovered during 2021. What is expected is that the GDPs in all these countries will remain well below projections for a non-pandemic scenario. However, with uncertain and changing global dynamics, many of the factors that will condition the exit from the crisis are beyond the control of Arab governments, as they depend on the global health and economic situation which, in turn, determines many of the sources of income for these countries (oil, trade, tourism, remittances, transport, etc.) and the employment opportunities that their young populations may find (Amirah-Fernández, 2020).

Economic losses from the pandemic have increased poverty and inequality in a region that was already showing poor results before. Current projections of increases in the number of poor are likely to be understated, with growth occurring in large numbers at the regional level (World Bank, 2021). In addition to the above, there is a trend of rising food prices in different parts of the region, with food prices in some countries rising by more than 20% between February 2020 and the summer of 2021.

Against the backdrop of unprecedented economic contraction, job destruction and social costs unseen in peacetime, several Arab countries have launched programmes to try to alleviate the devastating effects of the pandemic. These have focused on measures to combat the health emergency, unemployment and falling incomes, and help the hardest hit economic sectors. To this end, some countries have launched campaigns to collect donations to finance anti-crisis measures (e.g. Morocco, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon). During the pandemic, the percentage of the population in Middle Eastern and Maghreb countries receiving social assistance has increased from 20% to more than 70% (Dabrowski & Domínguez-Jiménez, 2021), although much of this assistance is in the form of subsidies that target the entire population, without differentiating between rich and poor. Most Arab countries have launched recovery plans that involve increasing their fiscal and macroeconomic imbalances. Those with large sovereign wealth funds have turned to them. Meanwhile, other countries have been forced into debt, seeking assistance from international financial institutions.
Given historical experience, such growing indebtedness will require painful adjustments later on. Moreover, the uncertainties associated with the pandemic prevent a clear picture of how recovery in Arab countries will unfold. Critical to this is combating the disease through vaccination, which should help reopen regional economies, especially the most vulnerable sectors such as tourism. For now, regional vaccination data leaves much to be desired in the majority of countries.

**Authoritarianism and Stability after the Pandemic**

One of the unknowns of the post-COVID stage in Arab countries is the effect on authoritarianism and the ability of current political regimes to maintain stability in their countries. The pandemic is testing both Arab states and societies. Civil society organizations – where they exist – have played an active role in mobilizing their members and resources to fight the coronavirus and its effects. In different countries, these organizations have carried out information campaigns, cleaned public spaces, delivered food and medicine to people in need, imported medical equipment, supported health centres and hospitals, and collected donations. Some of these organizations are religious in nature and used their activists from the outset.

A common reaction of regimes to such criticism has been to try to silence it, repressing those who aired it and imposing severe restrictions on freedom of expression through the judiciary and the police.

Experience varies from countries such as Egypt, where civil society organizations are subject to very restrictive legislation and are persecuted by the regime, to countries in conflict such as Syria, Libya and Yemen, where needs are greater, non-state or para-state armed actors dominate territory and population, and transparency is conspicuous for its absence. In Iraq and Lebanon, for example, sectarian faith-based organizations have become involved in health response where states have been unable to do so. As seen in a number of countries, civil society actors have been highly critical of their governments, whose inaction has had serious consequences for citizens. The main complaints have focused on poor governance, weak or non-existent public services, lack of preparedness for such a crisis, and the refusal to seek in-country support in the context of a national emergency. Among the most critical voices are those of health workers who have suffered directly from these failures, especially when their countries had some additional time to prepare because they were not affected on a large scale by the first global waves of the pandemic. There have also been critical voices among journalists and social media users. A common reaction of regimes to such criticism has been to try to silence it, repressing those who aired it and imposing severe restrictions on freedom of expression through the judiciary and the police. In countries with fierce security apparatuses, the latter have seemed to be more focused on exercising their tight control over civil society than on enforcing the health measures decreed by the government to curb the spread of coronavirus (Cherif *et al.*, 2020).

A case in point is Egypt, where legislative changes were introduced to give more administrative power to the presidency and exert tighter control over public spaces and cyberspace. Despite the relative success of several regimes in silencing critical voices and putting an end to the widespread social mobilizations taking place prior to the pandemic, these measures have failed to curb the health crisis and prepare their countries for a rapid and robust economic recovery.

**The Pending Revolutions**

The health, economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are exposing the institutional weaknesses, limitations and failures of public health systems and the fragility of the economies of several countries in the region. The consequences of confinement, mobility restrictions, economic slowdown and the international context are already being felt in Arab countries. Social unrest can be expected to
grow as citizens suffer from the long-term impacts of the pandemic and the uncertainties of large-scale regional and global recovery (Cherif et al., 2020). The population of Arab countries has grown by over 80 million since the uprisings began in 2010, and is projected to reach 600 million by 2050 (240 million more than in 2010). Ten years ago, much of the Arab world believed in the possibility of reforming governance systems in order to successfully manage the challenges facing the region, starting with demographic factors. A decade later, many of those hopes have faded, although the root causes that triggered the uprisings are just as present as in 2011, if not more so. Even in countries that are not at war, more Arabs live in poverty, are unemployed and are in prison for their political views than a decade ago (Sly, 2021).

Arab governments must profoundly revise the existing social contract in which states play a distorting role that holds back the development and prosperity of their societies.

Without the support that the rentier model has provided in preserving authoritarianism for decades, Arab governments must profoundly revise the existing social contract in which states play a distorting role that holds back the development and prosperity of their societies. A sine qua non condition for such change is to create productive economies based on knowledge and merit, rather than loyalty to obsolete systems that are incapable of fulfilling many of their functions, beginning with training human capital, who are offered opportunities to be constructive actors in their societies. It is estimated that by 2050, the 22 Arab countries will need to have created 300 million new jobs to absorb the people seeking to enter the labour market. The task seems daunting, but not impossible, although a number of revolutionary changes in political, economic and social systems are needed to get on the right track. Transparency, accountability and good governance are essential factors in unleashing the constructive energy of youth in Arab countries to meet today and tomorrow’s challenges. Some of these challenges will be exacerbated by the effects of climate change, water and food insecurity and demographics (Yousef et al., 2020), and will need to be addressed sooner rather than later if adequate responses are to be found.

For their part, international actors that have so far supported authoritarian Arab regimes from the perspective of security and stability face a paradox: their action based on the pursuit of these two objectives has turned into support for unstable and insecure power systems (O’Driscoll et al., 2020). There is every reason for the European Union and its Member States to revisit the supposed “dilemma between values and interests” that has guided its external action in its Southern Neighbourhood. Without good governance, stability is increasingly difficult to achieve, and there will come a time when it may be impossible. The EU would do well to abandon this false dilemma and begin a long overdue course correction in its relations with the southern and eastern Mediterranean. The risk of not doing so is that it may soon have to deal with a more fractured, conflictual and unstable neighbourhood.

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The coronavirus pandemic came as a huge shock to European economies. In many countries, public life and economic activity were almost completely shut down. Businesses had to close and curfews were imposed. The Member States of the euro area had no choice but to take massive fiscal measures by supporting businesses and certain groups most affected by the crisis. To allow active intervention by the Member States, the European Commission suspended the deficit rules.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, there has been a general consensus among economists that only an active fiscal policy has a chance of averting an economic catastrophe: a massive wave of bankruptcies and a sharp rise in unemployment. All this would have devastating social consequences, especially for the poorest parts of society. In addition, health expenditure has been considerably higher. Despite massive fiscal support for their economies, EU Member States have experienced the worst recession in decades. The southern countries of the euro area, which are still struggling with the aftermath of the euro crisis, including high levels of public debt and unemployment, have been particularly hard hit, with the tourism sector in southern Europe basically grinding to a halt. Declining economic growth combined with higher government spending has caused a spike in public debt (see Chart 14). In the case of Spain, the euro area country hardest hit by the crisis, an increase of 24 percentage points to 119% of GDP was forecast for 2021. In Greece, debt levels would reach a ceiling of 208%. There, public finances are also under pressure from military spending. The high level of public debt is also a challenge for Portugal and Cyprus. Even Germany does not meet the Maastricht criterion of 60% of GDP, as its debt ratio currently stands at 73%. In June 2021, the European Commission extended the suspension of the fiscal rules until 2023. Rising debt levels pose a challenge to existing fiscal rules. In most cases, public debt levels will be well above the Maastricht reference value of 60 percent of GDP. Therefore, the framework can hardly be expected to be sustainable and will have to be reconsidered.

In this context of increased levels of public sector debt, three questions are worth examining. Is increased public debt likely to become a real problem in the euro area? What is the significance of the adopted Recovery and Resilience Facility for fiscal integration? And, finally, how will the elevated public debt impact the social aspects of European integration?

Could Rising Public Debt Become a Pressing Problem?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the perception of public debt changed. The growing financial obligations of the state were no longer regarded as a problem, but began to be seen as a means to save jobs and economies from complete collapse. With rising levels of public debt, there was also no element of blame. COVID-19 is an exogenous factor, the emergence of which the Member States had no influence on. The debt-to-GDP ratio gives some indication of the fiscal situation, but the future sustainability of the debt depends on many other factors. We cannot set a specific debt ceiling. However, we must ask wheth-
Under the economies will be able to service higher levels of debt in the future. This requires, above all, a rapid rate of economic growth. It also requires flexibility in economic models and their ability to adapt to new challenges, such as the digital economy or the consequences of climate change. The latter may be particularly painful for the countries of the EU Med Group, due to the exposure of their economic sectors, including agriculture, to climate risks. Debt sustainability depends on a country’s ratio of assets to liabilities. In particular, long-term liabilities are important. It should be noted that some of the negative effects of the Corona crisis on public finances will only become apparent later. In many European countries the COVID-19 crisis has led to a sharp decline in the birth rate. This may increase implicit debt in the future, for example the costs of health care, welfare and the pension system. The outlook for highly indebted eurozone countries such as Italy, Portugal and Greece is unfavourable in this context. According to the European Commission, the old-age dependency ratio, i.e. the ratio of the number of people over 65 to the number of people aged between 20 and 64, is rising alarmingly.

All this will have a negative impact on public finances. The higher the level of public debt, the more sensitive public finances are to increase servicing its costs. In the event of an economic downturn, countries would face a dilemma between stabilizing the business cycle and debt sustainability. Finally, if a government is no longer able to meet some or all of its debt obligations on time, it risks losing access to financial markets. Currently, the entire debt sustainability of over-indebted euro area countries relies solely on the expansionary monetary policy. This strategy of stabilizing debt through the intervention of the European Central Bank is the only way to prevent the destabilization of Member States' public finances. However, it has side effects, including the growth of speculative bubbles in the stock or property markets. This leads to specific redistributive effects, for example making property owners richer, while excluding certain social groups from this market, such as young people starting their careers. Current prognoses show that post-crisis levels of public debt in many southern eurozone countries will remain a problem for longer. According to a May 2021 report by Euler Hermes, it will take decades to
return to public debt levels prior to the COVID-19 crisis. In the case of Spain, it will take 89 years to return to pre-pandemic levels of public debt to GDP. In the case of Italy, this time has been estimated at 27 years. Of course, in the meantime, it is difficult to rule out the occurrence of periods of economic downturn or collapse that will cause the debt to build up again. On the other hand, the cost of servicing public debt in euro area countries is still at a low level. This is thanks to interventions by the Eurosystem, which consists of the ECB and the 19 national central banks of the euro area. To this end, a special programme for the purchase of mainly government bonds (Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme, PEPP) was launched. The ECB has announced that debt market interventions will continue until at least 2022. On the other hand, however, with inflation rising considerably in the first quarter of 2021 and the huge US cyclical package pushing up bond yields in Europe, it could become increasingly difficult for the ECB to justify further interventions to stabilize the debt market.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the perception of public debt changed. The growing financial obligations of the state were no longer regarded as a problem, but began to be seen as a means to save jobs and economies from complete collapse.

The issue of tackling public sector over-indebtedness has been the subject of much discussion in recent times. Unfortunately, this discussion has not led to any concrete result, due to the lack of good alternative options. The proposals to write off the bonds purchased by some Eurosystem banks and the debt restructuring do not seem to be the way to solve the problem. Debt forgiveness by the ECB is questionable on legal grounds. On the other hand, debt restructuring, in the case of Italy, where the largest part of the debt is held by residents, would cause measurable damage to the domestic economy and financial system. For these reasons, the problem of public debt will require an urgent solution at supranational level. It seems that the development of a mechanism to stabilize the public debt of euro area Member States will become one of the political priorities after the current phase of the pandemic. Given the gravity of the problem, the introduction of mechanisms that would lead to the partial common public debt issuance should be considered. Without this, it will be difficult to replace the ECB in its role as debt market stabilizer. Besides, the issuance of common bonds could be beneficial for strengthening the international role of the euro. On the other hand, fiscal stabilization plans should take into account the voices of those countries that fear excessive risk sharing, particularly in those where support for the euro remains relatively low (the Netherlands). Otherwise, further plans for fiscal integration could deepen political divisions in the euro area.

Recovery and Resilience Facility at the Centre of the Anti-crisis Strategy

In addition to the huge public aid packages of the Member States and the aid package adopted by the Eurogroup, France and Germany proposed, on 18 May, the creation of a special financial aid instrument. The agreement negotiated in July was for the creation of a €672.5 billion Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), consisting largely of grants. The facility was based on the EU budget, so it applies to all Member States. The RRF is a financial mechanism without precedent in the history of European integration. Using the EU budget as collateral for joint debt issuance has happened before, for example in the early stages of the eurozone debt crisis. However, the EU has never issued debt on this scale to finance the non-repayable grants that make up a large part of this mechanism. Besides, basing the mechanism on the EU budget has opened it to all Member States, which could have a decisive impact on plans for further fiscal integration, which so far have focused on the EU-19.

In the case of the MED region, the problem with the use of RRF funds is the ability to effectively absorb them in the very short term. It has already been problematic for the latest EU financial perspectives. Estimates by the European Central Bank in its May 2021 Financial Stability Report indicate that EU MED countries may have difficulties in using RRF transfers. Therefore, a massive mobilization of countries in the region is needed to put these funds to good use, not only to create a development momentum after the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to prepare their economies for the new challenges of digitization and green transformation. When it comes to the effective use of RRF funds, special attention will be paid to Italy. The new government under the leadership of former ECB chief Mario Draghi increases the likelihood that these funds will be planned and used effectively. Besides, Mario Draghi enjoys great confidence from the financial markets, which means that Italy’s active fiscal policy is not reflected negatively on the interest rates of the country’s debt securities. On the other hand, Italy’s medium-term political prospects are a cause for concern, especially as a right-wing populist coalition is expected in the upcoming elections. All this is likely to have a negative impact on the country’s fiscal sustainability. It may also undermine the willingness of other euro area countries to further fiscal integration. The success associated with the effective use of this instrument may be a serious argument for making it a permanent stabilization mechanism for EU countries in the future. If the use of RRF funds produces clear benefits for Member States, this solution could also be resorted to in the future in case of external shocks or the need to accelerate green and digital transformation. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the EU has also created other instruments to reduce the negative social impact of the crisis. The southern countries of the eurozone will also be among the main beneficiaries of the Special Employment Maintenance Instrument (SURE), created by the European Commission with a focus on the self-employed. Spain and Italy are the main beneficiaries of this mechanism. On the other hand, no euro area Member State has requested assistance from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), despite the creation of a special credit line there (Pandemic Crisis Support). Particularly in Italy, the use of this instrument is difficult to imagine for political reasons. Given the previous experience with financial assistance to Greece and other countries that focused excessively on the fiscal dimension, assistance from the ESM is difficult to accept for political reasons. This raises the question about the future role of this institution as a tool for fiscal stability. The involvement of the ESM in, for example, stabilizing the debt of the euro area would require not only treaty changes, but above all making it a supranational institution. Currently, it is under the direct control of the Member States.

The problem of public debt will require an urgent solution at supranational level, the development of a mechanism to stabilize the public debt of euro area Member States will become one of the political priorities after the current phase of the pandemic.

Public Debt and the Social Aspects of Economic Integration

The sovereign debt problem can hardly be seen in isolation from the social problems caused by the successive crises that have afflicted the euro area since 2008. Many of the structural reforms and fiscal consolidation carried out in countries affected by the debt crisis translated into a permanent or temporary decline in living standards. An important date was 2017, when the EU announced the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2017. This pillar includes 20 key principles for paving the way to a strong social Europe, including equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions; and social protection and inclusion. The Covid-19 crisis has considerably increased the importance of this topic.

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The pandemic has had negative social consequences. A crisis of this magnitude, the effects of which on the economies of the currency area are largely asymmetric, risks increasing economic divergence between Member States. Economic divergence leads to social divergence. The consequence of the latter is political divergence, i.e. the divergence of objectives and expectations between the Member States. It is clear that there will always be a divergence of political interests among the countries of the euro area, due to their different economic models. However, if these divergences increase, particularly in the area of the benefits of monetary integration, these may one day reach such a level as to threaten the maintenance of the monetary area’s integrity.

In order to reduce the impact of the pandemic, an active fiscal policy is required, despite the deterioration in the budgetary situation of Member States. Budget support can help mitigate the impact of pandemic-related restrictions, especially on the most vulnerable groups: young people, women, the less educated, the unemployed and the elderly. Special emphasis should be placed on students and graduates recently entering the labour market. A major task for governments will be to avoid the possibility of a “lost generation” of young people who, because of the lower quality of education associated with online education, may face difficulties in the labour market in the future.3 These problems have particularly affected the labour markets in the countries and regions of southern Europe, which were already facing huge structural problems before the pandemic, as can be seen, for example, in the results of the PISA studies. The Member States should take advantage of the post-pandemic growth cycle in the economy to reform inefficient institutional mechanisms in the economy concerning, for example, labour market institutions. These will require multi-year recovery programmes, backed by substantial public funding.

In March 2021, the EU Commission presented an action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and, at the special European Council of 7-8 May, organized by the Portuguese Presidency, adopted the so-called Porto Declaration.4 On the one hand, the declaration commits to working towards a “social Europe” and recognizes the European pillar of social rights as an essential element in exiting the crisis. On the other hand, the declaration did not foresee a specific programme or concrete measures. The term “social Europe” remains very general in its definition. Besides, the differences in the economic models of the EU countries are so great that it is difficult to reduce social issues to one common denominator. Some states fear an extension of EU competences in this area, while others, particularly the Nordic states, fear a lowering of their own social standards through the adoption of common, lower ones. Despite attempts at deeper integration in this area, most social policy tasks will remain the preserve of the Member States. Nor does it seem that the conference on the future of the European Union, being held at the time of writing, will make any difference to social integration in Europe.

A major task for governments will be to avoid the possibility of a “lost generation” of young people who, because of the lower quality of education associated with online education, may face difficulties in the labour market in the future.

An important social aspect of the functioning of the single currency project is its perception by the citizens of the Member States. In the past, due to the various phases of the eurozone crisis and its social costs, support for the single currency project has declined. In recent years, despite the pandemic crisis, we have seen a reversal of this trend. The latest European Commission Eurobarometer surveys indicate that support for the euro has reached its highest level for the last ten years. In 2021, 80% of respondents were positive about the single currency.

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compared to only 66% in 2021. Importantly, support for the euro has increased markedly in the EU MED countries, while it is lowest in the Benelux countries. There, too, the biggest declines in support since 2019 have been recorded. Although support for the single currency in Greece, Cyprus and Italy is lower than the eurozone average (80%), support has increased and remains above 75%.5

**Outlook**

In mid-2021, the economic forecasts for southern members of the euro area were very positive. The economies of these countries should grow at a fairly fast pace after the pandemic. The prospects for further growth and recovery of post-pandemic economies will be critically dependent on the pandemic situation, including the number of fully vaccinated people. In May 2021, Malta became the first EU country to announce the achievement of so-called herd immunity. However, this will be more difficult to achieve in larger countries. The degree of vaccination, and the speed with which updated vaccines against new variants of the virus become available, will have a decisive impact on the economic and social situation. Disturbing developments in the UK in May/June 2021, associated with a new variant of the virus, indicated the real possibility of another phase of the pandemic and the related negative economic consequences.

Questions remain open about consumer behaviour, whether the tourism and service sectors in southern European countries will manage to recover from the pandemic. In this context, continued active and effective fiscal policy will be crucial, but they will have their consequences in terms of increased debt. As a result, the shape of future fiscal policy in the eurozone and reforms to the Stability and Growth Pact will be among the most important topics in European politics in the coming years. The evolution of German domestic policy will have a huge impact on this debate. Currently, the issue of “normalizing” fiscal policy after the COVID-19 crisis is one of the most controversial issues in the debates among German economists. However, most will depend on the outcome of the Bundestag elections, if the German Green party is co-ruling in a future governing coalition, then Berlin’s greater flexibility regarding Stability and Growth Pact reforms can be expected. While there is undoubtedly a need to make fiscal rules in the euro area more realistic, it does not seem to be a good idea to start this discussion now. Given the unfavourable political situation (elections in Germany will be held in 2021, in France in 2022) and the very different positions, it would be difficult to find a constructive solution.

In view of the unprecedented nature of the crisis and its wide-ranging impact, the Member States must monitor its effects closely, including in the long term. It also seems necessary to examine more closely the effects of the pandemic on specific sectors, such as education, which has been particularly affected by the pandemic. In this context, in view of the ongoing struggle with the economic and social impact of the pandemic, the challenge for the EU MED countries will be to prepare for the next challenges facing their economies and societies, which are at this point a priority for the EU itself: digitalization and climate change.

The eurozone, in turn, faces two challenges: the need to find a consensus on the redefinition of fiscal rules and an alternative to the stabilization of the debt market by the European Central Bank.

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Runaway Public Debt in Mediterranean Countries: Is It Manageable?

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Introduction and Literature Review

The Mediterranean (MED) countries of Tunisia, Jordan and Lebanon stand at a crossroad in history, with negative exogenous and endogenous shocks sweeping through them. The COVID-19 pandemic, social and political unrests and earlier series of financial and debt crises1 have exposed the weaknesses of the adopted macroeconomic models and raised questions about the sustainability and manageability of MED countries’ sovereign debt and deficits. The neoliberal economic model of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) implemented in MED countries since the late 1980s, which centred on fiscal and monetary stabilization and economic liberalization has yielded a relatively acceptable level of economic growth and, in general, has managed to meet the goals of economic and financial stability. Moreover, monetary, fiscal and inflationary pressures have, overall, been smoothed. However, and in light of the recent financial and debt crises and the more recent pandemic and its devastating consequences on the world economy, the impact of such macroeconomic policy choices has not led to the desired outcomes in terms of debt reductions and containment. Indeed, in certain cases, exogenous shocks, the COVID-19 pandemic and the fast financial liberalization have in fact aggravated the macroeconomic imbalances. In light of a critical reassessment of the achievements and failures of MED economic policies, a new macroeconomic approach should emerge, one which is more holistic, integrating the macroeconomic and social spheres in combination with strong institutions and democratization to ensure fiscal consolidation. The new macroeconomic model will reconsider macroeconomic policies that incorporate fiscal discipline in order to achieve a structural macroeconomic change. Moreover, and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, fiscal and monetary policies will have to be reshaped to achieve not only macroeconomic stabilization, but also fiscal discipline in order to render sovereign debt more manageable. Within this context, such macroeconomic stabilization policies will have to be reassessed for the purpose of proposing new fiscal policies that are sustainable and that will be conducive to growth, development and debt and budget deficit reductions.

In this article we will try to answer the following questions. How can the MED countries in health, financial and debt crises curb macroeconomic imbalances (debt, budget and current account deficits) at a time of low economic growth, high unemployment rates, rising inflation and sudden stops in capital inflows? If traditional macroeconomic policies and their modification in the context of the global crises have not helped, are there any new directions that one can think of that will not only solve the current health, financial and debt crises, but also prevent future ones from developing? What about the introduction of macroeconomic stabilization programmes, is there

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1 For a detailed discussion of the recent debt and financial crises and their impact on the MENA region see Neaime (2012a&b, and 2016).
still room to use both monetary and fiscal policies in tandem to curb those macroeconomic imbalances? MED policy makers need to be very careful since joint austerity measures can create a vicious circle whereby recessionary budgets, high interest rates and high levels of debt tend to reinforce each other.

Empirical studies on macroeconomic and debt sustainability are numerous and have gained extreme importance after the latest financial and debt crises worldwide. A major strand of the empirical literature looks at the time series properties of the fiscal variables. This approach has proven to be elegant and robust as it uses actual fiscal and macroeconomic variables and shies away from calibration empirical modelling. Two empirical frameworks have been used to test for fiscal sustainability. The first rests mainly on testing the stationarity of the various macroeconomic variables, while the second employs cointegration and granger causality time series techniques and explores the existence of a long- and short-run equilibrium relationship between the macroeconomic variables of interest.

Under the first framework, if the budget or current account deficit series are non-stationary, then it means that they are growing without bound over time, which means that subsequent debt will also grow without bound, rendering fiscal policy unsustainable (Hakkio & Rush, 1991). A stationary deficit means that the series is reverting to a certain mean over time, being in general close to zero. If that were the case, then obviously fiscal policy and debt would be sustainable, since deficits will be under control. The second framework explores whether there is a long-run relationship between government revenues and expenditures, and exports and imports. If such a relationship exists, this means that the respective government is not spending without bound and is taking into account the amount of revenues it is generating (Haug, 1995). Subsequently, it will not have to resort to deficit financing to cover its expenses, and debt would be sustainable and will not grow without bound.

Under the above strand of the literature, Neaime (2008, 2010, 2012a, 2015a&b) analysed the conduct of fiscal and financial policies and studied the sustainability of public debt and macroeconomic policies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in the post United States financial crisis period. Using time series econometric tests and the Present Value Constraint model for the period that ends in 2015, the empirical results show strong evidence of sustainability of fiscal policies in Tunisia, given the country’s fiscal discipline. The weak sustainability in Egypt is explained by the successful privatization plan introduced during the 1990s. Morocco’s mixed results are explained by the recently introduced fiscal recovery reforms. The unsustainable debt and fiscal policies for Jordan and Turkey are explained by the size of the government causing major fiscal imbalances for Jordan’s economy, and by the weakness of the financial and banking sectors in Turkey. With the above in mind, and in this chapter, we will not dive into any empirical exercise, but will only overview the latest macroeconomic fundamentals of some selected MED countries for the purpose of establishing the current sovereign debt situation in those countries, its sustainability and how manageable it is in light of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The macroeconomic improvements observed since 2015 in Tunisia’s key macroeconomic fundamentals have been largely offset by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic

**The MED Region: Recent Macroeconomic Developments: Is Sovereign Debt Manageable?**

**Tunisia**

The macroeconomic improvements observed since 2015 in Tunisia’s key macroeconomic fundamentals have been largely offset by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Tunisia’s national currency, the dinar, has lost about 65% of its value since 2014 and Tunisia’s economy shrank by 4.3% in 2020 (see Table 7). The severe depreciation of the local currency led to a further deterioration of living standards. The country is now running a twin deficit. The budget and fiscal deficit and the current account deficit are widening rapidly and are expected to reach 10% of GDP respectively by the end of 2021. As those deficits widen, there is growing concern of increased public debt accumulation. 80% of Tunisia’s public debt is exter-
nal and is being serviced in foreign currency thereby contributing to the rapid depletion of Tunisia’s foreign exchange reserves. Foreign public debt now stands at more than 100% of GDP. The bottom line is that Tunisia’s sovereign debt is becoming unsustainable. There have been renewed talks in early 2021 between the Tunisian authorities and the IMF, in view of a new assistance programme to help support economic reforms and bridge the financing gaps.²

In the absence of such financial support from international donors, there would be a further depreciation of the dinar, making debt servicing in foreign currency even more expensive. More recently and in early 2021, Tunisia’s public debt ratings were also downgraded by the international credit rating agencies, making it more difficult for Tunisia to borrow from domestic and international financial markets at low interest rates. It should also be noted that the 2017-2020 was a period of considerable economic hardship and uncertainty in Tunisia. Economic difficulties were amplified by the 2015 terrorist attacks, which produced low GDP growth rates (below 2%) and high inflation rates (close to 8%), as well as a decline in Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) to a low of 0.4% of GDP in 2020 (Table 7). The aftermath of the attacks was characterized by a crumbling tourism industry and a rapid deterioration in tourism receipts which constituted a major source of badly needed foreign currency, with international reserves declining to the extent that they were worth just three months of imports in 2020. Despite the relatively small size of the international financial assistance, Tunisia’s economic situation would have been far worse and would have further deteriorated without the IMF disbursements in 2017. During the same period, there were also serious structural problems, such as difficulties paying civil servants’ wages and acute social instability. During the same period, rising social unrest and tensions between workers’ unions and the government meant that the authorities could not adopt various fiscal and social measures as stipulated in the IMF and World Bank assistance programmes, respectively. The IMF, for instance, had recommended a pay freeze in the public sector. This conditionality could not be met, owing to the prevailing unfavourable social climate at the time. Note though that wages were increased in nominal terms during the period under consideration – but not in real terms given the prevailing high inflation rates. Furthermore, Tunisia’s government did not have much fiscal space, owing to a large share of the budget being allocated to reinforcing national security (especially after the 2015 attacks). The restructuring of subsidies and improvements in targeting social safety nets in Tunisia was ongoing.

Government revenues increased rapidly over the period 2017-2020. Fiscal reforms have been introduced to increase tax revenues (Value Added Tax (VAT) rates increased by one percentage point as of January 2018) and efforts were devoted to fight tax evasion. Government revenue growth was, however, hampered by the low growth environment. Subsequently, Tunisia had to borrow from the international financial

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market through several Eurobond issues over the 2017-2020 period. However, borrowing on local and international financial markets became increasingly difficult from 2019 onwards. The persistent depreciation of the dinar, rampant inflation, sustained macroeconomic imbalances and eight consecutive downgrades in sovereign bond ratings have limited Tunisia’s access to international financial markets.

**Jordan**

Jordan’s main macroeconomic problems lie in its past accumulated sovereign debt (forecast at 116% of GDP in 2021). The presence of such huge debt has restricted Jordan’s access to domestic and international financial markets. In the past, the IMF and European Union’s financing programmes have secured Jordan’s continued access to international financial markets. However, and despite the presence of these programmes, trends in the debt-to-GDP ratio appear to be unsustainable. In addition, Jordan does not have the needed fiscal space to finance its current account and budget deficits. The Jordanian government is also hosting half a million Syrian refugees which is even further exacerbating the government budget, the accumulation of sovereign debt, as well as Jordan’s infrastructure. It should also be noted that 2015-2020 was a period of considerable economic hardship and uncertainty in Jordan. Economic difficulties were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which produced low GDP growth rates (below 2%) and a contraction in the Jordanian economy in the order of 2% in 2020, as well as a decline in FDI to a low of 1.3% of GDP in 2020 (Table 8).

Another issue is Jordan’s ineffective monetary policy. In the presence of fixed exchange rates and an open capital account, monetary policy is impotent. These combined factors are also draining the Central Bank’s foreign exchange reserves which had fallen by 3% in April 2021. International reserves were already being depleted and the import coverage of reserves decreased considerably from eight months in 2015 to five months’ worth of imports in 2020. Furthermore, it should be stressed that the huge burden on Jordan’s macro economy is public debt, which is expected to climb to 116% of GDP in 2021. While Jordan is currently in a critical financial position, monetary policy continues to be ineffective, with no direct impact on the macro economy and GDP growth rate. The current situation could be attributed to the impossible trinity, discussed above. Therefore, more credit rating downgrades are to be expected from the international rating agencies, which could render servicing of Jordan’s public debt even more expensive. Since 2018, Jordan has been experiencing public debt manageability issues coupled with limited access to financial markets. Between 2015 and 2018, Jordan still managed to borrow from the international financial markets through a Eurobond issue, only at relatively high interest rates. Therefore, based on the current situation, it seems quite unlikely that Jordan will be able

### TABLE 8

**Selected Macro-Economic Indicators for Jordan: 2014-2020**

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<tr>
<td>Real GDP change, %</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inflation rate, % at end of period</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest rate, % at end of period</td>
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<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate, %</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>15.78</td>
<td>16.29</td>
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<td>18.5</td>
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<td>-3.5</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross public Debt, % of GDP</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>88.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Account Balance, % of GDP</td>
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<td>-9</td>
<td>-9.7</td>
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**Note:** Jordan cannot maintain a fixed exchange rate and an open capital account and have in place an effective monetary policy.
to issue new Eurobonds in 2021, i.e., tap into the international financial markets again. While Jordan may not have the ability/capacity to do so, it should perhaps resort to the domestic financial market, through the local issuance of government bonds. The development of the domestic financial market (local primary and secondary bond markets) was among the conditions specified under the IMF programme. The importance of developing the domestic financial market should also be emphasized at a time when access to international markets is becoming more and more difficult.

While Jordan is currently in a critical financial position, monetary policy continues to be ineffective, with no direct impact on the macro economy and GDP growth rate.

Easy access to international financial markets (with favourable terms) may well have been the case between 2015 and 2018, but this has now been severely challenged and jeopardized as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the use of fiscal policy to deal with macroeconomic imbalances is usually preferred in less developed economies, given Jordan’s socio-economic context (limited fiscal space, social unrest, fixed exchange rates, etc.) it is becoming impossible to introduce and implement fiscal adjustment measures or fiscal stimulus packages. In this context, there were limited options in terms of spending cuts and revenue increases. Tax evasion reform, however, was successfully implemented, subsequently raising tax revenues. More recently, while income tax evasion has been significantly reduced, the evasion of other revenue sources, such as sales and profit taxes, has not. While the presence of a fixed exchange rate regime has been used in the past to attract foreign investments, today this system, which is still in use, is now draining foreign exchange reserves and rendering debt unsustainable and monetary policy ineffective. The Jordanian dinar is overvalued— which is why Jordan is losing foreign exchange reserves, putting pressure on Jordan’s exports and producing current account deficits. If Jordan does not move as soon as possible to a flexible exchange rate regime, the threat of a currency and debt crisis will start to loom on the horizon.

Lebanon

An economic, financial, banking, political and social crisis of significant magnitude has been rapidly unfolding in Lebanon since October 2019. Unlike other recent crises in both emerging and mature economies, the current crisis is embedded in Lebanon’s corrupt political system and in the financial and economic system. The essence of the problem goes back to ill-guided decisions made by the Lebanese authorities since 1990, coupled with unsustainable government borrowing and its Ponzi scheme, widespread corruption and cronyism, which have all benefited Lebanon’s political elite and produced today’s perfect storm. The WhatsApp tax, which ignited the protests in October 2019, became an emblem of the need to stop corruption. The domino effect of such a crisis, which is now translating into a sovereign debt, banking and currency crisis is affecting all sectors of society and has already wiped out the middle class, with poverty rates climbing to 60% of the total population. Lebanon’s macroeconomic fundamentals are the worst among the MED countries reviewed above. Lebanon is the third most indebted country in the world, after Japan and Greece, with a debt-to-GDP ratio currently at 190%, and a gross public debt of USD100 billion. Lebanon’s debt and its service are becoming clearly unsustainable (Neaime, 2015b; Neaime & Gaysset, 2017). Lebanon’s fiscal policies have produced a large-scale debt, inequality and chronic twin deficits inflated by rampant corruption. The country imports vastly more goods and services than it exports. While the current account deficit was over 25% of GDP in 2019, the budget deficit was estimated at 15% of GDP by the end of 2019 (see Table 9 below). Finally, GDP growth has been near 1% since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011, with a severe 25% contraction in 2020. Lebanon’s current macroeconomic fundamentals can be summarized as follows. The country’s exchange rate has been fixed since the mid-1990s at Lebanese

4 Foreign investors would therefore know that under a fixed exchange rate system, the value of their investment will not depreciate as a result of exchange rate volatility/depreciation.
Pounds (LBP) 1,507 to the USD and depreciated to 9,000 LBP to the USD in 2020. By the end of 2019, Lebanon’s GDP was estimated at USD 53 billion with an estimated growth rate in 2020 of -34%. The current account deficit stands at USD 15 billion per year and has been on average 25% of GDP between 2015 and 2019; the highest among all MED countries during the last three decades. The total government budget in 2019 stood at USD 13.8 billion with government revenues at USD 11.6 billion (or 21% of GDP) and government expenditures at about USD 17.8 billion (or 160% of government revenues). Therefore, the government budget deficit in 2019 amounted to USD 6.2 billion or 11% of GDP and to USD 8.5 billion in 2019 or 15% of GDP. Government revenues decreased by about 20% in 2019, expanding the budget deficit even further.

Before the government debt default in 2020, the government’s foreign currency debt (Eurobonds) stood at USD 32.6 billion in 2020 (or 37% of total debt) and was held by local banks (USD 20 billion) and international investors (USD 12.6 billion), while government debt denominated in LBP amounted to USD 54.5 billion (or 63% of total debt) and was mostly held by the Banque du Liban (BdL) (USD 30 billion) and local commercial banks (USD 18 billion). The gross central bank foreign reserves are currently estimated at USD 15 billion. They include USD 15 billion in commercial banks’ reserve requirements. This means that today, the Central Bank is no longer able to pay for the country’s strategic imports (oil, wheat and medicine). More importantly, commercial banks’ total exposure to the BdL and the government is estimated at USD 125 billion or about 71% of total bank assets. This significant exposure to the government led to the downgrading of BankMed, Bank Audi and Blom Bank to the selective default category by several rating agencies, including Standard and Poor’s. The recent government debt default will lead to the bankruptcy or mergers of several commercial banks, depending on their relative exposure to the government debt, with a significant loss of the banking sector’s deposits, estimated at USD 80 billion.

The government’s recent default on its external debt and the exposure of Lebanon’s commercial banks to the country’s sovereign debt – with an estimated 70% of total assets invested in either treasury bills or bonds or certificates of deposit – have caused a severe banking crisis coupled with bank panics. For the past few decades, a dysfunctional electricity system, poor tap water quality and solid waste mismanagement constitute examples of an inefficient service delivery by the authorities to the people of Lebanon. Finally, the estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon have only exacerbated Lebanon’s fiscal problems, the cost of which was recently estimated by the IMF at around USD 25 billion since 2012.

### Concluding Remarks

In short, over the past few years, increased financial support from multilateral donors (the IMF, EU and

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<td>-1.9</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Unemployment rate, %</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>6.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Reserves, USD billion</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>38.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Reserves in Months of Imports</td>
<td>16.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign direct investment, % of GDP</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<td>4.8</td>
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World Bank) has remained difficult and unlikely, making it harder for Tunisia to continue managing its debt. Such assistance, whenever possible, will help Tunisia approach bilateral donors, and would also help open the door to the international financial markets, thereby allowing Tunisia to bridge its financing gaps and better manage its public debt. In the absence of international funding, the servicing of the public debt would become rather costly owing to rising interest rates and the depreciation of the domestic currency – which would further exacerbate the current macroeconomic imbalances.

Lebanon shares similar macroeconomic fundamentals with Jordan (e.g., a huge number of Syrian refugees, in the order of 1.5 million, a fixed exchange rate regime and the accumulation of a huge public debt). However, Lebanon has yet to benefit from financing from international donors. Lebanon’s current economic situation (currency, debt and banking crises) is exactly what could have happened in Jordan if the IMF and EU funding programmes were not introduced back in 2015-2020. Finally, it should be noted that Jordan is entirely under the influence of external shocks from neighbouring countries. Short of an IMF programme, the debt situation would not have been manageable. Without support from the EU and IMF, Jordan would have already defaulted on its debt; not to mention the problem of the Syrian refugees, and the subsequent pressure on Jordan’s infrastructure, and budget deficits from the past.

Unlike other recent financial and debt crises in both emerging and mature economies, Lebanon’s accumulation of the interrelated political, social and economic crises, mutually feeding on each other, can best be described as a perfect-storm scenario rooted in Lebanon’s past failed economic policies and corruption. The consequences of these crises individually, and even more so combined, for Lebanon and all stakeholders involved (people, government, universities, civil society, private sector, NGOs, etc.) could be devastating unless urgent policies are implemented. It is critical that Lebanon begins, under the umbrella of the IMF, a process of significant fiscal and monetary consolidation and structural reform to curb corruption, restructure public debt, stabilize and capitalize the banking system and increase economic growth (Neaime, 2015b). Structural, fiscal, monetary and social adjustment and reform measures are the only way out of Lebanon’s current situation.

References


Youth, Political Activism and Resilience in Tunisia

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It is customary to invoke resilience as a capacity for resistance and readjustment in Mediterranean countries in crisis (Greece, Lebanon, Tunisia...), allowing them to avoid the global collapse that has affected countries such as Libya and Syria, which have sunk into bloody, devastating civil wars. Resilience refers to the ability of the state and society to regain their original capacities and to meet the challenges threatening them. The social and political system thus becomes capable of sustaining itself and readapting to new, emerging situations that would otherwise induce major dysfunctions.

Resilience unfolds in relation to the challenges posed by threats, which, in the case of Tunisia in transition, are of three types: the security threat linked to terrorism, the political threat caused by endemic corruption, and the socio-economic threat resulting from the rise in unemployment, illegal emigration and social protest movements, which bring production to a halt.

These social movements are a matter of political activism and are driven by a youth yearning for work, dignity and freedom, the three watchwords and demands that shaped the 2011 revolution. However, the plural category of youth is so affected by social decline that it is driven towards mobilizations outside political institutions (parties and associations).

This raises the question of what is going on with the new forms of protest, which are divided between demonstrations in solidarity with political commitments on the one hand, and popular riots resulting from the dialectic of resentment and repression on the other.

The Rise of Social Protest Movements

At first glance, the space for social movements seems to be expanding lately, with the rise of protests in several cities, especially in suburban areas and public squares of the capital, Tunis. On closer examination, we realize that we are dealing with weak structuring and institutionalization of this space.

For instance, the nightly events that took place in the suburbs in mid-January 2021 were more like a riot. Lasting five nights in all, they were underpinned by violence and arrests, before being replaced by daytime demonstrations of a political nature, limited to the capital, around the main artery, Bourguiba Avenue, where the Ministry of the Interior is located, and Bardo Square, where the Assembly of People’s Representatives (ARP) is situated.

It is true that the Tunisian revolution took shape in an environment of rioting that had formed in the wake of Mohamed Bouazizi’s immolation. It was distinguished, however, by the desire to break away from this, as conveyed by the central slogan “the people want the fall of the system” (i.e. *nidham*), as well as by the driving role of the trade union centre, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), which decreed a general strike at the time, followed on a nationwide scale.

Yet nothing of the sort emerged from the wave of protests that developed in relation to the tenth anniversary of the revolution, which the government refused to celebrate by decreeing a four-day “targeted confinement,” for reasons that were more political than health-related. This provocative decision
led young people to leave peripheral neighbourhoods and attempt to join the protest movement on 26 January, on the occasion of the ARP’s debate and vote of confidence in the ministerial reshuffle proposed by the government. But their attempt to join the demonstration failed due to the organizational limits of the protest movement and the official decision to barricade public squares and prevent demonstrators from reaching them.

In order to understand the configuration of current protest, it is important to jointly examine the driving factors, namely: the context of global crisis, the staging of the revolution, the failure of national dialogue and the struggles for position within the ruling bloc.

In terms of the balance of power, the same is true of the demonstration on 30 January. Despite the virtual mobilization, they only managed to gather a hundred or so young demonstrators demanding the release of more than a thousand detainees and denouncing the repressive system in place. The fact remains that the latter demonstration was distinguished from the others by the performance of its actors, who set their actions in a “carnival of appearances,” defying the police through an aesthetic and political simulation that had more to do with alter-globalization dramaturgy than with classic political theatre. In this manner, they signalled the appearance of the “wrong generation,” with a strong message aimed at the political class in the form of a slogan: “the wrong generation against generalized corruption.”

In order to understand the configuration of current protest, which remains limited but quite varied, with the possibility of evolving depending on the reaction of the authorities and the capacity for mobilization, it is important to jointly examine the main driving factors, namely: the context of global crisis, the staging of the revolution, the failure of national dialogue and the struggles for position within the ruling bloc.

Global Crisis and the Staging of the Revolution

For the past ten years, Tunisia has been struggling with a global crisis aggravated by the coronavirus pandemic. The political instability generated by a semi-parliamentary, semi-presidential system based on a proportional voting model has led to a fragmentation of the party landscape and a crisis of governance. The choice of a hybrid and impotent political system has proven costly in economic and financial terms. The result has been a slowdown in growth, exponential over-indebtedness, a decline in investment and a rise in unemployment and precariousness.

In addition to this political, economic and social crisis, which has further accentuated social and regional inequalities, there is a crisis of mistrust in politicians and a crisis of moral and ethical values. It is therefore not only the standard of living and the state of infrastructure and public healthcare that have deteriorated to the point where the country looks as if it had been through a war, but also social and interpersonal relations have been tested.

The profound logic at work in this period of uncertain transition is that of the fragmentation of the political, the social and the subjective, as if anomic or the absence of rules had become the only shared language.

The transformation of the conjugal family and the extension of individualization, with all that it implies in terms of isolation and psychological distress, are experienced in a dramatic way by young people lacking an affective community, authority and material, educational, professional and cultural resources.

The result is a generalized “mala vita” and a youth left to its own devices almost everywhere, but particularly in working-class neighbourhoods and hinterland towns, where there is a lack of everything and where the informal sector orchestrates the world of survival for citizens seeking to be acknowledged.

The riot, which constitutes a spontaneous expression of collective emotion, relates to two different types of violence: that of the rulers who are incapable of articulating a coherent discourse, and that of the governed who attack the symbols of political and financial power.

However legitimate it may be in terms of the demands of its actors, who are denouncing injustice and arbi-
The Mediterranean in Times of Multi-level Crisis

trariness, the riot is nonetheless an infra-political language, seeking words to replace the violent acts.

Unlike the rioters in peripheral neighbourhoods, who are mostly out-of-school teenagers, the young people involved in the political demonstrations have been socialized into politics at university and through the structures of the minority left-wing and civil society parties that support the protest movement, without reflection or public debate.

The common point between the two “youths in revolution” is the joint rejection of the system and the misery of a world that deprives them of the right to live and enjoy freedom, as shown by the new slogan “the system is corrupted by the power and government” (“قبسات المندومة بسيلة الاعتراف والحكم”), and their condemnation of the heavy prison sentences imposed on smokers of cannabis and other drugs.

The glaring contradiction between the libertarian aspirations of youth and the conservative demands of a power devolved to the Ennahdha Islamists, allied with the populists of Heart of Tunisia (Qalb Tounes) and the Dignity Coalition (Ittihad al-Karama) in a context of global crisis, is resolved – in appearance only – by staging “the revolution of dignity.”

It is as if the present dramatization of a past revolution could compensate for the shortcomings of a corrupt administration at all levels and an opposition undermined by internal struggles and incapable of building a unified democratic front.

The common point between the two “youths in revolution” is the joint rejection of the system and the misery of a world that deprives them of the right to live and enjoy freedom – cold because of the seasonal temperature and hot because of the physical proximity of demonstrators, masked and unmasked alike – at was at once a ritual of confrontation, negation of the established order and affirmation of the Self and the “Us” in the face of social and political exclusion.

In this respect, the revolutionary ritual was akin to violence as a dual process of disintegration and integration of a youth struggling with the subjective and collective identity malaise of the “in-between”: between childhood and adulthood, between utopia and “Realpolitik.”

“Wrong Generation” vs. “Corrupted Generation”

Essentially, the “Wrong Generation” is in line with the digitalization and globalization of the world, and with the demands of minorities oppressed and stifled by social and moral control.

The “Wrong Generation” opposes what it considers to be the “Corrupted Generation,” linked to the old regime and the “system of dictatorship,” without distinguishing between the two periods – Bourguibian and Benalian – which are seen as a unified whole, although they are different “power blocs,” with a mixed and differentiated alternation of modernizing reforms and repression of freedoms.

The conflict is about ideological and symbolic issues, of which the appropriation of space is a fundamental component. Thus, the older generations, born in the twentieth century, are attached to the nomenclature of the streets inherited from independence, whereas the new generations tend to mark out the space according to new identities. This seems to be the case of the central artery, Avenue Bourguiba, which some young revolutionaries would like to rename Avenue of the Revolution, with the approval of Islamist and Arab nationalists.

The different generations do not have the same relationship with public symbols such as the statues of historical figures. While the equestrian statue of Bourguiba seems to be out of the crowds’ reach, that of Ibn Khaldun, following its renovation and inauguration by the Islamist mayor, was tagged by demonstrators on 6 March. The demonstration had been organized by left-wing groups demanding the release of young detainees, including the queer activ-
ist Rania Amdouni, who was sentenced to six months in prison for “insulting an officer of the law.” It is true that following criticism of this “vandalism” against a famous person, the youth returned to remove the anti-police/system tags and refurbish the memorial. The Wrong Generation is a new phenomenon emerging in early 2021, at odds with the conservative political oligarchy. It is neither a political party nor a civil society organization, but a movement of “anti-fascist, left-wing” sensitivity, denouncing “the return of the police state.”

The Wrong Generation is politicized according to a new model that does not follow traditional political standards while being radical in its criticism of the state’s repressive apparatus

During the demonstration on 26 January 2021, a couple of protesters defied the riot police by kissing one another on the lips. Similar acts (giving the police the finger, throwing paint at them, using obscene words and gestures...) by young people in colourful outfits and dyed hair occurred during what some called a “historic day of protest” on Bardo Avenue and Square, to protest against the ministerial reshuffle and the policy of the ruling blocs. It was a pioneering event: the junction of the public and the private in a framework marked by rejection of laws and codes that are anachronistic with respect to the evolution of Tunisian youth.

On the one hand are young people who have graduated and are open to the world despite the precariousness of their material and psychological conditions. On the other hand, such citizens aspiring to freedom are confronted with outdated legislation and closed attitudes emanating from a moralizing police and judicial power imposing severe sanctions on light drug users, surveillance of couples in public spaces and moral censorship inspired by the Islamic “hisbah.”

Hence the divide between generations and, beyond that, between the governed and the governors in a situation of crisis and conflict at the head of the state (between the President of the Republic and the Head of Government supported by the Islamic-liberal coalition), and between the state and society, auguring a rise in tensions without any dialogue or credible initiatives for conflict resolution.

In practice, the Wrong Generation is an informal structure made up of free individuals and composite groups of various tendencies: LGBT, libertarians, anarchists, left-wing activists... and young people without any political or ideological affiliation. Opposed to the Corrupted Generation – a term referring to elders in general, and to the groups in power in particular –, the Wrong Generation is politicized according to a new model that does not follow traditional political standards while being radical in its criticism of the state’s repressive apparatus. In short, the Wrong Generation aspires to live on its own terms, breaking with the norms imposed by the “fathers” of family and politics, by empowering itself on a physical and psychological level. Hence the calls for the legalization of cannabis, sexual freedoms as an integral part of individual freedoms, and full individual dignity.

National Dialogue, Power Struggles and Political Violence

The failure of the national dialogue is at the origin of the rise in tensions, the struggles within the power bloc and the violence that seems to be increasing despite isolated attempts to calm the situation.

Proposed by the trade union centre, which has a tradition of conciliation between the opposing poles of power and counter-power, the dialogue proved impossible to conduct because of the President of the Republic, Kais Saied’s refusal to negotiate with politicians who are reputed to be corrupt and extremist. This ethical stance also reflects a rejection of the Islamists’ plan to recover the dialogue in order to maintain their positions of power, in the wake of the successive experiences of the first (2011-2014) and second Troika (2019-?), not to mention the “historic compromise” sealed with the Nida Tounes party and its founder, the late President Caid Essebsi (2014-2019).

Ennahdha’s strategy is oriented towards recovery through concessions and the pursuit of the “Tamkin” policy, or infiltration of state bodies. Such a strategy,
which succeeded with the head of government Youssef Chahed and continues with the current president of government Hichem Mechichi, consists of creating a conflict between the two presidencies – Carthage and the Kasbah – in order to strengthen parliamentary power to the detriment of presidential power.

The future of the revolution and transition depends on the economic, social and cultural integration of young men and women who have thus far been excluded from political decision-making.

The aim of this action and retraction is to weaken the executive in order to establish the hegemony of the Islamists and their domination as guarantors of protection against the risk of exclusion from the political arena and return to prison, as experienced during the Ben Ali era.

Chosen and appointed by the President of the Republic, the current head of government was quickly won over by the Islamists in power and their allies, who ensured the Assembly’s approval of his government and then that of the January 2021 reshuffle, notwithstanding the reservations expressed by the head of state vis-à-vis the ministers suspected of corruption by the I Watch organization.

As a result, there is an arm-wrestling match between Carthage and the Kasbah via Le Bardo, whose speaker, Rached Ghannouchi, denounces the possible return of presidentialism in a period of democratic transition.

Tunisian public opinion is increasingly stunned by the fights and insults that take place in the Assembly, where symbolic violence has become a daily practice decried by the nationalist, democratic and populist opposition.

Short of a coup d’état, which some people are publicly advocating, or of a reform emerging from within the system, the deterioration of the political situation could lead to a generalization of violence and a failure of the experiment in transition from authoritarianism to democracy. In the face of this catastrophic scenario, democratic hope persists thanks to the resilience of civil society, which draws its strength from a long historical tradition of conflict and dialogue.

While it is true that the myth of the “Tunisian exception” has been definitively buried by political instability and violence in the public arena, the future of the revolution and transition depends on the economic, social and cultural integration of young men and women who have thus far been excluded from political decision-making.

Such exclusion is the product of a partisan and clientelist notion of power conceived as “booty” (“ghanima”) at the disposal of election winners, bargaining operations that the Court of Auditors has pointed out as being illegal and non-transparent.

This raises the question of what has happened to the project of building democracy, which is now blocked by the actors of the transition, who are inclined to defend their partisan interests by any means, rather than the constitutional principle of “sovereignty of the people.”
The Mediterranean Region: A Hotspot of Inequalities in the Aftermath of COVID-19

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Arab Reform Initiative (ARI)

The COVID-19 pandemic, which broke out in China in late 2019, reached the Mediterranean region by late winter 2020. While the impact of this crisis has been notorious on a global scale, it was remarkably more pronounced in the Mediterranean region as a result of economic fragility, exposure and transmissibility, and more importantly the quality of state and non-state responses which had a multidimensional multiplier effect on wealth distribution, access to health and education as well as other essential services, regional disparities and gender inequality, among others. Ever since its outbreak, COVID-19 has significantly exacerbated existing inequalities and has created new ones. It has also exacerbated vulnerabilities and created new forms of vulnerability, thus increasing the gaps on various levels between different social groups. These consequences were also more concentrated in the Mediterranean region as compared to the rest of the world, as the region had already been witnessing rising trends of inequality in the last decade, and especially before the pandemic hit, due to political instability, economic decay and inefficient public policies. While this reality has been experienced by both the northern and southern sides of the Mediterranean, it has been more intense in the latter. However, this is not to deny that constantly increasing inequalities in recent history has made both poles of the Basin much more susceptible to an enigmatic and acute shock such as COVID-19.

The impact of COVID-19 on multifaceted inequality in the Mediterranean is neither consistent nor linear. The region has witnessed declines in several forms of inequality and surges in several others. Yet, the overall impact in terms of the number and magnitude of increased inequalities versus reduced ones is negative, making the Mediterranean a hotspot of inequality in the aftermath of the sanitary crisis. Moreover, amplified inequalities have manifested in the Mediterranean Basin in the form of inter-country inequalities and intra-country inequalities – the former being mostly part driven by inter-sectoral imbalances. Inter-country inequalities have likely further cemented the north-south divide in the Basin.

This paper examines the different forms and faces of inequality in the region by trying to conceptualize the situations of different countries, despite their dissimilar and divergent contexts. It proves that COVID-19 has massively increased multidimensional inequality through various channels and at a relatively higher rate with respect to other regions. The paper also demonstrates that the Mediterranean is the cousin of the north-south cleavage, as it is the closest place where the South meets the North, which makes it a natural starting point for dialogue concerning the north-south dichotomy and inequalities. As such, this paper highlights the need for tangible cooperation across borders, between sectors, and among citizens and their representatives, both within the region – between the North and the South – and with other regions, to advance reforms that address the factors of inequity and inequality in an already fragile and shaky regional context.

1 https://ufmsecretariat.org/covid-19-what-next-mediterranean/
2 https://erf.org.eg/events/inequality-trends-around-the-mediterranean/
How Has COVID-19 Exacerbated Multidimensional Inequalities in the Mediterranean Region?

Income Inequality

It is well known in the literature that income and wealth inequalities are considered to be the most salient factors of inequality in human societies. The Mediterranean region, in particular, has been facing stark political instability and consecutive waves of protests and manifestations whereby deprivation and income inequality are noticeable in the nature of demands, the typology of social actors, their kind of activism and their geographic distribution. Waves of protests have swept across the Mediterranean countries since March 2019, from France to Algeria, Tunisia and Lebanon, and back to Italy. This not only marked a comeback ten years after the historic events related to the Arab uprising in the southern Mediterranean, but was also evidence of the growing discrepancies between these countries' social groups and populations, over the last decade and especially since the outbreak of COVID-19. The aggravation of discrepancies also applies within the social groups and populations of northern countries, as well as between the nations of the North and the South. This multilayered increase of social differences was made perfectly clear, through, among other means, “non-social movements, social movements” or “everyday social movements,” despite the fact that the pandemic has attenuated physical and even digital activism of all sorts, particularly during the initial outbreak.

What accentuated the impact of the pandemic on income inequality in the Mediterranean is that, according to the World Inequality Database, there has been a trend of increasing the “pre-tax top 1% share of national income” and “pre-tax top 10% share of national income” in most of the region over the past ten years. As for the “pre-tax middle 40% share of national income” and “pre-tax bottom 50% share of national income,” they, on the contrary, have been constantly but gradually decreasing. Therefore, the relatively high GDP per capita for many Mediterranean countries before COVID-19 hit is linked to broad wealth inequality. Moreover, both shores of the Mediterranean, like the rest of the world, have seen a reduction in income and rising unemployment due to the pandemic, which had immediate impacts on food security and nutrition, education, health and other essential elements of decent life; yet, this has mostly affected the poorer and vulnerable segments of societies, and has occurred in low- and middle-income Mediterranean countries and those affected by conflict (e.g. Libya, Syria and Palestine).

COVID-19 has significantly exacerbated existing inequalities and has created new ones. These consequences were also more concentrated in the Mediterranean region as compared to the rest of the world, as the region had already been witnessing rising trends of inequality in the last decade. Furthermore, the gap between the informal and the formal sectors has considerably widened everywhere, including in the Mediterranean. In the North, the informal sector was badly hit because it mostly depends on mobility, and the transportation systems came to a halt during the crisis. As for the South, it is the formal sector that was badly hit since this part of the region suffers from weak internet infrastructure, a key tool for formal businesses to keep operating during quarantine. This entails an asymmetry in the formality-informality relationships between the North and the South, thus deepening the north-south cleavage. Irrespective of the fis-

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4 https://med.ispionline.it/from-protests-to-covid-19-understanding-how-2020-changed-the-mediterranean/
5 www.researchgate.net/publication/343482580_The_Pandemic_is_a_battlefield_Social_movements_in_the_COVID-19_lockdown
6 ibid
sure between both sides of the region, the gap between the informal and formal sectors, which occurred everywhere, has widened socioeconomic inequalities. This is because informal workers are – on average – more vulnerable, have less job security, are more marginalized and have no access to social protection, and are poorer with lower, irregular or seasonal income, than their formal counterparts. While the size of the formal economy in the North is voluminous, that of the informal economy in the South is also not trivial.\textsuperscript{10}

In addition, on both shores of the Mediterranean, the gap between wage earners and rent earners has increased to the detriment of wage earners due to the pandemic, as businesses have started to close or slow down their operations.\textsuperscript{11} Such dynamics of income inequality have generated the issue of the “missing middle class,” as this social category is not eligible for aid, in the form of cash transfers for example, while it needs similar forms of assistance in crisis times, like the situation caused by COVID-19.\textsuperscript{12} Not receiving aid for the middle class and not being covered by social protection schemes for informal labour, has further impoverished the social groups in question, who also found themselves obliged to pay for additional COVID-19 related expenses, e.g. masks, hand sanitizers, medication and ventilators, out of their pockets.

On an intra-country level, the core-periphery and rural-urban dichotomies have become deeper. In fact, rural populations became better off compared to urban populations, as they mostly rely on the agricultural sector, which proved to be more resilient to the COVID-19 shock, being a flexible market with no barriers to entry, reliant on climate conditions and natural resources that were not altered by the pandemic, not subject to the restrictive labour market measures that were taken to contain the pandemic, and because it is a sector that meets its workers most basic needs of food, water and income, which remained essential throughout the confinements.\textsuperscript{13} Agriculture labour came in second place, behind workers in essential services, as it remained most intact during the pandemic. Agricultural and demographic imbalances between the countries of the South and those of the North have made the latter populations worse off relative to their counterparts on the opposite side of the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{14} Finally, the majority of the countries of the South were forced into debt despite the problems they might have been facing, varying from economic stagnation or repression, to indebtedness and debt insolvency, and financial crises... As for northern countries, they either had enough financial resources to respond to the pandemic without borrowing or were in a position to be able to lend to the South. This not only widens the financial gap between both groups of countries, but also between their current and future populations, given that loans are in most cases intergenerational.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Education Inequality}

Quality education during COVID-19 is only made possible with access to decent telecommunication infrastructure. Therefore, due to low broadband internet penetration rates in the southern Mediterranean, students receiving remote learning in this area have been at a disadvantage, which is expected to increase the educational gap between the North and the South over the coming years.\textsuperscript{16} Similarly, the electrification rate needs to be high enough for remote learning to work, and while it is 100% in the northern Mediterranean, it can be less than 50% in many countries on the opposite side. These disparities apply to the rural-urban divide, as rural areas on both shores of the region have relatively lower access to internet and electricity. This leads to high failure rates in the remote education system in southern countries and rural Mediterranean areas, especially considering the sudden rush into the experience of remote modalities of education, which caught almost everyone unprepared.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{11} www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_747070.pdf
\textsuperscript{12} https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/blog/missing-middle-addressing-income-inequality-next-challenge-philippines-it-approaches-umic
\textsuperscript{14} https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=8089&lang=EN
\textsuperscript{15} www.afr.com/policy/economy/low-interest-rates-forever-will-be-the-legacy-of-this-virus-20200406-p54he6
\textsuperscript{17} www.bgca.org/news-stories/2020/July/Teacher-Shares-Eye-Opening-Effect-of-School-Changes-and-COVID-19-on-Americas-Youth?c_src=edm_cm_googleads&gclid=Cj0KCQjwraqHBhDsARlsAKuGZeGwWnmfKLbVdknMKCuU_4JK4FU15w3IHVsQtNU0RJULyZWEXmIml8aAuzEALw_wcB
Due to low broadband internet penetration rates in the southern Mediterranean, students receiving remote learning in this area have been at a disadvantage, which is expected to increase the educational gap between the North and the South over the coming years.

Nonetheless, education inequality has always prevailed within and between the countries of the Mediterranean, regardless of COVID-19. This reflects the low levels in computer literacy, financial literacy and English literacy, all of which affect the ability to learn or access education, as well as the ability to access different forms of financial aid and development assistance. These issues are more intense in the South and in rural areas, making these geographic areas more prone to the negative repercussions of the pandemic on the education sector. Apart from the differences in access to the infrastructure needed for a successful education system and the link between income and education inequality, there is a consequent effect of these factors on the quality and ability of students and teachers, from which stems a layer of intergenerational inequality between youth and children. Southern and rural teachers are relatively less trained, and so are the teachers of kindergarten, primary and lower-secondary education, as compared to upper-secondary and tertiary education teachers. This is coupled with the fact that the younger the student is, the less their ability is to accommodate remote and self-learning, a form of learning widely imposed on all education systems during the pandemic. As a result, not only will there be an ensuing gap between students of the pre-COVID era and those of the post-COVID era, but also a subsequent gap between what the younger and the older students are getting in return for their school tuition and fees.$^{18}$

**Health Inequality**

The third most prominent form of inequality exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic has been health inequality, which also prevailed decades before the pandemic erupted. On both sides of the Basin, private healthcare outperforms public healthcare and is more available in terms of the number of medical and services centres and their distribution.$^{19}$ This makes decent medical care more expensive and less accessible for underprivileged and vulnerable social groups, including people living in rural areas where medical centres are much less concentrated. Fortunate segments of society can access private healthcare and have the ability to purchase private insurance, whereas the poor cannot afford such means and have to rely on public healthcare, which is still not totally free in many contexts, and on national social security programmes, most of which have decided to exclude COVID-19 treatments because they are “related to a global health crisis,” just as they have long excluded many other forms of healthcare treatment in the past. Even private insurance programmes have excluded COVID-19 treatments, forcing patients to pay out of their pockets.$^{20}$

Not only does the private sector lack the needed corporate social responsibility to lead such a vital sector, but it has also been left by the states to operate without sufficient monitoring or organization. For instance, in Egypt, private health centres were allowed to conduct PCR tests, and there were major discrepancies in the pricing between these centres, one test costing between 1,000 and 2,000 EGPs, for example. And this, in any case, is not affordable for the vast majority of Egyptians, thereby engendering an additional factor of discrimination between the rich and the poor.$^{21}$ This lack of coordination and cost-sharing between the private health sector and the government has led to citizens incurring heavy costs and caused more impoverishment and inequality, despite the fact that health is a fundamental right and should therefore be universal.
regional inequality between rural and urban areas is the fact that the hospitals in remote areas are mostly private. This geographic split is also more pronounced on the South shore, making the impact of the pandemic even more heterogeneous between the northern and southern Mediterranean.22 Besides the interrelation between income inequality and health inequality, and the cross cutting public-private binary, the rural-urban binary can also be understood thanks to the fact that particulate matter pollution is higher in urban areas. This leads to greater health risks for people in cities, and puts those with respiratory problems, identified as one of the new most vulnerable groups post-COVID-19, at a major disadvantage.23 While this applies both in the North and South, it is more intense in the former, where there are more cities. Furthermore, the absence of urban planning on both shores, particularly on the southern one, has led to a highly significant number of misery belts and dire living conditions, thereby creating the nascent urban-urban inequality, which has likely worsened due to the pandemic.24 Both shores have also witnessed a new form of vulnerability, which is medical staff, especially nurses, who have joined the lower bound in all types of social inequality.25

Health inequality due to COVID-19 stems from inequality in the access to vaccines, which mostly lies within a macro level between both shores of the Mediterranean, reflecting global inequality regarding the pandemic between the global North and the global South.

The fracture between the northern Mediterranean and the southern Mediterranean will also expand for two major reasons, which experts tend not to see: first, the northern societies are ageing whereas the southern populations are young, which is why the COVID-19 mortality rate in the North is much higher than it is in the South, since the elderly are more prone and susceptible to the virus. This increases the difference in the level of vulnerability between both sub-regions.26 However, the second reason is that poverty and food insecurity are relatively higher in the South, as is the number of anemic cases as a result. Since anemia weakens the immune system and increases vulnerability to the Coronavirus, then this situation represents a form of inequality between the populations of the opposite shores.27 This form of inequality also prevails between urban and rural areas of both poles of the Mediterranean, with rural areas being worse off. Finally, health inequality due to COVID-19 stems from inequality in the access to vaccines, which mostly lies within a macro level between both shores of the Mediterranean, reflecting global inequality regarding the pandemic between the global North and the global South. Northern countries have access to patents and have resorted to bilateral agreements with big pharmaceutical companies to get vaccines, which have undermined multilateral agreements that can provide and aim at providing a more inclusive coverage, thus violating the WHO’s Equitable Allocations Framework and the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (COVAX ACT). As for countries of the South, most of them are being refused patents to produce the vaccines or do not have the ability for such productions. Some of them are part of the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the European Union Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (EU DCFTAs), such as Tunisia and Morocco. These free trade agreements entail a binding TRIPS component on intellectual property rights, which has a degree of flexibility the whole world could benefit from to allow the production of the vaccines beyond the monopolizing pharmaceutical firms and to open space for more affordable generic production – like what was done with the therapeutics of HIV, Hepatitis C and Tuber-

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22 https://reliefweb.int/report/world/build-back-fairer-achieving-health-equity-eastern-mediterranean-region
23 www.hsph.harvard.edu/c-change/subtopics/coronavirus-and-pollution/
25 An unpublished manuscript on “the impact of COVID-19 responses in Tunisia,” by Cyrine Ghannoushi – Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, as a member of the Arab Hub for Social Protection from COVID.
culosis – to meet global needs at more affordable rates. However, this is being blocked by high-income countries, some of which belong to the northern Mediterranean. And let us not forget the lack of transparency and accountability due to the fact that civil society is not getting all the information about what is being planned, and is being neither consulted nor included in the entire process – on the global, regional and international levels.28

Other Socioeconomic Inequalities

One of the most flagrant socioeconomic inequalities to have been exacerbated by the pandemic is gender inequality. This has been a major issue in the North and the South and especially in the sub-regions of the latter. Yet, the pandemic made it still more intense, as it imposed considerably more hours of unpaid care work at home, which is mostly borne by females. Mothers are now forced to juggle family life with work due to obligations that are enforced on them, and not on fathers, as a result of social norms, especially in the Mediterranean South.29 Additionally, gender-based violence has increased exponentially because of the social, psychological and economic tensions brought about by the pandemic, as well as the forced cohabitation between spouses.30 It is true that COVID-19 responses in the Mediterranean have explicitly discriminated against women and other vulnerable and marginalized social groups, such as children, youth, the elderly, people with disabilities and migrants (migrant domestic workers and internally displaced people in the South versus refugees and asylum seekers in the North, in general), as well as among the new vulnerable and marginalized social groups as a result of the pandemic.31 It is also true that this explicit discrimination is due to unconscious and biased measures and laws. However, discrimination against these social segments is for the most part implicit as it stems from the fact that the social injustices of COVID-19 responses and interventions levy a heavier toll on already fragile populations that are much more susceptible to such a harmful shock. For example, daily workers, who are more mobile and need physical infrastructure to operate and take advantage of economic opportunities, were severely affected during the health crisis and especially during the lockdowns. The vulnerable groups among them, therefore, were the most affected among their peers due to their fragile predisposition. As for refugees, for instance, their exclusion from formal social protection systems and the prevailing loopholes in the frameworks that stipulate equity and inequality in their favour, makes them more exposed to the discrimination suffered by the whole population. This adds to “unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that impact people’s understanding, actions, behaviours and decisions” and thus negatively affect these social segments.32 Implicit as well as explicit discriminations are the result of a “continuity” instead of a “rupture” in countries’ public policies, despite the shock of the pandemic, thereby leading to accentuated social injustices.33

One of the most flagrant socioeconomic inequalities to have been exacerbated by the pandemic is gender inequality

Double and even triple vulnerabilities such as rural women, refugee women, women refugees with disabilities, are worthwhile mentioning in this context as well.34 Moreover, child labour has increased amid the pandemic, and related working conditions have...

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28 https://annd.org/english/itemId.php?itemId=873&__cf_chl_managed tk__=pmd_72bf03ff5d18d1ed2198714a72982e0a37de920b-16264490-0-gqNrzGzNAs2jcnBazOIQ#sthash.wIOvNr5H.dpbo
29 www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/04/impact%20of%20covid%20on%20 gender%20equality%20-%20policy%20brief.pdf?la=en&vs=4414
30 ibid
33 A series of unpublished manuscripts (four national working papers) on “the impact of COVID-19 responses” in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan, by the Arab Hub for Social Protection from COVID.
worsened, children working as waste pickers and in other similar informal jobs.35 These scenes that have arisen as a result of COVID-19 are reflective of increased inequalities during the pandemic to the disadvantage of the underprivileged. While all of these types of socioeconomic inequalities apply to both the Mediterranean North and the Mediterranean South, they are definitely stronger in the latter where social injustices are more evident.

### Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The impact of COVID-19 on multidimensional inequality is very significant in the whole world, but is more pronounced in the Mediterranean region than in any other. The pandemic has exacerbated multifaceted inequality and has created new forms of inequality, including by creating new forms of vulnerability. This has manifested on an inter-country level and an intra-country level, thus deepening the cleavage between the North and South shores and proving that the Mediterranean is the cousin of the North-South cleavage as it is the closest place where the South meets the North. However, this is not to deny that constantly increasing inequalities in recent history have made both poles of the Basin much more susceptible to an enigmatic and acute shock such as COVID-19. While both shores have actually witnessed exacerbated and new inequalities due to the pandemic, these inequalities have been more intense on the southern side of the Basin, as a consequence of its pre-pandemic socioeconomic and political landscapes, as well as the quality of public policies taken in response to the health crisis. The impact of COVID-19 on multifaceted inequality in the Mediterranean is not consistent and not linear, across and within countries. The region has witnessed declines in several faces of inequality and surges in others. Yet, the overall impact in terms of the number and magnitude of increased inequalities versus reduced ones is negative, making the Mediterranean a hotspot of inequality in the aftermath of the sanitary crisis.

This status quo of inequalities in the region, and especially in the southern part, is due to the fact that governments have been reactive to the pandemic and not proactive. They have also lacked a contingency plan. Instead, their actions were ad hoc and short-sighted. Mediterranean states have, on average, shown great inaction vis-à-vis inequalities, adopting an approach that represented a “continuity rather than a rupture” in their public policies when the pandemic hit, thus leveraging structural failures amid a hard socioeconomic shock. Even their measures in response to the health crisis were not inclusive and did not sufficiently consider the needs of vulnerable and marginalized social groups, thereby aggravating gaps between different social segments in Mediterranean societies. On top of this, states have prioritized economic parameters over health in their response, which has led to more social injustices, given that the pandemic has impacted the most essential and vital human needs (health, education, food, transportation, etc.).36

Henceforth, to mitigate these structural and intergovernmental inequalities, the Mediterranean region and the world should come together to emerge from the global crisis stronger and more resilient; and so should the southern and northern countries of the Mediterranean. This will ensure partnerships and cooperation that bring together the resources of the global and Mediterranean North with those of the South, thus bridging the gap between both shores of the Basin and within the populations of each of them. On a country-level, each government should cater more to the social needs of its underprivileged and vulnerable social groups and should not discriminate against them. Instead, they should devise more inclusive public policies. Involving civil society organizations at the decision-making level by adopting a more participatory approach can help drive a shift from the inactivity or continuity in public policy-making to the generation of transformative policies that directly respond to the multidimensional impact of the pandemic, without marginalizing the needs of social groups to the advantage of others.

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36 These statements which unveil the channels through which COVID-19 has exacerbated inequalities have been retrieved from a series of unpublished manuscripts (four national working papers) on “the impact of COVID-19 responses” in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan, by the Arab Hub for Social Protection from COVID.
Risks and Opportunities of the Post-Pandemic Recovery in the Mediterranean Region

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The Current Post-Covid Landscape

Across the world, the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed and aggravated several pre-existing vulnerabilities. Firstly, on the economic front, the flow of goods and services via global value chains (GVCs) has been affected as production-outsourcing models became unreliable in the face of an unprecedented global shock. Secondly, on the social and human dimensions, the pandemic has accentuated existing inequalities, causing unemployment and poverty incidence to soar. Finally, at the political level, coordination has been suboptimal and the pandemic has exacerbated some of the previous trends that were harmful to cooperation at the global level.

The situation is even worse in the southern and eastern Mediterranean (SEM) countries, whose pre-existing conditions have been severely aggravated by the crisis, making recovery even more challenging. The economic and social costs of the pandemic are expected to be very high in the SEM region. As highlighted by the CMI-FEMISE report (2021, forthcoming), in addition to the impact of curfews and other national restrictions to contain the epidemic, the impact on developing countries is amplified in SEM countries, as a result of:

— The collapse of tourism activities: Over the last three years (from 2017 to 2019), tourism represented, on average, almost 41% of exports for Jordan, 24% for Egypt, 23% for Morocco and 12% for Tunisia. It has taken a massive hit following the pandemic, with considerable repercussions for the industry and related employment.

— A fall in foreign direct investments (FDI): with FDI inflows into non-oil-producing MENA countries between January and June 2020 representing only a quarter of the inflows recorded over the same period in 2019.

— A massive drop in remittances: with the exception of Algeria, these remittances account for a higher share of GDP in the region compared with other countries with comparable income. A 20% decrease was expected in 2020 following the pandemic.

— The very large part of the population working in the informal sector and who, as a result, find themselves in a situation of precariousness and vulnerability (almost 80% of people working in Morocco, 63% for Egypt, 59% for Tunisia and 48% for Jordan).

Furthermore, while the EU revealed ambitious support programmes, the SEM countries have offered only modest support as room for manoeuvre in terms of fiscal and budgetary revenue has been extremely limited (Tsakas, 2020). The outlook seems slightly brighter for a country like Morocco, which has been able to put an IMF programme in place and also borrow on capital markets (1 billion euros) at reasonable rates. At the other end of the spectrum, Lebanon is going through the worst economic and financial crisis in its history, while Algeria has seen a doubling of the fiscal deficit (close to 15%) with the government’s options remaining very limited. As highlighted by the CMI-Growth Dialogue (2021), on the whole, SEM countries have benefited from financial support
The Covid-19 crisis has hit economies that were already struggling, as evidenced by chronically low GDP per capita growth rates, high unemployment rates for young people and graduates, rising inequalities in health and education, and subpar trade integration. A lot has been written already as to how their lack of dynamism is linked to a set of endemic problems concerning the business environment, corruption and the weakness of integration within the region. Dealing with those issues is necessary. But this cannot be done country by country, in isolation. The region needs above all greater regional cooperation, whether it be to promote private and foreign direct investment, to allow transfers of technology and know-how on a larger scale, to fight against the consequences of global warming and against possible future crises, to facilitate the mobility of people, to encourage co-production systems, or even to launch large-scale projects in specific sectors (CMI-FEMISE, 2021 forthcoming).

An Opportunity to Seize a Regionalization of Value Chains

The changes that the world is undergoing open up new prospects for SEM countries, as the pandemic has demonstrated the vulnerabilities of global value chains (GVC). In the current context, given supply shortages in some sectors, European companies have every interest in trading with SEM countries for the supply of inputs, manufactured products and services. SEM countries could benefit from a redeployment of EU value chains which include them, based on their comparative advantages. In addition to their privileged geographical position, being at the crossroad between Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa, SEM countries also have an undeniable human, social and cultural proximity to the EU. This would allow for (see CMI-FEMISE report, 2021 forthcoming):

- markedly reducing the environmental impact of products in terms of “product miles” and carbon footprint,
- helping protect European businesses and citizens in the event of new crises by ensuring continuous access to goods and services,
- better monitoring the production of inputs, particularly in terms of compliance with rules of origin and quality standards.

An important element to take into consideration is that the large wage differentials between China and SEM countries, which prevailed a decade ago, may no longer constitute an advantage for China. Among key sectors, one finds the pharmaceutical industry, which is already a priority sector in several SEM countries. The overall resilience of the pharmaceutical industry in times of Covid in the region has been strengthened. The contribution of the pharmaceutical industries is being decisive in limiting the spread of Covid in SEM countries and in supplying health systems with essential pharmaceutical products. Meanwhile, Mediterranean countries have started to reflect on the implications of a possible new reconfiguration of pharmaceutical industry value chains. For example, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia are already positioning themselves as preferred destinations for foreign investors who plan to relocate their production of pharmaceuticals from China to the southern Mediterranean.
Investing in “Smart” Digitalization

The current crisis, while putting strain on health systems worldwide, is contributing to an accelerated implementation of digitalization. In order to ensure “business continuity,” firms across sectors have turned to digital transformation solutions, initially to facilitate exchanges and minimize the economic damage caused by the lockdowns. Meanwhile, in the education sector, digital learning has become a necessity to ensure continuity and relevance. Last but not least, if used consistently, this increased technology use offers the potential to help breach healthcare inequities and could constitute a step forward towards a more universal health coverage.

Investing in digitalization also means strengthening security and privacy infrastructure. It is important to have enough secure web servers, which store the content available for the public, as well as other confidential data. Right now, the number of secure web servers in SEM countries is very low, with an average of 228.3 servers per 1 million people, which is about four times less than in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (CMI-FEMISE, 2021 forthcoming).

Achieving Energy Integration to Facilitate a Low-Carbon Transition

As stressed by Moreno-Dodson, Pariente-David and Tsakas (2021), the timing is right to rethink and actively support the transition to a low-carbon economy in the Mediterranean region. This cross-cutting challenge is common to all countries. In the face of increasing demographic pressures, as well as the progressive degradation of the environment triggered by climate change, we urgently need to take action and agree on strategies for the Mediterranean energy transition, which necessarily includes regional energy market integration.

With the unveiling of the European Commission’s Green Deal, SEM countries could seize the opportunity to align with the EU’s objectives, enabling them to achieve their own objectives of green growth and CO2 emissions reduction. The Green Deal also sets out to allow the EU to use trade policy and build partnerships with its neighbours, including in the SEM region, to help them with their own transitions. In the post-Covid world, harmonized energy policies will be imperative in order for SEM countries to develop resilient energy sectors that can both respond to their own needs and contribute to supplying the EU market.

Cooperation on energy can play a crucial role, as an integrated energy market between the SEM and the EU could boost FDI in the SEM renewables sector, make the sector more efficient and increase energy
security in the SEM and in the EU. It could also contribute to social equity by making renewable energy more affordable and, of course, further reduce CO$_2$ emissions in a sustained way at the regional level. The timing seems right, as the changing GVCs and the transformation occurring in many sectors, including energy, are opening up new opportunities, including, as seen above, reshoring production closer to consuming markets, increasing the digitalization of the economy and channeling investments into flourishing green sectors which drive energy transitions. In the post-Covid landscape, the renewables sector in SEM countries harbours opportunities. However, a key challenge for SEM governments is how to fund important renewable energy projects. An effective private sector needs to lead the transformation. In addition, most SEM governments would need to create policies, regulations and procedures that encourage private investors and facilitate public-private partnerships (PPPs). Furthermore, in order to maximize the regional benefit of renewable energy post-Covid, Mediterranean grids should also be transnational, which will require bilateral dialogue and a regional approach. The SEM energy sector needs to be supported by the public sector, which should play a key role in promoting efficiency and facilitating investments from the private sector, as well as from international financial organizations. The sector also needs more private sector participation for the development of technology, technical and management skills, as well as the transfer of knowledge, especially in cooperation with the EU.

**Ensuring Food Security and the Sustainability of Agricultural Models**

An assessment of the level of food security in the Mediterranean region (CMI-FEMISE, 2021 forthcoming) highlights its fragility in the post-Covid context. Countries in the region are very strongly dependent on cereal imports, which constitute the basis of their diet. In addition, a significant percentage of SEM populations are highly vulnerable to extreme poverty, which weakens their ability to access food. By triggering an increase in poverty levels in the region, the Covid-19 crisis has had a negative impact on food security. Malnutrition levels are expected to deteriorate further as the pandemic-related socioeconomic effects continue.

The pandemic may be considered an opportunity for Social Entrepreneurship, as locally driven organizations and entrepreneurs better understand the challenges of their communities and are capable of identifying and responding to changing needs more efficiently.

In the context of the post-Covid recovery period, there is an opportunity to act by supporting the family farming sector. This can contribute to increasing national supplies and securing food access for the sizeable agricultural population, which is among the region’s poorest. It is also important to put small farmers, which represent a non-negligible share of the population, at the heart of public policies and allow them access to credit and markets, while providing them training, land security and adequate infrastructure. Bridging the gap in market access suffered by small or medium-sized producers, compared to large production units, should be a priority. Such development in small-scale farming can simultaneously lead to improving the rural economy, which would be capable of absorbing part of the agricultural labour force and contribute to achieving economies of scale.

**Promoting Social Entrepreneurship**

The timing also seems right to unleash the potential of Social Entrepreneurship (SE) and Social Impact Financing in the SEM region. One of the key characteristics of SE is its ambition to unearth innovative answers to socioeconomic issues neglected by the public sector in a context of budgetary austerity (Tsakas and Moukaddem, 2019). The importance of this new business model is growing in SEM countries, as reflected by the increasing number of social enterprises and supporting organizations. This is particularly true in countries such as Egypt, where this model generates important direct and indirect economic opportunities, mainly for young people, women and informal workers (Ramadan, 2021).
A real tool for achieving social impact and inclusive growth, when supported by appropriate public policy, SE can contribute to the economic security of all segments of the population and to economic diversity (Hausser, Tsakas and Moukaddem, 2019), something that will be much needed in the post-Covid context. The pandemic may be considered an opportunity for SE, as locally driven organizations and entrepreneurs better understand the challenges of their communities and are capable of identifying and responding to changing needs more efficiently, especially in a sector such as health.

Cooperation at the regional level is key to trigger recovery and socioeconomic transformation. SEM countries should cooperate on trade within the region and on the broader rules-based multilateral systems.

But for SE to become a driving force of economic and social development policy in the Mediterranean countries, it is necessary to create a social innovation ecosystem. Particularly necessary is “social finance,” which provides access to liquidity and credit, as social entrepreneurs are often unable to finance their projects. Policymakers can play a key role in SEM countries, in promoting an adapted regulatory framework for social enterprises and in facilitating the growth of such an SE ecosystem.

Proposals for Moving forward

The combination of a Covid-19 pandemic with pre-existing conditions has profoundly affected all aspects of SEM economies and societies. Nevertheless, the pandemic offers a unique opportunity for SEM countries to rethink their development models and priorities. Major reforms are needed as part of an improved development approach at the regional level, supported by national strategies.

Furthermore, SEMs need to be forward-looking and strategically investing for the future. This includes investments in infrastructure, logistics, technical and higher education, research and development and innovation, and digital technologies, in order to promote and support sustained growth (CMI-Growth Dialogue, 2021). In addition, it is necessary to strengthen resilience, the current pandemic being a taste of future challenges, including climate change. Significant improvements in institutions will also be needed in order to avoid the crowding out of private sector initiatives and to facilitate competition. Financing all this will prove challenging, as there is also a need to rebuild fiscal and external balances to access financial markets and attract more FDI.

Based on the latest research by CMI and its partners, the following proposals should be part of the post-Covid development strategies in the Mediterranean.

1. Towards a Regional Reform Agenda for Better Integrating in GVCs and Attracting FDI

Overall, cooperation at the regional level is key to trigger recovery and socioeconomic transformation. Leveraging regional integration to enable domestic reforms as a stepping stone to enhance global integration could become a new source of growth, jobs and stability in the region. To reap the benefits of the global economy, SEM countries should cooperate on trade within the region and on the broader rules-based multilateral systems. At the regional level, the reform agenda (CMI-WB, Arezki et al, 2020) should favour certain reforms while also removing political economy obstacles that hinder cooperation:

— Favour policies with economy-wide impact, instead of sector-targeted policies that could be captured by interest groups. The creation of a common digital market could be one of them as SEM countries could improve their digital connectivity with markets in Africa and the EU, increasing productivity, inclusiveness and resilience. Among other things, digital technologies carry an important potential for developing the pharmaceuticals sector and public health in SEM countries. Promising modern technology such as blockchains seems particularly relevant. National registries of medical information about patients can be created and the transparency of financial flows in healthcare could be significantly improved. Meanwhile, linking the
distribution of insurance products with digital tools could also be a means of reaching lower-income and excluded populations of SEM countries (CMI-FEMISE 2021 forthcoming).

— Allow sectoral integration to proceed intelligently. SEM policies need to respond to reconfigurations of value chains. For example, Morocco appears poised to be a success story for post-pandemic sectoral integration. The country’s geographic position, relatively advanced trade relations with the European Union and the United States, and substantial investment in infrastructure should make it an obvious choice for companies looking to relocate their supply chains following the pandemic. Each country must identify its comparative advantages in order to attract FDI to the sectors offering most potential and to promote export-oriented goods and services.

— Adapt education and professional training programmes. GVCs are at the forefront of changing demands for skills, but a major gap remains between the needs of employers and the skills provided by the education system. Policy reforms that could enhance youth employability include dual education systems that combine general and vocational education; development of professional training curricula with the private sector; and extended use of apprentice models that allow young people to learn while working.

In order to attract FDI, a larger, more integrated market would be a strong incentive for foreign investors, as it would offer opportunities for specialization, greater economies of scale and larger local and reachable foreign markets. SME countries are well positioned between the EU and Sub-Saharan Africa to act as gateways to the latter. New foreign investors seeking to enter the AfCFTA may well consider them as a bridge to expanding Sub-Saharan markets. However, countries looking for more foreign investment also have to improve their investment climate, infrastructure and trade logistics, and offer greater policy clarity and modernized laws and regulations, among other things.

2. Role of the EU and External Actors in Accompanying a Sustainable and Green Transition

— The EU could also play an important role and initiate a major relocation strategy which includes the neighbourhood countries of the Mediterranean (CMI-FEMISE, 2021 forthcoming). Such an EU-Med industrial regionalization initiative would have beneficial effects for all, from the perspective of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), while better positioning European firms vis-à-vis Sub-Saharan markets. Furthermore, promoting the establishment of long-lasting relationships between European multinationals and SEM firms, in particular through direct investment and co-production models, would be a win-win strategy as it would reduce risks and ensure better product quality control for EU firms, while increasing competitiveness for SEM firms and creating new growth poles in SEM countries.

At the sectoral level, the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean regional hub for the pharmaceutical industry would be more than timely in a context of reconfiguration/relocation of certain production segments of European industries, currently established in Asia. The construction of an EU-Med regional innovation space, animated by cooperation between research centres, pharmaceutical companies, innovative start-ups and industrialists, around projects focused on common health challenges, would also make it possible to strengthen the regions’ international attractiveness.

— It is also time to relaunch agricultural cooperation between Europe and SEM countries. The EU should continue and even strengthen funding programmes for projects contributing to the intelligent development of agriculture in the region, taking into account local conditions and integrating issues of water management, adaptation to climate change and the need for inclusive growth. The deepening of cooperation between Europe and the SEM countries could also involve a wider opening of the European market to agricultural and agri-food products from the South, which should perhaps require an evolution of the common agricultural policy. Both the EU and SEM countries would also have a lot to gain through increased regional cooperation, by launching a common agricultural programme for the Mediterranean in order to have group purchasing policies, a common storage policy, common R&D projects and a shared...
approach to labelling Mediterranean products, among other things (CMI-FEMISE, 2021 forthcoming).

— The EU can also act as a catalytic actor by supporting the industrial development of its neighbours towards a greener pathway and accelerating their energy transition. Together with the financial and technical support of other partners and IFIs, the EU and SEM countries could quickly start working together on a regional strategy that clearly identifies trade opportunities and infrastructure requirements, along with harmonized regulations and human capital development, and the establishment of carbon policies aligned with the Paris Agreement. IFIs could also contribute through the funding of specific renewables projects that focus on economic and socially sustainable development.

— We urgently need to place the issue of decarbonization and energy transition at the centre of the post-Covid cooperation strategy of Mediterranean territories. A crucial issue for countries of the SEM region lies in the need to strengthen the skills of local decision-makers. Experience-sharing would be needed and a “Green Transition Knowledge & Policy Dialogue” at territorial level should be facilitated. The CMI’s “Territorial Resilience and Climate Change Hub” could serve as the hosting platform of such a dialogue, allowing decision-makers in SEM territories to be better informed and increasing the visibility of the different parts of the Mediterranean energy ecosystem.

Bibliography

AREZKI, Rabah; MORENO-DODSON, Blanca; YUTING FAN, Rachel; GANSEY, Romeo; NGUYEN, Ha; NGUYEN, Minh Cong; MOTTAGHI, Lili; TSAKAS, Constantin and WOOD, Christina A. “Trading Together: Reviving Middle East and North Africa Regional Integration in the Post-Covid Era.” Middle East and North Africa Economic Update (October), Washington, DC: World Bank, 2020. Doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648-1639-0. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO


MORENO-DODSON, Blanca; PARIENTE-DAVID, Silvia; TSAKAS, Constantin. “A Mediterranean Green Deal for an effective energy transition as part of the sustainable post-COVID recovery.” CMI paper, September, 2021.


Health crises typically expose systemic inequalities among social groups, exacerbate their vulnerabilities and amplify their socio-economic exclusion. The Covid-19 pandemic has done precisely this. It has pushed young people in the Euro-Mediterranean region to greater levels of uncertainties about their present and anxieties about their future. Even prior to the pandemic, young men and women experienced considerable challenges that fractured their transition from school to work, delayed their plans to start their own families and complicated their civic and political lives. The waves of youth protests on both shores of the Mediterranean, over the last two decades, speak of the accumulated frustrations of young people with the policies that typically leave them behind. The pandemic, therefore, is not solely responsible for disrupting the critical milestones in the life cycle of Mediterranean youth, but has also certainly exacerbated the multiple marginalities from which they suffer and pushed them further into despair.

As I explain in the sections below, the short- and long-term impacts of the pandemic on the so-called “lockdown generation” have yet to be fully documented and analyzed. Yet, as devastating as the pandemic is, young people’s crisis response behaviour has been remarkable. Across the region, youth have volunteered and partnered with health workers, community organizers and leaders, as well as government representatives to maintain safe and healthy environments. They affirmed, once again, their capacity to act as innovators, problem-solvers, and researchers willing to invest their time and energies in assisting the communities around them. However, their resourcefulness and resilience should be acknowledged, rather than romanticized; just as the pandemic should be taken by national leaders and policymakers as a serious opportunity to redirect their political capital and resources towards rebuilding their societies on more equitable, inclusive and sustainable foundations. The time for tokenism and empty promises is well over, as young women activists stated during the 2021 UN Women’s Generation Equality Forum, which brought together world leaders, youth organizations and activists.

The Pandemic as an Amplifier of Youth Vulnerabilities

The immediate consequences of the pandemic on young people’s lives, as studies are beginning to outline, are “systematic, deep and disproportionate” (ILO, 2020). At the outset, it is important to underscore that this impact is uneven and disproportionate precisely because youth, as the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu wisely reminds us, is but a word. As a word, youth conceals considerable differences between and among young people based on their gender, race, ethnicity, culture, educational attainments, sexual identities and health status. So, as practical as the various categorizations of youth might be (15-24, 12-24, or 15-29 year-olds), age groups grossly misrepresent the complex forces and realities that determine how and if youth can access resources to face adversity. Ultimately, youth’s experiences of the pandemic are shaped and mediated by the unevenly developed socio-economic, political and cultural environments of the Euromed region. The pandemic has
affected young men and women in vastly different ways in culturally conservative countries and communities where gender inequalities disproportionately overburden young women with unpaid labour, family care-giving and other daily responsibilities. Furthermore, the depth of youth vulnerabilities does not only correlate with their gender, class, health, ethnic, educational and occupational differences, even if these are extremely important markers. Their vulnerabilities are also determined by the broader institutional arrangements, political (in)stability and security considerations unique to their countries.

Covid has confirmed that the digital divide in the Euro-Mediterranean region is both deep and deeply gendered, with immediate consequences on the lives of young men and women who are already geographically, economically and technologically disadvantaged.

Thus, one would expect youth to experience the pandemic in southern European countries in less severe forms than youth in fragile and conflict-affected countries, such as Iran, Syria, Iraq, the Palestinian territories, Yemen and Libya. In many ways, emerging studies confirm this is the case. Yet, the challenges youth are facing in southern European countries should not be understated, especially since many had also been experiencing vulnerabilities prior to the pandemic and have, therefore, seen their prospects of better lives diminish rather than improve.

Education in Crisis and the Digital Divide

While school closures have affected the educational trajectories of all young people around the world, Covid has confirmed that the digital divide in the Euro-Mediterranean region is both deep and deeply gendered, with immediate consequences on the lives of young men and women who are already geographically, economically and technologically disadvantaged. In a region where educational opportunities are dis-

similar within and between countries, the disruptions in youth’s learning and schooling have varied in scope and severity since the beginning of the pandemic. Digital inequities have been particularly consequential within countries on the South Shore of the Mediterranean with limited resources to school administrators, teachers and students, as well as low levels of digital literacy and capacities.

The 2018 World Bank report Expectation and Aspirations provided a bleak overview of the overall educational landscape in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Although the region’s average spending on education is higher than the world average, and despite a series of reforms to the sector over the last five decades, the learning quality and outcome are still considered the lowest in the world. Access to schooling, let alone quality education, is very much determined by class, gender and location (urban versus rural). Recommendations from the report urge the region’s leaders to leverage digital technologies to provide efficient, effective and equitable access to learning for all (EdTech) and expand Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure to be able to reap more benefits from EdTech solutions.

While access to ICTs cannot solve all educational woes, they would have minimized the impact of Covid on school disruptions. Undoubtedly, some countries from the southern Mediterranean region (Egypt, Jordan and Morocco) have made remarkable strides in modernizing their information and communication technology infrastructure, digitizing sectors of the economy and government services, and providing e-health applications during the pandemic (Algeria). Despite this, the differences in digital access across the region are too significant to overlook. In 2018, while 90% of European households had domestic access to the Internet (with 33.5% fixed broadband subscriptions) southern Mediterranean countries hovered at an average of 61% with fixed broadband subscriptions as low as 7% in Algeria and Egypt. In addition, data on internet users show significant cross-country variability across the Euro-Mediterranean region. While 82.41% of the European Union population used the Internet in 2018, only 59.64% did so in North African and Middle Eastern countries – excluding the Gulf countries (El Kindi, 2020).

The pandemic has revealed significant variability in computer ownership and internet access even among southern European countries. In early 2021, an Italy
badly hit by the pandemic woke up to the reality that one third of its households do not possess computers and, therefore, run the risk of seeing their children left out of education, with school closures lasting several months. The rural/urban divide has also been observed in several areas of Spain, a country that realized in 2020 that over one in four of its citizens does not have reliable internet access, according to the Spanish trade union, UGT. Likewise, Greece and Portugal register marked inequalities, both domestically and compared to other EU Member States, in the access to and use of digital technologies.

The implications of these variations within and between counties on youth’s education and professional training are enormous. Digitally developed countries have typically wasted little time in providing e-learning solutions to their youth during the crisis. However, the countries from this region, which have the highest youth populations, have shown the lowest levels of digital readiness to minimize the nefarious impact of the pandemic on education. Numerous e-learning initiatives and programmes were implemented in North African countries and other Arab countries through ministries of education in partnership with national and international organizations. Despite this, unequal digital skills, limited access to digital portals and rural/urban disparities have posed serious obstacles to youth’s continuous learning. Millions of youth have either been left out completely from education or, as is the case of young girls, seen their access to e-learning opportunities severely diminished in favour of their brothers. The gender digital divide was one of the key issues raised by young activists in the 2021 UN Generation Equality Forum. Young Turkish activist, Selin Ozuñaldin, co-founder of the Turkish chapter of Girls Who Code,1 reported that “In Turkey, school is still taking place remotely from home. I was talking to a girl from the east side of the country, and she told me that she and her two siblings have to share their mother and father’s mobile phones to enter their online classes. And their access to the Internet is very limited. Because there are three of them, each day, one of them had to skip class so that the other sibling could attend. This is happening across the country. This is not acceptable.”

While the gender digital divide has been noticed in most developing countries, its severity is particularly disturbing in the Arab countries, which register the second highest gender disparities in the world in terms of accessing technologies. The gender divide has serious repercussions on young women’s education and employment opportunities, as well as on their overall conditions and quality of life.

Persistent Unemployment

Studies on youth employment patterns over the last few decades confirm that youth have been suffering from endemic unemployment and underemployment at staggeringly high rates on both shores of the Euromed region. Rigorous analyses have detailed the flawed economic, political and socio-cultural policies causing persistent youth unemployment. The global financial crisis and recession (2008), Arab democratic uprisings (2011), ongoing conflicts and displacement, as well as the Covid pandemic have all contributed to making an already bad situation worse. It is important to highlight here that youth’s diminishing job opportunities and limited prospects in volatile markets result from policies and decisions over which they have little say and power.

In southern European countries (Italy, Greece and Spain), youth unemployment rates have remained persistently high over the last two decades averaging between 30 and 40 percent. These rates reached new heights after the 2008 recession, where the figures in Greece, for instance, soared from 22 percent to nearly 60 percent in 2013. Spain, Italy and Portugal saw a relatively similar pattern of youth unemployment, although the rates never reached those of Greece. (Eubanks and Wiczer, 2014). Across the Maghreb and other Arab countries, youth unemployment rates have rarely, if ever, dipped below 25 percent over the last three decades, while rates in Palestine and even Saudi Arabia have reached as high as 40 percent (Kumar, 2020). Recent numbers from oil-rich Algeria, put youth unemployment rates at nearly 30 percent over the last five years, leading up to the 2019 street protests that put an end to the 20-year presidency of Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

1 www.npr.org/2016/06/24/483131204/can-coding-help-girls-take-risks
Gender differences in unemployment and underemployment are important to underscore in these contexts. The ILO World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020 reports that the youth unemployment rates in Arab countries have increased at a much faster rate for young women than men between 2012 and 2020. For young women, the rate is estimated at 42.1 percent in 2020 doubling that of young men (19.8 percent). These statistics confirm not only the invariable impact of Covid on youth, but also the complex set of vulnerabilities that are exacerbated by the pandemic. An important group of marginalized youth not typically captured by the reported youth unemployment statistics is the so-called NEET – Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training. The percentage of youth who are disengaged from education and the labour market has been on the increase on both shores of the Mediterranean, even prior to the pandemic. For instance, in 2012, around 25 percent of youth were classified as NEETs in Jordan and Tunisia, and over 30 percent in Egypt and Palestine. European countries recorded an average of 16.5 percent among the 20- to 34-year-olds as NEETs, with Italy reaching nearly 28% just before COVID hit (Eurostat, 2020). The NEET group has been on the increase and, together with the unemployed and underemployed, is the most at risk of experiencing extreme, precarious living conditions and severe forms of exclusion.

Precarious Livelihoods

In fragile economies around the world, vulnerable youth have been hit the hardest by the economic impact of Covid. The 2020 ILO youth survey confirms that the pandemic has inflicted “a heavy toll on young workers, destroying their livelihood and undermining their career prospects.” Those who were fortunate to keep their work saw a considerable reduction in work hours and a contraction in their income. This is particularly the case of young people in unstable jobs and low-skilled, income-generating activities that provide no opportunity to engage in remote work. In MENA, it is estimated that 80% of youth in the region work in the informal sector of national economies. The effects of poor education, training and digital literacy, combined with the pandemic-related restrictions in mobility, and the economic slowdown, have caused millions of young people considerable losses in their daily incomes. Loss or contraction in income have taken place in various forms and for various reasons. On the southern shore of the Mediterranean, loss of income for some youth has been caused by curtailed opportunities arising from their migration across the region. This is the case of Jordanian youth, for instance, many of whom migrate temporarily to work in the resource-rich Gulf countries. Travel restrictions caused by the pandemic severely curtailed these opportunities and caused job losses for existing migrants. For young women, Covid meant a greater reduction in incomes and work hours than for young men, and greater losses in productivity, as the 2020 ILO Survey and other studies confirm. This is because women are typically employed in sectors that are the hardest hit by curfews (informal economic activities), closures (education) and lay-offs (manufacturing and low-paid secretarial jobs). These are jobs with minimal to virtually no protection schemes (domestic work, agriculture). Since the beginning of the pandemic, vulnerable young women have had to deal with the combined effect of a triple burden: losing sources of income (where the job is paid), falling under the radar of Covid response packages (where these apply) and seeing an increase in household chores and caregiving responsibilities with greater exposure to the incidence of gender-based violence (ILO survey). The point here is not that vulnerable young men are not exposed to the same insecurities outlined here, but rather that young women experience additional layers of vulnerabilities given the entrenched gender disparities, practices and legal exclusions in conservative societies.

Unsurprisingly, disruptions in education, employment and livelihoods have taken a heavy toll on the overall health and well-being of youth in the Mediterranean region, as elsewhere in the world. While youth’s sense of “hopelessness” and anxiety has been documented in numerous studies prior to the pandemic, emerging research on the impact of Covid on youth’s health indicates increasing mental and emotional distress among the young. The 2020 ILO Global Survey on Youth and Covid-19 confirms that one out of two young people (15-29 of age) that responded to the questions on mental health are experiencing anxiety and/or depression. They ascribe this to increasing family stress, social isolation and an increased risk of domestic abuse and violence. The survey underlines that young girls experience higher rates of mental health problems than young men, largely because the pan-
The unsustainability of the growing gaps between political speeches and youth’s everyday frustrations is costly, not only to the lives of the young themselves, but to the overall economic development and political stability of their countries and region. Virtually none of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals are achievable without meaningful investment in young people’s presents and futures. Persistent youth exclusion and unaddressed vulnerabilities stand as serious obstacles to meeting the goals of the Barcelona Process, which seeks to narrow the gap in the living standards of people in the Euro-Mediterranean zone. No emergency rescue packages, however helpful these are, can resolve systemic vulnerabilities and exclusions which prevent youth from reaching their full potential. Bigger, bolder and better youth-friendly policies is what the region needs to move forward with its youth.

While youth’s sense of “hopelessness” and anxiety has been documented in numerous studies prior to the pandemic, emerging research on the impact of Covid on youth’s health indicates increasing mental and emotional distress among the young...
Bigger, bolder and better youth-friendly policies is what the region needs to move forward with its youth

At this juncture, it is critical for government leaders and decision-makers to seize this historical opportunity to put into action the recommendations accumulated by youth to develop pro-active, rather than re-active, youth-focused and youth-friendly policies that address the root causes of their systemic exclusion. The post-Covid recovery plans should provide more than a temporary relief from a crisis. This is precisely what transpired from an interesting webinar organized by Reseau Euro Mediterranéen France (9 June, 2020), on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on youth in the Euromed region. The 27 young participants (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Italy, France, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Belgium) made a series of realistic and pertinent recommendations addressed to national and regional leaders that call for effective commitment, coordination and collaboration among European and national institutions. In many respects, the recommendations made in this webinar reiterate similar calls made by generations of youth for decades now. One cannot help but sense the tenacity with which young people insist on being heard, taken seriously and included in the design and implementation of policies that shape and impact their lives.

Political discourses have been rife with promises, but rather short on delivery and implementation mechanisms. The time to put words into action is now. The peace and prosperity of the entire Euromed region depends on how inclusive and equitable the post-Covid policies are.

References


Panorama: The Mediterranean Year
## ALBANIA

**Official Name:** Republic of Albania  
**Form of Government:** Parliamentary republic  
**Head of State:** Ilir Meta  
**Head of Government:** Edi Rama

### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Party of Albania (PSSH, social democrat)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI, social democrat)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party of Albania (PDS, conservative)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democratic Party of Albania (social-democracy, centre-left)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population

| Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions) | 0.49 |
| Main urban agglomerations (population in millions) | Tirana |

| Area km² | 28.750 |
| Population (millions) | 2.9 |
| Population density (hab/km²) | 105 |
| Urban population (%) | 61 |
| Average annual population growth rate (%) | -0.4 |

### GDP & Debt

| GDP (millions $) | 15,276 |
| GDP per capita ($, PPP) | 14,534 |
| GDP growth (%) | 2.2 |
| Public Debt (% of GDP) | 67.8 |
| Public Deficit (% of GDP) | -2.0 |
| External Debt (millions $) | 9,626 |
| Inflation Rate (%) | 1.4 |

| FDI Inflows (millions $) | 1,281 |
| Outflows (millions $) | 127 |

### International tourism

| Tourist arrivals (000) | 5,919 |
| Tourism receipts (million $) | 2,332 |

### Migrant remittances

| Receipts (millions $) | 1,455 |
| Receipts (% of GDP) | 9.4 |

### Total Trade

| in goods and services (millions $) | 6,907 | 4,814 | -2,093 |
| in goods (millions $) | 4,532 | 1,014 | -3,518 |
| in services (millions $) | 2,375 | 3,800 | 1,425 |

| in goods and services (% of GDP) | 44.8 | 31.2 | -13.6 |

### Economic Sectors

| Agriculture, value added (% of GDP) | 21.3 |
| Industry, value added (% of GDP) | 23.0 |
| Services, value added (% of GDP) | 55.7 |

### Labour market

| Labour participation rate, female (%) | 52.5 |
| Unemployment rate (%) | 11.5 |
| Youth unemployment rate (%) | 27.0 |

### Employment in:

| Agriculture (% of total employment) | 36.4 |
| Industry (% of total employment) | 20.2 |
| Services (% of total employment) | 43.4 |

### Energy

| Production (millions mt oil eq) | 2.0 |
| Consumption (millions mt oil eq) | 2.3 |
| Consumption per capita (kg oil eq) | 0.8 |
| Import (% energy used) | 21.2 |

### Total Trade Imports

| in goods and services (millions $) | 6,907 |
| in goods (millions $) | 4,532 |
| in services (millions $) | 2,375 |
| in goods and services (% of GDP) | 44.8 |

### Main Trading Partners

| Import | Italy (25%), Turkey (10%), China (9%), Greece (8%), Germany (7%) |
| Export | Italy (48%), Spain (8%), Germany (5%), Greece (5%), Serbia (4%) |

### Education

| Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%) | 98.5/97.8 |
| Net enrolment rate (primary) | 95 |
| Gross enrolment rate (secondary) | 95 |
| Gross enrolment rate (tertiary) | 55 |
| Mean years of schooling | 10.1 |
| Public expenditure in education (% of GDP) | 2.5 |
| R&D expenditure (% of GDP) | .. |

### Water

| Water resources (km³) | 30.2 |
| Water withdrawal (m³ per capita) | 492 |
| Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture) | 64 |
| Water withdrawal by sector (% industry) | 16 |
| Desalinated water production (millions m³) | .. |

### Security

| Total armed forces (000) | 9 |
| Military expenditure (% of GDP) | 1.5 |

### Development

| Human Development Index (value) | 0.795 |
| Human Development Index (position in ranking) | 69 |

### Health

| Physicians density (per 10,000) | 16.5 |
| Hospital beds (per 10,000) | 28.9 |
| Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP) | 5.3 |

### Emissions

| CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita) | 1.5 |
| Passenger cars (per 1,000 people) | 138 |

### Protected areas

| Terrestrial (% of total land area) | 17.7 |
| Marine (% of territorial waters) | 2.7 |

### ICT

| Mobile subscriptions (per 100) | 94.2 |
| Households with computer (per 100) | 20.2 |
| Internet users (per 100) | 68.6 |
## ALGERIA

### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Liberation Front (FLN)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement of Society for Peace (MSP, Islamist)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Rally for Democracy (RND)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Moustakbel Front (FM, &quot;Future&quot;, centrist)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Construction Movement</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>People's Voice Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good Governance Front</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Justice and Development Front (FJD, Islamist)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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### ALGERIA

**Official Name:** People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
**Form of Government:** Semi-presidential republic  
**Head of State:** Abdelmadjid Tebboune  
**Head of Government:** Aymen Benabderrahmane

### Population

- **Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Algiers (2.81)
- **Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Oran (0.91); El Djelfa (0.53); Blida (0.49); Constantine (0.41)
- **Area km²:** 2,381,740
- **Population (millions):** 43.1
- **Population density (hab/km²):** 18
- **Urban population (%):** 73
- **Average annual population growth rate (%):** 1.9

### Economy

#### GDP & Debt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GDP (millions $):</th>
<th>171,070</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita ($, PPP):</td>
<td>11,895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (%):</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Debt (% of GDP):</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Deficit (% of GDP):</td>
<td>-5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Debt (millions $):</td>
<td>5,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation Rate (%):</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### FDI

| Inflows (millions $): | 1,382 |
| Outflows (millions $): | 83 |

### International tourism

| Tourist arrivals (000): | 2,371 |
| Tourism receipts (million $): | 165 |

### Migrant remittances

| Receipts (millions $): | 1,792 |
| Receipts (% of GDP): | 1.0 |

### Total Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $):</td>
<td>58,637</td>
<td>45,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $):</td>
<td>47,722</td>
<td>42,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $):</td>
<td>10,915</td>
<td>3,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP):</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Society

#### Education

| Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%): | 87.4/75.3 |
| Net enrolment rate (primary): | 99.6 |
| Gross enrolment rate (secondary): | - |
| Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): | - |
| Mean years of schooling: | 8.0 |
| Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): | - |
| R&D expenditure (% of GDP): | 0.50 |

#### Water

| Water resources (km³): | 11.7 |
| Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): | 253 |
| Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): | 64 |
| Water withdrawal by sector (% industry): | 2 |
| Desalinated water production (millions m³): | 631 |

#### Security

| Total armed forces (000): | 317 |
| Military expenditure (% of GDP): | 6.7 |

### Development

| Human Development Index (value): | 0.748 |
| Human Development Index (position in ranking): | 91 |

### Health

| Physicians density (per 10,000): | 17.2 |
| Hospital beds (per 10,000): | 19.0 |
| Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP): | 6.2 |

### Emissions

| CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita): | 3.3 |
| Passenger cars (per 1,000 people): | 93 |

### Protected areas

| Terrestrial (% of total land area): | 7.5 |
| Marine (% of territorial waters): | 0.1 |

### ICT

| Mobile subscriptions (per 100): | 109.4 |
| Households with computer (per 100): | 42.2 |
| Internet users (per 100): | 49.0 |
### Country Profile: Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Official Name:** Bosnia and Herzegovina  
**Form of Government:** Federal parliamentary republic  
**Head of State:** Milorad Dodik (Serb); Selik Dzaferović (Bosniak); Zeljko Komšić (Croat)  
**Head of Government:** Zoran Tegeltija

#### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party of Democratic Action (SDA, centre-right)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ, Croatian nationalist and conservative)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democratic Party (SDP)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) / Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) (Serbian nationalist)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Population

Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):
- Sarajevo (0.34)

Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):
- Banja Luka (0.20)
- Tuzla (0.12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
<th>51,210</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (millions)</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (hab/km²)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population (%)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual population growth rate (%)</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Economy

**GDP & Debt**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GDP (millions $)</th>
<th>20,203</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita ($, PPP)</td>
<td>15,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (%)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Debt (% of GDP)</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Deficit (% of GDP)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Debt (millions $)</td>
<td>16,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation Rate (%)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FDI**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inflows (millions $)</th>
<th>528</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outflows (millions $)</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**International tourism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tourist arrivals (000)</th>
<th>1,198</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism receipts (million $)</td>
<td>1,176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Migrant remittances**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receipts (millions $)</th>
<th>2,192</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receipts (% of GDP)</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Trade**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imports in goods and services (millions $)</th>
<th>11,125</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exports in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>10,381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>-3,064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imports in services (millions $)</th>
<th>8,061</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exports in services ($ millions)</td>
<td>5,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>-4,571</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imports in goods and services (% of GDP)</th>
<th>47.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exports in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>-15.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Main Trading Partners

**Import:**
- Croatia (15%), Serbia (14%), Germany (11%), Italy (10%), Slovenia (8%)

**Export:**
- Germany (13%), Croatia (12%), Italy (11%), Serbia (11%), Slovenia (10%)

#### Society

**Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Development Index (value):</th>
<th>0.780</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index (position in ranking):</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Health**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physicians density (per 10,000):</th>
<th>21.6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospital beds (per 10,000):</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Emissions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita):</th>
<th>6.7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passenger cars (per 1,000 people):</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Protected areas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marine (% of territorial waters):</th>
<th>1.4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrestrial (% of total land area):</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ICT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobile subscriptions (per 100):</th>
<th>104.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Households with computer (per 100):</td>
<td>64.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet users (per 100):</td>
<td>69.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%):</th>
<th>99.2/94.9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net enrolment rate (primary):</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross enrolment rate (secondary):</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean years of schooling:</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public expenditure in education (% of GDP):</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Water**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water resources (km³):</th>
<th>37.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal (m³ per capita):</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture):</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal by sector (% industry):</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desalinated water production (millions m³):</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Security**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total armed forces (000):</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CROATIA

**Official Name:** Republic of Croatia  
**Form of Government:** Parliamentary constitutional republic  
**Head of State:** Zoran Milanović  
**Head of Government:** Andrej Plenkovic

#### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Croatian Democratic Union Coalition (HDZ, conservatism)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restart Coalition (Social democracy)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeland Movement Coalition (DPMS, right wing)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge of Independent Lists (Most)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green-Left coalition</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIP-Smart-Focus Coalition (centre)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatian People’s Party - Liberal Democrats</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Party - Reformists</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Lists</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Population

- **Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Zagreb (0.69)
- **Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Split (0.24); Rijeka (0.21)

| Area (km²): | 56,590 |
| Population (millions): | 4.1 |
| Population density (hab/km²): | 72 |
| Urban population (%): | 57 |
| Average annual population growth rate (%): | -0.5 |

#### Economy

- **GDP (millions $):** 60,759
- **GDP per capita ($, PPP):** 29,925
- **GDP growth (%):** 2.9
- **Public Debt (% of GDP):** 72.8
- **Public Deficit (% of GDP):** 0.4
- **External Debt (millions $):** -
- **Inflation Rate (%):** 0.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FDI</th>
<th>Inflows (millions $):</th>
<th>1,365</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outflows (millions $):</td>
<td>231</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **International tourism**
  - **Tourist arrivals (000):** 17,353
  - **Tourism receipts (million $):** 11,753

#### Migrant remittances

- **Receipts (millions $):** 4,022
- **Receipts (% of GDP):** 6.7

- **Total Trade**
  - **Imports**
    - in goods and services (millions $): 31,371
    - in goods (millions $): 25,875
    - in services (millions $): 5,496
  - **Exports**
    - in goods and services (millions $): 31,112
    - in goods (millions $): 14,315
    - in services (millions $): 16,797
  - **Balance**
    - in goods and services (millions $): -259
    - in goods (millions $): -11,560
    - in services (millions $): 11,301

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Trading Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- **Import:** Germany (15%), Italy (14%), Slovenia (12%), Hungary (8%), Austria (6%)
- **Export:** Italy (14%), Germany (13%), Slovenia (11%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (10%), Austria (6%)
## CYPRUS

**Official Name:** Republic of Cyprus  
**Form of Government:** Presidential constitutional republic  
**Head of State:** Nicos Anastasiades  
**Head of Government:** Nicos Anastasiades

### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Coalition (DISY, conservative)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL, socialist)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party (DIKO, liberal)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Popular Front (ELAM, far right)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement of Social Democracy (EDEK)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Alignment (centrist)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement of Ecologists - Citizens' Cooperation (KOCS)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population

- **Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Nicosia (0.27)
- **Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Limassol (0.24); Larnaca (0.14)

#### Area

- Area km$^2$: 9,250
- Population (millions): 1.2
- Population density (hab/km$^2$): 129
- Urban population (%): 67
- Average annual population growth rate (%): 0.8
- Population age <15 (%): 17
- Population age >64 (%): 14
- Total fertility rate (births per woman): 1.33
- Life expectancy at birth. Men/Women (years): 79/83
- Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive): 2

### Economy

#### GDP & Debt

- **GDP (millions $):** 24,953
- **GDP per capita ($, PPP):** 42,236
- **GDP growth (%):** 3.1
- **Public Debt (% of GDP):** 94.0
- **Public Deficit (% of GDP):** 1.5
- **External Debt (millions $):** -
- **Inflation Rate (%):** 0.6

#### FDI

- **Inflows (millions $):** 24,248
- **Outflows (millions $):** 14,053

#### International tourism

- **Tourist arrivals (000):** 3,977
- **Tourism receipts (million $):** 3,254

#### Migrant remittances

- **Receipts (millions $):** 578
- **Receipts (% of GDP):** 2.4

#### Total Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $)</td>
<td>17,246</td>
<td>17,204</td>
<td>-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>8,673</td>
<td>3,395</td>
<td>-5,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $)</td>
<td>8,574</td>
<td>13,808</td>
<td>5,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Main Trading Partners

- **Import:** Greece (20%), Italy (10%), United Kingdom (7%), Israel (6%), Germany (6%)
- **Export:** Netherlands (13%), Libya (10%), Greece (7%), United Kingdom (6%), Hong Kong (5%)

### Society

#### Education

- **Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%):**
- **Net enrolment rate (primary):** 99
- **Gross enrolment rate (secondary):** 100
- **Gross enrolment rate (tertiary):** 76
- **Mean years of schooling:** 12.2
- **Public expenditure in education (% of GDP):** 5.8
- **R&D expenditure (% of GDP):** 0.55

#### Water

- **Water resources (km$^2$):** 0.8
- **Water withdrawal (m$^3$ per capita):** 264
- **Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture):** 59
- **Water withdrawal by sector (% industry):** 5
- **Desalinated water production (millions m$^3$):** 65

#### Security

- **Total armed forces (000):** 16
- **Military expenditure (% of GDP):** 1.8

#### Development

- **Human Development Index (value):** 0.887
- **Human Development Index (position in ranking):** 39

#### Health

- **Physicians density (per 10,000):** 19.5
- **Hospital beds (per 10,000):** 34.0
- **Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP):** 6.8

#### Emissions

- **CO$\text{\textsubscript{2}}$ Emissions (mt per capita):** 7.3
- **Passenger cars (per 1,000 people):** 420

#### Protected areas

- **Terrestrial (% of total land area):** 18.7
- **Marine (% of territorial waters):** 0.1

#### ICT

- **Mobile subscriptions (per 100):** 138.9
- **Households with computer (per 100):** 74.8
- **Internet users (per 100):** 86.1
## Egypt

**Official Name:** Arab Republic of Egypt  
**Form of Government:** Unitary semi-presidential constitutional republic  
**Head of State:** Abdel Fattah el-Sisi  
**Head of Government:** Mostafa Madbouly

### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nation’s Future Party</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican People’s Party</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Wafd Party</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeland Defenders</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Egypt Party</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population

- **Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Cairo (21.32)* [Greater Cairo including part of the population of Giza and Qalubiyya governorates]
- **Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Alexandria (5.38); Port Said (0.75)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area km²:</th>
<th>1,001,450</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (millions):</td>
<td>100.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (hab/km²):</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population (%):</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual population growth rate (%):</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Economy

#### GDP & Debt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP (millions $):</td>
<td>302,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita ($, PPP):</td>
<td>12,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (%):</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Debt (% of GDP):</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Deficit (% of GDP):</td>
<td>-8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Debt (millions $):</td>
<td>115,080</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inflation Rate (%):</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### FDI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inflows (millions $):</td>
<td>9,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outflows (millions $):</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### International tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourist arrivals (000):</td>
<td>13,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism receipts (million $):</td>
<td>13,030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Migrant remittances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receipts (millions $):</td>
<td>26,791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts (% of GDP):</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Total Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $):</td>
<td>78,689</td>
<td>53,523</td>
<td>-25,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>57,758</td>
<td>28,472</td>
<td>-29,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $)</td>
<td>20,932</td>
<td>25,051</td>
<td>4,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP):</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>-7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Economic Sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, value added (% of GDP):</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry, value added (% of GDP):</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services, value added (% of GDP):</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Labour market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour participation rate, female (%):</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate (%):</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth unemployment rate (%):</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Employment in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture (% of total employment):</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry (% of total employment):</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services (% of total employment):</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Energy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production (millions mt oil eq):</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption (millions mt oil eq):</td>
<td>95.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption per capita (kg oil eq):</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import (% energy used):</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Main Trading Partners

**Import:** China (16%), United States (7%), Saudi Arabia (6%), Russian Federation (6%), Germany (5%)

**Export:** United States (8%), United Arab Emirates (7%), Saudi Arabia (6%), Italy (6%), Turkey (6%)

### Society

#### Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%):</td>
<td>76.5/65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net enrolment rate (primary):</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross enrolment rate (secondary):</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross enrolment rate (tertiary):</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean years of schooling:</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public expenditure in education (% of GDP):</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
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</table>

#### Water

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water resources (km²):</td>
<td>57.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal (m³ per capita):</td>
<td>803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture):</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal by sector (% industry):</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desalinated water production (millions m³):</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
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</table>

#### Security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total armed forces (000):</td>
<td>836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td>1.2</td>
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</table>

#### Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index (value):</td>
<td>0.707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index (position in ranking):</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physicians density (per 10,000):</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital beds (per 10,000):</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Emissions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita):</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger cars (per 1,000 people):</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Protected areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrestrial (% of total land area):</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine (% of territorial waters):</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### ICT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobile subscriptions (per 100):</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with computer (per 100):</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet users (per 100):</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FRANCE

**Official Name:** French Republic  
**Form of Government:** Semi-presidential constitutional republic  
**Head of State:** Emmanuel Macron  
**Head of Government:** Jean Castex

**Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)**  
National Assembly:  
- La République En Marche! (liberal): 269  
- Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI and Independents): 19  
- The Republicans (LR, liberal conservative): 105  
- Liberties and Territories: 17  
- Democratic Movement (centrist): 58  
- La France Insoumise (left coalition): 17  
- Socialist and affiliated group (social democrat): 29  
- Democratic and Republican Left: 16  
- Act, the Constructive Right (Agir, centre right): 21  
- Non-Attached Members: 24

**Population**  
- **Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Paris (11.1)  
- **Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Lyon (1.73); Marseille-Aix-en-Provence (1.61); Lille (1.07); Toulouse (1.04); Bordeaux (0.98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area km²</th>
<th>549,087</th>
<th>Population age &lt;15 (%)</th>
<th>18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (millions)</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>Population age &gt;64 (%)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (hab/km²)</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>Total fertility rate (births per woman)</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population (%)</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Life expectancy at birth. Men/Women (years)</td>
<td>80/86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual population growth rate (%)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Economy**  
**GDP & Debt**  
- GDP (millions $): 2,717,200  
- GDP per capita ($, PPP): 49,696  
- GDP growth (%): 1.5  
- Public Debt (% of GDP): 98.1  
- Public Deficit (% of GDP): -3.0  
- External Debt (millions $): -  
- Inflation Rate (%): 1.3  
- FDI Inflows (millions $): 33,965  
- Outflows (millions $): 38,663  
- International tourism  
  - Tourist arrivals (000): 89,400  
  - Tourism receipts (million $): 63,801  
- Migrant remittances  
  - Receipts (millions $): 25,738  
  - Receipts (% of GDP): 1.0

**Total Trade**  
- in goods and services (millions $): 910,166  
  - Imports: 883,002  
  - Exports: 27,164
- in goods (millions $): 647,320  
  - Imports: 595,385  
  - Exports: 51,936
- in services (millions $): 262,846  
  - Imports: 287,617  
  - Exports: 24,772
- in goods and services (% of GDP): 33.6  
  - Imports: 32.6  
  - Exports: 1.0

**Main Trading Partners**  
Import: Germany (15%), China (9%), Italy (8%), United States (7%), Belgium (7%)  
Export: Germany (14%), United States (8%), Italy (8%), Spain (7%), United Kingdom (7%)

**Society**  
**Education**  
- Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%):  
- Net enrolment rate (primary): 100  
- Gross enrolment rate (secondary): 104  
- Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): 66  
- Mean years of schooling: 11.5  
- Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): 5.5  
- R&D expenditure (% of GDP): 2.2

**Water**  
- Water resources (km³): 211.0  
- Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): 563  
- Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): 12  
- Water withdrawal by sector (% industry): 69  
- Desalinated water production (millions m³): 12

**Security**  
- Total armed forces (000): 305  
- Military expenditure (% of GDP): 2.1

**Economic Sectors**  
- Agriculture, value added (% of GDP): 1.8  
- Industry, value added (% of GDP): 19.2  
- Services, value added (% of GDP): 79.0

**Labour market**  
- Labour participation rate, female (%): 50.6  
- Unemployment rate (%): 8.4  
- Youth unemployment rate (%): 19.5

**Employment in:**  
- Agriculture (% of total employment): 2.5  
- Industry (% of total employment): 20.4  
- Services (% of total employment): 77.0

**Energy**  
- Production (millions mt oil eq): 135.5  
- Consumption (millions mt oil eq): 246.3  
- Consumption per capita (kg oil eq): 3.6  
- Import (% energy used): 48.5

**International tourism**  
- Services (% of total employment): 77.0  
- Tourist arrivals (000): 89,400  
- Tourism receipts (million $): 63,801

**Migrant remittances**  
- Receipts (millions $): 25,738  
- Receipts (% of GDP): 1.0

**ICT**  
- Mobile subscriptions (per 100): 108.4  
- Households with computer (per 100): 77.5  
- Internet users (per 100): 83.3

**Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture):**  
- Total water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): 12

**Water withdrawal by sector (% industry):**  
- Total water withdrawal by sector (% industry): 69

**Desalinated water production (millions m³):**  
- Total desalinated water production (millions m³): 12

**Total trade imports: Exports: Balance:**  
- Total trade imports: 910,166  
- Total trade exports: 883,002  
- Total trade balance: -27,164

**Total trade in goods and services: (millions $):**  
- Total trade in goods and services: 647,320  
- Total trade in goods and services: 595,385  
- Total trade in goods and services: -51,936

**Total trade in goods: (millions $):**  
- Total trade in goods: 262,846  
- Total trade in goods: 287,617  
- Total trade in goods: 24,772

**Total trade in goods and services (% of GDP):**  
- Total trade in goods and services (% of GDP): 33.6  
- Total trade in goods and services (% of GDP): 32.6  
- Total trade in goods and services (% of GDP): -1.0

**Country Profiles**
**GREECE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official Name:</th>
<th>Hellenic Republic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form of Government:</td>
<td>Parliamentary constitutional republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of State:</td>
<td>Katerina Sakellaropoulou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Government:</td>
<td>Kyriakos Mitsotakis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Democracy (ND, conservative)</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA)</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement for Change</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Party of Greece (KKE)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Solution (far right)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Realistic Disobedience Front (MeRA25, left wing)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):</th>
<th>Athens (3.15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):</td>
<td>Thessaloniki (0.81): Patras (0.21); Herakliom (0.22); Larissa (0.17); Volos (0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area km²:</td>
<td>131,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (millions):</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (hab/km²):</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population (%):</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual population growth rate (%):</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population age &lt;15 (%):</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population age &gt;64 (%):</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total fertility rate (births per woman):</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth. Men/Women (years):</td>
<td>79/84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive):</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Economy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GDP &amp; Debt</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP (millions $):</td>
<td>205,349</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita ($, PPP):</td>
<td>30,917</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (%):</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Debt (% of GDP):</td>
<td>184.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Deficit (% of GDP):</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Debt (millions $):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation Rate (%):</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflows (millions $):</td>
<td>4,631</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outflows (millions $):</td>
<td>438</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International tourism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist arrivals (000):</td>
<td>31,348</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism receipts (million $):</td>
<td>20,351</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant remittances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts (millions $):</td>
<td>544</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts (% of GDP):</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Trade</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $):</td>
<td>83,208</td>
<td>81,422</td>
<td>-1,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $):</td>
<td>61,870</td>
<td>36,309</td>
<td>-25,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $):</td>
<td>21,338</td>
<td>45,112</td>
<td>23,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP):</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Sectors</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, value added (% of GDP):</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry, value added (% of GDP):</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services, value added (% of GDP):</td>
<td></td>
<td>80.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour market</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour participation rate, female (%):</td>
<td></td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate (%):</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth unemployment rate (%):</td>
<td></td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture (% of total employment):</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry (% of total employment):</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services (% of total employment):</td>
<td></td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production (millions mt oil eq):</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption (millions mt oil eq):</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption per capita (kg oil eq):</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import (% energy used):</td>
<td></td>
<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Trading Partners</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Import:</td>
<td>Germany (11%), Iraq (8%), Italy (8%), Russian Federation (7%), China (7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export:</td>
<td>Italy (11%), Germany (7%), Turkey (6%), Cyprus (6%), Bulgaria (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Society</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%):</td>
<td>98.5/97.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net enrolment rate (primary):</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross enrolment rate (secondary):</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross enrolment rate (tertiary):</td>
<td>137</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean years of schooling:</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public expenditure in education (% of GDP):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water resources (km³):</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal (m³ per capita):</td>
<td>1,063</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture):</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal by sector (% industry):</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desalinated water production (millions m³):</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total armed forces (000):</td>
<td>148</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index (value):</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index (position in ranking):</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicians density (per 10,000):</td>
<td></td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital beds (per 10,000):</td>
<td></td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emissions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita):</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger cars (per 1,000 people):</td>
<td></td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protected areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrestrial (% of total land area):</td>
<td></td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine (% of territorial waters):</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile subscriptions (per 100):</td>
<td></td>
<td>115.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with computer (per 100):</td>
<td></td>
<td>70.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet users (per 100):</td>
<td></td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ISRAEL

Official Name: State of Israel
Form of Government: Parliamentary democracy
Head of State: Reuven Rivlin
Head of Government: Naftali Bennett

Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats) (Knesset):
- Likud (neo-conservatives) 29
- Yesh Atid-Telem (liberalism) 17
- Shas (ultraorthodox Sephardis) 9
- Blue and White 8
- Labor Party 7
- United Torah Judaism (ultraorthodox Ashkenazis) 7
- Yisrael Beiteinu (far-right ultranationalist) 7
- Religious Zionist 7
- Blue and White 8
- Joint List (Arab parties) 6
- Shas (ultraorthodox Sephardis) 9
- religious Zion 7
- Blue and White 8
- Joint List (Arab parties) 6
- Yisrael Beiteinu (far-right ultranationalist) 7
- Religious Zionist 7
- Likud (neo-conservatives) 29

Population

Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions): Jerusalem (0.94)
Main urban agglomerations (population in millions): Tel Aviv-Jaffa (4.26); Haifa (1.15)
Area km²: 22,070
Population (millions): 9.1
Population age <15 (%): 28
Population age >64 (%): 12
Population density (hab/km²): 410
Total fertility rate (births per woman): 3.09
Average annual population growth rate (%): 1.9
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive): 3

Economy

GDP & Debt
- GDP (millions $): 394,652
- GDP per capita ($, PPP): 41,786
- GDP growth (%): 3.5
- Public Debt (% of GDP): 60.0
- Public Deficit (% of GDP): -3.9
- External Debt (millions $):
- Inflation Rate (%): 0.8
- FDI
  - Inflows (millions $): 18,224
  - Outflows (millions $): 8,566
- International tourism
  - Tourist arrivals (000): 4,552
  - Tourism receipts (million $): 7,600
- Migrant remittances
  - Receipts (millions $): 6,051
  - Receipts (% of GDP): 1.6
  - Inflows (millions $): 18,224
  - Outflows (millions $): 8,566

Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goods and services</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(millions $)</td>
<td>107,179</td>
<td>114,701</td>
<td>7,523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(millions $)</td>
<td>76,032</td>
<td>59,353</td>
<td>-16,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(millions $)</td>
<td>31,147</td>
<td>55,348</td>
<td>24,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(millions $)</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Society

Education
- Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%): ...
- Net enrolment rate (primary): 100
- Gross enrolment rate (secondary): 106
- Mean years of schooling: 13.0
- Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): 6.1
- R&D expenditure (% of GDP): 4.9

Water
- Water resources (km³): 1.8
- Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): 277
- Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): 54
- Desalinated water production (millions m³): 586

Security
- Total armed forces (000): 178
- Military expenditure (% of GDP): 5.6

Development
- Human Development Index (value): 0.919
- Human Development Index (position in ranking): 19

Health
- Physicians density (per 10,000): 54.7
- Hospital beds (per 10,000): 29.8
- Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP): 7.5

Energy
- Production (millions mt oil eq): 8.1
- Consumption (millions mt oil eq): 22.3
- Import (% energy used): 67.4

Main Trading Partners
- Import: United States (17%), China (11%), Germany (6%), Turkey (5%), Switzerland (4%)
- Export: United States (27%), United Kingdom (9%), China (8%), Hong Kong SAR, China (8%), Netherlands (4%)
ITALY

Official Name: Italian Republic
Form of Government: Parliamentary constitutional republic
Head of State: Sergio Mattarella
Head of Government: Mario Draghi

Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats) (Chamber of Deputies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five Star Movement (M5S, populist movement)</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italia Viva (liberal)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern League (LN, regionalists, populist right)</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage Italy (CI, centre-right)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forza Italia (FI, conservative)</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’Alternativa c’è (populism)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party (social democrat)</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free and Equal (left)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers of Italy (FdI)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Population

| Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions): | Rome (4.28) |
| Main urban agglomerations (population in millions): | Milan (3.14); Naples (2.18); Torino (1.79); Bergamo (0.90); Palermo (0.85) |

Area km²: 301,340
Population: 60.3
Population density (hab/km²): 203
Urban population (%): 71
Average annual population growth rate (%): -0.2

Economy

GDP & Debt

| GDP (millions $): | 2,005,140 |
| GDP per capita ($, PPP): | 44,218 |
| GDP growth (%): | 0.3 |
| Public Debt (% of GDP): | 134.6 |
| Public Deficit (% of GDP): | -1.6 |
| External Debt (millions $): | - |
| Inflation Rate (%): | 0.6 |

FDI

| Inflows (millions $): | 26,569 |
| Outflows (millions $): | 24,934 |

International tourism

| Tourist arrivals (000): | 64,513 |
| Tourism receipts (million $): | 49,596 |

Migrant remittances

| Receipts (millions $): | 10,361 |
| Receipts (% of GDP): | 0.5 |

Total Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $):</td>
<td>571,206</td>
<td>632,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $):</td>
<td>446,990</td>
<td>510,883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $):</td>
<td>124,216</td>
<td>122,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP):</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Economic Sectors

| Agriculture, value added (% of GDP): | 2.1 |
| Industry, value added (% of GDP): | 23.9 |
| Services, value added (% of GDP): | 74.0 |

Labour market

| Labour participation rate, female (%): | 41.0 |
| Unemployment rate (%): | 10.0 |
| Youth unemployment rate (%): | 29.2 |

Employment in:

| Agriculture (% of total employment): | 3.9 |
| Industry (% of total employment): | 25.9 |
| Services (% of total employment): | 70.2 |

Energy

| Production (millions mt oil eq): | 34.8 |
| Consumption (millions mt oil eq): | 150.6 |
| Consumption per capita (kg oil eq): | 2.4 |
| Import (% energy used): | 81.0 |

Total Trade Imports Exports Balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Trading Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Import: Germany (16%), France (8%), China (7%), Spain (5%), Netherlands (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export: Germany (12%), France (11%), United States (9%), Switzerland (5%), United Kingdom (5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Society

Education

| Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%): | 99.4/99.0 |
| Net enrolment rate (primary): | 97 |
| Gross enrolment rate (secondary): | 101 |
| Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): | 62 |
| Mean years of schooling: | 10.4 |
| Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): | 4.0 |
| R&D expenditure (% of GDP): | 1.39 |

Development

| Human Development Index (value): | 0.892 |

Health

| Physicians density (per 10,000): | 40.3 |
| Hospital beds (per 10,000): | 31.4 |

Emissions

| CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita): | 5.2 |
| Passenger cars (per 1,000 people): | 628 |

ICT

| Mobile subscriptions (per 100): | 137.5 |
| Households with computer (per 100): | 66.2 |
| Internet users (per 100): | 74.4 |

Water

| Water resources (km³): | 191.3 |
| Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): | 563 |
| Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): | 50 |
| Water withdrawal by sector (% industry): | 23 |
| Desalinated water production (m³): | 97 |

Security

| Total armed forces (000): | 342 |
| Military expenditure (% of GDP): | 1.6 |
# JORDAN

**Official Name:** Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan  
**Form of Government:** Parliamentary constitutional monarchy  
**Head of State:** King Abdullah II  
**Head of Government:** Bisher Khasawneh

### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats) (Chamber of Deputies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Action Front (Islamists, Muslim Brotherhood)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zamzam, (Islamists moderate)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Centrist Party (ICP, Islamists)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Current</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice and Reform Party</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Socialist Ba’ath</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Party</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Union Party</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population

**Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Amman (2.18)  
**Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Zarqa (0.74); Irbid (0.56); Russeifa (0.53)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area km²:</th>
<th>Population age &lt;15 (%):</th>
<th>Urban population (%):</th>
<th>Population age &gt;64 (%):</th>
<th>Life expectancy at birth. Men/Women (years):</th>
<th>Population (millions):</th>
<th>Total fertility rate (births per woman):</th>
<th>Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>89,320</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>73/76</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Economy

**GDP & Debt**

- GDP (millions $): 44,566  
- GDP per capita ($, PPP): 10,530  
- GDP growth (%): 2.0  
- Public Debt (% of GDP): 78.0  
- External Debt (millions $): 33,683  
- Inflation Rate (%): 0.7

- FDI flows (millions $): 916  
- FDI outflows (millions $): 41

**International tourism**

- Tourist arrivals (000): 4,488  
- Tourist receipts (million $): 5,786

**Migrant remittances**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receipts (millions $):</th>
<th>Receipts (% of GDP):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4,510</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Trade**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In goods and services (millions $)</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21,906</td>
<td>16,307</td>
<td>-5,598</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Main Trading Partners**

- Import: Saudi Arabia (16%), China (16%), United States (8%), Turkey (5%), India (4%)
- Export: United States (24%), Saudi Arabia (10%), India (8%), Iraq (8%), United Arab Emirates (4%)

### Society

**Education**

- Adult literacy rate, Men / Women (%): 98.6/97.8  
- Net enrolment rate (primary): 82  
- Gross enrolment rate (secondary): 63  
- Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): 34  
- Mean years of schooling: 10.5  
- Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): 3.1  
- R&D expenditure (% of GDP): 0.70

**Water**

- Water resources (km³): 1.0  
- Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): 107  
- Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): 53  
- Water withdrawal by sector (% industry): 3  
- Desalinated water production (millions m³): 136

**Security**

- Total armed forces (000): 102  
- Military expenditure (% of GDP): 5.0

### Economic Sectors

- Agriculture, value added (% of GDP): 5.4  
- Industry, value added (% of GDP): 27.1  
- Services, value added (% of GDP): 67.5

### Labour market

- Labour participation rate, female (%): 14.6  
- Unemployment rate (%): 16.9  
- Youth unemployment rate (%): 37.3

### Energy

- Production (millions mt oil eq): 0.6  
- Consumption (millions mt oil eq): 9.1  
- Consumption per capita (kg oil eq): 0.9  
- Import (% energy used): 97.0

**Total Trade Imports Exports Balance Main Trading Partners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Import: Saudi Arabia (16%), China (16%), United States (8%), Turkey (5%), India (4%)</th>
<th>Export: United States (24%), Saudi Arabia (10%), India (8%), Iraq (8%), United Arab Emirates (4%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21,906</td>
<td>16,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,786</td>
<td>4,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Development

- Human Development Index (value): 0.729  
- Human Development Index (position in ranking): 102

### Health

- Physicians density (per 10,000): 23.2  
- Hospital beds (per 10,000): 14.7  
- Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP): 7.8

### Emissions

- CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita): 2.3  
- Passenger cars (per 1,000 people): 109

### Protected areas

- Terrestrial (% of total land area): 1.8  
- Marine (% of territorial waters): 38.6

### ICT

- Mobile subscriptions (per 100): 87.6  
- Households with computer (per 100): 42.9  
- Internet users (per 100): 102
## LEBANON

### Official Name:
Lebanese Republic

### Form of Government:
Confessionalist parliamentary republic

### Head of State:
Michel Aoun

### Head of Government:
Hassan Diab

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free Patriotic Movement and allies (liberal conservative)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Movement and allies</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amal (centre-right) and allies</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanese Forces and allies</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hezbollah</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marada and allies</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Socialist Party and allies</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marada and allies</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidative Gathering</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population

- **Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Beirut (2.43)
- **Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Tripoli (0.5), Sidon (0.27)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area km²:</th>
<th>Population (millions):</th>
<th>Population age &lt;15 (%):</th>
<th>Population age &gt;64 (%):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10,450</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population density (hab/km²):</th>
<th>Total fertility rate (births per woman):</th>
<th>Urban population (%):</th>
<th>Life expectancy at birth. Men/Women (years):</th>
<th>Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>669</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>77/81</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Economy

- **GDP & Debt**
  - GDP (millions $): 52,572
  - GDP per capita ($, PPP): 15,167
  - GDP growth (%): -6.7
  - Public Debt (% of GDP): 174.3
  - Public Deficit (% of GDP): -10.5
  - External Debt (millions $): 73,985
  - Inflation Rate (%): 88.2

- **FDI**
  - Inflows (millions $): 2,128
  - Outflows (millions $): 438

- **International tourism**
  - Tourist arrivals (000): 1,936
  - Tourism receipts (million $): 8,593

- **Migrant remittances**
  - Receipts (millions $): 7,467
  - Receipts (% of GDP): 13.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Trade</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $)</td>
<td>33,208</td>
<td>19,565</td>
<td>-13,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>18,759</td>
<td>4,496</td>
<td>-14,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $)</td>
<td>14,449</td>
<td>15,068</td>
<td>619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>-24.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Main Trading Partners

- **Import:** China (9%), United States (7%), Greece (7%), Italy (7%), Turkey (6%)
- **Export:** Switzerland (23%), United Arab Emirates (15%), Saudi Arabia (6%), Syria (5%), Iraq (4%)

### Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%): 96.9/93.3</td>
<td>Human Development Index (value): 0.730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net enrolment rate (primary):</td>
<td>Human Development Index (position in ranking): 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross enrolment rate (secondary):</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross enrolment rate (tertiary):</td>
<td>Physicians density (per 10,000): 22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean years of schooling: 8.7</td>
<td>Hospital beds (per 10,000): 27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): 2.4</td>
<td>Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP): 8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td>Emissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita): 4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water resources (km²): 4.5</td>
<td>Passenger cars (per 1,000 people): 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): 270</td>
<td>Protected areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): 38</td>
<td>Terrestrial (% of total land area): 2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal by sector (% industry): 49</td>
<td>Marine (% of territorial waters): 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desalinated water production (millions m³): 47</td>
<td>ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Mobile subscriptions (per 100): 64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total armed forces (000): 80</td>
<td>Households with computer (per 100):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military expenditure (% of GDP): 3.0</td>
<td>Internet users (per 100):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Energy

- **Production (millions mt oil eq):** 0.2
- **Consumption (millions mt oil eq):** 8.6
- **Consumption per capita (kg oil eq):** 1.3
- **Import (% energy used):** 97.5

### Total Trade Imports Exports Balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Trade</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $)</td>
<td>33,208</td>
<td>19,565</td>
<td>-13,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>18,759</td>
<td>4,496</td>
<td>-14,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $)</td>
<td>14,449</td>
<td>15,068</td>
<td>619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>-24.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Emissions

- **CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita):** 4.4
- **Passenger cars (per 1,000 people):** 97
- **Protected areas**
  - **Terrestrial (% of total land area):** 2.6
  - **Marine (% of territorial waters):** 0.2

### ICT

- **Mobile subscriptions (per 100):** 64.5
- **Households with computer (per 100):** |
- **Internet users (per 100):** |
LIBYA

**Official Name:** State of Libya

**Form of Government:** Provisional parliamentary republic

**Head of State:**

**Head of Government:** Fayez al-Sarraj

**Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats):**

Uncertain state due to the collapse of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in 2011. During the month of march 2016, UN-backed Prime Minister-designated, Fayez al-Sarraj, came back from self-exile with the task of uniting the country after an ongoing civil war between the Council of Deputies in Tobruk and its supporters, the New General National Congress in Tripoli and its supporters, and various jihadist and tribal elements controlling parts of the country. Marshal Hafter’s Libyan National Army (LNA) controls the east and south of the country. In October 2020, a permanent ceasefire was signed to end the war. In March 2021, a national unity government unifying the Second Al-Thani Cabinet of the House of Representatives and the Government of National Accord was formed, which will hold power until the 2021 Libyan general election: scheduled to be held on 24 December 2021.

**Population**

- **Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Tripoli (1.17)
- **Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):**
  - Benghazi (0.92)
  - Misrata (0.84)
  - Zliten (0.29)

**Area km²:** 1,759,540

**Population density (hab/km²):** 4

**Urban population (%):** 80

**Population age <15 (%):** 28

**Population age >64 (%):** 5

**Population (millions):** 6.8

**Population growth (%):** 1.5

**Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive):** 10

**Life expectancy at birth. Men/Women (years):** 70/76

**Total fertility rate (births per woman):** 2.24

**Average annual population growth rate (%):** 2.5

**GDP & Debt**

- **GDP (millions $):** 39,832
- **GDP per capita ($, PPP):** 14,599
- **GDP growth (%):** 2.5
- **Public Debt (% of GDP):** ..
- **Public Deficit (% of GDP):** -24.0
- **Inflation Rate (%):** 4.8

**FDI**

- **Inflows (millions $):** ..
- **Outflows (millions $):** 345

**International tourism**

- **Tourist arrivals (000):** ..
- **Tourism receipts (million $):** ..

**Migrant remittances**

- **Receipts (millions $):** ..
- **Receipts (% of GDP):** ..

**Total Trade**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $)</td>
<td>24,279</td>
<td>26,507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>18,012</td>
<td>26,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $)</td>
<td>6,267</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>69.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Main Trading Partners**

- **Import:**
  - China (15%), Turkey (13%), United Arab Emirates (11%),
  - Italy (9%), Egypt (5%)
- **Export:**
  - Italy (26%), China (17%), Spain (13%), Germany (8%),
  - United Arab Emirates (7%)
### MALTA

**Official Name:** Republic of Malta  
**Form of Government:** Parliamentary republic  
**Head of State:** George Vella  
**Head of Government:** Robert Abela

#### Population

- **Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Valletta (0.21)  
- **Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Birkirkara (0.02); Qormi (0.02)  
- **Area km²:** 320  
- **Population (millions):** 0.5  
- **Population density (hab/km²):** 95  
- **Population age <15 (%):** 14  
- **Population age >64 (%):** 21  
- **Population growth rate (%):** 3.7  
- **Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive):** 6  
- **Urban population (%):** 95  
- **Average annual population growth rate (%):** 3.7  
- **Life expectancy at birth. Men/Women (years):** 80/85

#### Economy

**GDP & Debt**
- **GDP (millions $):** 15,218  
- **GDP per capita ($, PPP):** 47,468  
- **GDP growth (%):** 4.9  
- **Public Debt (% of GDP):** 42.0  
- **Public Deficit (% of GDP):** 0.5  
- **External Debt (millions $):** 3,573  
- **Inflation Rate (%):** 1.5  
- **FDI**
  - Inflows (millions $): 3,573  
  - Outflows (millions $): -7,163  
- **Tourism receipts (million $):** 1,901  
- **Migrant remittances**
  - Receipts (millions $): 263  
  - Receipts (% of GDP): 1.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Trade</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $)</td>
<td>17,759</td>
<td>20,810</td>
<td>3,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>5,503</td>
<td>3,729</td>
<td>-1,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $)</td>
<td>12,256</td>
<td>17,081</td>
<td>4,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>121.4</td>
<td>142.2</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Development

**Human Development Index (value):** 0.895  
**Human Development Index (position in ranking):** 28

#### Education

- **Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%):** 96.0/93.0  
- **Net enrolment rate (primary):** 100  
- **Gross enrolment rate (secondary):** 108  
- **Mean years of schooling:** 11.3  
- **Public expenditure in education (% of GDP):** 4.8  
- **R&D expenditure (% of GDP):** 0.57

#### Water

- **Water resources (km³):** 0.1  
- **Water withdrawal (m³ per capita):** 146  
- **Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture):** 40  
- **Water withdrawal by sector (% industry):** 2  
- **Desalinated water production (millions m³):** 20

#### Security

- **Total armed forces (000):** 2  
- **Military expenditure (% of GDP):** 0.6

#### Main Trading Partners

**Import:**
- Russian Federation (15%), United Kingdom (13%), Italy (13%), Germany (6%), China (6%)  

**Export:**
- Germany (11%), Italy (7%), France (7%), Singapore (4%), China (4%)

#### Energy

- **Production (millions mt oil eq):** 0.0  
- **Consumption (millions mt oil eq):** 0.7  
- **Consumption per capita (kg oil eq):** 1.4  
- **Import (% energy used):** 96.9

#### ICT

- **Mobile subscriptions (per 100):** 140.2  
- **Households with computer (per 100):** 82.9  
- **Internet users (per 100):** 85.8

---

**Country Profiles**  
**Mediterranean Yearbook 2021**
## Montenegro

**Official Name:** Montenegro  
**Form of Government:** Parliamentary republic  
**Head of State:** Milo Đukanović  
**Head of Government:** Zdravko Krivokapić

### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party of Socialists (centre-left)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Front (centre-right)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace in Our Nation (Democrats, centrist)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist People’s Party of Montenegro</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement for Changes</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

### Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions): Podgorica</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main urban agglomerations (population in millions): Niksic; Bar; Bijelo Polje</td>
<td>(0.07; 0.04; 0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area km²</td>
<td>13,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (hab/km²)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population (%)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual population growth rate (%)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population age &lt;15 (%)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population age &gt;64 (%)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total fertility rate (births per woman)</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth. Men/Women (years)</td>
<td>74/79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Economy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP (millions $)</td>
<td>5,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita ($, PPP)</td>
<td>22,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (%)</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Debt (% of GDP)</td>
<td>78.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Deficit (% of GDP)</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Debt (millions $)</td>
<td>8,339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation Rate (%)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDI Inflows (millions $)</td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDI Outflows (millions $)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist arrivals (000)</td>
<td>2,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism receipts (million $)</td>
<td>1,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant remittances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts (millions $)</td>
<td>1,376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts (% of GDP)</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, value added (% of GDP)</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry, value added (% of GDP)</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services, value added (% of GDP)</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour participation rate, female (%)</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate (%)</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth unemployment rate (%)</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Total Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Import: Serbia (19%), Germany (9%), China (9%), Italy (7%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export: Serbia (29%), Hungary (12%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (8%), Slovenia (7%), Czechia (9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index (value):</td>
<td>0.829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index (position in ranking):</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicians density (per 10,000)</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital beds (per 10,000)</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emissions CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita):</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger cars (per 1,000 people):</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protected areas Terrestrial (% of total land area):</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine (% of territorial waters):</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT Mobile subscriptions (per 100):</td>
<td>180.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with computer (per 100):</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet users (per 100):</td>
<td>73.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**MOROCCO**

**Official Name:** Kingdom of Morocco  
**Form of Government:** Parliamentary constitutional monarchy  
**Head of State:** King Mohammed VI  
**Head of Government:** Saadeddine Othmani

Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats) (House of Representatives)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice and Development Party (PJD, Islamist)</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Union of People’s Forces (USFP)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM, liberal)</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional Union (UC, centrist)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Istiqlal Party (PI, centre-right, nationalism)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS, communist)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Rally of Independents (RNI, centre-left, liberal)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic and Social Movement (royalist)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Movement (MP, conservative)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population (millions):</th>
<th>36.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):</td>
<td>Rabat (1.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):</td>
<td>Casablanca (3.79); Fes (1.25); Tanger (1.24); Marrakech (1.02); Agadir (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area km²:</td>
<td>446,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population age &lt; 15 (%):</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population age &gt; 64 (%):</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (hab/km²):</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population (%):</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual population growth rate (%):</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive):</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Economy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GDP &amp; Debt</th>
<th>119,701</th>
<th>Agriculture, value added (% of GDP):</th>
<th>13.8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8,180</td>
<td>Industry, value added (% of GDP):</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP (millions $):</td>
<td>119,701</td>
<td>Public Debt (% of GDP):</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>per capita ($, PPP):</td>
<td>8,180</td>
<td>Services, value added (% of GDP):</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (%):</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Debt (% of GDP):</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Deficit (% of GDP):</td>
<td>-4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Debt (millions $):</td>
<td>54,968</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation Rate (%):</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDI</td>
<td>1,599</td>
<td>Labour participation rate, female (%):</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflows (millions $):</td>
<td>1,599</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outflows (millions $):</td>
<td>1,033</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International tourism</td>
<td>12,932</td>
<td>Unemployment rate (%):</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist arrivals (000):</td>
<td>12,932</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism receipts (million $):</td>
<td>8,179</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant remittances</td>
<td>6,669</td>
<td>Youth unemployment rate (%):</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts (millions $):</td>
<td>6,669</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts (% of GDP):</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>8,179</td>
<td>Consumption (millions mt oil eq):</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production (millions mt oil eq):</td>
<td>8,179</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>8,179</td>
<td>Consumption per capita (kg oil eq):</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import (% energy used):</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Trade</td>
<td>Imports</td>
<td>Exports</td>
<td>Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $)</td>
<td>54,820</td>
<td>43,960</td>
<td>-10,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>44,635</td>
<td>24,590</td>
<td>-20,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $)</td>
<td>10,184</td>
<td>19,370</td>
<td>9,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>-9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Human Development Index (value):</td>
<td>0.686</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Physicians density (per 10,000):</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital beds (per 10,000):</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emissions</td>
<td>CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita):</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger cars (per 1,000 people):</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protected areas</td>
<td>Terrestrial (% of total land area):</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Mobile subscriptions (per 100):</td>
<td>293</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with computer (per 100):</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet users (per 100):</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Society**

**Education**

| Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%): | 83.3/64.6 |
| Net enrolment rate (primary): | 100 |
| Gross enrolment rate (secondary): | 81 |
| Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): | 36 |
| Mean years of schooling: | 5.6 |
| Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): | .. |
| R&D expenditure (% of GDP): | .. |

**Water**

| Water resources (km³): | 29.0 |
| Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): | 293 |
| Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): | 88 |
| Water withdrawal by sector (% industry): | 2 |
| Desalinated water production (millions m³): | 7 |

**Security**

<p>| Total armed forces (000): | 246 |
| Military expenditure (% of GDP): | 4.3 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>NORTH MACEDONIA</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Official Name:</strong> Republic of North Macedonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form of Government:</strong> Parliamentary republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Head of State:</strong> Stevo Pendarovski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Head of Government:</strong> Zoran Zaev</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats) (Assembly of the Republic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>We Can (Social Democratic Union Coalition (SDSM)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>social democracy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Renewal (Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity Coalition (VMRO-DPMNE) (conservatism)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democratic Union for Integration (BDI/DUI, (Albanian minority interests)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Population</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):</strong> Skopje (0.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):</strong> Kumanovo (0.11), Bitola (0.09), Prilep (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area km²:</strong> 25,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population (millions):</strong> 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population density (hab/km²):</strong> 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban population (%):</strong> 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average annual population growth rate (%):</strong> 0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Economy</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GDP &amp; Debt</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP (millions $):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita ($, PPP):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (%):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Debt (% of GDP):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Deficit (% of GDP):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Debt (millions $):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation Rate (%):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FDI</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflows (millions $):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outflows (millions $):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International tourism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist arrivals (000):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism receipts (million $):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Migrant remittances</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts (millions $):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts (% of GDP):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Trade</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Society</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net enrolment rate (primary):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross enrolment rate (secondary):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross enrolment rate (tertiary):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean years of schooling:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public expenditure jn education (% of GDP):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water resources (km³):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal (m³ per capita):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water withdrawal by sector (% industry):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desalinated water production (millions m³):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Security</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total armed forces (000):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index (value):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index (position in ranking):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicians density (per 10,000):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital beds (per 10,000):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emissions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger cars (per 1,000 people):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protected areas</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrestrial (% of total land area):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine (% of territorial waters):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ICT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile subscriptions (per 100):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with computer (per 100):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet users (per 100):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Name (UN use): Occupied Palestinian Territories
Form of Government: De jure parliamentary democracy operating de facto as a semi-presidential system
Head of State: Mahmoud Abbas
Head of Government: Mohammad Shtayyeh

Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats) (Palestinian legislative council has been unable to meet and govern since 2007)
- Hamas (Islamists) 74
- Palestinian National Initiative (social democracy) 2
- Fatah (nationalists, socialists) 45
- Third Way (centrist) 2
- Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP, nationalists, Marxists) 3
- Others 2
- Independents 4

Population

Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions): Al Quds (Jerusalem East) (0.30); Ramallah (0.04) [administrative centre]
Main urban agglomerations (population in millions): Gaza City (0.73); Khan Yunis (0.26); Jabalia (0.24); Rafah (0.23); Hebron (0.22)
Area km²: 6,020
Population age <15 (%): 39
Population (millions): 4.7
Population age >64 (%): 3
Population density (hab/km²): 759
Urban population (%): 76
Average annual population growth rate (%): 2.5
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive): 17

Economy

GDP & Debt
- GDP (millions $): 17,134
- GDP per capita ($, PPP): 6,128
- GDP growth (%): 0.9
- Public Debt (% of GDP): 34.49
- Public Deficit (% of GDP): -4.5
- External Debt (millions $): -
- Inflation Rate (%): 1.6

FDI
- Inflows (millions $): 176
- Outflows (millions $): 29

International tourism
- Tourist arrivals (000): 688
- Tourism receipts (million $): -

Migrant remittances
- Receipts (millions $): 2,383
- Receipts (% of GDP): 14.2

Total Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $)</td>
<td>9,018</td>
<td>2,937</td>
<td>-6,081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>7,339</td>
<td>2,317</td>
<td>-5,022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $)</td>
<td>1,679</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>-1,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>-36.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Economic Sectors
- Agriculture, value added (% of GDP): 8.5
- Industry, value added (% of GDP): 21.6
- Services, value added (% of GDP): 69.8

Labour market
- Labour participation rate, female (%): 18.2
- Unemployment rate (%): 25.3
- Youth unemployment rate (%): 40.0

Employment in:
- Agriculture (% of total employment): 6.0
- Industry (% of total employment): 30.4
- Services (% of total employment): 63.6

Energy
- Production (millions mt oil eq): -
- Consumption (millions mt oil eq): -
- Consumption per capita (kg oil eq): -
- Import (% energy used): -

Main Trading Partners
- Import: Israel (64%), Turkey (6%), China (5%), Jordan (4%), Germany (2%)
- Export: Israel (63%), Jordan (5%), United Arab Emirates (3%), Saudi Arabia (2%), United States of America (1%)

Society

Education
- Adult literacy rate, Men / Women (%): 98.7/96.7
- Net enrolment rate (primary): 97
- Gross enrolment rate (secondary): 91
- Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): 44
- Mean years of schooling: 9.2
- Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): 5.3
- R&D expenditure (% of GDP): 0.5

Water
- Water resources (km²): 0.8
- Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): 76
- Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): 43
- Water withdrawal by sector (% industry): 9
- Desalinated water production (millions m³): 4

Security
- Total armed forces (000): -
- Military expenditure (% of GDP): -

Development
- Human Development Index (value): 0.708
- Human Development Index (position in ranking): 115

Health
- Physicians density (per 10,000): -
- Hospital beds (per 10,000): -
- Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP): -

Emissions
- CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita): -
- Passenger cars (per 1,000 people): 56

Protected areas
- Terrestrial (% of total land area): 8.4
- Marine (% of territorial waters): -

ICT
- Mobile subscriptions (per 100): 90.0
- Households with computer (per 100): 33.2
- Internet users (per 100): 70.6
## PORTUGAL

**Official Name:** Portuguese Republic  
**Form of Government:** Semi-presidential constitutional republic  
**Head of State:** Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa  
**Head of Government:** Antonio Luis Santos da Costa

### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Party (PS)</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democratic Party (PSD)</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Bloc (BE, socialism / left wing)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese Communist Party (PCP)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic and Social Centre - People’s Party</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CDS/PP, Christian democracy)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People-Animals-Nature</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecologist Party &quot;The Greens&quot; (PEV)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population

- **Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Lisbon (2.97)
- **Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Porto (1.32); Braga (0.19); Guimaraes (0.16)
- **Area km²:** 92,226
- **Population:** 10.3
- **Population age <15 (%):** 13
- **Population age >64 (%):** 22
- **Population density (hab/km²):** 112
- **Urban population (%):** 65
- **Life expectancy at birth. Men/Women (years):** 78/85
- **Average annual population growth rate (%):** -0.1
- **Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive):** 3

### Economy

#### GDP & Debt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GDP (millions $):</th>
<th>239,537</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita ($, PPP):</td>
<td>36,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (%):</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Debt (% of GDP):</td>
<td>116.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Deficit (% of GDP):</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Debt (millions $):</td>
<td>4,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflows (millions $):</td>
<td>20,633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outflows (millions $):</td>
<td>8,234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### International tourism

- **Tourist arrivals (000):** 24,800
- **Tourism receipts (million $):** 8,234

#### Migrant remittances

- **Receipts (millions $):** 4,327
- **Receipts (million $):** 8,234

#### Total Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $)</td>
<td>103,946</td>
<td>104,265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>83,821</td>
<td>65,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $)</td>
<td>20,126</td>
<td>39,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Main Trading Partners

- **Import:** Spain (31%), Germany (13%), France (10%), Italy (5%), Netherlands (5%)
- **Export:** Spain (25%), France (13%), Germany (12%), United Kingdom (6%), United States (5%)

### Society

#### Education

- **Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%):** 97.4/95.1
- **Net enrolment rate (primary):** 100
- **Gross enrolment rate (secondary):** 121
- **Gross enrolment rate (tertiary):** 64
- **Mean years of schooling:** 9.3
- **Public expenditure in education (% of GDP):** 5.0
- **R&D expenditure (% of GDP):** 1.35

#### Water

- **Water resources (km³):** 77.4
- **Water withdrawal (m³ per capita):** 1,086
- **Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture):** 78
- **Desalinated water production (millions m³):** 2

#### Security

- **Total armed forces (000):** 52
- **Military expenditure (% of GDP):** 2.1

#### Environment

- **Total energy consumption (million $):** 20,126
- **CO2 Emissions (mt per capita):** 4.6
- **Passenger cars (per 1,000 people):** 441
- **Mobile subscriptions (per 100):** 115.6
- **Households with computer (per 100):** 71.5
- **Internet users (per 100):** 75.3
## SERBIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official Name:</th>
<th>Republic of Serbia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form of Government:</td>
<td>Parliamentary republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of State:</td>
<td>Aleksandar Vučić</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Government:</td>
<td>Ana Brnabići</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)

- For Our Children (Serbian Progressive Party led Coalition): 180 United Serbia
- Socialist Party of Serbia (socialism): 24 United Valley - Party of Democratic Action of Sandžak (SDA)
- Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians: 9 Justice and Reconciliation Party (SPP) - United Peasant Party
- Party of United Pensioners of Serbia: 9 Independent
- Social Democratic Party of Serbia: 8

---

### Population

- Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions): Belgrade (1.40)
- Main urban agglomerations (population in millions): Novi Sad (0.34); Nis (0.26); Kragujevac (0.18); Subotica (0.14)
- Area km²: 88,360
- Population (millions): 6.9
- Population density (hab/km²): 80
- Urban population (%): 56
- Average annual population growth rate (%): -0.5

### Economy

#### GDP & Debt

- GDP (millions $): 51,475
- GDP per capita ($, PPP): 19,027
- GDP growth (%): 4.2
- Public Debt (% of GDP): 52.8
- Public Deficit (% of GDP): 0.0
- External Debt (millions $): 35,896
- Inflation Rate (%): 1.9

#### FDI

- Inflows (millions $): 4,585
- Outflows (millions $): 343

#### International tourism

- Tourist arrivals (000): 1,847
- Tourism receipts (million $): 1,606

#### Migrant remittances

- Receipts (millions $): 5,412
- Receipts (% of GDP): 9.2

### Total Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services</td>
<td>32,528</td>
<td>28,218</td>
<td>-4,311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods ($)</td>
<td>25,066</td>
<td>18,549</td>
<td>-6,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services ($)</td>
<td>7,462</td>
<td>9,669</td>
<td>2,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>-7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Economic Sectors

- Agriculture, value added (% of GDP): 7.5
- Industry, value added (% of GDP): 31.1
- Services, value added (% of GDP): 61.4

#### Labour market

- Labour participation rate, female (%): 47.9
- Unemployment rate (%): 10.4
- Youth unemployment rate (%): 27.1

#### Employment in:

- Agriculture (% of total employment): 15.6
- Industry (% of total employment): 27.4
- Services (% of total employment): 57.0

#### Energy

- Production (millions mt oil eq): 10.0
- Consumption (millions mt oil eq): 15.3
- Consumption per capita (kg oil eq): 2.2
- Import (% energy used): 35.0

### Total Trade Imports Exports Balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Import</th>
<th>Export</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services</td>
<td>32,528</td>
<td>28,218</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>25,066</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services ($)</td>
<td>7,462</td>
<td>9,669</td>
<td>2,207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Main Trading Partners

**Imports:**

- Germany (13%),
- Russian Federation (10%),
- China (9%),
- Italy (9%),
- Hungary (4%)

**Exports:**

- Germany (13%),
- Italy (10%),
- Bosnia and Herzegovina (8%),
- Romania (6%),
- Russian Federation (5%)

### Society

#### Education

- Adult literacy rate, Men / Women (%): 99.5/98.2
- Net enrolment rate (primary): 98
- Gross enrolment rate (secondary): 94
- Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): 67
- Mean years of schooling: 11.2
- Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): 3.6
- R&D expenditure (% of GDP): 0.92

#### Water

- Water resources (km³): 8.4
- Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): 609
- Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): 12
- Water withdrawal by sector (% industry): 76
- Desalinated water production (millions m³): 0

#### Security

- Total armed forces (000): 32
- Military expenditure (% of GDP): 2.1

### Development

- Human Development Index (value): 0.806
- Human Development Index (position in ranking): 64

### Health

- Physicians density (per 10,000): 31.1
- Hospital beds (per 10,000): 56.1
- Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP): 8.5

### Emissions

- CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita): 6.4
- Passenger cars (per 1,000 people): 207

### Protected areas

- Terrestrial (% of total land area): 6.6
- Marine (% of territorial waters): --

### ICT

- Mobile subscriptions (per 100): 95.8
- Households with computer (per 100): 73.1
- Internet users (per 100): 77.4
## SLOVENIA

**Official Name:** Republic of Slovenia  
**Form of Government:** Parliamentary constitutional republic  
**Head of State:** Borut Pahor  
**Head of Government:** Janez Janša

### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS, conservative)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Marjan Sarec</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democrats (SD)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Left</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Slovenia - Christian People’s Party (NSi)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Centre Party (SMC) (social liberalism)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party of Alenka Bratusek</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Pensioners’ Party of Slovenia (DESUS)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-issue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenian National Party (SNS)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population

- **Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Ljubljana (0.29)
- **Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Maribor (0.10); Celje (0.05); Kranj (0.04)

- **Area km²:** 20,675
- **Population (millions):** 2.1
- **Population density (hab/km²):** 103
- **Urban population (%):** 55
- **Average annual population growth rate (%):** 0.7

### Economy

#### GDP & Debt

- **GDP (millions $):** 54,180
- **GDP per capita ($, PPP):** 40,879
- **GDP growth (%):** 3.2
- **Public Debt (% of GDP):** 65.6
- **Public Deficit (% of GDP):** 0.5
- **External Debt (millions $):** ...
- **Inflation Rate (%):** 1.6

#### FDI

- **Inflows (millions $):** 910
- **Outflows (millions $):** 135

#### International tourism

- **Tourist arrivals (000):** 4,702
- **Tourism receipts (million $):** 3,081

#### Migrant remittances

- **Receipts (millions $):** 553
- **Receipts (% of GDP):** 1.5

#### Total Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services</td>
<td>40,524</td>
<td>45,362</td>
<td>4,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>34,319</td>
<td>35,805</td>
<td>1,486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $)</td>
<td>6,204</td>
<td>9,556</td>
<td>3,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP)</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Education

- **Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%):** 99.7/99.6
- **Net enrolment rate (primary):** 100
- **Gross enrolment rate (secondary):** 114
- **Gross enrolment rate (tertiary):** 79
- **Mean years of schooling:** 12.7
- **Public expenditure in education (% of GDP):** 4.8
- **R&D expenditure (% of GDP):** 1.95

### Water

- **Water resources (km²):** 31.9
- **Water withdrawal (m³ per capita):** 449
- **Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture):** 0
- **Water withdrawal by sector (% industry):** 81
- **Desalinated water production (millions m³):** 

### Security

- **Total armed forces (000):** 7
- **Military expenditure (% of GDP):** 1.1

### Health

- **Physicians density (per 10,000):** 31.7
- **Hospital beds (per 10,000):** 44.3
- **Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP):** 8.3

### Emissions

- **CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita):** 6.6
- **Passenger cars (per 1,000 people):** 524

### Main Trading Partners

- **Import:**
  - Germany (13%)
  - Italy (11%)
  - Switzerland (8%)
  - Austria (7%)
  - China (5%)
- **Export:**
  - Germany (16%)
  - Italy (10%)
  - Croatia (7%)
  - Switzerland (6%)
  - Austria (6%)

### Development

- **Human Development Index (value):** 0.917
- **Human Development Index (position in ranking):** 22

### Protected areas

- **Terrestrial (% of total land area):** 53.6
- **Marine (% of territorial waters):** 100.0

### ICT

- **Mobile subscriptions (per 100):** 118.7
- **Households with computer (per 100):** 79.5
- **Internet users (per 100):** 83.1
## SPAIN

### Official Name:
Kingdom of Spain

### Form of Government:
Parliamentary constitutional monarchy

### Head of State:
King Felipe VI

### Head of Government:
Pedro Sánchez

### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats) (Congress of Deputies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE, social democrat)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Citizens 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People's Party (PP, conservative)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>Basque Nationalist Party (Christian democratic nationalist) 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vox (far right)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>EH-Bildu (far left, basque nationalist) 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United We Can and allies (left wing)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Junts per Cat (independentist regional) 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC, independentist regional)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Others 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population

**Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Madrid (6.67)

**Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Barcelona (5.62); Valencia (0.84); Zaragoza (0.73); Seville (0.70)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area km²:</th>
<th>505,935</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (millions):</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (hab/km²):</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population (%):</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual population growth rate (%):</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Economy

#### GDP & Debt

| GDP (millions $): | 1,393,640 |
| GDP per capita ($, PPP): | 42,609 |
| GDP growth (%): | 2.0 |
| Public Debt (% of GDP): | 95.5 |
| Public Deficit (% of GDP): | -2.9 |
| External Debt (millions $): | - |
| Inflation Rate (%): | 0.7 |

**FDI**

- Inflows (millions $): 12,406
- Outflows (millions $): 21,135

**International tourism**

- Tourist arrivals (000): 83,509
- Tourism receipts (million $): 79,708

**Migrant remittances**

- Receipts (millions $): 9,975
- Receipts (% of GDP): 0.7

#### Total Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $)</td>
<td>462,800</td>
<td>491,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods (millions $)</td>
<td>377,409</td>
<td>342,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $)</td>
<td>85,391</td>
<td>149,167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### GDP growth (%): 2.0

### Economic Sectors

- Agriculture, value added (% of GDP): 2.9
- Industry, value added (% of GDP): 22.6
- Services, value added (% of GDP): 74.5

#### Labour market

- Labour participation rate, female (%): 52.2
- Unemployment rate (%): 14.1
- Youth unemployment rate (%): 32.6

#### Employment in:

- Agriculture (% of total employment): 11.0
- Industry (% of total employment): 20.4
- Services (% of total employment): 68.6

#### Energy

- Production (millions mt oil eq): 33.9
- Consumption (millions mt oil eq): 125.0
- Consumption per capita (kg oil eq): 2.6
- Import (% energy used): 80.6

#### Total Trade Imports Exports Balance Main Trading Partners

| Import: | Germany (12%), France (10%), China (9%), Italy (6%), United States (5%) |
| Export: | France (15%), Germany (10%), Italy (8%), Portugal (7%), United Kingdom (7%) |

### Society

#### Education

- Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%): 98.9/98.0
- Net enrolment rate (primary): 97
- Gross enrolment rate (secondary): 126
- Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): 89
- Mean years of schooling: 10.3
- Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): 4.2
- R&D expenditure (% of GDP): 1.24

#### Water

- Water resources (km³): 111.5
- Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): 669
- Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): 65
- Water withdrawal by sector (% industry): 19
- Desalinated water production (millions m³): 364

#### Security

- Total armed forces (000): 196
- Military expenditure (% of GDP): 1.4

#### Development

- Human Development Index (value): 0.904
- Human Development Index (position in ranking): 25

#### Health

- Physicians density (per 10,000): 40.3
- Hospital beds (per 10,000): 29.7
- Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP): 9.0

#### Emissions

- CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita): 5.3
- Passenger cars (per 1,000 people): 482

#### Protected areas

- Terrestrial (% of total land area): 28.1
- Marine (% of territorial waters): 8.4

#### ICT

- Mobile subscriptions (per 100): 116.0
- Households with computer (per 100): 80.9
- Internet users (per 100): 90.7
**SYRIA**

**Official Name:** Syrian Arab Republic  
**Form of Government:** Dominant-party semi-presidential state  
**Head of State:** Bashar al-Assad  
**Head of Government:** Hussein Arnous  

Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats) (People’s Council of Syria)  
National Progressive Front (NFP, coalition led by the Baath Party)  
183 Independents 67

### Population

| Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions): | Damascus (2.44) |  
| Main urban agglomerations (population in millions): | Aleppo (2.00); Homs (1.36); Hamah (0.94); Latakia (0.67) |  
| Area km²: | 185,180 |  
| Population (millions): | 17.1 |  
| Population density (hab/km²): | 92 |  
| Urban population (%): | 55 |  
| Average annual population growth rate (%): | 1.0 |  
| Population age <15 (%): | 31 |  
| Population age >64 (%): | 5 |  
| Total fertility rate (births per woman): | 2.81 |  
| Life expectancy at birth. Men/Women (years): | 67/78 |  
| Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 born alive): | 18 |  

### Economy

| GDP & Debt  
GDP (millions $): | ..  
GDP per capita ($, PPP): | ..  
GDP growth (%): | ..  
Public Debt (% of GDP): | ..  
Public Deficit (% of GDP): | ..  
| External Debt (millions $): | 4,590  
Inflation Rate (%): | ..  
FDI  
Inflows (millions $): | ..  
Outflows (millions $): | ..  
International tourism  
Tourist arrivals (000): | ..  
Tourism receipts (million $): | ..  
Migrant remittances  
Receipts (millions $): | 1,623  
Receipts (% of GDP): | 8.3  
| Total Trade  
Imports | ..  
Exports | ..  
Balance | ..  
| in goods and services (millions $): | ..  
in goods (millions $): | 7,583  
2,498  
-5,085  
in services (millions $): | ..  
in goods and services (% of GDP) | ..  
| Economic Sectors  
Agriculture, value added (% of GDP): | 20.6  
Industry, value added (% of GDP): | 30.1  
Services, value added (% of GDP): | 49.3  
Labour market  
Labour participation rate, female (%): | 14.7  
Unemployment rate (%): | 8.2  
Youth unemployment rate (%): | 20.8  
Employment in:  
Agriculture (% of total employment): | 10.1  
Industry (% of total employment): | 23.2  
Services (% of total employment): | 66.7  
Energy  
Production (millions mt oil eq): | 4.0  
Consumption (millions mt oil eq): | 10.4  
Consumption per capita (kg oil eq): | 0.6  
Import (% energy used): | 64.7  
Main Trading Partners  
Import: China (11%), Turkey (9%), Russian Federation (7%), Ukraine (7%), Republic of Korea (6%)  
Export: Iraq (61%), Saudi Arabia (4%), Algeria (4%), Lebanon (4%), Turkey (4%)  

### Society

| Education  
Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%): | ..  
Net enrolment rate (primary): | 72  
Gross enrolment rate (secondary): | ..  
Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): | ..  
Mean years of schooling: | 5.1  
Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): | ..  
R&D expenditure (% of GDP): | ..  
| Water  
Water resources (km³): | 16.8  
Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): | 980  
Water withdrawal by sector (% of agriculture): | 88  
Water withdrawal by sector (% of industry): | 4  
Desalinated water production (millions m³): | ..  
| Security  
Total armed forces (000): | 258  
Military expenditure (% of GDP): | ..  
| Development  
Human Development Index (value): | 0.567  
Human Development Index (position in ranking): | 151  
| Health  
Physicians density (per 10,000): | 12.9  
Hospital beds (per 10,000): | 14.0  
Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP): | ..  
| Emissions  
CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita): | 1.5  
Passenger cars (per 1,000 people): | 246  
| Protected areas  
Terrestrial (% of total land area): | 0.7  
Marine (% of territorial waters): | 0.2  
| ICT  
Mobile subscriptions (per 100): | 101.1  
Households with computer (per 100): | ..  
Internet users (per 100): | ..  

### Water

- Water resources: 16.8 km³
- Water withdrawal: 980 m³ per capita
- Water withdrawal by sector: 88% agriculture, 4% industry
- Desalinated water production: 

### Security

- Total armed forces: 258,000
- Military expenditure: 

### Education

- Adult literacy rate: 
- Net enrolment rate (primary): 72%
- Gross enrolment rate (secondary): 
- Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): 
- Mean years of schooling: 5.1
- Public expenditure in education: 
- R&D expenditure: 

### Health

- Physicians density: 12.9 per 10,000
- Hospital beds: 14.0 per 10,000
- Total Health Expenditure: 

### Emissions

- CO₂ Emissions: 1.5 mt per capita
- Passenger cars: 246 per 1,000 people

### Protected areas

- Terrestrial: 0.7%
- Marine: 0.2%

### ICT

- Mobile subscriptions: 101.1 per 100
- Households with computer: 
- Internet users: 

---

For more detailed information, refer to the full source document.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Country Profiles</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TUNISIA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Official Name:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form of Government:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Head of State:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Head of Government:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats) (National Constituent Assembly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ennahda (Islamist)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart of Tunisia (NT) (secularist, centre)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Current (Pan-Arabist)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity Coalition</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Destourian Party (secularist, right wing)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People's Movement (secularist, socialist)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tahya Tounes (secularist, liberalist)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machrou Tounes (nationalist, centrist)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Errahma</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Population

| Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions): | Tunis (2.40) |
| Main urban agglomerations (population in millions): | Sfax (0.63); Sousse (0.67); Kairouan (0.57) |

| Area km²: | 163,610 |
| Population (millions): | 11.7 |
| Population density (hab/km²): | 74 |
| Urban population (%): | 69 |
| Average annual population growth rate (%): | 1.1 |

Economy

GDP & Debt

| GDP (millions $): | 39,169 |
| GDP per capita ($, PPP): | 11,075 |
| GDP growth (%): | 1.0 |
| Public Debt (% of GDP): | 71.8 |
| Public Deficit (% of GDP): | -3.9 |
| External Debt (millions $): | 37,764 |
| Inflation Rate (%): | 6.7 |

FDI

| Inflows (millions $): | 845 |
| Outflows (millions $): | 22 |

International tourism

| Tourist arrivals (000): | 9,429 |
| Tourism receipts (million $): | 2,320 |

Migrant remittances

| Receipts (millions $): | 1,902 |
| Receipts (% of GDP): | 4.9 |

Total Trade

| in goods and services (millions $): | 23,456 |
| in goods (millions $): | 20,359 |
| in services (millions $): | 3,098 |
| in goods and services (% of GDP): | 60.5 |

Economic Sectors

| Agriculture, value added (% of GDP): | 10.9 |
| Industry, value added (% of GDP): | 24.0 |
| Services, value added (% of GDP): | 65.1 |

Labour market

| Labour participation rate, female (%): | 24.9 |
| Unemployment rate (%): | 15.1 |
| Youth unemployment rate (%): | 35.8 |

Employment in:

| Agriculture (% of total employment): | 13.8 |
| Industry (% of total employment): | 33.5 |
| Services (% of total employment): | 52.7 |

Energy

| Production (millions mt oil eq): | 5.4 |
| Consumption (millions mt oil eq): | 11.5 |
| Consumption per capita (kg oil eq): | 1.0 |
| Import (% energy used): | 52.6 |

Total Trade Imports Exports Balance

| in goods and services (millions $): | 23,456 |
| in goods (millions $): | 20,359 |
| in services (millions $): | 3,098 |
| in goods and services (% of GDP): | 60.5 |

Main Trading Partners

| Import: Italy (15%), France (14%), China (9%), Germany (7%), Algeria (7%) | 23,456 |
| Export: France (29%), Italy (16%), Germany (13%), Spain (4%), Libya (4%) | 19,247 |

Society

Education

| Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%): | 86.1/72.2 |
| Net enrolment rate (primary): | 99 |
| Gross enrolment rate (secondary): | 93 |
| Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): | 32 |
| Mean years of schooling: | 7.2 |
| Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): | 6.6 |
| R&D expenditure (% of GDP): | 0.60 |

Water

| Water resources (km³): | 4.6 |
| Water withdrawal (m³ per capita): | 426 |
| Water withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): | 77 |
| Water withdrawal by sector (% industry): | 20 |
| Desalinated water production (millions m³): | 55 |

Security

| Total armed forces (000): | 48 |
| Military expenditure (% of GDP): | 2.9 |

Development

| Human Development Index (value): | 0.740 |
| Human Development Index (position in ranking): | 95 |

Health

| Physicians density (per 10,000): | 13.0 |
| Hospital beds (per 10,000): | 21.8 |
| Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP): | 7.3 |

Emissions

| CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita): | 2.3 |
| Passenger cars (per 1,000 people): | 88 |

ICT

| Mobile subscriptions (per 100): | 126.3 |
| Households with computer (per 100): | 52.1 |
| Internet users (per 100): | 66.7 |
## TURKEY

**Official Name:** Republic of Turkey  
**Form of Government:** Parliamentary republic  
**Head of State:** Recep Tayyip Erdoğan  
**Head of Government:** Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

### Political parties represented in the current Parliament (seats) (Grand National Assembly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice and Development Party (AKP, Islamism, conservative)</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>Nationalist Movement Party (MHP, Turkish nationalist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican People’s Party (CHP, social democracy, laicist)</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>YP Party (centrist, Turkish nationalist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP, democratic socialist, anti-capitalist)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Independents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population

- **Capital (urban agglomeration population in millions):** Ankara (5.22)
- **Main urban agglomerations (population in millions):** Istanbul (15.41); Izmir (3.02); Bursa (2.02); Adana (1.79); Gaziantep (1.74); Konya (1.35)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area (km²):</th>
<th>785,350</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (millions):</td>
<td>82.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (hab/km²):</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population (%):</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual population growth rate (%):</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Economy

#### GDP & Debt

- **GDP (millions $):** 760,940  
- **GDP per capita ($, PPP):** 29,724  
- **GDP growth (%):** 0.9  
- **Public Debt (% of GDP):** 32.6  
- **External Debt (millions $):** 440,783  
- **Inflation Rate (%):** 15.2

| FDI |  
|----|---|
| Inflows (millions $): | 8,434 |
| Outflows (millions $): | 2,841 |

| International tourism |  
|-----------------------|---|
| Tourist arrivals (000): | 51,198 |
| Tourism receipts (million $): | 28,042 |

| Migrant remittances |  
|---------------------|---|
| Receipts (million $): | 810 |
| Receipts (% of GDP): | 0.1 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Trade</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (millions $):</td>
<td>226,969</td>
<td>247,205</td>
<td>20,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in services (millions $):</td>
<td>198,927</td>
<td>182,309</td>
<td>-16,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in goods and services (% of GDP):</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Educational Development

| Adult literacy rate. Men / Women (%): | 98.8/93.5 |
| Enrollment rate (primary): | 95 |
| Gross enrolment rate (secondary): | 104 |
| Gross enrolment rate (tertiary): | .. |
| Mean years of schooling | 8.1 |
| Public expenditure in education (% of GDP): | .. |
| R&D expenditure (% of GDP): | 0.96 |

#### Water

| Water resources (km³): | 211.6 |
| Withdrawal (km³ per capita): | 7.27 |
| Withdrawal by sector (% agriculture): | 85 |
| Withdrawal by sector (% industry): | 5 |
| Desalinated water production (millions m³): | 8 |

### Security

| Total armed forces (000): | 512 |
| Military expenditure (% of GDP): | 2.8 |

### Health

| Physicians density (per 10,000): | 18.1 |
| Hospital beds (per 10,000): | 28.5 |
| Total Health Expenditure (% of GDP): | 4.1 |

### Emissions

| CO₂ Emissions (mt per capita): | 4.6 |
| Passenger cars (per 1,000 people): | 135 |

### ICT

| Mobile subscriptions (per 100): | 97.3 |
| Households with computer (per 100): | 52.1 |
| Internet users (per 100): | 77.7 |

### Main Trading Partners

**Import:** Russian Federation (11%), Germany (9%), China (9%), United States (6%), Italy (4%)  
**Export:** Germany (9%), United Kingdom (6%), Iraq (6%), Italy (5%), United States (5%)
The Cyprus Conflict: New Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean

Thomas Diez
University of Tuebingen

Not a Good Year

Even for the standards of a conflict-ridden place such as Cyprus, the period between May 2020 and May 2021 can hardly be described as a good one. Turkey continued to probe Greek Cypriot patience through its gas explorations in what the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) considers its own Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Elections in the internationally not recognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) brought about a shift in the Presidency from pro-solution Mustafa Akinci to nationalist Ersin Tatar. The new government and Turkey have started to openly question the remit of United Nations-led negotiations. And all the while, Covid-19 made direct bicommunal contacts next to impossible.

In this brief contribution, I will offer a condensed review of these developments. In doing so, my underlying argument is that the openings of the past twenty years, both physically in terms of green line crossings, and metaphorically in terms of negotiations, have done little to alter the basic conflict structure. In the meantime, Turkey’s grip on Northern Cyprus is becoming ever stronger, as the island has turned into one of Erdogan’s main bargaining chips. While this calls for a fresh approach, for which recognition of the TRNC would be one option, this year’s elections, and the subsequent unilateral steps towards a change in the basis for negotiations has further undermined whatever little prospect such a strategic change had anyway.

The Gas Scramble

When gas was found in the eastern Mediterranean seabed more than ten years ago, many had seen this as a window of opportunity to overcome conflicts and enhance cooperation (e.g. Gurel and Le Cornu, 2014). In particular, economies of scale, given the limited size of the finds and logistical necessities regarding gas storage and transportation, provided incentives for collaboration. Indeed, in September 2020, the RoC, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority signed the foundation charter establishing the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EastMed), which had been brought into existence through the 2019 Cairo Declaration, as an international organization. Yet Turkey has remained outside EastMed, and instead in 2019 agreed EEZ boundaries with the Libyan Government of National Accord, overlapping with the RoC’s EEZ (Axt 2021). So instead of universal cooperation, the gas finds led to a resource scramble that helped overcome some divisions, but reinforced others. In Cyprus, possible revenues were subsumed under existing conflict structures and competing sovereignty claims.

Thus, Turkish vessels started drilling for gas in waters claimed by the RoC as its own EEZ, both in areas seen by Turkey as its own and others by invitation of the TRNC. The RoC government as well as many other international actors have condemned these incursions as violations of the RoC’s rights. Yet the Turkish government also seems to have used the drillings for tactical purposes, withdrawing their ships periodically, a behaviour that continued in 2020/21. While in late summer 2020 it looked as if Turkey would engage in continued brinkmanship,
When gas was found in the eastern Mediterranean seabed more than ten years ago, many had seen this as a window of opportunity to overcome conflicts and enhance cooperation. However, ships sailed back to their ports in mid-September, only for the research vessel Oruc Reis to return into contested waters in October. In early 2021, coinciding with the beginning of the Biden Administration in the United States, Turkey started to pursue a more conciliatory strategy, Greece and Turkey resumed their bilateral dialogue, and EU High Representative Josep Borrell submitted a report to the European Council outlining a more positive agenda for EU-Turkey relations. Yet in early June 2021, Turkish Energy Minister Fatih Donmez made threats of further drillings, continuing Turkey’s double track of threats and detente.

**Turkish Strategies**

In part, this reflects Cyprus’s standing as a strategic asset for the Turkish government. When the AKP and Erdogan came to power in 2002, their aim had been to solve the Cyprus issue, and Turkey thus supported the 2004 Annan plan. Yet, whatever other reasons there may have been, in retrospect it looks as if this conciliatory line was at least partly motivated by the need to weaken a hostile military, whose domestic reputation is fed by the continuation of the Cyprus and Kurdish conflicts. Yet as Erdogan managed to weaken the Kemalist influence on the army and had to form coalitions with nationalist forces, Cyprus returned to its former place in Turkish domestic politics, as a source of identity politics and influence (including attempts to make Turkish Cypriots more pious, see Moudouros, 2019), as a vital pillar of Turkey’s geopolitical strategy and as a bargaining chip in Turkey’s relations with the EU.

**Electoral Shifts**

Of course, Turkish Cypriots are not mere puppets of Turkey. As many other societies today, Turkish Cypriot society, too, is deeply divided, and the division lines in Cyprus mostly run between supporters and opponents of a solution within the UN bizonal, bi-communal framework. The disappointment of many Turkish Cypriots with the EU following the failure of the Annan Plan has clearly weakened the pro-unification camp. While Mehmet Ali Talat won the 2005 presidential elections by a large majority in the first round, results since then have been more contested and fluctuated between victories for each camp. After five years of pro-solution President Mustafa Akinci (independent), the 18 October 2020 second round of elections resulted in a victory for conservative candidate Ersin Tatar (UBP, National Unity Party) by the narrowest of margins (51.7 per cent). The UBP had already won the parliamentary elections in 2018. The tide thus seems to have shifted back to a more hardline stance in the conflict, in line with Turkey’s strategies.

The disappointment of many Turkish Cypriots with the EU following the failure of the Annan Plan has clearly weakened the pro-unification camp. This shift had already been visible during the election campaign. Following initial plans from the previous year, the then Foreign Minister and presidential candidate Kudret Ozersay put forward proposals in August 2020 to re-open the military zone of Varosha, sandwiched between Famagusta and the Green Line. In the 1960s, Varosha had been the main and most glamorous site of tourism in Cyprus. In 1974, it was occupied by the Turkish army and cordoned off, and has remained a ghost town ever since. The UN Security Council has repeatedly called for Varosha to be returned to its mostly Greek Cypriot former inhabitants, and its return or opening has often been floated as part of a broader territorial adjustment in the context of a solution. While Ozersay wanted to return property to the Greek-Cypriot owners, his plan was to do so under Turkish-Cypriot administration, which was unacceptable to the RoC. However, in October 2020, Ozersay’s plans were overtaken by the then Prime Minister and co-contender for the
Presidency Tatar, who unilaterally opened parts of Varosha to visitors and assumes that most property actually belongs to the Evkaf foundation, successor to an Ottoman ministry, which supposedly held these properties following the Ottoman conquest of the island in the 1570s. Such claims, in turn, also align with Erdogan’s invocations of the Ottoman empire as part of his foreign policy. The picture of Erdogan having a picnic on Varosha’s beachside worked as a perfect illustration of this discourse.

On 31 May 2021, parliamentary elections were held in the RoC. Because of the presidential system in the South, these are less significant, especially regarding the conflict, in which the presidents function as the respective leaders of their communities. Nonetheless, it is alarming that the extreme right-wing ELAM party received 6.8 percent of votes and doubled its seats in Parliament to four. However, while ELAM pursues a policy of a unitary, Greek Cypriot-led Cyprus, its election may be more of a reaction to corruption scandals in the government, including contested schemes of selling Cypriot passports, than directly related to the conflict.

**Negotiating Negotiations**

Despite these highly unfortunate circumstances, UN efforts to resolve the conflict resumed in Geneva on 27-29 April 2021 in the new format of a “five plus one” meeting. The parties involved included not only the two Cypriot leaders, but also the three guarantor powers under the 1960 Treaties that established the RoC: Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom, as well as the European Union. The talks were not formal negotiations, but rather designed to clear the ground for possible steps towards later negotiations. Even so, in light of the context outlined so far, hopes were extremely low. In this sense, it was already a success that the parties agreed to meet again in the near future.

However, the main difference to previous negotiations was that Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots openly declared the need to move beyond the existing remit of negotiations, towards a bizonal, bicomunal federation, and explicitly include the possibility of a two-state solution. In light of the debates around Varosha and the Turkish gas drilling exercises, such a move was quickly interpreted as more Turkish aggressive posturing and rejected by Greek Cypriots.

**Covid-19**

All of these developments took place against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, which by the end of May 2021 had seen more than 360 deaths in the RoC alone and more than eight percent of the population contracting the virus. As the pandemic led to unilateral border closures even within the EU, so it did in Cyprus. While tourists were no longer able to come to the island anyway, this meant that those commuting between the two sides for work or education could no longer do so, and that bicomunal contacts, which had flourished on the island even in times of deepening tensions, were restricted to virtual encounters. Even after the RoC allowed workers to cross from the North, quarantine restrictions in the TRNC made daily commutes practically impossible. Both sides finally reached an agreement to open all crossings according to a traffic light system in early June 2021. Developments are to be monitored by the Technical Committee on Health, one of several bicomunal committees set up as long-term confidence-building measures and whose importance was enhanced by Akinci and Greek Cypriot President Anastasiades in the mid-2010s.

Turkey’s present foreign policies are far from conducive to a solution of the Cyprus conflict within the established bizonal, bicomunal framework

On the one hand, turning to such established institutions of bicomunal cooperation is a positive sign; yet, on the other, the Committees themselves risk becoming the object of political tactics. While they should have been the core mechanism right from the start of the pandemic, the fact that Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots seem to insist that they are no longer referred to as “bicomunal” further illus-
trates the determination with which they are presently pursuing a two-state solution.

Prospects

The current context in the eastern Mediterranean and, in particular, Turkey’s present foreign policies are far from conducive to a solution of the Cyprus conflict within the established bizonal, bicomunal framework. As a two-state solution is anathema to most Greek Cypriots, it is difficult to see how significant steps towards overcoming the status quo on the island may be taken in the foreseeable future. While some of the developments outlined in this chapter are linked to domestic Turkish politics, it is far from clear that a change of government in Turkey would make things easier, especially now that the pendulum has swung back to a nationalist administration in the TRNC as well. The sad irony of all this is that the Turkish Cypriots are becoming ever more dependent on Turkey, and thus Turkey’s influence on Northern Cyprus is constantly increasing. This has led to a deepened division in recent decades, despite all bicomunal contacts and the opening of the Green Line. Perhaps, therefore, it is time for a new approach, which may well entail a move away from the old framework (Diez 2021). Alas, the timing for such a move seems far from ideal.

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Outlawing Golden Dawn: Dealing with Right-Wing Extremism in Greece

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After a high-profile trial that lasted over five years, a Greek court ordered Golden Dawn’s leader Nikolaos Michaloliakos and many former members of the party to begin serving their prison sentences in October 2020. This was the biggest trial of Nazis since Nuremberg; it not only marked the end of Golden Dawn’s criminal activities in Greece, but also forced the party to close many of its headquarters across the country. Amongst others, Golden Dawn members have been involved in serious crimes, including murder, attacks on refugees, extortion and racketeering. The trial’s completion was celebrated by many Greeks, who perceive the party as a “paradox” in politics. How can a country, that suffered tremendously under Nazi occupation during World War II, vote for politicians who openly embrace such symbolism and ideology? Some researchers seem to think there is evidence of a “dictatorship nostalgia” in Greek society, especially in rural areas, which was amplified by the negative effects of the fiscal crisis. Others even believe that Golden Dawn might return in the future, as some of their remnants are committed to spreading the leadership’s ideology. One thing is certain: Golden Dawn’s extremism fractured Greece’s political system and almost a year after the trial, the country is still healing from a decade of violence, hatred and fear.

The Fiscal Crisis and Golden Dawn’s Rise

Before explaining Golden Dawn’s rise in Greek politics, it is important to briefly look at the macroeconomic effects of the fiscal crisis, which deeply affected the working class. The country almost went bankrupt in 2010. To save the Greek State from total collapse, the first economic adjustment programme was signed between the government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the same year. The bailout introduced sweeping changes, cuts and public sector reforms. Early figures from the Hellenic Statistical Authority showed that the unemployment rate doubled in less than two years (2009-2011), rising from 9.62% to 17.87%. With Greece’s GDP growth rate declining sharply and the debt skyrocketing, austerity was the government’s last card. Most of those reforms and cuts were not received well by Greeks, who saw the programme as an attempt by the government to proceed with mass layoffs. Consequently, political turmoil and the simultaneous decline of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement of Greece (PASOK) led to an era of dealignment in Greek politics. Coalitions were formed, while new parties surfaced and competed for seats in the Parliament in the 2012 general election – the first one in the austerity years. Up until that point, the name “Golden Dawn” was unknown to the public, and despite its existence as a political party for more than two decades, its ideology was a well-kept secret. Only anti-fascist groups were aware of its ties to neo-Nazism. This uncertainty gave Golden Dawn’s candidates clout and allowed them to appear on mainstream media to normalize their rhetoric. In June 2012, Golden Dawn emerged as one of the biggest winners of that election, and a few years later rose to third position in Parliament with almost 7% of the vote. The distrust in both Greek and European elites and their strong anti-migrant stance helped Golden Dawn gain significant momentum. Whilst the overall popularity of right-wing parties was shrinking, the party’s self-portrayal as the “only nationalist choice”
allowed them to attract voters from other right-wing parties. Golden Dawn even absorbed voters from the centre-right New Democracy, which at the time was going through an identity crisis. From 2012 until 2019, the party’s domination in the Greek far-right scene was clear. Their continuous electoral success enabled its MPs and MEPs to express their ideology without constraints as they were facing no competition from other Greek far-right groups. Xenophobia, Islamophobia, and the promotion of nationhood became central themes in their rhetoric. They capitalized on many important issues, including the Macedonian name dispute, Greece’s relations with Turkey and tensions in the Balkan Peninsula. Even the Greek Parliament’s decision to suspend Golden Dawn’s election fund in late 2013 because of their criminal activities, was not enough to stop them. Many Greeks saw it as an attempt to censor and punish the party.

A Criminal Organization

In October 2020, the leader of Golden Dawn and his inner circle were handed 13-year prison sentences. The party was also found guilty of operating a criminal organization. More than 1,100 documents about alleged crimes committed by party members and officials were examined during the trial, while hundreds of witnesses testified from 2015 to 2020. 69 defendants, including fifteen former MPs and leader Nikolaos Michaloliakos, all worked together as a gang for many years and adopted a military structure to recruit volunteers and organize themselves in Athens. Unsurprisingly, many Golden Dawn MPs had been involved in crimes before their parliamentary stints. According to Greek law, convicted citizens are allowed to run in general elections in Greece. The investigation into Golden Dawn’s activities originally began in September 2013, after the killing of Pavlos Fyssas, also known as Killah P. The young rapper was murdered in Keratsini by Golden Dawn enforcer Giorgos Roupakias, and according to his testimony, it was ordered directly by the party to send a clear message: Golden Dawn’s power in the streets of Athens is indisputable. At the time, in a televised statement, Prime Minister Antonis Samaras called for public calm and stated that he would stop “the descendants of the Nazis from poisoning our social life, to act criminally, to terrorize and to undermine the foundations of the country which gave birth to democracy.” But nothing really changed after the murder. At the height of the Greek fiscal crisis, Golden Dawn MPs also orchestrated numerous attacks on migrants and left-wing groups – in some cases spreading their violent tactics to rural areas across the country.

The distrust in both Greek and European elites and their strong anti-migrant stance helped Golden Dawn gain significant momentum

The events of September 2013 resulted in the temporary imprisonment of many Golden Dawn MPs, who were not suspended from their parliamentary duties, despite an ongoing investigation to determine whether they were part of a criminal syndicate. The party was not banned from running in general elections and quickly recovered in the two general elections of January and September 2015, retaining its third position in the Greek Parliament. It could be argued that Greek voters were rewarding Golden Dawn for their extremism and violent tactics.

What Remains of Golden Dawn

Up until May 2021, two convicted members of Golden Dawn were still at large. The first, Ioannis Lagos, a 48-year-old former nightclub bouncer and more recently Member of the European Parliament, had already been convicted in Greece on several charges and sentenced to 13 years in prison. However, soon after the verdict he made use of his diplomatic immunity to flee to Brussels. The process of stripping him of his immunity took approximately eight months, as the European Parliament had to initiate a special vote, which was delayed because of the global pandemic. The second member still at large is deputy leader Christos Pappas, who, to this day, refuses to turn himself in. Interpol and the Greek government launched an international investigation, which has so far failed to produce any results. In the past, Christos Pappas has been photo-
graphed numerous times under Nazi flags, whilst he is widely believed to be the ideological father of Golden Dawn and perhaps the most dangerous member of the party.

Other far-right parties emerged to replace the gap left by Golden Dawn

So, is Golden Dawn fully gone? With most of their members in prison, the party has lost both its leadership and political power in Greece. But other far-right parties have recently emerged to replace the gap left by Golden Dawn. A notable example is the ultranationalist Greek Solution, which surfaced in the 2019 general election and won 10 seats in the Parliament. Although it has not endorsed Golden Dawn’s extremism, it shares many similarities with the neo-Nazis. Their leader Kyriakos Velopoulos is currently the new leading voice in Greek far-right politics and has a long history of political activity with several right-wing parties, including the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) and more recently New Democracy. His experience might play an instrumental role in “restructuring” the far-right in Greece in the future. Any potential alliances with other parties could also include Golden Dawn, which is still represented in the Athens City Council by Ourania Michaloliakou. She happens to be the daughter of the former leader of Golden Dawn and has been involved with the party’s political activism for more than a decade.

Conclusion

Golden Dawn’s outlawing was a very lengthy process in Greek politics, but it is still a landmark victory for victims, their families and civil society. Greek justice managed to ultimately tackle Golden Dawn’s hateful ideology and the violence initiated by the party’s members. They are not welcome in Greek society anymore. The verdict, therefore, not only represents a solemn commitment undertaken by society, but is also a victory for anti-fascist movements after years of campaigning against neo-Nazi violence. The verdict also marked the first step towards reparation for the victims of these acts and is an important reminder of the dangers that the manipulation of collective fears, propaganda and stigmatization can pose to societies.

Golden Dawn’s activities also show that its MPs engaged in domestic terrorism under the mask of operating a political party. The outlawing of the party also opens up a much-needed debate about right-wing extremism in Greece and the much-needed structural reforms of the Greek justice system, the slowness of which allowed Golden Dawn to roam free for more than six years after the murder of Pavlos Fyssas. If successful, those reforms could lead to a new era in Greek politics where violent militia and extremism are no longer tolerated in any of their current forms. In theory, Golden Dawn is no more, but in practice – and when the opportunity arises – its remnants could return.

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The Geopolitics of Pandemic-related Assistance to the Western Balkans

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Covid-19 brought to the surface many structural vulnerabilities in the Western Balkans, a European periphery marked by its weak economies and inefficient and underfinanced healthcare and social welfare systems. There has been a pressing need for external support and several external actors (such as the EU, China, Russia and Turkey) have stepped in to provide assistance. Under normal circumstances, the prompt response of a plurality of actors should have been a very positive development for the region. However, this is not entirely the case. External actors have been in direct competition in a fierce race for geopolitical influence and preeminence, striving to position themselves ahead of the others for the challenges and opportunities of the post-pandemic period.

The EU distinguishes itself from the other external actors for its comprehensive pandemic-related assistance to the region, which has exceeded €3.3 billion. Its concerns cover a range of priorities, from supporting national healthcare systems to stimulating socioeconomic recovery. The EU has also donated more than 23 million pieces of personal protective equipment, as well as dozens of ambulances, ventilators and intensive care monitors. Moreover, Brussels has given €70 million for the procurement of EU-approved vaccines; promised to provide 651,000 vaccine doses until August 2021; and said it would also deliver more than 1.1 million vaccine doses until June 2021, which have been allocated to the region via the COVAX mechanism. Yet, while the EU has provided unparalleled pandemic-related assistance to the Western Balkans, it has lost the public diplomacy contest to the other external actors, who have been given a disproportionate amount of credit, for the delivery of rather symbolic levels of aid. This chapter briefly presents the health assistance efforts of China, Russia and Turkey (i.e., the most important non-Western external actors) in the region from the outbreak of the pandemic to the end of April 2021, and concludes with some comparative findings.

China: It’s Business Time

Although China has been blamed for having mismanaged the pandemic outbreak, it strove to turn the tables on its critics and portray itself as a pioneer in the management of the Covid-19 crisis and as a preeminent provider of health assistance. It fought the (dis)information war to change the narrative about the Covid-19 origins, and established itself as a global leader of essential medical goods for the fight against the pandemic. According to a study, Chinese exports of Covid-19-related medical supplies skyrocketed in 2020, with the value of exports of respirator masks and related textiles increasing more than twelvefold in comparison to 2019. China also engaged in a race against time and against the world’s leading pharmaceutical companies to be the first to develop an effective and affordable vaccine, partly for the prestige this would afford, but also in order to secure a large share of the global vaccine market. Overall, it used pandemic-related aid to

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stimulate business opportunities worldwide. For instance, its donations of vaccines have so far been directed to 56 countries, 55 out of which participate in the “Belt and Road Initiative,” which has been re-invigorated during the pandemic with the advancement of the “health silk road” idea.\(^3\)

The largest part of Chinese health assistance was directed to Serbia. Beijing and Belgrade have built a strategic partnership, which has further deepened during the pandemic.

The Chinese health assistance towards the Western Balkans was distributed to all countries in the region but Kosovo, whose statehood Beijing has not recognized. While the quantities of medical goods delivered to each recipient country were publicly announced, China has not released any information concerning the ratio between donations and sales in these deliveries. Medical supplies were mostly sent during the March-April 2020 period and consisted of thousands of masks, testing kits, gloves, goggles, and protective clothing. The largest part of Chinese health assistance – that also included the equipment for two Covid-19 testing laboratories and a team of medical experts – was directed to Serbia. Beijing and Belgrade have built a strategic partnership, which has further deepened during the pandemic with new deals concerning transfers of military equipment, and the construction of the Belgrade subway. The two countries have also launched talks for the construction of an oil refinery plant in Smederevo and Serbia's purchase of high-speed trains.\(^4\) Serbia’s President, Aleksandar Vucic, has facilitated the spread of Chinese influence in the region. Not only has he praised (backed by the regime-friendly media) the Chinese health assistance to Serbia (going so far as to contrast it with the corresponding EU aid), but he has also been the first European leader to place his trust in Sinopharm, the Chinese vaccine, despite the lack of reliable scientific information about its safety and efficacy. Serbia ordered two million doses of Sinopharm and quickly attained high inoculation numbers (it had the highest rate in Europe until March 2021), setting the example for other countries in the region to follow its course. Beijing rewarded Belgrade with an agreement to finance (together with the United Arab Emirates) the establishment of a vaccine production factory in Serbia,\(^5\) while it encouraged the region’s interest in Sinopharm with modest donations of vaccines to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro (50,000 and 30,000 doses respectively).

Russia: Friends matter

Contrary to China, which sent health assistance to more than 150 countries, Russia concentrated its pandemic-related aid to a small number of states that were selected on the basis of political expediency. These included either key countries in Moscow’s campaign to seek relief from the Ukraine-related economic sanctions, or countries with which it shares friendly relations and to which it wanted to demonstrate its solidarity. Russian health assistance has, overall, been rather symbolic, but its effect has been amplified by an accompanying disinformation campaign aimed at denigrating the West’s health management efforts. Moscow also participated in the global race for the swift development of a vaccine that would meet high standards of safety and efficacy. Interestingly, Russia named its vaccine “Sputnik V,” after the Soviet Union’s first ever satellite launch, while it precipitated the vaccine’s release onto the market for as early as October 2020, before the completion of Phase III trials. In this way, Russia sought to claim itself as the first country to develop a vaccine against Covid-19, intending not only to make an impression, but also to secure a large share of the vaccine market. Notably, Russia has made very few donations of vaccines, which in many cases have served as “free samples” to countries that had


already expressed interest in the procurement of Sputnik V doses.6

Russia used its health assistance in the Western Balkans as a way of dishing out rewards and sanctions. While it sent support in the Spring of 2020 to its two main allies in the region, namely Serbia and Republika Srpska (the Serbian entity in Bosnia and Hercegovina), it ignored the relatively simple demands for cooperation of Montenegro and North Macedonia, the two newest NATO members, concerning the evacuation of those countries’ citizens.7 Apart from medical supplies, its pandemic-related aid to Serbia and Republika Srpska included the deployment of military medical expert teams, assigned to decontaminate facilities. The coordination of Russian health assistance by its Ministry of Defence was the cause of some concern among external observers, who reasonably questioned Moscow’s true motives.

Russia has not so far donated any vaccine doses to the Western Balkans. However, Sputnik V has been promoted in the region by Serbia, which ordered tens of thousands of doses, despite the lack of peer-reviewed studies concerning its merits. Serbia’s very successful inoculation campaign (that was owed to the procurement of substantial quantities of every available vaccine on the market) stimulated a wider interest in the region for the Russian vaccine as well. Eventually, Russia rewarded Serbia’s endorsement of Sputnik V by conceding to the demand for the establishment of a vaccine production facility in Belgrade.8

Turkey: All Politics Are Personal

The outbreak of the pandemic hit Turkey at a difficult time. The economy was in trouble, with high inflation and a steady depreciation of its national currency. In 2020, Turkey was also engaged (more or less directly) militarily in three different theatres of armed hostilities (i.e., in Syria, in Libya and in Nagorno Karabakh), making new enemies and stretching to the limits its margins of diplomatic manoeuvre. Indeed, the gap between Turkey and the West has widened during the period in question due to divergent views and interests over a large array of issues. However, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey’s President, perceived an opportunity in the Covid-19 crisis to project soft power abroad, affirm the country’s self-styled image as a rising great power and cultivate his own domestic profile as an influential world leader. Turkey responded positively to all international demands for assistance, sending small quantities of medical supplies to 158 countries. It has also recently striven to develop its own vaccine, whose release is planned for the end of summer 2021.9

Turkey does not want to cede space to other external actors (such as Russia and China) to exercise influence in the region

Turkey has shown particular interest in the Western Balkans, which were part of the Ottoman Empire and fall within the wider region delineated by President Erdogan as the “borders of our [the Turkish people’s] heart.”10 Turkey does not want to cede space to other external actors (such as Russia and China) to exercise influence in the region. It expressed its solidarity to all Western Balkan countries in the Spring of 2020 with modest donations of medical supplies, consisting of thousands of masks, protective clothes, goggles and testing kits. To the extent that Turkey has not yet developed a vaccine, it has also not participated actively in vaccine diplomacy. It has just made two donations totalling 40,000 doses of the Chinese-manufactured CoronaVac (also known as Sinovac) vaccine to Bosnia and Herzegovina in March-April 2021, where pandemic rates were flaring.11 Crucially, all decisions concerning Turkey’s pandemic-related aid deliveries to the Western Balkans were taken by President Erdogan himself, following communications with his counterparts in the region. Erdogan’s

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strong interpersonal relations with most Western Balkan leaders, and the latters’ personal gratitude to the Turkish President for Ankara’s acts of support, point to a particular model of personal diplomacy that best serves the interests of the decision-makers involved. Indeed, Turkey’s most remarkable health assistance gesture to the region was the construction of a fully equipped 150-bed hospital in Fier, in Albania. The hospital was promised to Albania’s Prime Minister, Edi Rama, by President Erdogan at the beginning of the year and was constructed very quickly, within less than three months. Notably, it was inaugurated by the Turkish President on 21 April 2021, i.e., just four days ahead of the Albanian parliamentary elections, thereby clearly boosting Rama’s chances of re-election.\(^{12}\)

**In lieu of Conclusions**

Covid-19 and the mitigation of its effects have not brought new external players to the Western Balkans. External actors which had already established a strong foothold in the region during the previous years are those who mobilized to offer pandemic-related support in order to consolidate their influence and garner themselves the best position for the post-pandemic world.

While the EU donated substantial levels of assistance, the other external actors examined in this study proceeded with mostly symbolic acts of support during the researched period. Still, public perceptions in the region reflect a different story. According to several public opinion surveys, in 2020, Serbians believed that the Chinese and Russian levels of assistance were superior to the corresponding levels of aid provided by the EU. Admittedly, Brussels has failed to convey to the Western Balkans a message of genuine concern, while it has committed a series of policy errors, the last one being the serious mismanagement of the question of prompt vaccine delivery. The low appreciation of EU support should also be attributed to the disinformation campaign launched by both external (mainly Russian and Chinese) and local media, which have systematically denigrated the West’s pandemic-related policies. Last, but not least, the Chinese, Russian and Turkish initiatives in the region have benefitted from the support of local leaders (e.g. the Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic, in the cases of China and Russia and the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, in the case of Turkey), who have profiled themselves domestically as privileged interlocutors of the leaders of those external actors and have invested much in strengthening the corresponding interpersonal relations. Therefore, the hard lesson that the EU should draw from the Western Balkans is that the way external health assistance is presented and perceived locally is no less important than the volume of assistance itself.

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Re-examining Two Key Accession Processes: The Cases of North Macedonia and Serbia

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The Crisis of EU Enlargement Policy

The EU’s enlargement policy has been in permanent crisis since the autumn of 2019. The EU has not opened a single chapter with Serbia since October 2019 and could not start accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, despite the Commission’s positive recommendation made even before the June summit in 2019. Most recently – in late 2020 – Bulgaria vetoed opening accession talks with North Macedonia due to disagreements over Macedonian language and history. Beyond blocking North Macedonia’s accession process, this is likely to undermine Albania’s prospects for starting negotiations soon, as most EU Member States are against decoupling the negotiation process of the two candidate states. However, this most recent deadlock provoked by Bulgaria was just yet another episode in a long saga that started in late 2019. At the European Council summit held on 15 October that year, Member States could not agree on starting accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia due to the opposition of three countries: France, Denmark and the Netherlands. France demanded a fundamental overhaul of accession conditionality methodology to put an end to candidate states backsliding on democratic criteria in their progression along the EU integration path. While the French veto directly harmed North Macedonia’s and Albania’s prospects, it reflected deeper tensions within enlargement policy that have been building up for more than a decade. Despite accusations of underming the credibility of the EU enlargement process, the French had a point in arguing that the policy needed fundamental review, even if they might have been wrong to apply such a brutal instrument against two candidates not deserving of it. Albania and North Macedonia were thus the collateral damage associated with this policy crisis, which has now come to a turning point.

The EU has put human rights and democracy at the core of its enlargement policy since the introduction of the Copenhagen criteria in the enlargement process in 1993, while since the start of membership negotiations with Croatia, the role of political criteria in the accession process has been significantly upgraded. The sufficient fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria is necessary, in principle, for the opening of accession negotiations. Thus, as a country advances on the EU integration path, one should expect to see an improvement in human rights and democracy in candidate states. However, the opposite has been happening. A case in point is Serbia, where the overall democracy score has been deteriorating since 2011, and media freedom since 2007. In the meantime, Serbia has made great progress along the accession path: in 2012 it became an EU candidate; in January 2014 membership talks started; and negotiations of the rule-of-law chapters began in July 2016. While the EU opened further negotiation chapters with Serbia, the last two (Chapter 9 on financial services and Chapter 4 on the free movement of capital) in 2019, Serbia’s status was downgraded from a semi-consolidated democracy to a transitional or hybrid regime by Freedom House

The EU’s enlargement policy has been in permanent crisis since the autumn of 2019. Albania and North Macedonia were thus the collateral damage associated with this policy crisis in the same year. France – through its veto in October 2019 – wanted to put an end to this practice of the EU letting candidate countries get away with undermining democracy, rule of law, and human rights. In order to address French and Dutch concerns, the European Commission, in April 2020, adopted a new enlargement methodology that groups negotiation chapters belonging to the same thematic policy blocks into different clusters, while prioritizing rule-of-law chapters, which are now to be opened first. Importantly, candidates would be able to access EU structural funds while opening chapters of certain clusters, thus making the benefits of enlargement more tangible for citizens before accession. The disbursement of these funds would be conditioned on progress in implementation, which would mean that a lack of results or backsliding would involve a financial cost. This could create a more direct incentive for complying with conditionality criteria than the relatively distant prospect of obtaining membership.\(^2\) While this new methodology would automatically apply to Albania and North Macedonia, which are yet to start their accession negotiations, in May 2021 Montenegro and Serbia also opted in. While the Commission promised a “stronger focus on rule of law, fundamental rights, the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration reform,” it is not clear whether the new methodology will fulfill these expectations. Even within the “old” negotiation framework, the Commission and Member States had ample room to apply sanctions on candidate countries in the form of withholding the granting of candidate status, delaying the opening or closing of negotiation chapters, or cutting IPA funds. However, sanctions have rarely been used by the EU, revealing inconsistency in the EU’s conditionality policy that stems from the EU’s reluctance to hold back rewards when candidates fail to comply with political criteria.

**Serbia**

The adoption of the new methodology reflected a change of heart in the EU. The EU recently toned down its rhetoric, praising Serbia as a frontrunner of EU enlargement. The EU’s relations with Serbia cooled during the Covid crisis, as reflected not only in the absence of new chapter openings for almost two years, but also in the virulent anti-EU rhetoric in Serbia, alongside official Serbian discourse hyping Chinese and Russian medical help, and the government’s cultivation of stronger ties with these countries.\(^3\) While Serbia’s failure to comply with political criteria largely halted the country’s progress with membership negotiations, resolving the status of Kosovo is another condition which must be sorted out before Serbia can obtain membership. After a long stalemate, the Belgrade-Pristina negotiations resumed last summer under American and EU sponsorship, yet the Kosovar and Serbian positions are as far apart as ever. While Kosovo wants recognition from Serbia, for the moment it seems reluctant to make any concessions, while president Vucic made it clear on several occasions that Serbia seeks to gain something in exchange for any deal that extends beyond EU membership (without clarifying what that should be). For Serbia, the starting point for reaching an agreement would be the creation of the Association of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo, which was agreed in 2013 within the framework of the Brussels Agreement. However, some of the agreement’s provisions were found unconstitutional by Kosovo’s Constitutional Court, preventing its implementation. Such an association would amount to granting some form of territorial autonomy to Serbian majority municipalities in Kosovo, which is anathema to Kosovo politicians and public opinion, as Kosovars see it as endangering

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the territorial integrity of their incipient state. Re- cent statements by Albin Kurti, Kosovo’s newly elected Prime Minister, indicate little hope of reaching a compromise soon, while the Serbian government is unlikely to concede to recognizing Kosovo unconditionally.

In North Macedonia, there appears to be a close connection between EU integration and domestic stability, with EU integration being the most important guarantee of the maintenance of ethnic peace with the Albanian minority.

North Macedonia

While Serbia seems to have deserved the cold shoulder it has been shown by the EU lately, North Macedonia, in contrast, has unjustly been languishing in the EU’s waiting room for a very long time. North Macedonia became an EU candidate in 2005, while the European Commission recommended opening accession negotiations with this country as early as in 2009, which however was prevented by Greece’s veto threat because of the bilateral dispute over the country’s name. Because of the action of Greece, Macedonia was denied a much-anticipated membership offer at the 2008 Bucharest NATO summit, setting off a wave of nationalist protests, while the government (led by the nationalist Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski) began to pursue more open and provocative nationalist policies. This derailed the country’s EU integration process, undermined democratic institutions, and threatened inter-ethnic peace. Ethnic relations between Albanians and ethnic Macedonians also slowly deteriorated, as marked by sporadic ethnic incidents. In 2015, a so-called wire-tapping scandal emerged, causing a deep political crisis. Recordings leaked by Macedonian political opposition parties revealed that Gruevski’s government had wiretapped 20,000 people, exercised control over judges and journalists, manipulated elections, and tried to cover up a murder case. Although culminating tensions divided the population along pro- and anti-government lines, rather than along the ethnic divide, the governing party tried to turn public sentiment against the Albanians. Finally, after the December 2016 elections, the main opposition party, the Social Democratic Party of Macedonia (SDSM), managed to create a government together with the Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) party and two other smaller parties, opening the way for a revitalization of Macedonia’s EU integration process. The change of government allowed for the resumption of negotiations with Greece, which resulted in the signing of the historical Prespa agreement with Greece in June 2018. The new government made painful concessions to Greece by agreeing to change the country’s name for the sake of furthering the EU accession process. In North Macedonia, there appears to be a close connection between EU integration and domestic stability, with EU integration being the most important guarantee of the maintenance of ethnic peace with the Albanian minority. Since the regime change in 2016, North Macedonia has managed to improve its democratic record, which was upgraded by Freedom House from 3.75 to 3.82 – the latter commending its general democratic progress. The Bulgarian veto is threatening to undermine these hard-won results.

The EU’s Waning Credibility

Analysts have been warning that the credibility of the EU accession process is in peril, and not only because of the block on North Macedonia’s accession negotiations by a neighbouring country due to bilat-

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Kosovo has been waiting for visa liberalization from the EU since 2016 – when the European Commission found that it fulfilled the related requirements. However, a decision has been blocked in the Council for no obvious good reason. Ruffling feathers in EU circles, a unanimous non-paper (allegedly authored by the Slovenian government, albeit not officially acknowledged by anyone) was recently circulated in the media. It proposed radical territorial changes in the region through the creation of a greater Serbia, Croatia and Albania, at the expense of Montenegro, North Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. As Carl Bildt argued, such ideas represent “plan B” solutions if “plan A” – the orderly EU integration of the Western Balkan states – goes off track. One of the greatest threats now is the enlargement fatigue endemic in Western European capitals, where the prevailing negative mood suggests doubt about whether enlargement will ever happen, despite the process technically moving forward. There is understandably little appetite for admitting authoritarian states like Serbia into the EU. However, countries that have demonstrated their democratic credentials, such as North Macedonia and Montenegro (where elections brought political change last summer after three decades of rule by the Democratic Party of Socialists [DPS]), and Kosovo, (where during the February 2021 elections voters rejected the corrupt, old guard politicians) should be rewarded and encouraged more by the EU. These countries deserve a credible EU perspective that can serve as an example for citizens in other countries that change is possible, and worth being pursued. Alternative scenarios in the form of territorial rearrangements threaten renewed instability and conflict, turning the Western Balkans – practically an enclave within the EU, surrounded by EU states – into the geopolitical playground of great powers, setting the Balkan states on a quite different kind of trajectory, marked by authoritarianism and in the EU’s direct neighbourhood.

The year 2021 in Morocco has been dominated by two trends that have characterized Moroccan policy for the last decade: the entrenchment of the monarchy as the central piece of the political system, which rules and governs, with the consequent isolation of the country’s representative institutions in political decision-making; and a more aggressive and confrontational foreign policy with regard to the Western Sahara issue.

Ten Years After the Anti-authoritarian Protests in Morocco

“Freedom, dignity and social justice.” With this slogan, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in different cities throughout Morocco, coming together around the “20 February Movement,” which, in 2011, led in that country the anti-authoritarian protests taking place in countries across North Africa and the Middle East. Ten years on, Morocco is not only in the middle of an institutional crisis and a crisis of its development model, but has also taken an authoritarian turn, including a major backslide in terms of citizens’ rights and freedoms.

Since the constitutional reform of 2011, which reduced the King’s executive powers, the monarch has steadily regained his centrality in the political system, whilst the government has seen its role eroded to that of mere manager of the actual decisions and orientations. The depoliticization of the political field and preference for technocratic policy management has been a constant in the last ten years, enabled by the gradual loss of power of the Justice and Development Party (PJD) over the last two legislative terms, despite its electoral growth. This centralization of power has not been devoid of risks, such as the subordination of political responses to the pace set by the monarchy or the decoupling of its decisions from any sort of popular pressure. As Zaireg (2018) notes, these dynamics have not had the desired effects: on the one hand, the monarch’s decision to respond to the protests by launching long-term projects has proved insufficient, insofar as most of them remain unfinished and incomplete due to the lack of follow-through on their implementation; on the other, it is difficult to defend the idea of a monarch attuned to the concerns of his people when, even as he incorporates or embraces social demands, he is repressing or imprisoning the people who voice them.\(^1\)

Over the last year, in the context of the pandemic and ensuing lockdowns, the three aforementioned trends (royal leadership and institutional weakness, crisis of the development model, authoritarian regression) have become more evident than ever. On the one hand, the management of the Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the robust leadership of the King, who did not hesitate to mobilize the armed forces on the ground and promote programmes aimed at mitigating the economic and social effects of the crisis and ensuring the effective purchase and management of vaccines. On the other hand, the pandemic

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\(^1\) ZAIREG, Reda. “Social protest in Morocco: Does Mohammed VI have a plan?” Middle East Eye, 2018. Available at: www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/social-protest-morocco-does-mohammed-vi-have-plan.
exposed the fragility of the Moroccan health system, its poor funding, the shortage of medical personnel and of hospitals and intensive care units, as well as the disparities between the country’s urban and rural areas in terms of the public health system’s quality and accessibility. Finally, the declaration of the health state of emergency allowed the Moroccan government to reinforce the regime’s authoritarian drift and restrict citizens’ rights and freedoms, repressing protests, as in Fnideq in February, with the excuse of forcing the population to comply with the imposed health measures.

The pandemic exposed the fragility of the Moroccan health system, its poor funding, the shortage of personnel, hospitals and intensive care units, as well as the disparities between urban and rural areas

Western Sahara at the Centre of Moroccan Domestic and Foreign Policy

Western Sahara has occupied a central place in Moroccan policy throughout 2021, as a result of the diplomatic moves made over the previous two years, led by Nasser Bourita, Morocco’s top diplomat and the right-hand man of King Mohammed VI, from whom he takes direct orders in foreign policy. Since taking over the Foreign Ministry in 2017, Bourita has spearheaded a dramatically more assertive foreign policy. As a result, in 2020, more than twenty African and Arab countries opened consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla and, on 10 December 2020, the United States recognized Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. This recognition was the consequence of the Alawite kingdom’s adhesion to the so-called Abraham Agreement, previously signed with three other Arab countries (United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan), entailing the normalization of bilateral relations with Israel. The signing of this agreement triggered considerable unrest in Moroccan civil society and the non-governing left-wing parties, as well as amongst Islamist organizations, which viewed it as Moroccan disregard for Palestinian rights. Within Parliament, the party most affected by this diplomatic move has been the PJD, which had to abide by the royal decision, even though it meant contradicting its own positions regarding the Palestinian question and running counter to the widespread sentiment of its deeply anti-Zionist rank and file. For now, the normalization of relations with Israel involves three issues: the authorization of direct flights between the two countries; the reestablishment of official contacts and diplomatic relations whenever possible; and economic and technological cooperation, as well as the reopening of the Moroccan liaison office in Tel Aviv.

Western Sahara at the Centre of Moroccan

Domestic and Foreign Policy

The US recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara marked a turning point in the international consensus on the non-formal recognition of Morocco’s claims of sovereignty of the territory. It has emboldened the country to take a stronger stance on the issue and to strain relations with other countries, especially the European Union, as much as necessary to convince them to join the US position. This aim of the Alawite monarchy has driven the growing tension, since March 2021, with other European states, specifically Germany and Spain. In the case of Germany, the disagreements are due to the confluence of several controversies (Morocco’s exclusion from the international conference on the Libyan civil war, the broadcasting on German state television of a report on alleged human rights violations in Morocco) and the country’s response to Donald Trump’s recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara and its request to the UN Security Council that the US respect the provisions

of international law applicable to the dispute. These differences led, first, to a breakdown in the cooperation between the Moroccan government and the German Embassy in Rabat in March and, subsequently, to the recall of the Moroccan ambassador to Berlin for consultations in May. In the case of Spain, the trigger was the secret admission of the Front Polisario leader Brahim Ghali to a hospital in Logroño in April to be treated for the coronavirus. This prompted an unprecedented response by Morocco, which left the border with Ceuta uncontrolled, thereby facilitating the entry of between 12,000 and 14,000 migrants into the self-governing city between 17 and 20 May.5

Beyond the specific case of Ghali, the Moroccan response of making such intense use of immigration as a tool for pressure and for protesting what Morocco considers “red lines” has been viewed as unacceptable by Brussels. Although the Alawite kingdom has sought to attribute the situation of migratory crisis to the deterioration of its relations with Spain, in an attempt to distance the European Union from the controversy, as of the writing of this article,6 the European institutions have responded with a condemnation by the European Parliament of Morocco’s use of migrant minors as a weapon of political pressure. Whilst the new US administration has yet to make any statements regarding the continuity of the agreements established by Trump or on the diplomatic crisis, Morocco seems determined to maintain its firm commitment and break off bilateral agreements with the EU, as it did in 2016 and 2019 as a result of the judgments of the EU Court of Justice annulling the application of the agriculture, fisheries and aviation agreements between the EU and Morocco to Western Sahara.7 This confrontational position is framed both within the defiant tone the country has adopted towards the EU in recent years every time it has perceived political interference by the Union in its internal affairs, including, of course, the situation in Western Sahara, and in the demand to be treated on equal terms and the diversification of Moroccan foreign affairs. However, this time the Alawite kingdom seems to have miscalculated the consequences of its geostrategic gamble, such that, whilst the political evolution of the crisis remains open, Morocco’s diplomatic debilitation may be counterproductive to its interests and future negotiations with the EU.

2021, the Electoral “Super Year”

The political autumn of 2021 will be marked by the holding of up to five electoral processes in the country, which will begin with the election of the members of the professional chambers (of agriculture, commerce, industry, crafts, services and fisheries) on 6 August. These professional chambers participate in the indirect election system for the House of Councillors (the upper house of Parliament), which is scheduled to be renewed on 5 October. In the interim between these two electoral processes, three other elections will be held, all on 8 September, in which Moroccans will be called to the polls to elect the members of the House of Representatives (the lower house of Parliament), the local councils and the regional chambers.

The organization of this electoral “super year” in Morocco has been preceded by a reform of the electoral law that has generated an intense debate in the country since March 2020, when the parties began to discuss its terms. Finally, on 6 March 2021, the Moroccan Parliament passed four organic laws that will be implemented in the next elections. With regard to the modifications made for the election of the House of Representatives, undoubtedly the


6 10 June 2021.

One cannot help but think that the reform was also driven by the desire to limit the Islamist party’s power and reduce its weight in Parliament, as well as its ability to form a government.

Most controversial, the most important developments were the elimination of the electoral barrier (previously set at 3% for the legislative elections), the elimination of the 90 seats reserved for the “national list” and their distribution amongst the regional districts, and the modification of the electoral quotient. As for the latter, the system implemented in 2002, consisting of a proportional distribution by electoral list using a “greater remainder” method calculated based on valid votes was replaced by an electoral quotient to be calculated based on the lists of registered voters, whether or not they have voted. The approval of this change in how the quotient is calculated was strongly opposed by the PJD, the majority party in the house and, foreseeably, the one that will be the most affected by this new electoral system. Officially, according to Minister of the Interior Abdelouafi Laftit, this change was made to strengthen political pluralism and competition between parties and promote greater representation. However, one cannot help but think that the reform was also driven by the desire to limit the Islamist party’s power and reduce its weight in Parliament, as well as its ability to form a government. The new electoral quotient will mainly affect the majority parties, reducing their representation, and will generate a balkanized Parliament, which will likely weaken the parties in relation to the political decision-makers who are above the control of the government and Parliament. Thus, insofar as the King is responsible for appointing the head of government from amongst the party to win the most votes, a much more atomized and plural political map would increase the monarch’s discretion regarding whom to tap to form a government.
Algeria: Two Years after the Hirak, Deadlock?

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Taking stock of the internal situation in Algeria is far from easy. And this is not for lack of information and data that can be used for analysis. What makes the Algerian situation so particular is its constant evolution, rendering it difficult to determine its final trajectory. Indeed, since 22 February 2019, Algeria has been experiencing political and social movements, which the process of institutional normalization undertaken as of the 12 December 2019 presidential elections has been struggling to contain. Neither the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced a pause of almost a year, nor the socio-economic crisis seem to have relegated political demands to the background. It is true that these demonstrations have decreased in intensity, due to the health situation and a certain resignation among part of the Algerian population, beset by doubts about the viability of weekly marches as a means of bringing about change. However, it is neither weariness nor demobilization that has stopped the marches, but the policy of repression punctuated by the questioning, arrest and imprisonment of hundreds of Hirak activists.

The voter turnout in the 2019 presidential elections and the referendum on the new constitution held on 1 November 2020, which was very modest for the former (39.88% compared to 51.07% in 2014) and extremely low for the latter (23%), indicates the limits of political engineering, whose focal point remains the institutional normalization to which the political authorities are clinging.

Over two and a half years after the outbreak of the popular revolt, the promises of a break with the old regime are struggling to materialize. What are the reasons for this?

New Constitution and Elections, or How to Bypass the Transition Process

Though declaring to side with the people, the army’s high command had never planned on setting in motion a transition that would mean a negotiation process with the opposition and the Hirak activists. The position adopted was to not go beyond the bounds of the constitution and to complete the electoral process. Thus, after a first postponement on 4 July, the presidential elections were held on 12 December 2019. Five candidates stood: Ali Benflis, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Abdelkader Bengrina, Abdelaziz Belaid and Azzedine Mihoubi. It was Abdelmadjid Tebboune, a former minister and Prime Minister in the Abdelaziz Bouteflika Administrations, who won the elections with 59% of the votes.

Once elected, Abdelmadjid Tebboune promised to complete the institutional normalization process by appointing a commission of experts to draft the new constitution. Comprised of constitutional jurists, the Laraba Commission, named after its chair, Professor Ahmed Laraba, was tasked with drawing up a new text to be submitted to a referendum. However, this commission did not have the latitude to propose major revisions that could challenge the imbalance between the three powers. In other words, there was no possibility of questioning the semi-presidential nature of the Algerian regime. Nor of limiting the powers of the President of the Republic by removing certain prerogatives such as: legislating by ordinance, the abolition of the presidentially appointed third of the upper house of Parliament, or the distribution of the power of ap-
pointment between the President and the head of government. Adopted with 69% of the votes in favour and 13% against, this new constitution in fact reinforces the hyper-presidentialist nature of the Algerian regime by maintaining some of the President of the Republic’s chief prerogatives. The reintroduction of the post of head of government, on condition that it be filled by a member of the opposition, does not call into question the President’s pre-eminence over the executive. Thus conceived, the new constitution in no way breaks with the old order in the sense that token constitutionalism, which has formed the basis of all constitutional engineering since 1989, remains the rule. A sort of double standard: one democratic, the other authoritarian. In other words, the political power continues to reappropriate democratic tools to consolidate its authoritarian grip. It is in this spirit that President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has committed himself to dissolving the Parliament and organizing legislative elections for 12 June 2021, followed by local elections for the fourth quarter of 2021. This process of institutional normalization is taking place in a context marked by a shrinking of the space for individual and collective freedoms. Arrests of Hirak activists have continued and increased, although President Abdelmadjid Tebboune decided to release dozens of prisoners of conscience in early January this year.

The Hirak in the Middle of the Pandemic

Paradoxically, the wave of arrests grew in full COVID-19 pandemic, despite the fact that activists and significant figures within the Hirak protest movement had called for the temporary suspension of the marches to avoid the spread of the virus. The political authorities took advantage of this health truce to arrest some of the main Hirak activists, including the journalist Khaled Drareni, in spite of criticism and condemnation by human rights associations and the European Parliament. In so doing, the Algerian authorities hoped to stop the popular demonstrations. However, on 21 February 2021, the second anniversary of the popular uprising, tens of thousands of Algerians resumed their marches on Fridays, but also on Tuesdays for students. Admittedly, the number of demonstrators did not reach that of the first weeks of the uprising in 2019. Nevertheless, the resumption of these marches reflects a climate of mistrust towards a regime that is still unable to reconstitute a social base. Thus, by taking advantage of the pandemic to tighten the grip on the Hirak, the authorities were hoping to put an end to the demonstrations by relying at times on attrition and at others on a discourse of fear. Official discourse focused on criminalizing the Hirak, accusing it of being affiliated to Islamist and separatist terrorist organizations. The fact that the Hirak is not structured raises questions, but also concerns among some Algerian citizens, disappointed by President Tebboune’s management of the situation. Should the Hirak structure itself and move from a force of objection to a proactive force of proposal? This is the question that keeps popping up.

Between Internal Divisions and Hostility from the Authorities: Structuring of the Hirak at Issue

In one of our previous studies, we raised the question of the representation of the Hirak in terms of the

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2 Ibid., p. 55.
face-off with political power. Should the Hirak structure itself, passing the stage of movement of objection to become a pro-active force? More than two years after the beginning of the popular uprising, this question continues to crop up. If for some, the strength of the Hirak lies in the absence of a leadership that could cause it to splinter and thus weaken, others, on the other hand, consider that structuring is the only way to allow the Hirak to endure and force those in power in Algeria to accept negotiating a real transition.

However, structuring the movement is proving to be one of the issues that divides many of its militants. Certainly, initiatives have arisen in the midst of the popular movement, especially in 2019, such as the conference of Civil Society Actors on 15 June 2019. This was followed by the Ain Benian meeting on 6 July the same year, which brought together opposition parties and civil society actors of conservative persuasion. Or the PAD (Pact for a Democratic Alternative) coalition, with progressive tendencies. However, no consensual platform has been found, even if attempts are occasionally made, such as the meeting in Kherrata on 8 May this year. The Hirak advances without a leader. And sometimes moves backwards. There are two major reasons for this. The first is the internal tensions that undermine the Hirak actors. This is due not only to ideological and political divergences, but also to personal rivalries. Moreover, suspicions and accusations of rallying to the camp of power formulated by some against their fellow activists have become legion. The second is due to the obstacles raised by the government to any action aimed at letting the Hirak organize itself. Thus, the refusal to grant authorizations to meet, the closure of the public media to discordant voices, and the imprisonment of some of the well-known figures of the popular movement are all tangible signs of a refusal to allow the Hirak to structure itself.

In the wake of this political context, characterized by the dualism between the desire for change among a large majority of Algerians and the political power’s desire to perpetuate the regime, the socio-economic situation is showing signs of fragility. The health crisis and its immediate consequences have brutally raised the economic stakes alongside the pending political challenges. Over two years after the start of the popular uprising and over a year after the presidential election, where does Algeria stand on the socio-economic front?

The Economic and Social Situation: Structural Vulnerabilities and the Need for In-Depth Restructuring

Let us begin with the constants, those that persist year after year despite the speeches affirming and announcing capital changes. First among these constants is the dependence of the Algerian economy on hydrocarbons. They represent 98% of exports, 60% of tax revenues and 19% of the GDP.

However, falling oil prices reduced energy export revenues to USD 20.6 billion in 2020, plunging the current account deficit to 10.5% of the GDP in 2020. How did Algeria finance its budget deficit? Once again, it resorted to so-called “unconventional” financing, i.e., printing cash. It also tried to absorb the funds invested in the informal sector, estimated at 40% of GDP. As expected, this measure did not yield results.

The sharp drop in financial resources is due to the accumulation of three factors: the 2008 financial crisis, the consequences of which became apparent in 2014, the drop in national production con-

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comitant with the rise in domestic demand,\(^8\) and the COVID-19 pandemic. According to IMF forecasts, GDP growth fell to -6\% in 2020. If the global economy recovers, it would rise to 2.9\% in 2021 and stabilize at 2.8\% in 2022.\(^9\) Meanwhile, public debt was estimated at 53.1\% for 2020, but is expected to rise to 63.3\% in 2021 and 73.9\% in 2022.\(^10\)

What are the economic challenges ahead?\(^11\) The Algerian economy needs profound restructuring to prepare the transition to a productive and job-creating economy. The unemployment rate is expected to reach 14.5\% in 2021, and 14.9\% in 2022.\(^12\) Worse yet, the decline in purchasing power due to the devaluation of the dinar and unemployment has plunged whole sectors of society into insecurity. Hence the increase in social movements and strikes in 2021.\(^13\)

The sectors likely to contribute to this transition are agriculture, which represents 12\% of GDP and employs 9.7\% of the active population,\(^14\) but whose dependence on agricultural inputs remains a handicap. The tertiary sector is booming. It contributed to almost 46\% of GDP in 2019 and employed 59.6\% of the active population. But this sector suffers not only from the anachronistic nature of its financial sector and the monopoly of public banks, but also from the political climate.

However, the confusion that has reigned at the political level since 2019, the continued criminalization of the act of administration, and the nearly generalized campaigns of repression have created a noxious climate that repels productive investments requiring visibility, predictability and confidence. On the contrary, this period may, as in the 1990s, facilitate speculation and money laundering that will aggravate Algeria’s socio-economic situation.

### The Algerian economy needs profound restructuring to prepare the transition to a productive and job-creating economy

Throughout these lines, we have tried to define the contours of a situation that follows the rhythm of a multiform dynamic whose trajectory remains to be determined. Faced with a Hirak that is fighting to become a force for change, the government in power persists in wishing to maintain a political system whose resilience was tested by the popular uprising of 22 February 2019. The political proposal outlined in 2019 seems to have shown its limits. The turnout for the Constitution referendum, the lowest Algeria has ever seen, as well as the clampdown on the Hirak are perfect illustrations of this. For the Hirak, as for the authorities, the impasse persists and the risks are increasing.

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8 Algeria is among the top five gas exporters in the world and ranks 16th in oil reserves and 11th in confirmed gas reserves. However, gas exports are expected to fall sharply from 45 billion cubic metres in 2020 to 26 billion cubic metres in 2025, mainly due to the steady rise in domestic consumption and the emergence of new suppliers.


10 Ibid.


13 Education, health, postal services and even civil security (the fire brigade) are experiencing a major internal revolt. Strikes have been repressed and strikers sanctioned.

14 World Bank, 2019
Tunisia, 10 Years after the Promising Spring: The Harsh Realities of the Democratic Transition

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On 14 January 2021, Tunisia celebrated the 10th anniversary of its revolution, the Revolution for Freedom and Dignity, catalyst of the Arab Spring. Despite the great expectations generated in 2011, the results today are more than mixed and future prospects remain uncertain.

Of course, a democratic transition is always accompanied by a weakening of the State and a loss of economic efficiency and effectiveness, as well as a certain frustration among the population, who believed in a significant improvement in their living conditions. Tunisia is no exception to this general pattern, but the beginnings of a recovery – even a relative one – are slow in coming.

A Democracy that’s Losing Its Bearings

The first democratic election in the country’s history took place on 23 October 2011. It was the election of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), tasked with drafting a new constitution to underpin and guarantee the sustainability of democracy. Since then, Tunisians have been called to the polls seven times: two legislative elections (2014 and 2019), two presidential elections with two rounds (2014 and 2018) and municipal elections. The Islamist movement, Ennahdha, won three elections: the first one with a significant lead (the NCA in 2011, with 37% of the votes cast and 89 deputies out of 217), the second one with a slightly lower mark (the 2018 municipal elections, with 28% of the votes), and in the third one (the 2019 legislative elections), it did not even receive a fifth of the votes (19.6%).2 The major winner of the 2014 general elections (presidential and legislative), the modernist party Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia), has been radically swept from the political scene. The party, which carried 38% of the vote in 2014, with 86 deputies out of 217, only garnered 1.5% of the vote for three seats in the Assembly of Representatives of the People (ARP) in 2019.

The 2014 electoral campaign was very tense and extremely polarized between the modernists (Nidaa) and the Islamists (Ennahdha), and though the latter lost quite clearly (38% for Nidaa against 28% for Ennahdha), the two parties decided to govern together during the five-year term. This soft consensus and the dissensions between the different factions of the majority party made the first post-revolutionary legislature a period of economic stagnation and political quarrels of little scope.

Is this the only reason for popular disapproval in 2019?

The Convergence of Wrath

The causes of anger of the voters who are putting the political system that emerged from the Revolution to the test are complex. One can distinguish two basic movements of different natures but which have converged since the 2019 elections:

— A complex web that is difficult to define because its components are so diverse. It aspires to a rad-

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1 This article was written in May 2021 (editor’s note).
2 All figures relating to the election results are taken from the Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Élections website (www.isie.tn).
ical change that would make a clean sweep of the past. A kind of revolution that challenges all forms of hegemony of the dominant elites. This web considers itself revolutionary, anti-party system, anti-rich and anti-Western;
— A counter-revolution in the strongest sense of the term. According to this movement, the failures and setbacks of this decade are not due to the effects of unfavourable circumstances but to a “plot” that ousted Ben Ali’s patriotic regime to give power to the Islamists and their allies (mainly human rights defenders). The only way to save the country is to get rid of the whole system that emerged from the pseudo-revolution of 14 January 2011. To do so, the country needs a “real revolution,” a patriotic and anti-Islamist one, the “Enlightenment Revolution” announced at the beginning of 2021 by the leader of the Free Destourian Party (PDL), Abir Moussi, who aspires to continue the work of Bourguiba, the founder of the modern Tunisian State.

The PDL, founded in 2013, came in third in the 2019 legislative elections, with 6.6% of the votes cast. However, for a year now, it has been leading in all voting intention surveys, with nearly 40% of the vote, far ahead of the Islamist party Ennahdha, which has reached a ceiling of 20%.

A Seedbed of Populism

Tunisia’s young democracy has quickly run out of steam in less than a decade. Yet it has achieved some undeniable feats in just a few years: putting an end to a regime of aggressive Islamization initiated by the Ennahdha movement following its broad victory in 2011. It has also succeeded in drafting a new Constitution (ratified and enacted in January 2014) that respects human rights, establishing a semi-parliamentary regime with a President of the Republic elected by universal suffrage, and pronounced decentralization and independent bodies to underpin the democratic transition.

The young democracy has weathered the terrorism that struck hard from 2013 to 2016 (several large-scale attacks targeting the army, the police and foreign tourists at the Bardo Museum in March 2015 and a hotel in Sousse in June 2015), but the price was very high in human lives (nearly 200 victims) and an economic slump. In fact, it was the corrupt partocracy of the winners of the 2014 general elections that got the better of its patience. This, in part, explains the major victory of the populists in 2019.

A democratic transition is always accompanied by a weakening of the State and a loss of economic efficiency and effectiveness

The great paradox of the Tunisian Revolution lies in the ever-widening gap between the exponential demands of all components of society (trades, regions, social classes, etc.) and the redistributive capacities of the State. All of this with almost no growth.

“The Green Population”

The death of the first post-revolutionary President elected by universal suffrage, Beji Caid Essebsi, on 25 July 2019 led to an early presidential election, the final results of which were to be declared within a maximum of 90 days.

The ruling coalition presented three candidates: the Islamist Abdelfattah Mourou – interim Speaker of Parliament, the Nidaaist dissident, founder of the Tahya Tounes (Long Live Tunisia) party and head of government Youssef Chahed, and Defence Minister

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3 The recent Sigma/Le Maghreb poll published in the daily newspaper Le Maghreb on 25 May 2021 put the PDL at 36%, against 18.6% for Ennahdha.
Abdelkarim Zebidi – who was very close to the late President and intended to continue his work. These three worthy representatives of the “system” were unfortunately eliminated in the first round: Mourou with 12.9% of the vote came third, followed by Zebidi with 10.7% and Chahed with 7.4%.

The two winners of the first round (Kais Saied, with 18.4% of the votes, and Nabil Karoui, with 15.6%), as well as the majority of candidates after the leading quintet, were all more right-wing than left-wing populists. Kais Saied, a law professor, was less well-known to the general public than media mogul Nabil Karoui. He was also the most difficult to decipher. He said in his election campaign (called the “explanation campaign”) that he had no promises to make and that his only programme was to implement what the people and the youth would decide. He took up one of the main slogans of the revolutionary epic: “the people want” and he added “and they know what they want.” On this basis, Saied wished to build a form of direct, grassroots democracy, where the people always have the power to dismiss elected officials. Saied was perceived (and still is for a large part of public opinion) as a man of integrity, against the rotten party system and the authentic representative of the revolutionary ideal of “work, freedom and national dignity.” This is what allowed him to win the second round with 72.7% of the votes.4

Unnatural Alliances

The political situation following the 2019 general elections is rather peculiar. The leading Islamist party, with just under 20% of the vote, was unable to form a government, although its leader, the divisive Rached Ghannouchi, was elected Speaker of Parliament.

The Tunisian Constitution stipulates in Article 89 that if the leading party or coalition is unable to form a government, then the initiative lies with the President of the Republic to designate – after consultation with the parties and parliamentary groups – the person most suitable to forming a government.

The animosity between Ennahdha and Qalb Tounes (Heart of Tunisia), the party of the candidate that lost the second round, businessman Nabil Karoui, who came second in the legislative elections, quickly turned into a strategic alliance.

Tunisia’s young democracy has quickly run out of steam in less than a decade. Yet it has achieved some undeniable feats in just a few years

The head of government proposed by the President against the will of these two parties, Elyes Fakhfakh, even if he first managed to integrate the Islamists into his government to ensure the Parliament’s vote of confidence, was unable to last long because he constantly opposed Qalb Tounes, which had become Ennahdha’s main ally, joining the majority coalition. Taking advantage of a conflict-of-interest case concerning the head of government, revealed by the media barely three months after his investiture, Elyes Fakhfakh was forced to resign after less than five months in power. The ball is once again in the President’s court, who this time, against the advice of all parties, chose the Fakhfakh Administration’s Minister of the Interior and former legal adviser to Saied, Hichem Mechichi. Ironically, this man, who owes everything to his mentor, the President of the Republic, rebelled even before his investiture and concluded an agreement with Ennahdha, Qalb Tounes and the Alliance of Dignity (a fundamentalist and populist nebula), thus becoming head of government on 2 September 2020, against the will of the man who had proposed him a month earlier.

Deadlock or Balanced Weaknesses

Since September 2020, the political crisis has reached dangerous and imbalanced levels:

— An open struggle between the two heads of the executive going as far as the President’s

refusing to ratify a major cabinet reshuffle, even though it was approved by Parliament on 26 January 2021;

— A Parliament almost paralysed by a dysfunctional presidency and an opposition, that of Abir Moussi’s PDL, using all possible and unimaginable forms of obstruction to block the Muslim Brotherhood project – i.e., Ennahdha and its allies;

— A government struggling with intractable economic and social difficulties. The recession is at 8.9% in 2021, with unemployment at 17.8% and peaking among youth (15-24 years), at over 40%;

— Broad rejection among public opinion of the partisan political class and particularly of the Islamists, who have been blamed for the country’s setbacks. Ennahdha is the only party that has governed or participated in all the governments of this decade, with the exception of the technocrat government of 2014;

— The refusal of the Head of State to call for national dialogue proposed by the powerful trade union federation (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail) since 30 November 2020.

The balance of power is in fact a balance of weaknesses. Each party can hinder the action of its opponents/enemies, but no party is able to prevail on its own

In ten years, Tunisia’s young democracy has gained some wrinkles. There are many reasons for this, the most significant being the frustration felt by broad sectors of society with the shortcomings of the various administrations and the widespread idea that the democratic transition has only benefited the powerful. This is not unique to Tunisia. This feeling crosses peoples and cultures, as the American intelligence report *The World in 2035 as seen by the CIA: The Paradox of Progress* has masterfully demonstrated. Despite everything, Tunisia has shown a strong capacity for resilience. It would suffice for its elites to agree on a recovery plan for the country for the promises of the Spring to be fulfilled.

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5 See the latest statistics at the Institut National des Statistiques (www.ins.tn)
Libya: General Overview of the Country

It has been one of those years for Libya in which a decade’s worth of events have taken place. Today, Libya is filled with talk of elections, anxiety over political misconduct and the tentative hope of a reconciliation process. A jarring change from only 12 months ago where a pall of foreboding hung over Libya and the broader Mediterranean. Then, Tripoli was in the midst of a war started by a renegade military man with dreams of autocracy – Khalifa Haftar – and the Turkish armed forces had arrived to help Libya’s government defend a city housing over 1.5 million souls. The wider ramifications of Haftar’s war, the Pandora’s box it opened, and Turkey’s corresponding intervention still ripple through the eastern Mediterranean today. In fact, the currents stirred by those events retain the capacity to wash away Libya’s fragile peace, as do the looming unresolved grievances around what to do with Haftar. The journey to Libyan elections this December, and the integrity of the event itself will determine whether Libya’s division will fossilize and a new proxy conflict begin, or if a sovereign, stable Libya can finally emerge from a decade of revolutionary anarchy.

The Turkish Tide of War

Turkey arrived in Libya right in the nick of time. At that point, the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) – an umbrella term for the collection of tribal militias, Salafist fighters, foreign mercenaries and battalions belonging to children of the organization’s leader Field Marshal Haftar – had begun encroaching into greater Tripoli. After almost a year of stagnation, the frontline deployment of Russian mercenary organization the Wagner Group – belonging to Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin – had made an immediate difference and drove the LAAF within touching distance of Tripoli proper. In their desperation, after prolonged outreach for assistance from Europeans and the United States (US) proved fruitless, Libya’s government turned to Turkey. A security pact was tabled that would effectively buy Libya a Turkish saviour. The price was a corresponding agreement delineating maritime boundaries between the two countries, something Turkey had been pushing for since late 2018, but which Libya was loathed to sign, aware of the enmity it would trigger in Europe.

As predicted, the maritime agreement between Libya and Turkey inspired considerably more European activity on Libya than the thousands of casualties and the widespread devastation of the war which led to them. Greece furiously kicked out the Libyan Ambassador, and France (one of Haftar’s core supporters) led the condemnations of Turkey and the deal at EU level.

Nevertheless, Turkey delivered on their deal. They quickly deployed thousands of Syrian mercenaries to stem Haftar’s advance, whilst working on a more strategic response. Next came air defences to protect against the LAAF’s use of Chinese drones, and then Turkey’s own drones entered the fray. In a dynamic which would be repeated in Syria and then Nagorno-Karabakh, a drone-led military strategy devastated the LAAF and their hopes for Tripoli. Months after the deal was struck, Turkey’s support caused the LAAF to implode. Haftar lost all command and control as his forces routed. In a 48-hour window Libya’s government forces had chased them over 1,500 miles away from Tripoli.
War & Peace

Turkey had saved Libya from a fate of messy urban conflict, only to deliver it straight into a frozen conflict with Russia. Even though the LAAF had dissolved under Haftar, the host of countries who had supported him still needed a vehicle to advance their interests. So, Russia dispatched jets to halt the advance of government forces in the central Libyan city of Sirte and warned Turkey not to advance any further. Wagner Group mercenaries dug in to form a new front line, and Sudanese mercenaries were delivered by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to buttress these positions, as LAAF troops trickled back to Sirte now they knew they were safe from Turkish drones.

The collapse of Haftar, and the LAAF, was the perfect opportunity for Germany, the US and others who had supported the UN process for stabilizing Libya to make genuine progress and unify political and security establishments without Haftar’s cynical interventions – i.e., his relentless attempts to empower himself at the expense of his country. With his army in tatters, and Libya’s divide as artificial as ever, given the Russian enforcement which sustained it, this was a prime yet fleeting opportunity, which passed in silence. Instead, Egypt tentatively advanced a ceasefire announcement premised on accepting the LAAF as Libya’s army and calling for a surrender of arms to them. The Cairo declaration was enthusiastically supported by Europeans as an olive branch, and yet the war of words between Egypt and Turkey continued escalating. Eventually Egyptian President Sisi threatened to send in the Egyptian army should Libya’s government try to reclaim Sirte. But by then, the threat was unnecessary, the division had been reconstituted and Haftar had been salvaged.

United Nations’ Art of Peace

As Libya’s war and the positions of its international belligerents gradually froze, the new landscape offered the opportunity for the UN to advance its shaky peace process. Reborn in the Berlin Conference of January 2020 – where Libya’s intervening states were corralled by Germany and the UN into signing up to a new diplomatic framework for Libya engagement – the process initially appeared dead on arrival. For even as these states were signing the page in Berlin, their operatives were breaking UN Security Council resolutions to prosecute Libya’s conflict ever more harshly. The virtue of the Berlin Conference, however, was not in the conclusions that nobody was willing to enforce but in the follow-up process which everyone wanted to remain a part of. The international parties continued meeting in a series of thematic working groups to pursue progress on the agreed conclusions. Although little tangible was accomplished by these groups, the format and familiarity it created between nations who rarely share a table, created an environment which conducded Libya’s war into freezing rather than inflaming and Turkey to start a quiet rapprochement with Egypt.

Meanwhile, the UN pressed on with its intra-Libyan work built out across political, economic and military tracks. Unfortunately, Haftar’s attempt to seize power had to be settled one way or another for peace to have a chance. A real opportunity only came once stalemate had been achieved. The UN was further emboldened by support from the US, which had grown increasingly uncomfortable with Russia’s entrenchment in military sites just hundreds of kilometres across the Mediterranean from NATO bases in Sicily. Military-to-military talks finally convened four months after the war had ended and produced a ceasefire agreement shockingly quickly. Much like the Berlin Conference conclusions, the agreement was lauded for the precedent it set rather than for its feasibility. Always unlikely headline calls to remove foreign mercenaries were reduced to a mockery by Russians who refused government-aligned participants landing rights when they tried to attend follow-up meetings in Sirte. Nevertheless, their progress created a demand for similar political advance and the creation of a unified government that could drive the agreement’s implementation. So, the UN crafted a new body – the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) – carefully selecting political representatives – leading actors and key groups of parliamentarians – to try and engineer a power-sharing agreement, alongside a sprinkling of civil society representatives for legitimation.

Political progress was not as quick however, and despite an early announcement that the unity government would essentially be caretakers until elections on 24 December 2021, the winds of change stirred considerable disruption as all parties jostled for prime position. The planned outcome, anticipated by Libyans and international stakeholders alike, was the Speaker
of the Parliament Aguileh Salah, as a civilian and less divisive face than some of the stakeholders who en-joined in Haftar’s war, and Minister of Interior Fathi Bashagha, as a representative of those who repelled him. Yet, Haftar and other aspirational politicians fought back through a series of gambits across Libya’s military patchwork and economic sector. Four months later, the LPDF finally appointed a new unity Prime Minister and President, and to everyone’s surprise it was neither the two anticipated candidates, nor any of those who had so publicly tried to supplant them.

Vested Interests Strike Back

Libya’s new authorities had seemingly surprised everyone, yet some were more disappointed than others. The new Prime Minister, Abdul-Hamid Dabaiba, had a long history with Turkey stretching back to the Gaddafi-era where he helped his uncle orchestrate social construction projects as part of a conglomerate notorious for its corruption. His associate, President Mohammed Menfi, had been a largely innocuous MP since the revolution and was best known for being the ambassador that Greece had once expelled. Amidst very few talks on elections, but lots on reconstruction, Dabaiba pieced together the largest government since Libya’s revolution, involving 35 appointments, mostly provided by key parliamentary caucuses to ensure the Parliament’s support. Haftar, despite helping to swing the LPDF in Dabaiba’s favour, did not get the key positions he was promised. When Saleh, still bitter about losing a presidential chair he had long lusted over, tried to block the approval process, heavy foreign pressure convinced him otherwise. Despite mixed feelings from many states, and Libyans making weighty accusations that Dabaiba had bought the votes needed to win, driving this behind the scenes was strong American pressure. The US, after all, still saw the culmination of the UN’s roadmap to elections as the best way to get rid of Russia in the region and keep leading from behind. As the government has settled in, familiar trends have resurfaced. Turkey is cashing in on its intervention, securing over ten agreements to engage in Libya’s reconstruction across numerous sectors. Meanwhile, its security sector reform programme continues to re-shape western Libya’s militia scene. Russia has strong ties to many key ministers who were technocrats of the old regime and will exploit this to gain contracts in energy and infrastructure, which Dabaiba hopes will encourage Wagner’s withdrawal. Meanwhile, Haftar-supporting states like the UAE, and those hostile to Turkey, like Greece and Egypt, are empowering Saleh at Menfi’s expense. If things continue apace, some countries will deal through Aguileh and associated oil and security actors in eastern Libya, while others will work with Dabaiba, an oil minister, and the forces of western Libya. Meanwhile, stagnation of the military to military discussions and reluctance to unify forces and resolve the Haftar question keeps the possibility for renewed violence alive. Separately, many political and military actors are being encouraged not to contest the status quo but rather await December’s elections. If elections are mishandled, the many grievances will boil over.

The Return of Elections

As the cacophony of construction returns to Tripoli, alongside the whispers of conspirators, and the intermittent whirs of jet engines over Sirte’s frontlines, everything is building up to the crescendo of December’s elections. Dabaiba is desperately trying to convince Turkey, Russia, Egypt and others that elections can be delayed and divisions can be healed by the power of business. Opposing this, Marshal Haftar is swapping fatigues for a suit. Whilst hoping his backers ensure his LAAF “wins” any military unification, he is already campaigning by holding rallies and making outlandish reconstruction promises of his own. Many others, but most notably the Russians, are also quietly laying groundwork for December, even after finally securing the release of Wagner operatives who had been arrested by Tripoli in 2018 for electioneering. They have long invested in bringing back the old regime and see this as their moment. What hope for peace is there in Libya? If the US’s singular focus on elections can broaden to ensure elections are protected, engaging and truly free then they might just stymie all the side plots. The Libyan people, despite rarely being engaged on Libyan politics, are just tired. Tired of the corruption, of foreign forces, of pervasive violence and the insecurity of living in poverty in a country exporting over a million barrels of oil on a bad day. In Libya, the popular route seems to be the only policy route left to real stability.
Mauritania: Changing to Remain the Same?

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Mauritania in 2021 is witnessing a pivotal transition, as one regime and its rules end, and another takes its place. An unexpected succession crisis has challenged presidential immunity and elite impunity, as former President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz and several ministers find themselves under indictment for corruption, while current President Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani, Abdel Aziz’s anointed successor, promises to pursue good governance and address the Covid recession with a more ambitious social policy of redistribution and reinvestment in public goods. Yet Mauritans are no longer waiting for Ghazouani’s promises, and instead are increasingly mobilizing to demand redress for their grievances, as well as more proactive measures to address the current economic crisis.

Prosecuting the Corrupt, or Corrupting the Prosecution?

Since spearheading a 2008 coup, Abdel Aziz has loomed large over Mauritanian politics, securing two terms as President from 2009 to 2019, and allegedly presiding over a vast patronage network that captured Mauritania’s considerable rents from its fisheries, minerals, oil and now natural gas, in addition to private holdings. After a thwarted attempt at launching a bid for an unconstitutional third term, Abdel Aziz then campaigned for Ghazouani. Ghazouani, a former general, armed forces chief of staff and defence minister, had served alongside Abdel Aziz for nearly three decades and had long been considered the incumbent’s trustworthy adjutant. Many observers had assumed that Abdel Aziz would remain the power behind the throne, with Ghazouani a mere figurehead. However, Abdel Aziz’s return to Mauritania’s capital, Nouakchott, and attempted interference in politics in October 2019 saw him sidelined, then indicted for corruption and detained.

In subsequent proceedings, several cabinet ministers and former prime ministers have been indicted for corruption after being called to testify before a select parliamentary committee on corruption. Few have stuck by Abdel Aziz, with many former associates defecting to side with the new administration. Former exiles such as Moustapha Ould Limam Chafi and lesser-known domestic political figures have also risen to prominence. Abdel Aziz’s prosecution would create a precedent and define the limits of the Mauritanian constitution’s article 93, which protects presidents from prosecution for any crime short of high treason. This campaign also encompassed some foreign investors in Mauritania.

The overlap between the Ghazouani Administration’s opponents and those on trial was clear, particularly in light of previous weaponization of corruption charges. Abdel Aziz himself had been quick to

co-opt donor and civil society rhetoric of good governance, reform and the fight against corruption in his first run for the presidency in 2009, ultimately undermining civil society. Ultimately, the politicization of the judiciary’s pursuit of corruption charges risks undercutting the Ghazouani government’s credibility in the coming year, in addition to public confidence in reform.

**Good Governance, the COVID-19 Shock and the Future of the Rentier Economy**

Perceptions of corruption, as well as the enduring role of oligarchic networks in Mauritania’s economy, have long contributed to the perceptions of opacity and uncertainty. Disputes over taxation have also contributed to perceptions of legal ambiguity. In addition to Nouakchott’s challenges in attracting foreign direct investment, successive governments have struggled in their attempts to diversify the country’s economy from the extractive sector. Nouakchott has long counted on the development of its offshore liquid natural gas reserves, in coordination with Senegal, through multinational oil and gas firms. Exploration and exploitation proceeded based on assumptions of pre-COVID prices and demand, as did government planning. In consequence, the COVID demand shock, followed by announcements that some firms would exit Mauritania entirely, has hit Nouakchott hard, particularly given its public debt and dependence on income from extractives to finance its public spending promises. In the wake of these developments, the new government has sought to attract foreign investment from other sources, as well as to broaden the formal economy.

Successive governments have struggled in their attempts to diversify the country’s economy from the extractive sector

Mauritania suffered its first confirmed COVID-19 fatality on 30 March, 2020, following its first reported case on 13 March, 2020. Since then, the novel Coronavirus has claimed the lives of over 20,000 Mauritians. COVID-19 exposed the weaknesses of public health in Mauritania, as elsewhere, while its economic ramifications led to growing hardships for Mauritians. Though official unemployment figures changed little over the course of 2020, the economic impact of COVID-19 was clear and far-reaching. In an attempt to respond to public demands amid the COVID-19 crisis, in November 2020 Ghazouani committed to several ambitious public spending measures, including doubling the base rate for pensions, doubling widows’ pensions and health insurance contributions and raising educational spending allowances. This followed on Ghazouani’s earlier

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6 The key economic development of the decade for Mauritania came in December 2018, with the final agreement between the Senegalese and Mauritanian government, as well as private partners BP and Kosmos Energy, for the extraction of liquified natural gas from the Grand Tortue Ahmeyin (GTA) offshore fields. These fields span the maritime borders of Mauritania and Senegal, and their output, scheduled to begin in 2022, is expected to average 2.5 million tonnes per year.


12 Year over year unemployment rose only 0.5% to 10.7% in 2020; Unemployment, total: Mauritania, International Labor Organization, IL-OSTAT database. Data retrieved on 15 June, 2021, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=MR.

promises to build 3,500 new classrooms and recruit 5,500 new teachers in his first term, in a country where 70% of students leave school by age 13, and where a labour mismatch leads to high youth unemployment among graduates.

In the past decade Mauritania has been able to avoid the growing insurgencies and terrorist attacks that have engulfed its neighbours. In comparison to many worsening trends, Mauritania’s security has been a rare source of consolation – especially relative to neighbouring Mali. Nouakchott has been quick to attribute the lack of terrorist attacks since 2011 to its military prowess, modernization initiatives and deradicalization programmes, though Mauritania’s value to jihadist groups points to other possible reasons for the lack of attacks in the country. Domestic security, in the form of popular perceptions of rising crime rates since the COVID-induced recession, have emerged as an issue mobilizing Mauritanians.

Grievances and Claims-Making

In the past year Mauritanians have mobilized to demand redress for economic, environmental and social grievances, including the effects of the COVID-induced recession and the simultaneous rise in crime, police brutality and discrimination against Haratines and black African or Afro-Mauritanians. Afro-Mauritanians continue to push for their rights, notably demanding an abrogation of the 1993 amnesty laws that gave perpetrators of the 1987-1991 state violence against them immunity from prosecution, as well as institutionalized discrimination in the education system, working through loosely-aligned civil society organizations such as COVIRE and the Widow’s Collective of Mauritania.

The Haratine, the descendants of former slaves who constitute over a third of the population and a significant constituency in major cities, have emerged from political marginalization to increasing prominence. Activist groups from SOS-Esclaves to IRA-Mauritania press for the rights of Haratines and against the vestiges of slavery in the country. Civil society demands have succeeded in applying pressure on the Ghazouani government to increase representation of both the Haratine and sub-Saharan African Mauritanian ethnic groups. Out of the current cabinet of 26 ministers, five are Haratines and five Afro-Mauritanians, compared to the 80% of senior government leadership positions reserved under the previous government for the Bidan or white Maures, who comprise no more than 30% of the total population.

In sum, Mauritania finds itself at a crossroads. Longstanding political taboos are being broken as a new government consolidates its power, while an increasingly politically conscious urban population reacts to an economic crisis and the growing divide between state policy and public demands.

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Egypt: Between Internal Fragilities and Regional Ambitions

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Hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Egypt of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is now having to reckon with the political and socio-economic consequences of the health emergency that risks aggravating what is already a difficult situation. In fact, the pandemic has been a fundamental test for the Egyptian economy which, in March 2020, was consolidating a series of reforms thanks to an economic recovery loan agreed upon in 2016 with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). While maintenance of these reforms and a renewed IMF loan of US$ 5.2 billion obtained in late June 2020 (Reuters, 2020) helped push economic growth in a period of global recession, at the same time these measures were unable to provide a strong social safety net for the most vulnerable groups in Egyptian society, the hardest hit by the pandemic.

A Risky Non-alignment between Public Expenditure Priorities and Social Needs

According to recent research conducted by Egypt’s Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the country’s poverty rate declined to 29.7% in 2019/2020, from 32.5% in the previous survey in 2018 (Moneim, 2020). This was heralded as good news, backed by IMF estimates emphasizing the fact that Egypt is one of the few countries with promising growth prospects, since, again according to the IMF, Egypt’s GDP should rise to 5.7% in 2022 following a global post-pandemic economic recovery. However, at the same time, nearly a third of Egypt’s population, which stands at over 100 million, live below the poverty line, the direct consequence of years of cuts in state subsidies and the general worsening of economic conditions due to the health emergency.

The reform programme, centred principally on rationalizing social expenditure, was not accompanied by adequate social and job sector reforms. Although the government had launched various social protection plans for low-income families, the Covid-19 pandemic forced it to step back from them in order to lessen heavy public debt, which in 2021 rose to 93% of GDP from 90% in 2020 (Gad, 2021), reducing government expenditures in fundamental sectors like healthcare and education and leading to a general worsening of living standards for much of the population.

Another serious problem the government faces is the high rate of unemployment (currently risen to 9.8% in 2021 and expected to be 9.4% in 2022), further aggravated by the negative economic impact of Covid-19. The tourism sector was badly hit, whose 2020 revenue plummeted to US$ 4.4 billion from 13 billion the previous year, with growth prospects and a return to normalcy predicted only for 2024.

The non-alignment between public expenditure priorities and social needs is also quite apparent in the Egyptian government’s drive for big infrastructure projects (such as building the New Administrative Capital 45 km from Cairo, which would cost some US$ 58 billion) backed by companies owned by the military, whose economic clout is increasing all the time. In fact, the growing involvement in state projects of companies run directly by the armed forces – which enjoy many fiscal facilitations – has discouraged private investors, both national and foreign,
making access to public contracts by private civilian companies less and less competitive (Sayigh, 2020).

Securitizing the Pandemic as a Tool for Social Control

Persisting in this difficult socio-economic context is the regime’s constant veering towards authoritarian methods of tight control over society and repressing any criticism of the government, which is deemed a danger to the country’s stability and security. Ten years after the outbreak of the so-called “Arab Spring,” Egypt under President al-Sisi (elected in 2014 and for a second term in 2018) seems to have backslid into a situation of political stasis, economic impasse and stringent control over society. Ongoing, in fact, is a wave of repression of civil society activists, journalists and Islamist opponents, a situation that the pandemic has exacerbated (El Banna, 2020). In response to the spread of Covid-19, the al-Sisi regime chose to present the emergency as a national security risk rather than a health problem, quickly securitizing the pandemic itself. One example is the extension of the nationwide state of emergency for three months, approved again on 25 April 2021 for health and security reasons, which has been almost automatically repeated since 2017; and also the Parliament’s approval in April 2020 of several emergency law amendments to address the pandemic that reinforce the powers of the President and security agencies. Months later, the latter measures appear to show the Egyptian government’s intention to further strengthen state control over society, capitalizing on and instrumentalizing the restrictions imposed in the emergency stage.

Egypt's Geopolitical Strategy: Ambitions and Risks for the al-Sisi Regime

In foreign policy, Egypt is committed to redesigning its geopolitical aspirations to recoup its historic role as a strategic pivot in the Middle East, re-launching the country’s image among regional competitors and bolstering its own domestic legitimacy, undermined by the authoritarian policies the regime pursues. With regard to its lines of strategic intervention, Cairo seems to be heavily involved in three issues of great geopolitical importance for the country: the Libyan question; the conflict with Ethiopia over the GERD (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam); and the recent crisis in Gaza.

The Libyan Crisis and National Interests

For Egypt, Libya is an important element in the defence of its own interests on the great geo-economic chessboard of the eastern Mediterranean, and in its national security, due to the possible penetration of jihadist groups from the porous border with Cyrenaica.

The failure of the siege of Tripoli (2019-2020) by General Khalifa Hafter, chief of the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA), forced Cairo to reduce its support for the general and opt for re-launching the diplomatic path, thereby appearing as the actor most seeking compromise among the Libyan general’s backers.

With these moves, Egypt has clearly shown the strategic pivots of its political action in the Libyan context and at the regional level: to cautiously distance itself from Saudi and Emirati strategy and thus achieve a more independent and peace-facilitating role in the Libyan dossier, and, at the same time, to show greater moderation on the international level thus avoiding possible conflicts with the new US Administration. With regard to Turkey, another competitor extremely active in Libya, we are now seeing a sort of appeasement underway between the two
regional actors and a return to unofficial diplomatic dialogue between Cairo and Ankara that could potentially lead to new scenarios on the regional and international levels (Bakir, 2021). The high-level bilateral talks held in Cairo on 5-6 May 2021 laid the groundwork for defining the main areas of cooperation for the near future, primarily Libya and the need to achieve stability in the eastern Mediterranean. Despite the elements in favour of a possible “Grand Bargain” between the two countries, Egypt continues to insist on the need for Turkish forces and affiliated mercenaries to leave the country (there are thousands of Turkey-sponsored Syrian mercenaries in Libya, although the number cannot be accurately assessed). Furthermore, Egypt will not accept the creation of an Islamic-oriented unity government in Libya closely tied to Turkey, since Cairo has long been involved in battling (not just internally) political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood, which Ankara actively supports. These conditions make reaching an agreement hard, although, if acting in tandem, Cairo and Ankara could help in the search for a political solution in an extremely fragile Libya, which no other regional or European actors have been able to do (Melcangi, 2021).

If acting in tandem, Cairo and Ankara could help in the search for a political solution in an extremely fragile Libya, which no other regional or European actors have been able to do

The “GERD Affair”: A Still-worrisome Dispute

The dispute over the GERD is a strategic issue for Egypt’s national interests, tied directly to the use of Nile River water, on which 90% of the country’s potable water supply depends. This issue is the reason for the country’s deteriorating relations with Ethiopia. In fact, Ethiopia’s new hydroelectric project would quickly fill the dam, drastically reducing the flow of Blue Nile water to Egypt. The Egyptian government has long demanded third-party mediation that could compensate for Cairo’s lack of direct influence over the Addis Ababa government, which, for its part, has constantly refused such external interference (Kaldas, 2021). Egypt has re-launched its proposal for an internationally-mediated plan to manage the river’s water, even hoping to get the United Nations Security Council involved.

Cairo is well aware that any interruption of the Nile’s water flow could have grave repercussions economically and socially in terms of water supply, farming and food production and the industrial and energy output of the countries downstream. Moreover, Egypt is also well aware that entering a military conflict at this stage would be imprudent, hence the large-scale diplomatic campaign it has launched to put pressure on Ethiopia. The initial achievement of this tactic has been to ensure support from the United States and from Sudan, the latter equally harmed by the GERD project and willing to strengthen collaboration with Egypt. However, the continued failure of negotiations mediated by the United States, the World Bank and the African Union have only heightened the Egyptian President’s fears. Failure in what Cairo considers an issue of vital national interest could be the most significant foreign policy setback since al-Sisi came to power.

Egyptian Mediation in the Gaza Crisis (2021): al-Sisi’s Diplomatic Success

During the May 2021 crisis in Gaza, Egypt further strengthened its regional clout by brokering a difficult ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. On the international level, acting as one of the few countries in the region that engages with both Israel and Hamas allowed al-Sisi to achieve a fundamental diplomatic victory and acquire regional prestige. This was especially the case amidst the embarrassed hesitation of many Arab countries to condemn Israel – the UAE and Bahrain at the forefront of this, which had both normalized their relations with Tel Aviv in 2020 with the Abraham Accords. But most importantly, Egypt’s mediation helped burnish Cairo’s credentials with the United States under Biden, with public praise for al-Sisi’s diplomatic efforts (Najjar, 2021). On the domestic level, al-Sisi scored another success as well, presenting himself as a peacemaker and supporter of the Palestinian cause and also pledging an active role in the post-conflict stage
and promising US$ 500 million to rebuild Gaza. This means an investment for the Egyptian government not only in terms of its political influence on an international level, but also with Hamas. In fact, although Egypt continues to consider the Islamist organization as a national security threat – especially due to the risk of terrorist infiltrations from the Gaza/Sinai Peninsula border – al-Sisi is looking for a new engagement with Hamas, which recently distanced itself from the Muslim Brotherhood. These conditions could make Egypt a decisive actor on the regional and international levels and finally allow the ra’is to strengthen popular support at a delicate time for the regime, not just socially but also, and above all, economically.

References


The year 2021 should be one of celebration for Jordan. Roundabouts and public buildings all over the country are strewn with banners commemorating the centenary of the founding of the State. In April 1921, the Hashemite Prince Abdullah – son of the Sharif of Mecca and great-grandfather of Jordan’s current King – was appointed Emir of Transjordan by the British mandatory power. The development, against all odds, of this provisional arrangement into one of the most stable countries in the Middle East can indeed be a source of pride. However, the anniversary is overshadowed by an economic crisis that is being gravely exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and a political reform deadlock that the November 2020 parliamentary elections could not resolve. In addition, Jordan has to adapt to changing regional dynamics. It successfully lobbied against the annexation plans in the West Bank, which Israel’s Prime Minister Netanyahu put forward at the beginning of 2020. Still, the rapprochement of some Arab Gulf states with Israel, enshrined in the Abraham Accords, threatened to sideline Jordan, which remains committed to the Palestinians’ right to statehood and to its own custodianship of holy sites in Jerusalem. Amidst these domestic and international dynamics, some are hoping for reform – genuine this time.

Economic Crisis and Covid-19

Jordan has been hard hit by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Whereas infections were kept low during the first wave of the spring of 2020, partly due to strict lockdown and entry regulations, the country suffered from very high case numbers a year later (up to 10,000 positive tests daily out of 10 million inhabitants), which pushed the health system to its limits. The economic fallout will be felt for some time to come. Jordan’s tourism sector, which was growing before the pandemic and contributed to almost a fifth of the country’s GDP and job market, has almost come to a standstill. Remittances from the several hundred thousand Jordanians working in the Gulf states dropped, as these countries also had to cope with economic turbulences and imposed travel restrictions. Finally, daily labourers and small entrepreneurs, from cab drivers to shop owners, suffered from the Covid-19-induced mobility restrictions, such as the weekly Friday and daily overnight curfews, which were in place for large parts of 2020 and continued into 2021. Unemployment has risen to 23 percent and is much higher for youth and women. Covid-19 has shaken an economy already facing structural challenges. The neoliberal reforms and privatization of the last two decades have brought fresh foreign investment into the country and stimulated business activity. However, social inequalities have risen and anger about crony capitalism and corruption has become widespread. At the same time, the public sector, which already employs more than a quarter of the labour force, cannot be further expanded, given the strained finances of the State. Jordan, which hosts a large refugee community, including more than one million Syrians (according to Jordanian authorities), is dependent on international assistance. Donor pledges for 2020 added up to $3.73 billion and included direct budget support.1 With the United States still being Jordan’s biggest donor aid pledged to Kingdom stands at $3.73b — Planning Ministry,” Jordan Times, 31 December 2020, see http://jordantimes.com/news/local/foreign-aid-pledged-kingdom-stands-373b-%E2%80%94-planning-ministry, accessed 1 May 2021.

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donor (with $1.5 billion yearly, civil and military combined), the EU and Member States such as Germany have also increased their financial assistance over the last decade. However, although the strategic value of the Hashemite Kingdom will remain relevant for its Western partners, their international development aid might come under more scrutiny in light of the financial fallout of the pandemic and ensuing domestic imperatives.

**Political Deadlock and Calls for Reform**

While Jordan has seen a prudent strengthening of its democratic framework in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, as with the establishment of the Independent Electoral Commission and a Constitutional Court, political reform has come to a halt over the last few years, and critical voices fear that their space for expression is continuing to shrink. In July 2020, the Teachers Syndicate was closed down after it led protests and strikes the previous year over a salary increase. At the end of 2020, the government brought legal charges against the Partnership and Salvation Party, an Islamist opposition party that boycotted the last parliamentary elections. The Defence Law enacted at the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic to allow for swift implementation of measures to fight the spread of the virus is also limiting possibilities to gather and to protest. In its latest report, Freedom House downgraded Jordan from “partly free” to “not free.”

In an effort to display democratic routine, the Royal Court insisted on holding parliamentary elections, as scheduled, in November 2020, despite a spike in Covid-19 cases at the time. The virus and the curfew planned right after the elections undoubtedly contributed to the low turnout of 29%. But pre-election polls also indicated little interest in participating in elections seen by many as ineffective. Although 99 of the 130 deputies are newcomers to the Parliament, its politico-social composition has not changed much. It is dominated by businessmen and personalities from prominent families and tribal backgrounds, who are more focused on service provision to their constituencies than on government legislation and supervision. On the other hand, political parties, traditionally weak in Jordan, lost seats. The strongest party, the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Islamic Action Front, barely received 6% of the votes. While the state apparatus has always exerted some control over elections in Jordan, several parties and candidates complained about increased interference by the security services in the run-up to this election.

**Jordan’s rapprochement with Egypt and Iraq, is part of the effort to re-position the country in the region and develop new economic opportunities with its neighbours**

In February 2021, in an open letter, Abdullah II himself requested the General Intelligence Department (GID) to focus more on its core business of security. The King also called for a reform of the electoral and political party laws to guarantee better representation in the future. However, as long as the institutional power of the Parliament remains limited, it will be difficult to convince Jordanians to go to the polls and vote for political views rather than for service-providing individuals. Meanwhile, the royal family itself was shaken on 3 April 2021, when Prince Hamza, a half-brother of the King and former crown prince, was put under house arrest because of allegations of sedition. He then leaked a video and several audio tapes, accusing the country’s “governing structure” of corruption, incompetence and harassing critics. The incident, whose background remains blurred, never threatened the stability of the regime,

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but illustrates its nervousness, as well as underlying socio-political tensions in the country. Nonetheless, the Hashemite monarchy is still widely seen – and appreciated – as the guarantor of stability and national unity, even by detractors of the ruling elite.

**Re-Positioning Jordan in the Changing Middle East**

External relations have always played a crucial role for Jordan. The resource-poor country is caught between major regional powers and adjacent conflicts, such as in Syria or Palestine, which threaten to spill over into the country. Usually well connected to Washington, Jordan struggled with the Trump Administration and its one-sided policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While Amman contributed to putting a halt to Israeli annexation plans in the West Bank in 2020, it felt sidelined, at least initially, by the Abraham Accords. Being excluded from Middle Eastern diplomacy is a foreign policy nightmare for Jordan, which has long feared that the Palestinian question will be “resolved” to its detriment. Jordan’s rapprochement with Egypt and Iraq, illustrated by a series of tripartite summits in 2020 and 2021, is part of the effort to re-position the country in the region and develop new economic opportunities with its neighbours.

Joe Biden’s election as President of the United States has therefore been received with much relief in Amman. The nomination of William Burns, a former US Ambassador to Jordan, as director of the CIA has further raised hopes for a decisive improvement of US-Jordan relations. However, the new administration apparently bringing back a normative accent to American foreign policy also constitutes a challenge to Jordan. Coddled in Washington as a moderate and democracy-leaning ally, the Hashemite Kingdom has come under closer scrutiny for its authoritarian tendencies, even before the royal quarrels between Abdullah and Hamza moved it into the international spotlight. Getting back on the path of reform while maintaining stability could thus become a bargaining chip in Jordan’s relations with its American and European partners.

**The March Continues - but Where to?**

Like many other countries in the region, Jordan has to redefine both its political and economic models. Considering its history of statehood, including a commonly accepted monarchic framework, its diplomatic tradition of forging regional and international partnerships, and the human potential of its young and educated population, Jordan has some basic assets to succeed in this endeavour. However, despite all the talk – and some steps – of reform in the last decade, the country’s politics seem to be locked and its economy is not sustainable enough, socially as well as environmentally. It remains to be seen whether King Abdullah II’s recent encouragement for political reform will finally lead to a more representative and participatory system of governance. “The march continues,” (wa-tastamir al-masirah) reads the slogan of the government’s 100-year campaign. But where to go in the second century of their nation’s existence, is still a matter for debate for Jordanians.
Is Lebanon Still Redeemable?

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In an alarming report published at the beginning of this summer, the World Bank declared that Lebanon’s financial and economic crisis is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly top three, most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-19th century. Already in the autumn of 2020, Lebanon’s economic crisis was also termed by the World Bank as a “Deliberate Depression.”

Indeed, since the start of an ongoing collapse process, Lebanon’s GDP plummeted from close to US$ 55 billion in 2018 to an estimated US$ 33 billion in 2020, with US$ GDP/ capita falling by around 40 percent. On top of this, for over a year, Lebanon countered an assailment of compounded crises – namely, the country’s largest economic and financial crisis in its history, Covid-19 and its effects, then the Port of Beirut explosion – all met with inadequate policy responses, mainly due to the complete absence of political will and/or the ability to act. On top of all the material duress they endure, the Lebanese also have to face a deep, almost structural, political crisis, as well as a moral one, which reaches into the ethical foundations of society and the bonds between its components.

It is probably more telling to describe this concretely; the Lebanese wake up every day trying to figure out the value of whatever savings they have left and whether or not they can afford everyday goods, the prices of which fluctuate daily. This has generated a swell of anger in the banking sector and the political establishment that has perpetuated the economic collapse. Exacerbating an already dire situation, residents of the country face increasingly frequent shortages of key items, including fuel, medicine and electricity. A more recent phenomena has involved scuffles in supermarkets and angry protests outside over access to subsidized products. This is even occurring in high end supermarkets.

The social impact of the crisis, which is already dire, could rapidly become catastrophic, with more than half the population likely to drop below the national poverty line. Those paid in Lebanese lira – the bulk of the labour force – are seeing their purchasing power declining by the day.

As a longer-term prospect, Lebanon faces a dangerous depletion of resources, including human capital, since brain drain is making the situation increasingly desperate.

The economic implosion has catalyzed a new wave of Lebanese emigration, as the country’s youth and highly skilled and educated population seeks stability and prosperity abroad. In 2019, the year when the economic underpinnings of the State became unhinged, the country witnessed over 65,000 Lebanese leaving the country without a return ticket, a 97 percent increase from 2018. Put simply, the economic collapse is contributing to the exhaustion of the country’s social and human capital.

A Quick History of the Total Bankruptcy

Several analysts have described Lebanon’s financial system as a nationally regulated Ponzi scheme, where new money is borrowed to pay existing creditors. This usually works until fresh money runs out. After the civil war, Lebanon, indeed, balanced its books with tourism receipts, foreign aid, earnings from its financial industry and the largesse of Gulf
Arab states, which bankrolled the State by bolstering central bank reserves. But remittances started slowing from 2011, as Lebanon’s sectarian squabbling led to more political sclerosis and much of the Middle East, including neighbouring Syria, descended into chaos.

Then, the budget deficit started skyrocketing and the balance of payments sank deeper into the red, as transfers failed to match very high import levels. In 2016, banks began offering remarkable interest rates for new deposits of dollars and even more extraordinary rates for Lebanese pound deposits. Dollars flowed again and banks could keep funding the spending binge. This was a deadly illusion to entertain since what was less obvious to the naked eye was a rise in liabilities.

The final spark for unrest came in October 2019, when mass protests, driven by a disenchanted youth demanding wholesale change, erupted against a political elite, many of them aging warlords who thrived while others struggled. Foreign exchange inflows came to a halt, and the last dollars exited the country, in defiance of a semi-official capital control exerted arbitrarily by banks, according to the might of certain clients and depositors. Banks also shut their doors for almost two weeks, and the currency started to collapse, sliding from 1,500 to the dollar to a street rate of around 22,000 at the time of writing.

Compounding these macro-economic problems, Covid confinement and the resulting economic slowdown, and then the enormous explosion on 4 August at Beirut port, caused billions more dollars of damage.

Making Political Sense of the Collapse

Such a brutal and rapid contraction is usually associated with conflicts or wars. If this is not the case for Lebanon now, and if these aspects are not the causes of Lebanon’s catastrophe, they could well become its consequences.

Already accomplices to this economic collapse due to years of corruption and mismanagement, Lebanon’s leaders have been reviled for their limited response. The financial and economic crisis has intensified Lebanon’s fragility and fragmentation, increasing the risk of social and civil unrest. With the Lebanese exasperated by their increasingly desperate situation, there could now be widespread social unrest and a major breakdown, which would have major humanitarian and regional security implications.

On top of all the material duress they endure, the Lebanese also have to face a deep, almost structural, political crisis, as well as a moral one.

The security implications of Lebanon’s deepening crises are not to be neglected. Like in many other past instances, Lebanon’s accelerating collapse could provoke a dangerous security crisis, marked by a sequence of widespread social unrest, vigilantism, then heightened sectarianism and polarization, which could dismantle the country completely. All scenarios would lead to chaos and the total breakdown of law and order.

In essence, Lebanon’s overlapping crises hold the potential to spark a major breakdown in security – either from the top down or from the bottom up. So far solid and at bay from the overall polarization, the Lebanese army is now contending with growing disaffection as its troops experience the full brunt of the economic crisis. With the Lebanese lira losing nearly 90 percent of its value since 2019, security forces’ salaries are declining precipitously, forcing many to seek second jobs. While military attrition still remains low, the Lebanese army chief visited Paris last month to warn that the situation is untenable. More recently, a French-organized international meeting was held in support of the LAF (Lebanese Armed Forces), with the aim of providing the troops with logistical aid; some Gulf countries (like Qatar) have also offered to provide the army with food and drinks in order to keep the morale afloat within the rank-and-file.

However, the abrupt dissolution of subsidies – without a big enough social safety net in place – could trigger widespread social unrest, even social explosion, leaving the troops facing their own compatriots and families’ wrath.
The World Food Programme announced last month that it would triple its assistance to Lebanon, something unprecedented for a country that has, even during wartime, managed to address the basic needs of its inhabitants.

The financial and economic crisis has intensified Lebanon’s fragility and fragmentation, increasing the risk of social and civil unrest.

Launching an international humanitarian appeal for Lebanon that targets major donors should lead to direct cash assistance to beneficiaries and is the most effective and efficient approach, minimizing market distortions, bypassing the Lebanese government and ensuring the beneficiaries’ agency and dignity. Lebanon’s extensive diaspora is also mobilizing to provide greater support, contributing to international appeals, as well as connecting directly to local Lebanese NGOs. The economic crisis is compounded by a political one, which has heightened fears of the country falling victim to regional and international divisions and competition.

As the political and economic crises worsen, it is more likely that political actors will turn to tried and tested strategies that increase sectarianism and political polarization in the country. Part of this strategy entails further aligning along regional and international fault lines (United States versus Iran; Iran versus the Gulf), thereby further internationalizing and regionalizing the country’s problems.

Is There a Way out?

Today, France is leading international efforts to push Lebanon to tackle corruption and implement other reforms demanded by donors. Crucially, Lebanon needs to form a new government so it can resume stalled talks with the International Monetary Fund. But politicians and bankers – often a very unhealthy collusion – need to agree on the scale of the vast losses and on what went wrong, allowing Lebanon to shift direction and stop living beyond its means.

The economic crisis is compounded by a political one, which has heightened fears of the country falling victim to regional and international divisions and competition.

Finally, to address the root cause of inaction by the Lebanese political class, the international community should apply concerted pressure for change. Deploying both the positive incentives of a financial rescue package and broader assistance, as well as coercive measures that target corrupt members of Lebanon’s political elite (travel bans, asset freezes, targeted sanctions), the international community should demand the formation of an emergency cabinet with extraordinary legislative powers to implement the much-needed reforms. The country must look to the next legislative elections, in 2022, as a possibility to change what seems an almost irredeemable situation.
The Israeli Roller Coaster between Pandemic, Peace, War and Political Turmoil

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Setting the Scene: Internal Challenges and Opportunities

After over two years without a stable government, Israel’s 36th government was sworn in on 13 June 2021. The unity government will have two alternating prime ministers: Naftali Bennet, the leader of Yarina (rightwards in Hebrew), and from August 2023 Yair Lapid, leader of the centrist Yesh Atid party. It comprises factions from across the political spectrum including – for the first time – Ra’am, an Islamic Arab party. The cause that brought this hodge-podge of a coalition together was the goal to unseat Netanyahu as Prime Minister. The unity government will attempt to avoid controversial issues such as annexation, peace with the Palestinians and deep-seated reforms in the legal system, and focus on handling mainstream challenges such as economic growth, homeland security and rehabilitating the healthcare system.

To say that this government has a lot on its plate would be an understatement. The continuous lack of political stability of the past two years has led to incoherent policy-making and a failure to properly pass the annual budgets for 2020 and 2021. The implications vary and include a decrease in the nominal rate of government investment in Israeli citizens, a halt to economic and social reforms, and even, according to some experts, a possible downgrade of Israel’s credit rating.

A change in Israel’s leadership is monumental, particularly after PM Netanyahu has held his position for more than twelve consecutive years. The new government brought hope to many, while others remain sceptical – to the point of disbelief – that it will survive. It is certain, however, that a stable government is needed to deal with the mounting social, economic, security and strategic challenges Israel is facing. Political instability aside, Israel has managed to accomplish a great deal in 2021 when it became the first country to rapidly vaccinate its population. Israel, a small country with excellent public and centralized healthcare infrastructure, was a textbook candidate for an efficacious vaccination operation. In addition, Israel paid both Pfizer and Moderna a high premium for the right to acquire and receive early deliveries of millions of vaccines.

The Honeymoon of the “Abraham Accords”

The concept of “peace,” which in recent years has almost entirely vanished from the Israeli political lexicon in light of the long stalemate in the political process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, has unexpectedly returned to centre stage during the past year. Since September 2020, Israel has established diplomatic relations with four Arab countries, namely the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. The agreement with the UAE has already produced concrete mutual understandings

in a variety of areas, including healthcare, trade, innovation and aviation. Cooperation with Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco on different issues is also advancing, albeit at a slower pace and with a more limited scope. The fresh taste of peace aroused in Israelis an appetite for the possibilities that would come with deeper integration in the region. Yet, questions remained regarding the feasibility of additional progress, while the conflict with the Palestinians remains unresolved.

Political instability aside, Israel has managed to accomplish a great deal in 2021 when it became the first country to rapidly vaccinate its population.

The “Abraham Accords,” which came decades after Israel’s last peace agreements, signed with Egypt and Jordan in 1979 and 1994, respectively, reflect three key trends. First is the will of Israel and the Arab nations to capitalize on President Trump’s motivation to reach peace agreements during his last months in office to accomplish highly desired political goals. Arab states held a much-founded perception that the “road to Washington passes through Jerusalem,” and, therefore, believed that warming up to Israel would yield returns from the US. These returns were materialized in the form of an arms deal for F-35 fighter jets offered to the UAE, a promise to Sudan that it would be excluded from the American list of countries that support terrorism and American recognition of Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara.

The second key trend is the shared regional threats. These include Iran’s ambition to obtain nuclear capabilities, in addition to its insidious regional activity and the support it provides to terrorist groups in the region; the political Islam camp affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and sponsored by Turkey and Qatar; and Salafi-Jihadi groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. In recent decades, Israel has developed a low-profile Tacit Security Cooperation (TSC) with countries in the Gulf to combat these threats. Gradually, some aspects of this TSC came out of the shadows and paved the way towards official and open relations. In fact, the Abraham Accords should be understood as an indirect consequence of the so-called “Arab Spring,” as both sides decided to join forces to contain radical elements that endanger their regional and domestic interests.

Finally, pragmatic Arab states and Israel also share a positive vision for the future of the region. They embrace similar priorities, including strengthening regional stability, gaining economic prosperity, achieving scientific progress and developing natural energy resources, particularly in the Mediterranean. These countries don’t necessarily have a conjoined ideology, but they are like-minded in terms of their agreement on core values, including maintaining the integrity and sovereignty of the nation states and the preference of particular national identities over the transnational pan-Islamic order. These principles were a sufficient foundation for establishing institutional political, security and economic alliances, and the crystallization of a new regional architecture. The growing Israeli-Arab relations were portrayed\(^2\) by Emirati and other Arab scholars as a new regional camp of moderation, stability and prosperity. By joining this camp, Israel has publicly become a legitimate regional actor and an integral part of the regional state order. The Abraham Accords opened the door for Israel to upgrade its regional status from an enemy state to a positive player that contributes to the new ethos of regional cooperation and interdependence. Furthermore, as a result, the traditional linkage (anchored in the Arab Peace Initiative) between promoting Arab-Israeli normalization and progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was significantly weakened.

A remaining question is whether the recently signed normalization agreements may help to warm Israel’s “cold” peace with Egypt and Jordan. While Netanyahu’s relations with King Abdullah of Jordan were strained, the security cooperation between Israel and Jordan is solid and Israel’s economic ties with Egypt are moving slowly forward. Israel and Egypt’s energy partnership manifested in 2019 in the foundation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum.

(EMGF) and resulted in rare mutual visits by both countries’ Energy Ministers to Cairo and Jerusalem. In March 2021, the Israeli Intelligence Minister met with his Egyptian counterpart in Sharm El-Sheikh, while accompanied by a large delegation of Israeli businessmen. However, higher-level public meetings between Israeli and Arab heads of states were not held recently, as the UAE, Egypt and Morocco alike were reportedly reluctant to host PM Netanyahu partly due to their concerns it would be interpreted as an interference in Israel’s political arena.

Israel-Hamas Escalation: A Test of Old and New Partnerships

In May 2021, an escalation erupted between Israel and Gaza, after Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, fired rockets at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) embarked on an 11-day operation to diminish Hamas’ military facilities and capabilities, while Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad continued to launch over 3,000 missiles at Israeli civilians. This escalation challenged the traditional Israel-US allyship as well as the new emerging Israeli-Arab regional alliance. While Jerusalem-related disputes were used by Hamas as the main pretext for firing rockets at Israel, the movement’s motives for initiating a military confrontation in Gaza were also to spoil Israel’s growing relations with Arab states following the Abraham Accords. Subsequent to the achievement of a ceasefire agreement with Israel, the Chief of Hamas’s Political Bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, hailed Hamas’s “victory,” saying it had foiled attempts by Israel to integrate into the Arab world, and “defeated the projects of normalizing relations with the Zionist occupation.”

It is still too early to assess whether, and to what extent, the “honeymoon” period of the Abraham Accords might be over. However, Israel’s Arab peace partners found themselves in an uneasy situation. On the one hand, countries such as the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt see Hamas as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. These and other pragmatic Arab states share with Israel the notion of Hamas as a radical terror organization, which endangers peace, security and stability in the region. Yet, mainly due to public opinion considerations, their declared positions varied: while most Arab countries bluntly condemned Israel; the UAE took a rather neutral stance. Its Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, called all parties to work towards a de-escalation of the conflict. Once the conflict ended, the UAE offered to play a role in Israel-Palestine peace talks and support the Egyptian efforts for the reconstruction of Gaza.

Arab states held a much-founded perception that the “road to Washington passes through Jerusalem,” and, therefore, believed that warming up to Israel would yield returns from the US.

A New Man in the White House

As Israel’s greatest and most prominent ally, America plays a central role in Israeli decision-making and strategic calculations. The Trump Administration acted as a staunch supporter of Israel and took steps that even Israelis were surprised by, such as moving the American embassy to Jerusalem, recognizing the Golan Heights as Israeli territory, disengaging formal relations with the Palestinian Authority, and brokering peace between Israel and Arab nations. It was no surprise, then, that Israel was wary of a Democratic administration, even if the then-candidate Joe Biden was considered to be a lifelong friend of Israel. These concerns were somewhat substantiated in Biden’s first few months in office. First, notwith-
standing his public remarks on supporting the Abraham Accords, the Biden Administration re­neged⁹ on its predecessor’s commitment to supply the UAE with F-35 fighter jets. Second, Biden’s apparent commitment to return to the JCPOA nuclear agreement with Iran made both the security and the political echelons in Israel leery. Having said that, it does seem that the Biden Administration, as did Israel, has learned from the mistakes made during the JCPOA negotiations under President Obama. Both Israel and the Biden Administration are taking a more cooperative approach during the Vienna talks. During his first Middle East tour, Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated¹⁰ that the US is “consulting closely with Israel… on the ongoing negotiations in Vienna around a potential return to the Iran nuclear agreement.”

During the Gaza escalation, President Biden and his administration have reportedly been heavily involved in intensive high-level engagement with Israel, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and other Middle Eastern countries throughout the conflict. When the conflict subsided and the ceasefire – brokered by Egypt – became official, President Biden commended Israel’s decision to agree to end hostilities. In his speech, the President managed to show that America still stood with Israel and defended Israel’s right to defend itself, while expressing his commitment to achieving progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israeli decision-makers likely heaved a sigh of relief. President Biden did not cave in to progressive voices in Congress criticizing Israel and outspoken about Palestinian rights. That is not to say that these voices should not concern Israel. As they become more dominant in liberal discourse, they might affect the Israel-US partnership.

During the Gaza escalation, President Biden and his administration have reportedly been heavily involved in intensive high-level engagement with Israel, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and other Middle Eastern countries throughout the conflict.

The Middle East, and particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was not a high priority for the incoming Biden Administration. Nevertheless, like many presidents before him, the turn of events have drawn President Biden back to the region. France, Germany, Egypt and Jordan also held several meetings¹² in order to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Only time will tell how involved the US and the EU will be in these efforts. It is likely, however, that the new unity government in Israel will attempt to avoid this issue to keep the considerable ideological gaps among coalition factions from rising and leading to its fast collapse.

⁹ www.defenseworld.net/news/28847/Biden_Administration_Suspends_F_35_Sale_to_U_A_E_/YLC56g2Y2w
¹¹ www.axios.com/gaza-crisis-israel-biden-response-3119a844-357a-4f5f-ba7e-3c497475893a.html
Praxis of Palestinian Democracy: The Elections that Never Were and the Events of May 2021

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Middle East and North Africa Panel
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In recent years, time and again, the end of spring has brought opportunities to look to historical Palestine. In 2021, it was assumed that the occasion would be the holding of elections on either side of the Green Line. Both elections were perceived as mechanisms for maintaining the status quo. This proved to be true in Israel: although Netanyahu was finally expelled from the government, it is clear from the Lapid-Bennett executive’s first steps that nothing is going to change where the Palestinians are concerned. In theory, at least, the future of a part of the Palestinians was also going to be affected by the holding of elections in occupied territory. But these elections were cancelled. Shortly thereafter, the world was nevertheless forced to turn its gaze to Jerusalem and to reflect on the ensuing events, whose transformative impact may have been more overwhelming than a trip to the polls.

The elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) were scheduled for 22 May 2021, the presidential election for 31 July, and a third election, for the Palestinian National Council (PNC) – the parliament of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which represents the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and the diaspora (although not Palestinian citizens of Israel) – for 31 August. They were presented as the first elections in 15 years, although other elections had already been announced – and suspended – in 2011. The first legislative and presidential elections took pace in 1996, shortly after the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA), intended to be a temporary institution. Yasser Arafat dominated the political arena until his death in 2004, and new legislative elections were not held until 2006. To the surprise of many Western foreign ministries, Hamas won a majority of the votes. Israel, the United States and the European Union imposed sanctions on the Palestinian government and gave their blessing to the power-struggle-turned-violent-conflict between Hamas and Fatah. The former would take control of the Gaza Strip, which was soon after subjected to an Israeli blockade; the latter would govern the West Bank. The deep enmity has continued, notwithstanding various attempts at reconciliation, to the present day.

After 15 years of division and in a completely transformed historical Palestine, new elections were announced in January 2021, giving the political arena only a few months to prepare. The decision was closely related to the international political field, particularly the arrival of Joe Biden to the White House. In Ramallah, Biden was expected to join the demands of international society for the PA to renew its eroded legitimacy in preparation for an eventual return to peace talks on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Madrid Conference. The same question was soon on everyone’s lips: what is the point of elections, and what legitimacy do they have, in an apartheid reality in which Israel has control over all historical Palestine and the PA is per-
ceived as the guarantor of the outsourcing of the occupation represented by the Oslo Accords? Whilst ballot boxes could not be set up in Jerusalem, the elections to the Knesset would include polling stations in the colonies in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Would this not be a mere exercise of procedural democracy, when many other elements of democratic culture are absent and the people are perceived more as consumers than citizens?

The Covid-19 pandemic was not a fruitful period for the PA. In addition to all the fingers pointing to what has been called “healthcare apartheid,” some experts accused it of failing to respond quickly and effectively. These accusations joined complaints voiced for years by a growing number of Palestinians. Quite especially, they point to a progressive authoritarianism and arbitrary use of presidential decrees (as in the case of the convening of the elections itself) to erode counterweights and shrink the democratic space and diversity that characterize the Palestinian political arena. They also denounce the repression of citizens and quashing of any counter-hegemonic resistance by the Palestinian security forces – with blatant symbols, such as the assassination of Nizar Banat on 24 June – or as a result of coordination on security matters with Israel, which has led to the arrest, and even murder, of dozens of Palestinian activists.

The PA is also criticized for having abandoned the liberation struggle as the essence of any nationalist movement to become an organization for building a state for which the conditions have not been met. All of this criticism is a reflection, in whole or in part, of a multidimensional fragmentation that the Palestinian people have been suffering for decades. First, between political fields subjected to different control mechanisms as a consequence of the colonization of historical Palestine that began with the Nakba, especially through the establishment of Israel in 1948. Second, between Fatah and Hamas, although many consider that this division, advertised as a power struggle, has become a means of power sharing in which both groups win and gain popularity in certain circles. A relatively new division has emerged within Fatah, represented by three electoral lists that would have contested the elections: the “Fatah list” from Mahmoud Abbas’s circle, the “Freedom list,” spearheaded by the imprisoned Marwan Barghouti and Yasser Arafat’s nephew Nasser al-Qudwa, and the “Future list,” supported by Mohammed Dahlan. Polling indicated that the core Fatah list would win the largest share of votes, although not enough to form

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6. https://al-shabaka.org/focuses/focus-on-palestinian-political-leadership/
a majority in the PLC; the two breakaway factions of Fatah and Hamas might have won more seats. All of this is compounded by the question of Mahmoud Abbas’s successor, which remains an unknown for the vast majority.

The most pressing differences, however, are those between the official leadership and a growing segment of the Palestinian people, especially from an intergenerational perspective. As a symbol, the PLC headquarters has presided over Ramallah’s Youth Square, empty and unmoved, since 2006. No Palestinian under the age of 34 living in the Occupied Territories has had the opportunity to vote. The average age of this population is less than 22 – Mahmoud Abbas is 85 – in a system that automatically expels young people, with mechanisms such as a minimum age limit of 28 to run for office, whilst the majority of representatives are well over 50, or the requirement to pay a fee of 20,000 dollars and quit one’s job with no certainty of being elected simply to be included on an electoral list. Initiatives such as Nabd al-Balad, an independent list that sought to represent Palestinian youth and their interests, were anecdotal. Although there was an effort by several factions to include more young people, some viewed it as little more than a cosmetic measure undertaken with an eye to their positions on the lists.

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This neopatriarchal system also excludes women, despite their key role throughout the history and present of the Palestinian resistance. Several initiatives have arisen to combat this, such as Jeel al-Tajdeed al-Democracy, an alternative online parliamentary list that began as a challenge to the elections but continues today as a platform for organizing a democratic change, or a Gaza-based Facebook page called “15 years,” that accuses Hamas and Fatah of prioritizing their political rivalry over urgent material concerns resulting from the de-development to which the Palestinian economy has been subjected for years. In a less organized way, complaints are constant in the streets and on social media.

Just as many expected and had been rumoured for weeks, on 29 April the elections were postponed indefinitely. The alleged reason was the impossibility for Palestinians in East Jerusalem to participate in them. Fatah had already made it clear that the cards were marked when it imposed the extremely short period for the mobilization and creation of lists, as well as a proportional representation system that would have favoured parties with a strong national presence, but its internal divisions were an insurmountable obstacle. With this decision, everyone involved who benefits from the status quo came out a winner. The PA remains in power and has met the demands, whilst Hamas, perceived as a lesser evil that still keeps some spirit of resistance alive, has gained in popularity. International donors, who had feared a repeat of the events of 2006 and were unwilling to accept a Hamas victory, could also breathe a sigh of relief. Everyone wins except the Palestinian people, once again.

The events of May 2021 were the coup de grâce for official Palestinian leadership, confirming the decline the elections were intended to hide. The PA’s impotence, usually expressed through silence and irrelevance, in the face of the expulsions in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan and the violence in Jerusalem and against Palestinian citizens of Israel, lay bare its futility. Hamas’s entry into action endowed the movement with legitimacy through war and as the sole organized alternative, not of consensus or a new liberation strategy. Both pillars of the traditional leadership were ignored by the “Unity Intifada” throughout historical Palestine and by the Palestinian diaspora around the world, whose stated goal was to rid itself of the political fragmentation imposed on the Palestinian peo-

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ple with the aim of atomizing their struggle and to re-signify, especially through depoliticization, their resistance. In addition to the protests and online activities, the 18 May strike became a transformative and extremely symbolic event, fuelled by subsequent actions, such as Palestine Economic Week, to keep up the momentum and remind people that the ceasefire in no way represents the end of structural violence.

May 2021 represented, above all, a call for a paradigm shift. One of the key demands was to leave the Oslo framework behind and allow the Palestinians to articulate their future on their own terms. This evolution has been felt in various spheres, bolstered by the growing number of voices that speak of “apartheid.” This is not the case in international society, especially the international donors who, a growing number of Palestinians argue, have become part of the problem. They refuse to abandon the Oslo framework and everything it represents. The end of Oslo and the end of the PA go hand in hand: the PA is the only actor willing to accept the continuous concessions imposed from the capitals, and this funding is its only means of staying in power. As with the suspension of the elections, the Israel-Hamas-PA triangle has emerged as the main beneficiary of the status quo, and they are thus also the main parties interested in investing their efforts in repressing potential alternative leaderships that call for genuine resistance. Nevertheless, it seems undeniable that the seed has been sown and that, elections or otherwise, the PA will sooner or later be forced to look at itself in the mirror held up by more and more Palestinians.

As with al-Hirak al-Shababi in 2011-2013, the protests and initiatives were largely led by Palestinian youths, many of whom are not affiliated with any political party, in a way reminiscent of how the first Intifada likewise escaped the control of the PLO, then exiled in Tunisia. As the events unfolded, the leaders of the PA appeared to look on from a distance, whilst their security forces were busy arresting or intimidating activists and demonstrators, or giving their names to the Israeli security forces, in a desperate effort to assert their authority. The demands for unity were joined by renewed denunciations of the current political system, utterly disconnected from the demands of representativeness, legitimacy, participation and consensus embodied in “The Dignity and Hope Manifesto.”

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Syria’s Troubled Military Status Quo

As of early July 2021, Syria had witnessed its longest period of time without major military developments since the start of the civil war in 2011. Indeed, frontlines did not significantly change during the sixteen months that followed the 5 March 2020 ceasefire negotiated by Russia and Turkey to put an end to a loyalist offensive against the rebel-held province of Idlib. This situation of frozen conflict was the ultimate consequence of successive foreign interventions on behalf of each of the main surviving warring parties. From 2014 onwards, the United States helped the Kurdish YPG (later turned into the backbone of the multiethnic Syrian Democratic Forces, hereafter SDF) to seize the eastern bank of the Euphrates from the Islamic State (IS) organization; the Trump Administration further shielded the SDF from regime encroachments while allowing Turkey to invade the regions of Afrin in January 2018, and Tell Abyad-Ras al-'Ayn in October 2019. After 2015, Russian and Iranian support enabled the Assad regime to re-establish its authority over most of western and central Syria, including, in 2018, the suburbs of Damascus and southern provinces. Finally, between 2016 and 2020, Turkish troops gradually secured a northwestern crescent including regions held by the rebel Syrian National Army, north of Aleppo, and the Islamist Hay'a Tahrir al-Sham (hereafter HTS, formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra), around Idlib. The recent absence of major military developments should not be construed as stability, however. Over the last year and a half, indeed, each of the abovementioned regions has been subject to endemic violence stemming from external and internal military actors.

Regime-held Areas: Ending “Reconciliation”? 

Besides regular Israeli (and occasional US) missile strikes (500 in 2020 alone) against Iranian forces and their Syrian support infrastructure, the loyalist camp has been faced with two mounting insurgencies. In the Badiya (central desert), IS attacks resulted in about 500 casualties in 2020, that is, twice as many as in 2019; in the first half of 2021, a loyalist military surge succeeded in reducing, though not eliminating, IS activities in the area. In the southern provinces of Der'a and Qunaytra, meanwhile, chronic instability has been the result of the exceedingly complex security landscape, which resulted from the restoration of regime control over the area in 2018. Instead of evacuating their strongholds or disarming, many rebels simply “reconciled” with Damascus as part of Russian-brokered agreements that allowed them to keep their light weapons and prevented regime forces from entering certain towns and neighbourhoods. Since early 2020, violent clashes erupted on several occasions between “reconciled” former rebels and regime forces following the latter’s attempts at storming towns in search of the alleged perpetrators of anti-regime attacks. In Sanamayn and Umm Batina, clashes were ended by new settlement agreements that provided for the departure of recalcitrant armed elements towards rebel-held areas in the north, in June 2021. In addition, regime forces besieged the “reconciled” neighbourhoods of Der’a city to force former rebels to hand over their light weapons. It is extremely difficult, in such a context, to attribute responsibilities for the daily assassinations and other small-scale operations that have occurred in the region in recent years. While loyalist fighters were kidnapped by locals as bargaining chips to secure the release of detainees held by the regime, army officers and former rebels-turned-regime collaborators were
targeted by remnants of the Free Syrian Army and IS cells. Meanwhile, former rebel leaders may have been killed by loyalist elements because they stand in the way of Damascus’ ambitions to overturn the 2018 arrangements and restore direct control over the region. Some assassinations may also have been related to rivalries between the different pro-regime forces that have competed for the allegiance of the region’s former insurgents, namely, the regime’s army and air force intelligence apparatuses, the pro-Iranian Lebanese Hezbollah and 4th Armoured Division, and the Russian-commanded 5th Corps. While such rivalries are most pronounced in southern Syria, given Moscow’s 2018 promise to Israel and the United States that it would check Iran’s influence in the area, they also play out on the western bank of the Euphrates, where Russia has co-opted units from the paramilitary National Defense Forces and Palestinian-led Quds Brigade, while Tehran exerts its influence through affiliates of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps such as the Afghan Hazara-led Fatimid Brigade and its local recruits.

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Wartime proliferation of paramilitary groups has also fed chronic violence in the Druze-majority province of Suwayda, which never fell to the rebels, but secured some level of autonomy during the conflict. Dwindling regime patronage pushed some local militias to fund themselves by ransoming Sunnis from the nearby province of Der’a, which has contributed to reigniting a decades-old communal conflict over land ownership. Dozens were killed in 2020 during clashes between Druze militias and former rebels now affiliated with the Russian-backed 5th Corps. In parallel, independent Druze fighters from the Men of Dignity militia have kidnapped loyalist soldiers and set up checkpoints to secure concessions from Damascus such as the release of prisoners.

**SDF: Between Turkey’s Hammer, the Regime’s Anvil, and IS’s Dagger**

In the east and north of the country, the SDF have been fighting on three fronts. Occasional shelling and skirmishes have occurred regularly along the frontlines that separate Kurdish-led forces from the Turkish and Syrian National Army units operating north of Aleppo and Raqqa. Threats of escalation, which peaked at the end of 2020, have served Ankara’s (so far unsuccessful) attempt to impose a partial replacement of SDF elements stationed along the border and frontline with regime and/or more palatable Kurdish fighters affiliated with the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria.

Relations between the SDF and the regime also markedly deteriorated following the failure of early 2020 negotiations between Damascus and the SDF’s political arm, the Syrian Democratic Council. Tensions peaked in April 2021 when the SDF expelled Arab tribesmen affiliated with the National Defense Forces from Qamishli, thereby seizing most of the city from the regime. Finally, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (the governance structure established in SDF-controlled areas) has been faced with a low-intensity insurgency aimed to weaken its grip over the Arab-majority region of Deir ez-Zor, notably through the assassination of pro-SDF tribal leaders. Although most of these attacks have been carried out by IS cells, which have regularly been targeted by joint SDF-US operations, Kurdish leaders have also accused the regime of fostering ethnic tensions east of the Euphrates through covert operations.

**Security Breakdown in Northern Aleppo, and a Shaky Ceasefire in Idlib**

The Turkish military presence has generally shielded northern areas held by the Syrian National Army (SNA) from direct loyalist attacks, except for occasional missile strikes against infrastructure processing oil imported from SDF-held areas. Meanwhile,
Turkish soldiers and the Syrian National Army have been faced with a twin insurgency. The Afrin Liberation Movement (a YPG front) has been waging increasingly sophisticated rural guerilla warfare in the hilly northwestern corner of the country, probably with logistical support from the regime. In other Turkish-held areas further east, weekly bomb attacks and drive-by shootings have been blamed on the YPG and IS cells. Violence in the Turkish-controlled north has also stemmed from chronic infighting between SNA components. Such fratricide conflicts have usually been caused by disputes over economic resources such as the control of smuggling routes and booty. They have typically played along regional lines (e.g. local factions vs groups originating from Deir ez-Zor or Damascus) or ethnic ones (e.g. Turkmens vs Arabs).

In spite of the 5 March 2020 ceasefire negotiated by Russia and Turkey, Idlib has witnessed frequent armed incidents between local rebels and pro-regime forces. Most serious to date were a Russian airstrike that killed dozens of fighters from the Turkish-backed Sham Legion in November 2020 (possibly in response to Ankara’s support for Azerbaijan in the Karabakh war), and an escalation in loyalist bombardments that killed dozens of civilians and deliberately burnt crops throughout the spring of 2021. Rather than as a preparation for a major ground assault, the latter escalation was apparently designed to pressure Turkey and its Western allies into accepting Russian demands regarding the provision of humanitarian aid to Idlib. While threatening to veto the extension by the UN Security Council of cross-border aid from Turkey (which would expose the three million people living in Idlib to deadly food shortages), Moscow proposed to replace it with humanitarian corridors stemming from regime-held territories – this would be a first step, the Kremlin hoped, in a gradual reassertion of Damascus’ sovereignty over the rebel enclave.

Inside Idlib, the last year has been marked by the emergence of shadowy Jihadi groups that have concentrated their attacks on Turkish forces inside the province; in August 2020, one such attack against a patrol jointly carried out by Turkish and Russian vehicles as per the 5 March ceasefire agreement led Moscow to freeze its participation in this mechanism. It is assumed that the new groups operate as front organizations for hardline Jihadi factions that oppose Turkey’s deployment in the province, like the al-Qaeda-loyalist Hurras al-Din. Following armed clashes with the latter in June 2020, HTS carried out several arrest campaigns against Idlib’s remaining independent Jihadi groups. The crackdown was part of HTS’ pragmatic policy of acquiescence to Ankara’s de facto protectorate over the province, while it served the organization’s efforts to be perceived as a lesser evil by Western governments.

**Economic Collapse and Legitimacy Crises**

Aside from the violence, Syria’s multiple governing structures have strived to address legitimacy crises that have been heightened by growing economic difficulties. This nationwide trend was most spectacularly illustrated by the collapse of the Syrian pound, whose exchange rate temporarily fell to 1% of its prewar value in March 2021, and by the fuel crises, both of which have hit regime-held areas and the Autonomous Administration (due, in the latter case, to the extensive smuggling out of locally-produced oil). The most unanticipated (albeit so far innocuous) challenge to Bashar al-Assad’s legitimacy came from his cousin Rami Makhluf, who in 2020 released a series of videos in which he indignantly denounced the seizure of his (enormous) economic assets. The move was reportedly instigated as a means to favour rival businessmen aligned with Assad’s spouse Asma al-Akhras, whose political profile has risen in the meantime thanks to charitable operations among pro-regime (i.e., Alawite) constituencies and public displays of giant posters.

More expectedly, popular dissent has found its main venues of expression in regions that escape the full control of the regime, that is, southern “reconciled” towns and Suweida. Protests peaked in June 2020, over deteriorating economic conditions, and in May 2021, as demonstrators rejected the façade presiden-
tial election held that month, which saw Assad win a fourth seven-year term with 95% of the votes. Yet, although discontent has spread among pro-regime communities due to falling living standards, there has been no sign that it could coalesce into a nationwide movement able to overcome sectarian polarization and the fear of another merciless regime response.

Economic difficulties, poor public services and conscription into the SDF have also sparked several rounds of popular protests in the Arab-majority regions of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. In June 2021, the Asayish (security forces) killed eight demonstrators in Manbij, a volatile situation that led the local authorities to stop the forced recruitment of locals into the SDF.

The absence of such major instances of popular protests in Turkish-administered areas should not obscure the fact that local authorities have also been going through a serious legitimacy crisis. This was first due to the SNA's inability to put an end to the security chaos in the area, and to the abuses of its own units. Second, local governance has suffered from a duality of power: while civilian and military affairs are supposedly in the hands of the Syrian opposition's Interim Government, in reality, most matters are dealt with by local councils that liaise directly with Turkish authorities. As for the Syrian National Coalition and Higher Negotiations Committee, the opposition's main representative bodies, they have increasingly been criticized as the preserve of a narrow group of politicians, a sentiment exacerbated by the June 2020 job swap between the respective heads of the two bodies, Anas al-Abdah and Nasr Hariri.

In Idlib, finally, protests against HTS and its de facto civilian arm, the Syrian Salvation Government, have remained limited and focused on specific issues such as taxation policies. In spite of their modest scale, however, protests have demonstrated the determination of local communities to resist HTS' hegemony, and forced the ruling faction to tone down the most controversial aspects of Islamist governance, notably by restraining the operations of its religious police.

By mid-2021, therefore, foreign military protection continued to shield Syria's fragmented governance structures from the most immediate military and political threats. Neither armed violence, nor civilian protests seemed likely to induce major transformations in the short run. By contrast, a more pressing problem faced by all warring parties was the risk of economic implosion, be it related to a multiplicity of structural factors, as in regime-held areas, or to a single fatal decision, i.e., if cross-border aid towards Idlib was to be vetoed by Russia.

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Turkey’s relations with its traditional Western allies have been under the spotlight for years. European decision makers connect this declining trajectory to democratic backsliding in Turkey and its unilateral foreign policy, which is not always compatible with European interests. Lately, developments in regional theatres of power – mainly in Syria, Libya, the eastern Mediterranean and Nagorno-Karabakh – have shifted the entire focus towards foreign policy. In 2020, Turkey became a country to contain for some Europeans, while collaborating in dossiers of mutual interest. This situation has downgraded the importance of domestic backsliding in the realms of democracy, rule of law, basic rights and freedoms, while defining the framework of relations between Turkey and the EU. This reality was very much reflected in European Council conclusions in October and December 2020. It was again repeated in March and June 2021. Even if the European Council turns the entire focus towards foreign policy, treating Turkey as a third country rather than a candidate for accession, the links between domestic policy and foreign policy are quite strong. This is why the EU will always be fragile to domestic developments in Turkey.

From 2020 to 2021: A Drastic Shift?

2020 was a year of unilateral moves, shifts and drifts in Turkish foreign policy. Tensions between Greece and Turkey, two NATO allies, through maritime boundaries and hydrocarbon drillings were central to the European agenda. Josep Borrell, defined relations with Turkey as one of the most important challenges for the EU’s foreign policy,¹ in December 2020. Turkey, a long standing member of NATO and the Council of Europe, was rather perceived as an issue to be dealt with. Keeping in mind existing differences between EU institutions and between Member States, this was not an easy task. The divisions between Member States grew, since France, Greece and Cyprus were defending a harsh response, which included sanctions, while others like Germany or Spain were rather seeking dialogue. And it was not only the EU Member States Turkey was at odds with. Also regional powers like Egypt or Israel were perceiving Turkish foreign policy as a challenge to their national interests. They started to gather around common aims. The East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), for example, brought many of these actors together. Turkey was isolated in the region, at odds with its European allies. Not to mention all the bilateral problems it has with the United States. The arrival of Joe Biden in the White House, however, led to an intention of reconciliation with the allies and recalibration of Turkish foreign policy. 2021, so far, has been a year of intentions.

A Trend that Links the Domestic to the Global?

To give the year 2020 perspective, those were not just momentary conflicts. For years, Turkish decision makers kept on defending that the West is in decline. Multilateralism and international institutions of the 20th century are inefficacious. It is important to un-

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¹ For the full text please visit: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90861/way-ahead-after-difficult-2020-eu-turkey-relations
derline this trend since it is key to understanding the dynamics of Turkish foreign policy. The incumbent Turkish government is not necessarily a true believer of solid alliances, but rather is looking for collaborations when interests align. This approach was very visible in the purchase of the S400 missile system from Russia. Cooperation with Russia when interests align is the definition of an ideal alliance in the 21st century for Turkey. This, however, would not stop the Turkish ruling elite from playing the NATO card or the EU candidate country card when necessary. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is looking for a mission impossible: to stay integrated to the West and enjoy its privileges while diversifying partnerships when needed.

With the departure of Donald Trump from the White House, the global context was to become less compatible with Turkey’s unilateral foreign policy and its challenging attitude towards its transatlantic allies. President Biden announced that the United States is back and will put democracy as an important component of foreign policy – mainly to confront China on the global scene. Secondly, the transatlantic alliance began rebuilding its very much damaged relationship. Work began on a global agenda that includes not only global health, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also green and digital transition, and hybrid threats, etc. Thirdly, the transatlantic allies started to rethinking the future of international organizations and multilateralism. G7, G20 and NATO were at the spotlight – however, the intention to reflect the realities of the 21st century in the WTO and the WHO were also topics on the table. Following all these developments, Turkey as a NATO ally and a candidate country for EU accession, was encouraged to rethink its unilateral foreign policy.

**All Politics Are Local. Turkey's Foreign Policy as Well**

The reasons for Turkey’s charm offensive in 2021, however, cannot just be explained with a global shift. While trying to understand what is going on in Turkish foreign policy, three elements should always be kept in mind: the government’s overwhelming desire to stay in charge; the power struggles within the state apparatus; and the lack of institutional structures that serve as check and balance mechanisms. The transition to the presidential system in 2018 eliminated the separation of powers within the state apparatus, while personalizing both domestic and foreign policy. Furthermore, it has also weakened Turkey’s diplomatic capacity, somehow obliging the country to step up its footprint in armed conflicts. The interests of the ever-growing national defence industry also helped to push the country in that direction. The constant decline in Turkey’s economy accompanied these global trends. In addition to the weakening of recent years, COVID-19 has been the cherry on the cake. The Turkish lira has been depreciating while inflation has been on the rise. According to the World Bank, “the pandemic has deepened gender gaps, and increased youth employment and the poverty rate.” This economic decline had dire consequences for the governing alliance, which includes the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). All recent polls reflect a decline in support for the government. This is why the ruling elite is looking for an economic impulse that will increase their chances of staying in power in the forthcoming election, which is scheduled to take place in 2023. The European Union is a key trading partner and source of foreign direct investment for the country. In that regard, sanctions by the EU or the United States would have vital consequences for the already very weak Turkish economy. Any investment from the West has become a life jacket for the survival of the coalition. When evalu-

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2 According to the World Bank, average inflation is projected to increase to 15.5 percent in 2021, and the current account deficit is expected to narrow to 3.7 percent of GDP. For more information: [www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview#3](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview#3)
ated together with the global shift, these domestic trends have led to an intention of rapprochement with both Western allies and regional actors. As a result, in 2021, we are witnessing intentions of rapprochement with almost all of the actors mentioned above. Turkey anchored its research ships, to avoid causing any more tension with Greece and Cyprus; re-started exploratory talks with Greece – very much pleasing the European Union; and started negotiating for a peaceful transition both in Syria and Libya. Talks on a new modus vivendi with Egypt, Israel and the United Arab Emirates became visible. To demonstrate that it is a valuable NATO ally, Turkey supported the Baltic members and declared that it is ready to confront Russia in the region. The last surprising move came when Turkey volunteered to protect Kabul Airport in Afghanistan and allies’ embassies on completion of the NATO withdrawal. Understanding the link between domestic politics and foreign policy helps to make sense of all these developments.

Conclusion: Why Should the West Not Turn a Blind Eye to Domestic Developments in Turkey?

There is a window of opportunity for the Western allies right now. It is easier to negotiate with a Turkey that is in charm offensive mode – trying to avoid sanctions from the West, upholding its argument for geo-strategic importance and one that needs economic stimulation. The current status of the Turkish economy and the desire to stay in power have an impact on the definition of foreign policy. Attracting foreign direct investment is an ultimate goal. The domestic situation is way too fragile for President Erdogan that 2021 has been the year of rapprochements.

One key question is about the kind of strategic alliance the future could bring when there are no common values between allies. Can Turkey collaborate effectively with NATO allies while not respecting democracy, rule of law or basic rights and freedoms at home? This is a question yet to be answered. Global trends put democracy at the heart of the alliance – the US President perceives this as the way forward when it comes to fighting China’s influence in the world. According to him, the next war is between democracies and autocracies. If so, where does Turkey stand? Next to its NATO allies? Or should it be grouped together with China and Russia?

Right now there is an opportunity both for applying democratic conditionality and also for coming up with innovative proposals to multilateralize Turkey’s moves in the region. It is time to use that opportunity.
The 5+5 Dialogue after 30 years: Prospects and Challenges for Western Mediterranean Cooperation

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Over the last 30 years, the Mediterranean Basin has witnessed countless initiatives to promote dialogue and cooperation between both shores of the Mare Nostrum. These initiatives have been heterogeneous as regards to the number of members involved – the whole Mediterranean region versus sub-regional dynamics –, the degree of political ambition – strong cooperation versus informal political dialogues – and the sectoral areas concerned.

In this context, the first Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was launched in 1995 at the Barcelona Conference while the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was created in 2008. Similarly, the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched in 2003, reviewed in 2015 and given a new impetus for southern Mediterranean countries recently in February 2021 under the scope of the “New Agenda for the Mediterranean.”

However, despite the intergovernmental nature of such cooperation being channelled heterogeneously over the years, with the goal of bolstering prosperity, stability and security for the region, none of the aforementioned initiatives could claim to be the first in scope and essence. Indeed, the 5+5 Dialogue is the oldest active forum for dialogue and cooperation among Mediterranean countries, 2020 marking its 30th anniversary.

Its creation in 1990 was a milestone on the path towards Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, as it facilitated the development of the first ever dialogue structure to bring together the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of five countries from the northwestern Mediterranean – Spain, France, Italy, Malta¹ and Portugal – and five countries from the southwestern Mediterranean – Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia. The essence of the intergovernmental structures created in the first two meetings in Rome (1990) and Algiers (1991) would become a prelude to – and to some extent served as inspiration for – the cooperation framework that was built in 1995 with the Barcelona Process.

The 5+5 Dialogue: Origin, Essence and Impasse

As ministers expressed in the first two Ministerial Declarations in Rome (Déclaration commune, 1990)² and Algiers (Déclaration Ministérielle d’Alger, 1991),³ the original and longstanding aim of the 5+5 Dialogue was to enhance western Mediterranean cooperation by finding joint solutions to shared challenges in the region. In that context, member states agreed to the principles of the comprehensiveness and indivisibility of the challenges of the western Mediterranean, expressing their conviction that the resulting advantages for each country – and for the whole sub-region – in terms of political stability, economic and human development, social progress and culture...
could contribute to the transformation of the Mediterranean at large into an area of peace and cooperation (Déclaration commune, 1990). Likewise, ministers asserted that the current development gaps between the North and the South shores of the western Mediterranean Basin could generate socio-economic imbalances that may lead to serious challenges for the stability and well-being of the whole region, and, therefore, there was a more pressing need than ever to cooperate to overcome those challenges (Déclaration Ministérielle d’Alger, 1991).

In actual fact, the first two ministerial gatherings and their respective Ministerial Declarations laid the foundations for developing the initial 5+5 Dialogue structures and set the main guidelines that would shape western Mediterranean cooperation and solidarity through intergovernmental dialogue processes. At the same time, the potential offered by the new regional context was also key to further intensifying member’s efforts and establishing a strong framework for dialogue and cooperation that helped advance towards greater integration, prosperity and socio-economic development on both shores of the western Mediterranean Basin. This momentum was preceded by two key facts that shaped regional dynamics: the recent establishment of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in 1989 and the publication of the Renewed Agenda for the Mediterranean (1990) a few months earlier, both events giving the necessary impetus for this initiative to be consolidated in October 1990.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the 5+5 Dialogue aimed to strengthen sub-regional cooperation dynamics in the western Mediterranean, but as a complementary and non-replacement mechanism to the existing official bilateral cooperation between the European Economic Community (ECC) and the recently established AMU. The 5+5 Dialogue working dynamics were envisioned to strengthen the good neighbourhood relations between Europe and the Maghreb while furthering discussions among the ten countries on issues of strategic and mutual interest, especially related to foreign affairs.

At that time, the need to harness the new Euro-Arab relations through an informal cooperation mechanism outweighed the latent differences that some of the members had over two major conflicts that were shaping the region from West to East. First, the Western Sahara war was still raging, although at the end of 1991 the two sides would reach a ceasefire agreement; second, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was escalating in violence, while the Oslo Peace Accords would not be brokered until 1993. However, these two ongoing crises did not represent a stumbling block for the founding members, and neither did they interfere with the dialogue roundtables and working groups that were formed around the western Mediterranean countries. Moreover, the personal implication of both the Italian and Spanish governments, precisely through their Prime Ministers Bettino Craxi and Felipe González, was crucial to ensure the 5+5 Dialogue’s formation.

However, while these warlike events did not negatively influence the consolidation of intergovernmental working dynamics for two years, two other events at the end of 1991 did indeed break the 5+5 Dialogue cooperation, leading to a 10-year lethargy where no other ministerial meetings among its ten members were convened. Firstly, the involvement of two nationals of Libyan origin in the bombing of a transatlantic flight – also known as the Lockerbie bombing – where 243 passengers and 16 cabin crew were killed, led to the country suffering reprisals from the international community and international isolation in 1991. And secondly, the legislative elections in Algeria that took place in December 1991 resulted in the outbreak of an armed civil war between pro-Islamist rebel groups against the Algerian government, which plunged the country into an armed civil war that lasted ten years.

### Rising from the Ashes: An Evolving Format Amid Regional Dynamics and Area Needs

After the end of the Algerian crisis and the lifting of the isolationist context against Libya, the 5+5 Dialogue in its foreign affairs format resumed in Lisbon in January 2001. A working format was established by which ministers would meet at least once a year and working groups were developed to discuss cooperation actions over selected areas. Moreover, after the Rabat meeting in 2008, it was decided that the presidency of the foreign affairs ministerial format would adopt a bicephalous head by which the country hosting the gathering would share the co-presidency with the outgoing country. Aside from the rare occasions such as in 2006, 2007,
and 2017 when there were no meetings, every year since 2001, the ministers of foreign affairs of the ten founding members have met to discuss issues of common interest to both shores, and to further advance western Mediterranean cooperation and greater integration.

However, a turning point for the 5+5 Dialogue arrived in 2003 during the foreign affairs meeting held in Sainte-Maxime. Ministers gathered in France decided to promote a first-ever Summit of Heads of State and Government, which was held in Tunis in December 2003. This intergovernmental gathering served to strengthen the 5+5 Dialogue structures and its continuation in line with the spirit of the Declarations of Rome (1990), Algiers (1991) and Lisbon (2001), i.e., encouraging peace, political stability and socio-economic development through regional integration and cooperation in the western Mediterranean region. Moreover, given the increasing role of the European Union (EU) as a core interlocutor in the region, – the European Neighbourhood Policy was recently launched in that same year – Heads of State and Government recalled the importance of the EU accompanying their cooperation efforts and processes with a parallel effort to support the countries on the southern shore of the western Mediterranean Basin (Déclaration de Tunis, 2003).

The formal involvement of the EU, first through the European Commission and later also through the European External Action Service, underlined the increasing mutual attractiveness in the relations between the Maghreb and EU countries.

As a consequence of the events that occurred in the Middle East and North Africa region after 2011, the political, social and economic landscape of Europe’s southern neighbourhood was plunged into turmoil. The latter prompted the decision to hold a second Summit of Heads of State and Government in La Valletta (2012) to reinforce the dialogue mechanisms and cooperation framework created by the 5+5 Dialogue. Upon the suggestion of the European Commission, the Summit endorsed the regular presence of the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean in the ministerial meetings of the 5+5 Dialogue, while it also welcomed the readiness of the UfM to assist in the implementation of decisions adopted by ministerial meetings and flagship projects identified in the framework of the 5+5 Dialogue.

Specifically, the 5+5 Dialogue was created with the aim of encouraging inter-ministerial cooperation in areas of mutual interest related to foreign affairs, while the celebration of two Summits of Heads of State and Government helped give visibility and strength to the initiative. However, in recent years the sub-regional gathering has increased its activity in a significant number of sectoral fields, thereby expanding its original framework towards thematic ministerial summits beyond external action. This expansion occurred due to changing regional interests and the growing need to include other types of ministerial dialogues on issues that to a greater or lesser extent had an influence on improving western Mediterranean integration, cooperation and development.

In this regard, the ten founding members have also organized ministerial meetings concerning affairs related to the interior (since 2002), migration (since 2002), defence (since 2004), tourism (since 2006), transport (since 2007), education (since 2009) and environment and energy (since 2010). Other ministerial formats that have been organized – yet have not fully reached the working dynamics of the other formats – were related to agriculture, water, finances, culture, research and higher education, and territorial development.

Furthermore, and with the aim to open the scope of the Dialogue 5+5 to civil society and business organizations, including national parliamentary representatives, events all over the region have been organized back-to-back with the ministerial gatherings in recent years. For instance, based on the mandate of the Summit of Heads of State and Government in Malta (2012), the first Economic and Business Forum was organized in Barcelona (2013) and Lisbon (2014). Likewise, the first ever forum on civil society was held in Tangiers (2015) – organized by the national networks of the Anna Lindh

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Prospects and Challenges for Western Mediterranean Cooperation

In its thirty-year history, the 5+5 Dialogue (also referred to as the Western Mediterranean Forum) has proven to be a flexible and trustful framework of sub-regional cooperation. Notwithstanding the complex regional environment, member states of the Western Mediterranean Forum have continued to rely on this intergovernmental dialogue, and so ministerial meetings have occurred on a relatively regular basis, particularly in the foreign affairs format, alongside the core sectoral fields of defence, interior affairs, migration and transport. In the remaining sectoral areas and new ones that have been instituted in recent years, the organization of ministerial meetings has instead relied on the specific initiative of individual member states like France, Morocco, Spain, Tunisia or Algeria due to the informal and non-institutional nature of such a grouping.

The informality of the 5+5 Dialogue has been unequivocally regarded as a virtue that has provided strength to this sub-regional cooperation framework (Coustillière, 2012), in particular if one considers that multilateralism has weakened worldwide, as well as across the region, but also bearing in mind the region has been more exposed to security threats since 2012. The latter might not have necessarily diminished the appetite for multilateral action in favour of individual bilateral relations, but it could have steered the attention of the involved parties towards other more effective multilateral and regional frameworks.

Against this backdrop, the 5+5 Dialogue continues to be one of the two main intergovernmental settings, alongside the Union for the Mediterranean, through which the ten countries of the grouping conduct their regional cooperation in the Mediterranean. Despite there being no prospects of a short to mid-term upgrade of the current institutional settings of the 5+5 Dialogue, there are several areas of improvement needed to turn this sub-regional grouping into a more effective cooperation framework without losing the benefits of its informal character:

Enhance Inter-institutional Coordination Namely with the European Union and the Union for the Mediterranean

As noted beforehand, the Summits of Heads of State and Government of 2003 and 2012, respectively, facilitated the involvement of the EU institutions and the Secretariat of the UfM as observers of the 5+5 Dialogue. The informal nature of the Dialogue hinders the possibility that this coordination can become structural for all ministerial formats and permanent over time. If the rotating presidencies of the various ministerial formats of the 5+5 Dialogue established regular concertation and coordination with the European Commission (through the Directorate General for the Neighbourhood, and by extension the other concerned sectoral Directorates General) and the EU External Action Service, which acts as the northern co-presidency of the UfM, their respective presidency’s agendas and topics for cooperation would be streamlined with those of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, and, in return, the latter would also gain substantial leverage into this sub-regional cooperation framework.

As a quasi-unique example, at the transport ministerial format of the 5+5 Dialogue, there is the Centre for Transportation Studies for the Western Mediterranean (CETMO), which has acted as the ad-hoc secretariat of this ministerial format since it was launched in 2007, and which keeps this permanent cooperation with both EU institutions and UfM to the benefit of all institutional settings.

7 Upon the decision of the 2012 Summit of Heads of State and Government, the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) established a network of think tanks, and academic and public diplomacy institutions of the western Mediterranean to respond to basic needs within the system of the 5+5 Dialogue by working to enable dialogue though the organization of conferences, seminars and symposia with key players in the region. It also serves as a platform for joint research and dissemination, providing an output for the policy-making leadership of the Western Mediterranean Forum.

8 See www.cetmo.org
Reinforcing the Implementation of the Ministerial Conclusions

Since its establishment, the 5+5 Dialogue has been engulfed by a trade-off between co-ownership from its member countries and the will to pursue further institutionalization. Whilst member countries have generally expressed appreciation and support for the 5+5 Dialogue, some of them have conspicuously opposed any form of institutionalization, arguing that by introducing institutional constraints, the Dialogue’s cohesion might be severely hampered. In this context, the absence of (almost) any kind of institutionalization limits the capacity to perform a proper follow-up of the ministerial declarations, and leaves the implementation of decisions adopted at the ministerial meetings to the will of national ministries.

In March 2015 in Madrid, the 5+5 Dialogue’s ministerial meeting of higher education and research invited the Secretariat of the UfM to act as the ad hoc secretariat of this format, and thus provide the support needed to implement decisions adopted at ministerial level. The Union for the Mediterranean does not share competences with all the ministerial formats of the 5+5 Dialogue, but it could progressively step in and support the work undertaken by those ministerial formats in which competences overlap, besides merely attending the ministerial meetings.

Bolstering the Role of Civil Society within the Dialogue

The 5+5 Dialogue was conceived as a purely intergovernmental setting. Back in 1990, it made complete sense, and these thirty years of history have served its initial purpose well. However, the regional context has changed so drastically since then, that now an effective presence of civil society representatives would boost the legitimacy of the works conducted by the various ministerial formats. Since the 2012 Summit of Heads of State and Government in Malta, at which a specific call was adopted to involve civil society and think tank organizations in its deliberations, a few ministerial formats of the 5+5 Dialogue, especially the one on foreign affairs, have held structured dialogue with civil society organizations. In June 2019, the French government decided to promote a bottom-up exercise which fully engaged civil society representatives entitled the “Summit of the two shores.” While not exactly falling into the 5+5 Dialogue dynamics, it did target the ten countries of the western Mediterranean and a number of regional and international organizations with the aim to appraise and foster different regional projects. Despite the good intentions of the original idea, the impact of the exercise could have been stronger had the initiative been conceptualized and developed under the umbrella of the 5+5 Dialogue.

Bibliography


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The United States and Iran:
From Past Complicity to the Fight against the “Satans”

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Washington is exactly 10,181 km from Tehran, the capital of Iran, and yet Iran continues to be an American obsession and is catalogued among the “evil axis” countries. For Iran, the US represents the “Great Satan,” and the American flag has been trampled by frenzied crowds for over 40 years, that is, since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Why such hostility when the two countries are not close enemies (close enemies are neighbours), nor intimate enemies (those are the enemies from within), nor hidden enemies (the so-called domestic conspirators), nor conceptual enemies (as in the global war against terrorism), nor systemic enemies (in the case of a cold war between two major powers), nor planetary rivals (as is the case today between the US and China)?

None of the elements of this typology quite corresponds to the conflict opposing the United States (US) and Iran. So, is the Iranian or the American enemy a concoction? If so, we could, like Pierre Conesa, speak of “the fabrication of the enemy.” This would mean that the enemy has a social function, that it is a political object and therefore “a choice, not a given”; there is no structural enemy, but one of opportunity.

In the case in point, Iran hasn’t always been the US’s enemy: one could even say that the Shah’s Iran, up until 1979, was a pillar of American strategy in the Middle East. It was thus the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that shifted Iran to the US’s “enemy” camp. Why? Because the Islamic Revolution took Iran out of the American sphere of influence, foiled the US’s plans for the region, is perceived as a threat by its regional allies – particularly Israel and the Gulf states – but above all because the Islamic Revolution could produce “a demonstration effect” on other Muslim countries.

Europe does not have the same perception, considering the Islamic Revolution to have emerged from an authoritarian, police state, that it is a legitimate reaction of a suffering people, and, above all, that it does not directly threaten the interests of European countries in the region and does not hamper their plans at all. If it so happens that the Islamic Republic does not meet the aspirations of Iranians, says European discourse, it is up to them to get rid of it, and not to external actors.

For Iran, the US is a dangerous but necessary enemy. Dangerous of course, because American military bases are scattered everywhere in the Gulf region and in Afghanistan, encircling Iran and increasing its sensation of being surrounded. Dangerous, because the US supports the State of Israel, which has made the Islamic Republic a bogeyman, a sort of existential threat that it regularly brandishes to conceal its own occupation of Palestinian and Syrian territories.

A necessary enemy also because the American enemy has an identity function. Isn’t it generally said that we arise by opposing? The enemy thus allows group unity and national identity to be rebuilt. The enemy binds a nation together, cementing its collective sense: the Turks need the Greek enemy, the

2 Ibid., p. 31
Pakistanis join together against the Indian enemy. Someone once said that the Other is hell. But it is a hell that stirs up nationalist fervour. I am convinced that this perception of a constant threat, whether real or deliberately constructed, freezes the internal dynamics in Iran and, ultimately, allows the Islamic Republic to maintain its stranglehold on Iranian society.

The fabrication of the enemy thus has an instrumental function. Iran is not a direct security threat to the US (I cannot imagine Iran bombing the US, even if it had the means), but the fact that the United States catalogues Iran as part of the “evil axis” allows it to keep its military bases in the region, claiming to be the guarantor of its allies’ security, and sell billions of dollars’ worth of arms.

The Iranian Nuclear Question: Threat or Alibi?

The Iranian nuclear programme resumed in the early 1990s. But the country’s Atomic Energy Organization was weak, poorly funded and poorly supported, and Western countries were little inclined to help the Islamic Republic. This was when Iran turned to China, which was beginning to have a great need for Iranian oil and gas, and above all Russia, happy to take over from the Western countries in a country whose strategic centrality is unquestionable. Cooperation with Russia led to the completion of the first unit of the Bushehr Power Plant. The contract was signed in 1999. The co-operation agreement with China, for its part, was signed earlier, in 1990, for the “transfer of nuclear fuel cycle technology.” This strategic shift by Iran aroused the wrath of the US, which imposed a battery of sanctions between 1995 and 1996 on companies investing in Iranian oil and gas.

The sanctions irritated the Iranians and triggered a nationwide, nearly visceral anti-Americanism among them. But they also hit European interests in Iran hard. Indeed, Iran was beginning to be a lucrative market for European oil companies and for the business community. Important investments had already been undertaken. European countries were thus being directly targeted by the extraterritoriality of American law, a discretionary power that allows the US to unilaterally decide to prohibit other countries from trading with a third country, as was the case with Iran. European countries thus saw their “sovereignty” affected, but were obliged to abide by sanctions they hadn’t chosen and that went against their interests.

The European states, like their companies, felt cornered: submit or rebel at great risk. They chose to deal with the problem at its source. In 2003, Germany, France and the United Kingdom (UK) proposed a negotiation on the Iranian nuclear issue, which was the real stumbling block. According to the proposal, Iran would agree to apply the Additional Protocol to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which allows unannounced inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna. But this did not seem to satisfy the US. And yet, in 2006, the United States, Russia and China joined the negotiations initiated by the EU-3 group (France, Germany and the UK).

Israel, on the other hand, began threatening, launching a campaign to denounce Iranian nuclear activi-
ties and shouting from the rooftops that it was ready to destroy all Iranian nuclear facilities, claiming that Iran constituted an “existential” threat to the Jewish State. However, while it is true that Iran may have sponsored some terrorist attacks against Israeli or Jewish targets around the world, at no time has Iran risked a direct confrontation with the State of Israel. For the time being, Israel limits itself, according to many informed Israeli analysts, to liquidating Iranian nuclear scientists or those in charge of the ballistic programme, the latest being Mohsen Fakhrizadeh,\(^3\) assassinated on 27 November 2020. Commenting on this assassination, President Trump simply tweeted that it was “a blow for Iran.”\(^4\)

In response to the accusations made by the US and Israel, Iran retorts that it co-operates with the IAEA, submits to its control of its nuclear activities and recalls that, unlike Israel, it is a member of the NPT. Iran reiterates its commitment not to produce nuclear weapons, but also recalls that the Treaty allows it to master civilian nuclear technology, which is, moreover, a “legitimate claim” and even a “national cause.” Some observers doubt Iran’s sincerity, but the majority of analysts find the American and Israeli arguments not only alarmist, but also false. And this for several reasons:

1. Nuclear weapons are not made to hurt but to scare;
2. To think that Iran could launch bombs on Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities is to forget that Israel is the only nuclear power in the region today and that any Iranian nuclear aggression would lead to the destruction of Iran by Israel and the United States;
3. In a nuclear confrontation between two nuclear powers, there are no winners, only losers.

Therefore, the reason why Israel and the US are so relentless in raising the spectre of Iran’s nuclear power is that military nuclear power is first and foremost a “power equaliser” and a means of “sanctuarizing a country.” It creates a balance. In this respect, the case of India and Pakistan is emblematic.

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However, the US, like Israel, wants Israel to maintain military supremacy over all the states in the region at all costs.

From the above, it is clear that the Iranian nuclear issue is an obsession for both the US and Israel, to which we can now add the Gulf states, primarily the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. For the latter, a nuclear Iran would be more threatening and destabilizing, and would lead to nuclear proliferation in the region. This would explain, in large part, the recent normalization agreements between Israel, the Emirates and Bahrain, thanks to the good offices of President Trump and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

**Towards the 2015 Nuclear Agreement: The EU’s Key Role**

Between 2003 and 2013, negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue stalled and international sanctions were maintained and reinforced.

It was only after the replacement of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad by Hassan Rouhani as President of Iran on 14 June 2013 that the situation was unblocked. Rouhani has a good image as a member of the “moderate” camp in Iran and was also Iran’s former nuclear negotiator from 2003 to 2005. As soon as he took office, negotiations resumed between Iran

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\(^3\) This Iranian scientist was assassinated on 27 November 2020 in a sophisticated operation executed professionally. To Raz Simmt, researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies (Tel Aviv), only two countries have the capacity and interest in carrying out such an undertaking: Israel and the United States. But when asked by the New York Times, an American official attributed sole responsibility for the attack to the Hebrew State. Armin Arefi: “Israel experts explain why the Hebrew State is likely to be linked to the elimination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the father of Iran’s nuclear programme,” Le Point International, 29/11/2020.

and the Group of Seven (the five members of the Security Council, the European Union (EU) and Germany), first in Geneva, then in Lausanne (on 2 April 2015), and finally in Vienna, where a framework agreement, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was formalised on 14 July 2015 and approved by Security Council Resolution 2231. The agreement included three important points:

1. Limitation of the Iranian nuclear programme for at least a decade;
2. Lifting of international sanctions against Iran;

On 16 January 2016, the IAEA, in charge of controls, certified that Iran had complied with the agreement by ceasing uranium enrichment. In exchange, the economic sanctions against Iran were gradually lifted, including part of the frozen financial assets estimated at nearly €135 billion ($150 billion).

There was general satisfaction: European diplomacy had achieved a resounding success, Obama ended his term in office with the feeling that he had made a significant breakthrough on a complicated foreign policy issue, and China and Russia were happy to have been associated with the agreement. Western media hailed the deal as “historic.” However, two countries remained fiercely opposed to the deal: Israel and Saudi Arabia. They would do everything they could to derail it, counting on a key ally: President Trump himself.

Indeed, as soon as he was elected in 2017, Trump announced his intention to withdraw from the Agreement. On 8 May 2018, he announced that “the United States will withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal. [...] we will not allow a regime that chants ‘Death to America’ to gain access to the most deadly [sic] weapons on Earth.” He also announced the signing of a memorandum to reinstate economic sanctions on the Tehran regime, notably on the energy, petrochemical and financial sectors, and even “the highest level of economic sanction.” Trump was thus opting for “maximum pressure,” leading Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran’s Foreign Minister, to make this bitter observation: “The United States has become the first state in the world to not only violate a binding resolution that it itself sponsored, but also sanction governments and companies that support international law by implementing the provisions of this agreement.”

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To justify this about-face, the US Secretary of State hammered home the point that he had proof that Iran’s commitments were a lie and that Iran had not stopped developing nuclear weapons, exactly the same misleading speech made by the ex US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, on 5 February 2003 before the US invasion of Iraq.

The European states, signatories of the Agreement, did everything to avoid the worst, but Trump’s decision left them stunned and dumbfounded. Not only was the US withdrawing from the Agreement, but it decided to reimpose heavier sanctions, provoking a crisis in transatlantic relations.

To circumvent US sanctions, the EU announced the creation of an alternative payment mechanism within a so-called Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), isolating any link with the US monetary system so as not to expose any transactions to US sanctions. As envisaged by the EU, the new mechanism would accept payments from companies wishing to trade with Iran, either through waivers for oil imports or by allowing trade in goods such as food and medicine. But Trump threatened in a Tweet that if Europeans try to evade US sanctions on Iran, they would be subject to stiff fines and penalties.

The new president-elect, Joe Biden, thus inherits an explosive portfolio. In September 2019, he already took a stand on the Iranian issue, saying that the policy of “maximum pressure” has been a failure because it has inflicted unnecessary suffering on the Iranian people without making the regime bend.

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Realizing that the negotiators’ consensus is broken and that the American withdrawal from the Agreement (in 2018) gave Iran a free hand to increase its nuclear capabilities and perhaps even get closer to a nuclear weapon, Joe Biden has promised to resume negotiations, but adding new demands: release of American detainees in Iran, respect for human rights, limitation of its ballistic programme and cessation of Iran’s external interference and “destabilizing activities,” particularly in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. To bring the Iranians to the negotiating table, he proposes “targeted sanctions.”

The Iranians have made it clear that there is no question of renegotiating the 2015 agreement, and they demand the US ratify the agreement and the Security Council give it “binding force.” As for the other US demands, notably human rights, the Iranians claim that they are not directly related to the purpose of the agreement, namely the nuclear issue. Regarding the limitation of the ballistic programme, Iran recalls that this is a demand made by Israel and Saudi Arabia. According to the Iranians, it is an issue that must be negotiated “regionally” and “collectively”: they say it is not normal that so much noise be made about Iranian missiles with a range of 2,000 km, while Israel has hundreds of Jericho II missiles with a range of 3,500 km and Saudi Arabia has Chinese missiles with a range of over 2,000 km in its arsenal. As for “external interference,” Iran recalls the Israeli policy of occupation and rampant annexation of Palestinian and Syrian territories and military incursions into neighbouring countries as well as Saudi Arabia’s direct involvement in the inter-Yemeni conflict and its indirect involvement through the export of Wahabi ideology to various Muslim and non-Muslim countries. This means that resumption of dialogue will be fraught with difficulties. Not only could the Iranian conservatives win the next Iranian elections in June 2021, but the new American President’s room for manoeuvre will be limited because of Congress’s opposition to the lifting of sanctions and the pressure of powerful pro-Israeli lobbies (notably the Evangelicals and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee – AIPAC) and pro-Saudi lobbies (primarily oil companies and the arms industry), not to mention possible obstruction by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), which is populated by anti-Iranian hardliners.7

Joe Biden will have to face backlash from Israel and its allies in the United States, who will do everything they can to scupper the negotiations.7

If negotiations resume, it is unlikely that Iran will want to participate in a negotiation with Israel, but it is not unthinkable that the group of negotiators will expand to include Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, or even the League of Arab States. Should this occur, Joe Biden will have to face backlash from Israel and its allies in the United States, who will do everything they can to scupper the negotiations. The assassination of the Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh on 27 November 2020, attributed to the Israeli Mossad, aimed precisely at putting obstacles in the way of the future Biden Administration, which is preparing to resume the negotiations despite Israeli opposition. It is taking an important risk because Israel is not a foreign policy issue for the United States, but rather a “domestic policy issue,” as John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt have masterfully demonstrated in the book entitled The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy.8

By Way of Conclusion

In a remarkable article,9 Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon pose the following question: Since the end of the Second World War, which countries have obsessed America? The authors list three countries: First of all, the Soviet Union. Throughout the Cold War, it was enemy number one. But, as General Éric de la Maisonneuve observed, this Soviet enemy had all the qualities of a “good enemy: sturdy, constant, coherent… Militarily it was similar to us… Troubling, certainly, but known and predictable… Its disappearance undermines our cohesion and makes our

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8 MEARSHEIMER, John and WALT, Stephen. Le lobby pro-israélien et la politique étrangère américaine. Paris: La Découverte, 2010
power futile” and plunged the West into anxiety.\textsuperscript{10} Hence the famous phrase by Georgi Arbatov, Mikhail Gorbachev’s advisor, “We are going to do you the worst service, we are going to deprive you of an enemy,” highlighting the technical unemployment of the Western strategic sector.\textsuperscript{11}

Since 1989, the Soviet enemy has become a friend under Gorbachev, then “a mere nuisance” with Putin’s Russia, a challenging nuisance, in the words of Benjamin and Simon. I would say more like a “systemic adversary.”

Secondly, China. China was an ideological adversary, then an economic partner and, finally, it has become a geostrategic global rival that is sanctioned, but with whom we discuss matters and do business. But if there is one enemy that has obsessed America for more than 40 years, it is Iran, to the extent that Henry Kissinger wondered whether Iran was “a country or a cause.”

How to explain this American obsession when Washington is 10,181 km from Tehran, Iran’s gross domestic product is not even 2% of the American GDP, its military expenditure hardly exceeds 1% of that of the United States, and it is far from having the strike force of the American army?

This article has answered this question in summary fashion. First of all, Iran’s geography gives it considerable geostrategic importance. Secondly, Iran has important connections in the region which it can use to intimidate its neighbours and threaten America’s allies, namely Israel and the Gulf states. Moreover, it can count on its new alliances with Russia and China and the other members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. And finally, Iran “holds its own,” shows remarkable resilience and does not submit willingly to anyone’s “diktat.”

This appeals to the disillusioned and disoriented youth of the Middle East more than “the Islamic revolution as such.” And it is precisely this Iranian appeal that frightens the Sunni Gulf states, Israel and their American sponsor. The nuclear issue is therefore only an alibi: it can be resolved through diplomacy, as the EU-3 clearly demonstrated. In reality, the true objective of the US and its allies is to undermine Iran’s regional influence, prevent it from upsetting their plans for the region and, above all, preserve the military supremacy of Israel – the only nuclear power in the Middle East – over all the states in the region. In other words, the Iranian question cannot be disconnected from all the problems that plague the region, hinder its development and prevent it from living in peace and security. There is, in fact, a direct link between the Iranian issue and the other theatres of conflict in the region, notably Palestine, Yemen, Syria and Lebanon. Making Iran a bogeyman while pampering the State of Israel, which has been occupying the Palestinian territories and Syria’s Golan since 1967 and violating international law with impunity, is absurd and unfair. Moreover, it gives credence to those who criticise the West’s double standards. And above all, it shocks the peoples of the region. Indeed, according to the latest opinion poll conducted by the renowned Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Doha and involving 28,288 people, 89% of respondents believe that Israel is the primary threat to the region, followed by the US, with 81%. Iran only comes in third place with 67%.\textsuperscript{12}

This shows how important it is to have a holistic approach to the region in its entirety. The EU, which was the catalyst and facilitator of the 2015 Iran Nuclear Agreement, could take the initiative for an international conference for comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It is true that the pandemic is mobilizing people, finances and energy. But Joe Biden’s election offers an excellent opportunity, not only to restore transatlantic ties, but above all to act together and rid the Middle East of all the stumbling blocks hindering its development and stability, and by extension, threatening European security.

\textsuperscript{10} Conesa, Pierre, op. cit., p.14
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p.14
Alliances with Violent Non-State Actors in Middle East Conflicts: Between Theory and Practice

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A decade of regional turmoil in the Middle East has heightened the role of violent non-state actors (VNSA), which have become both a critical tool and a decisive element in shaping political landscapes and inter-state competition between regional powers. This article focuses on the role of violent non-state actors in Middle East politics within the context of alliances and from a theoretical and empirical point of view. It describes how states and VNSA use each other to increase their leverage in a given conflict or in the broader regional environment. What do notable examples of such relationships tell us about the nature of alliances between states and VNSA? And how do these cross-border proxy alliances affect statehood, and more broadly, regional stability?

One of the ramifications of the Arab Spring and its aftermath, has been the growing proliferation of non-state actors (NSA) and violent non-state actors (VNSA). Joining the armed groups that have operated in the Middle East in recent decades, such as Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Hezbollah in Lebanon and other theatres, are new militant organizations in the regional landscape. Among them are jihadist organizations, some of which are official branches of al-Qaeda; the Islamic State (IS); local militias such as the Houthis in Yemen; the multiple armed opposition groups operating during the war in Syria; the armed militias aligned with the two rival governments in Libya; and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU) in Iraq.

The increasing role of VNSA has generated a dynamic whereby major global powers such as Russia and the United States, as well as regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, confront each other by collaborating with non-state forces. VNSA, therefore, have become increasingly decisive in shaping not only intra-state but also inter-state power struggles.¹

Non-State Actors and Alliances in IR Literature

Non-state actors are defined as “actors which are at least in principle autonomous from the structure and machinery of the state, and of the governmental and intergovernmental bodies below and above the formally-sovereign state.”² Violent non-state actors are defined as organizations that use illegal violence to reach their goals, thereby contesting the state’s monopoly on violence.³ Their existence is not new to the international political and security landscapes, and hence it is hardly surprising that the focus on VNSA among scholars has grown significantly since the end of the Cold War.

Still, despite their growing and unequivocal prevalence, their role in shaping the political order has earned insufficient attention. The analytical lapse often stems from the dominance of the “state-centric approach,” whereby the state is the primary and ex-

exclusive actor in the political system. This bias is evident in the literature concerning alliances, starting from Walt’s classic definition: “A formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states. [It] assumes some level of commitment and an exchange of benefits for both parties.” Even in more recent studies about alliances, NSA and VNSA are hardly mentioned, or conceived of as playing a secondary role.

Joining the armed groups that have operated in the Middle East in recent decades, are new militant organizations in the regional landscape.

However, in the global international system, and in the Middle East in particular, one cannot fully comprehend dynamics and key events without taking into account VNSA and their interface with state actors. A more nuanced view of the region, which acknowledges the simultaneous presence and interaction between these types of actors, enables a more accurate assessment.

**Alliance Balance Sheet**

Alliances between states and VNSA embody both advantages and disadvantages. For the state’s patrons, the use of local VNSA provides combat advantages and often spares them direct military involvement. It also ensures the state’s ability to project power and deter distant enemies. Furthermore, VNSA are less expected to “play” according to conventional rules and international norms compared to states. Therefore, an alliance affords the state more manoeuvrability, as it allows it to shed direct responsibility for its partner’s actions. For the VNSA, state support lends greater empowerment by strengthening their military capabilities, as they enjoy the best of both worlds: the advantages of irregular warfare, and the advantages of receiving more sophisticated and advanced weapons.

Allying with VNSA also poses some risks, as the state party does not have full control over VNSA, with fewer constraints governing a non-state group. The state, therefore, could potentially lose its absolute hold over the behavioural proclivities of the VNSA. In addition, sustaining the alliance over time requires the state to invest extensive resources in the form of substantial funding, in order to ensure that its proxies will be effective. For its part, the VNSA might gradually lose its autonomy. It would likely take more risks and expose itself to counter actions by its rivals (as well as by its sponsor state’s rivals).

**Alliances with Violent Non-State Actors in the Middle East**

In much of the Middle East, governance is structured and regulated by more than one actor, giving VNSA room to compete for – or share – power with the formal government authority. One example of this interaction can be found in the past decade in Syria, in which the combination of a formal state apparatus and a variety of VNSA – including armed rebel groups, Iranian-Shiite militias, Kurds (as well as traditional NSA such as humanitarian organizations and other civilian movements) – has created a division of power between the many actors. Interaction between VNSA and external states, such as Russia, Israel, Iran and Turkey, has likewise triggered the emergence of multiple alliances between states and VNSA.

The relationships between states and non-state actors are varied and depend on elements such as the type of VNSA, the geographical space of their cooperation and the strength of their alliance.

a. An alliance may be formed between VNSA and a state within the state’s territory based on consent. The driving rationale for this formation is that governments can benefit from domestic non-state actors (violent or not) that complement governance functions by delivering servic-

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es that the state is either incapable or unwilling to provide. However, although the alliance is based on a desire to cooperate, overtime, it could turn into a source of competition and tension, as the VNSA starts challenging the state’s sovereignty.

The case of the Syrian regime-Hezbollah alliance (along with other Shiite militias under Iranian auspices), which has operated in Syria since late 2012, clearly demonstrates this tension. Although its initial goal to save Bashar al-Assad’s rule was accomplished, over time these VNSA have challenged Assad’s ability to apply full governance by turning into another local authority that exercises control, provides public services and promotes an agenda that is not always aligned with the central regime in Damascus.

Similarly, the Kurds constituted the main force that fought the Islamic State and helped restore regional stability by neutralizing other non-state challengers to Syria and Iraq. Despite the tactical cooperation between the Kurds and the central regime in both states, their achievements prompted them to demand a certain level of autonomy from the regimes, and thereby threaten their domestic sovereignty.

In Syria, the combination of a formal state apparatus and a variety of VNSA, has created a division of power between the many actors.

b. A more prevalent type of alliance is between VNSA and an external state/foreign state operating in another state’s territory, which often result in proxy wars, as in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Libya.

VNSA may rely on “external” states’ financial, political and military support and, in turn, may use these assets to help advance their “patrons’” interests on the ground, contesting the sovereignty and stability of the state where they operate. Moreover, in many cases the external state wishes to project power and influence beyond its own territory and the other state’s territory in order to gain leverage in the regional or even the international balance of power.

For decades, Iran has provided support to violent non-state proxies to promote its interests in the region. Hezbollah is the most prominent actor that operates under Iranian auspices, mostly in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. Although founded nearly forty years ago, even today, when Hezbollah is a political entity and military organization with tremendous domestic and regional influence, it remains highly dependent on Iran. Hezbollah’s budget comes almost entirely from Iran, and, aside from weapons provision, the Iranian army and the Quds Force oversee Hezbollah’s force buildup, preparedness and training of their fighters. Hezbollah’s massive intervention in the war in Syria is a clear demonstration of how Iran uses its proxies in order to leverage its regional stature.

c. Another defining element relates to the identity of the VNSA. It can be local with domestic roots (such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen or the PMU in Iraq) or external (Hezbollah or Russian mercenaries in Syria). Local VNSA have an advantage in that they are not perceived by the local population as an invasive force, but rather as an organic part of the state and its society (though they still may be criticized for undermining stability).

**Strategic vs. Tactical Alliances**

Alliances between states and VNSA are usually less institutionalized than alliances between states, as they do not adhere to formal agreements/accords and do not oblige the parties to constitute shared institutions. As such, what keeps them from collapsing?

Critical here are the differences between strategic and tactical alliances. Strategic alliances are characterized by high levels of cooperation and are usually based on shared values and ideology – as in the case of Iran and Hezbollah. Hence, these alliances are usually more sustainable and durable. Tactical cooperation occurs when the parties pursue a number of common short-term interests and do not necessarily rely on religious, sectarian or even ideologi-
While numerous countries that intervened in the Syrian war, created or supported their own Syrian proxy forces, only Turkey and Russia began exporting theirs to fight in foreign conflicts.

Turkish collaboration with the rebels and jihadists in Syria is exemplified by the use of proxy relations rooted in tactical cooperation, with ensuing local and regional implications. The alliance between the proxy force created by Turkey in 2016, known as the Syrian National Army (SNA), is not based on shared ideological or ethnic identities, but on short-term, mutual security and influence interests: Ankara used this force to secure its southern border against the Islamic State, in 2016, and later, to wage war against the Kurdish YPG militia (People’s Protection Units) in northern and northeastern Syria in 2018. For the SNA, Turkey is a strong actor that can provide security and a buffer against the regime’s aggression and that of its supporters (Russia and Iran). Although tactical, this alliance expanded to other conflict theatres in the Middle East. While numerous countries that intervened in the Syrian war, including the United States, Israel and Iran, created or supported their own Syrian proxy forces, only Turkey and Russia began exporting theirs to fight in foreign conflicts. The fighters Turkey sent to Libya, starting in late December 2019, and then later to Azerbaijan, were largely drawn from the ranks of the SNA’s proxy forces.\(^5\)

**Conclusion**

The history of the Middle East is littered with violent conflict – interstate wars, civil wars, insurgencies, revolutions, coups, invasions by foreign powers and ethnic and sectarian strife. A closer glance at the contemporary security landscape illustrates the proliferation of violent non-state actors, and highlights the need to extend our understanding of alliances and their utilization within the security system by granting greater analytical weight to the intensity of the impact that VNSA have today.

The prevalence of NSA proves that the familiar nation-states are no longer the sole model organizing international relations, either in the Middle East or the rest of the world. In fact, after a decade of turmoil, states have become weaker and more fragile, hence the appearance of power vacuums. These vacuums are exploited either by VNSA or by states that wish to expand their own influence or fear that their rivals will. The most effective way to do so is by creating alliances with local proxies as a response to proxies of other regional rivals. This dynamic makes de-escalation in contemporary Middle East conflicts intensely difficult.

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Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning and Cyber Command as a Tool of War: A New Method in the Mediterranean Battlefield?

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“We’re at the beginning of a golden age of AI. Recent advancements have already led to invention that previously lived in the realm of science fiction – and we’ve only scratched the surface of what’s possible” – Jeff Bezos

When are we going to establish a full-domain cyber dome for the Mediterranean region? When are we shifting our strategy from reacting after-the-fact to anticipating an event and pre-empting incidents?

In 2012, a group of Iranian-backed hackers launched the biggest ever DDoS attack on 46 financial sector firms in the United States and Europe. In December 2015, Russian military intelligence services conducted a destructive cyber attack against the Ukrainian power grid that left most of the country in darkness. In 2020, a satellite-controlled Artificial Intelligence (AI) rifle assassinated a nuclear scientist and the infamous STUXNET virus compromised centrifuges in a nuclear plant. And there are countless other notable examples in the public domain.

I envision a cooperative effort of like-minded allies creating a cyber dome for the Mediterranean. A multi-country and multi-agency cyber/AI dome structured around a C6ISR system (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Cyber-defence and Combat Systems, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance).

Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning

Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning (AI/ML) systems can now learn, identify, select, understand, analyse, surmise, deduce and even anticipate. Advanced data processing capabilities offer the promise of digesting large volumes of information, thereby helping military decision makers choose the most effective courses of action.

Addressing these challenges will require Mediterranean cooperation between government and industry. Mediterranean and North African allies bound by common values and a shared interest in promoting the digital economy can work together against a common enemy.

Cybersecurity

“Cyber attacks as a strategic matter do not differ fundamentally from older tools of espionage and sabotage” – Noah Feldman
Cyber criminals come with varying degrees of sophistication, backing and resources. They can be organized crime groups, lone hackers, hacktivist groups and nation state attackers. Nation state attackers are arguably the most dangerous because they are not driven by emotion or zeal like a terrorist. They are deliberate, calculated, well funded and supported with the resources to target anything they deem worthwhile.

Cyber attacks can take the form of phishing attacks, password attacks, man-in-the-middle attacks, Distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, SQL injections, remote access tools, eavesdropping, ransomware or hacking data for espionage purposes.

**Mediterranean Capability**

In the Mediterranean, cyber capabilities are unequally distributed, with France, Spain, Greece, Italy and Israel leading the race. Cyber-commanders and cyber-military units are growing in number and great progress is being made in cybersecurity using AI.

**North-South Actors and Tools**

France, Spain, Greece and Italy are taking big steps to make their cyberspace as secure as possible. Various NATO initiatives or the Tallinn manual considers “cyberspace” as a full domain in the battlefield. The other states in the South are trying to catch up with the paradigm shift. While advancements in regulatory and national strategy are being made, their cyberspace remains extremely vulnerable.

Our world’s major battles are fought in silence and secrecy, between soldiers thousands of miles apart and on computer screens. Cyberwarfare is devastating, highly refined, relatively inexpensive and a distinctly effective method of harming one’s enemies.

**Med North-South Comparison**

The e-Governance Academy’s NCSI offers up-to-date public information on how prepared states are for preventing cyber threats – it is a capacity-building index. If we compare statistics (in the graphics...
below) published on the NCSI website (National Cyber Security Index), we can confirm that the current state of security is similar to a web-based protective system, which actually looks like a spider’s web with many holes and gaps, while what we actually need is a full-domain cyber dome.

**The AI Environment in the Mediterranean**

**Current Global Know-how**

A global study released in May 2018 by Asgard, a Berlin-based venture capital firm focused on AI, states that by far the country with the largest AI industry is the US (40%), followed by China (11%), Israel (11%) and the UK (7%).

In scientific and military literature, there are countless articles about AI development, describing its possibilities and warning those who fall behind in the AI arms race.

**Arms Race**

Extensive research by academia and industry is changing the face of modern warfare. The world’s superpowers are engaged in an esoteric, pitched arms race on the advances in AI-powered autonomous systems, unmanned arms vehicles, drones, lasers, etc. Military theorists are now doubling down on AI research to turbocharge their country’s warfare capabilities. As nations, individually and collectively, accelerate their efforts to gain a competitive advantage in sci-

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NATION STATE ATTACKERS ARE ARGUABLY THE MOST DANGEROUS BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT DRIVEN BY EMOTION OR ZEAL LIKE A TERRORIST. THEY ARE DELIBERATE, CALCULATED, WELL FUNDED AND SUPPORTED WITH THE RESOURCES TO TARGET ANYTHING THEY DEEM WORTHWHILE.

Furthermore and technology, further weaponization of AI is inevitable. As a result, the status of “Artificial Weaponized Systems” (AWS) would alter the very meaning of what it is to be human, along with the very fundamentals of security and future of humanity and peace.

Below are examples of current capabilities.

- **C6ISR**
  This powerful AI/ML capability can allow select Mediterranean governments to persistently monitor crises and generate a wealth of actionable intelligence for military and civilian decision makers to proactively engage in responses and anticipate a multitude of threats.

  From my personal exposure with this technology, it is the most breathtaking I have seen yet. The technology exists today to deliver a centralized C6ISR system that combines advanced sensors, ISR workflow practices and intelligence tradecrafts and can analyze threats in real time, anticipate and predict threat activity, calculate damage assessment and provide recommended courses of action (COAs).

  A real-time virtual machine is at the heart of this process. It will ingest imagery data, geospatial intelligence, signal intelligence reports, cellular phone metadata, real-time video feeds, social media and a variety of other sources. This dynamic system learns from experiences, actions and inputs, and grows increasingly more effective.

  Potential situations a C6ISR can help with are; counter-insurgency/terrorism, political unrest and public dissatisfaction, political coups and regime change attempts, cyber defence/offence, support to conventional land, air and sea operations, border conflicts, drug interdiction, illegal cross-border smuggling and disaster management.

- **Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWS)**
  These are AI-powered autonomous weapons systems, known as force multipliers for future warfare. Currently, the armies and defence departments of several nations are on their way to deploying autonomous lethal AI systems called Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWS).

  LAWS are highly sophisticated AI-powered weapons that use sensors and artificial intelligence to identify and destroy targets. They can select and engage targets based on a set of predetermined criteria.

- **AI-Enabled Drones**
  With each passing day, drones are gaining more autonomy. AI-enabled weapons systems such as armed drones selectively target threats, causing less collateral damage. A case in point is the Chinese attack drone, Blowfish A2, unveiled by Ziyen UAV at the 2019 LIMA exhibition.

- **AI-Powered Killer Robots**
  Researchers worldwide are developing killer robots, which can carry out attacks without human intervention and can help in target identification and classification.

**The Mediterranean’s AI Environment**

- **EU (North Mediterranean)**
  Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice-President of A Europe fit for the Digital Age, said: “On Artificial Intelligence, trust is a must, not a nice to have. With these landmark rules, the EU is spearheading the development of new global norms to make sure AI can be trusted. By setting the standards, we can pave the way to ethical technology worldwide and ensure that the EU remains competitive along the way. Future-proof and innovation-friendly, our rules will intervene where strictly needed: when the safety and fundamental rights of EU citizens are at stake.”

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2 According to sources, the attack drone can carry radar-jamming devices, guns or bombs under its spine. Later, the company introduced Blowfish A3, which can carry multiple types of machine guns and features a different aerodynamic design allowing the gun to shoot at more angles mid-flight.
• MAGHREB (South Mediterranean)
The Maghreb countries (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) are working on national artificial intelligence strategies. The embryonic AI ecosystems forming in all three countries are at varying degrees of maturity. While awaiting the development of such strategies, governments have already started to launch various initiatives to prepare their countries for this new technological revolution.  

Concluding Remarks

Current discussion around the impact of AI/ML on national security strategy is focused on the operational level of war. This includes how future wars will be influenced by new military capabilities, and how those capabilities will, in turn, influence conflict on the battlefield.

At the operational level, we need to consider how artificial intelligence will influence ethics in national security. Particularly the role played by decision-makers, i.e., how much autonomy they have in employing force, and how much they delegate to a machine.

Cyberspace is turning into a theatre for geopolitical interactions. Multiple cases, such as those seen in Libya and Syria, have turned into digital battlefields, with foreign actors exacerbating the ongoing conflicts with cyber attacks, propaganda and disinformation.

As states use aggressive AI-driven strategies, opponents will respond ever more fiercely. As with all weapons, the use of AI-driven operational plans is escalating. This could evolve into ever more devastating cyber attacks on critical infrastructure and economic production facilities. Such a vicious cycle might ultimately lead to a physical deployment and morph into conventional warfare.

Cyber diplomacy goes hand-in-hand with building capacities. Strengthening multilateral coordination and openly communicating efforts and best practices is productive.

Moving forward into the Mediterranean Battlefield

We need to be ready to respond to large-scale, cross-border cyber attacks and cyber crises. Cross-border
interdependencies means the need for effective cooperation between Euromed states, for faster response and proper coordination of efforts at all levels. This entails:

— Creating a cyber defence committee for good governance and increasing the number of joint exercises designed to respond to attacks through international cooperation, dialogue, capacity building and joint investigations.
— Exchanging different cyber defence-related information and assistance to improve cyber incident prevention, resilience and response capabilities by setting up a multi-agency Computer Emergency Response Team (CERTs).
— Adopting a cyberwarfare treaty, (similar to the EU cybersecurity act), with objectives to reinforce trust and enhance cooperation between Euromed Member States

World leaders, including Obama, Xi and Putin, have all made important statements that bring to the forefront the significance of AI. The Russian President Vladimir Putin stated in September 2017: “Artificial Intelligence is the future for all humankind. It comes with colossal opportunities, but also threats that are difficult to predict. Whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the ruler of the world.”

The absence of a legal framework in relation to cyberspace warfare provides attackers with a disproportionately large amount of cover and plausible deniability. This uncertainty is giving organized crime groups, hacktivists and nation states added flexibility that is not sustainable in the future of warfare

In conclusion, we are collectively facing serious challenges. Cyberwarfare is becoming ever more complex and does not respect borders. The southern Mediterranean region is badly equipped compared to the North. We must, therefore, put in place a common C6ISR system as a tool of war based on common trust.

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As elsewhere in the world, Covid-19 has disrupted the markets of Mediterranean economies. Indeed, the imposition of restrictions, at the local level as well as for relations with the outside world, has had impacts, although different from one country to another and from one category of actors to another, but on the whole, negative across the entire economic circuit: agents and channels. With regard to the labour market, the influence of the quarantine on production factors has resulted in a freeze in the overall functioning of many businesses, particularly those whose activity relies on the mobility and gathering of people (e.g. tourism, art and culture), but also those with important supply and transport links with the rest of the world (including/ even/ and still countries heavily impacted by the pandemic). This influence has also materialized through increased risk aversion and deferred investment. This has led to an episode of contraction in economic growth across the region. The countries on the north shore felt the effect of the pandemic on growth more during the first quarter of 2020, with contractions of around 14% in Spain and France, and over 10% in Italy and Portugal. On the other side of the Mediterranean, the effect appears to have peaked in the second quarter, with significant contractions of -18.6% in Tunisia and -14.9% in Morocco. In the East, a contraction of -5.2% was recorded in Turkey in the first quarter of 2020, and -3.6% in Jordan in the second. Over the whole of 2020, only in Egypt was a positive growth rate observed. The overall increase in non-oil private sector activity, the relatively small number of new Covid-19 patients, and a continued public spending effort favoured and contributed to growth in economic activity in the latter country.

Thus, labour demand has been negatively affected because of the negative impacts on sectoral growth and output, sectoral employment, and business operations (temporary and permanent stoppages of activity; significant decline in sales; problems at various levels of business, including logistics, supply chains, investment plans, communication plans, wage payments and cash flow requirements; and high default risks).

The impact on workers, for its part, has been reflected in three main ways or phenomena: unemployment, a drop in working hours and a drop in income (lower consumption and evaporation of savings). As an indication, Morocco’s High Commission for Planning (HCP) reported that a total of...
600,000 jobs and 300 salaried jobs were destroyed between the second quarters of 2019 and 2020, which is about 5% of jobs, but more than half (53%) of hours worked in the non-agricultural sectors were lost. In Egypt, the unemployment rate increased from 7.7% to 9.6% between the first and second quarters of 2020 respectively, while the number of labour market participants decreased from 28 million in the second quarter of 2019 to 26.7 million in the second quarter of 2020, a decrease of about 18% of the Egyptian labour force. In Tunisia, the unemployment rate stood at about 18% in the second quarter of 2020 compared to 15.1% in the first quarter of the same year; and the number of unemployed increased by 17.6% during this period, from 634,800 to 746,400 unemployed out of the total labour force, respectively. Furthermore, Eurostat data shows that the unemployment rate increased from 6.8% to 7.3% between the first and second quarters of 2020 in the European Union (EU-27), and from 7.6% to 8% in the Eurozone. Countries such as Spain, Montenegro and Turkey, which were already experiencing high unemployment rates, were particularly affected.

On the northern shore of the Mediterranean, particularly in the Eurozone, observation of the difference between the unemployment rate at its peak in 2020 and the rate recorded in the first quarter of 2020 shows that women were more affected by unemployment. There was a difference of 1.1% among women, compared to around 0.9% in the population as a whole. However, this finding was far from uniform among northern shore countries. While the difference in a country like France was about 2.6% among women compared to 2.1% overall, it was about 2.7% overall compared to 1.6% among women in Croatia.

On the southern shore, there was a deterioration of indicators for labour force participation, employment and unemployment. In Egypt, for example, women were more affected by the decline in labour force participation in the second quarter of 2020, as about 1.1 million women withdrew from the labour market. In Morocco, the female unemployment rate jumped by about 7.1% between the first and third quarters of 2020, compared to an overall rise of 2.2%. In Tunisia, the number of women in employment fell from 950,000 in the first quarter of 2020 to 892,000 in the second quarter, a decrease of 6.1%. In the countries of the southern shore (North Africa) as a whole, the volume of unemployment increased by 373,000 over one year.

In the East, after a downward trend during 2019, the unemployment rate for Turkish women increased from 13.3% in the second quarter to 15.9% in the third. In Jordan, the female unemployment rate was already high before the pandemic, and crossed the 30% mark in the second (33.6%) and third (32.6%) quarters of 2020.

The Covid-19 crisis has also led to a rise in unemployment among youth (15-24-year-olds) in the Mediterranean region. In the majority of countries, the youth unemployment rate was already high before the crisis, exceeding 30% in Spain, Italy and Tunisia. Also, two-thirds of youth employment in the MENA region is considered informal; this percentage is about a quarter in Europe.

The Covid-19 crisis has also led to a rise in unemployment among youth (15-24-year-olds) in the Mediterranean region

During the crisis, the unemployment rate of 15-24-year-olds jumped to about 40.4% in the third quarter of 2020 in Spain. It was 36% at its peak in Greece, 33.4% in Morocco and 31% in Italy. In volume, youth unemployment rose by 438,000 in the EU and 353,000 in the euro area over one year. It continues to be a major challenge in the MENA region with a proportion approaching 25%, almost half of which are women (40%).

Covid-19 has also had an impact on graduate unemployment rates. The increase was widespread, but particularly significant among countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean where economies generate less skilled and decent jobs. Even before the advent of the pandemic, unemployment in North

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Africa displayed some asymmetry to the disadvantage of graduates. Indeed, the unemployment rate dispersion in countries such as Egypt, Morocco and/or Tunisia is relatively higher than that observed in lower-income countries, on average. This shows the degree of difficulties encountered by unemployed graduates in terms of labour market integration. A recovery not conducive to the creation of productive and decent work would exacerbate the situation.
employment would only restrict the transition opportunities available to unemployed graduates.

High unemployment, before and during the pandemic, was not the only concern of Mediterranean countries. The setbacks of the crisis are many, including the inequalities that are growing with the pandemic. Certainly, the impact of the crisis on inequalities is not the same from one coast to the other. Also, the degree of preparedness and comprehensiveness of socio-economic mitigation policies is different. Greece,
CHART 21  Unemployment Rate Trends for Tertiary Graduates in the Mediterranean, 2019-2020

Sources: National statistics bureaus, Eurostat, author’s calculations.
Italy and Spain seem to be the least prepared in the northern Mediterranean.\(^2\)

In Europe, for example, automatic economic stabilizers and social protection are at an advanced stage of development, and already include a significant amount of population support measures. In addition, various measures have been taken during the pandemic, including a temporary instrument for recovery and resilience amounting to €750 billion to help repair the immediate economic and social damage caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the Arab Mediterranean countries, the weight of informal and vulnerable employment is high, while automatic stabilizers such as social benefits and unemployment compensation are almost completely absent. Moreover, cash benefits for the informally unemployed have been limited to a few months and are well below the minimum wage. In Egypt, for example, benefits have been a one-off amount of approximately $34, while the minimum wage is about $138; in Morocco, benefits have ranged from $86 per month for three months, to approximately $217 per month, whereas the minimum wage is about $293. This has left people in the region extremely exposed to the impacts of the pandemic. The least prepared in the East-South Mediterranean according to the Policy Response Monitor for Covid-19 in the Mediterranean are: Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia.

In this context, and taking poverty as an indicator of inequality, the number of poor people at the $1.9 a day threshold would change only slightly in the Europe and Central Asia region, according to World Bank estimates. These estimates indicate, however, that Covid-19 could push more than three million people into extreme poverty in the MENA region. More pessimistic assessments (Oxfam, 2020) estimate that the economic contractions caused by the measures put in place to prevent the spread of the virus would push an additional 45 million people into poverty across the MENA region.

The inequalities caused by the pandemic may not only occur in the short term, but are also likely to last over time. Indeed, the negative shock to the la-

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\(^2\) Here, the degree of preparedness is assessed according to an indicator of the Policy Response Monitor for Covid-19 in the Mediterranean. This indicator covers the following areas: fiscal and monetary space; quality of institutions; economic relevance of sectors at risk; economic dependency on the rest of the world; social vulnerability; social buffers and protection; banking soundness; banking dependency on the rest of the world; bank profitability. [https://research.euromed-economists.org/pillar-3-economic-preparedness/]
Labour market may be of a hysteretic nature, and unemployment, which might in principle be temporary, could persist. There are several factors suggesting a prolongation of the influence of current shocks on future labour market conditions in the Arab Mediterranean countries. The list is broad. It includes the ability of firms to hire, the consolidation of their financial situation and the use of cost-cutting strategies, notably through the adoption and dissemination of new technologies and the adoption of capital-based techniques and best practices, structural rigidities, which prevent a certain fluidity between supply and demand, the loss of attractiveness and employability of the long-term unemployed due to the depreciation or even obsolescence of their skills or simply lack of notification, etc.

Tackling the surge in unemployment and reducing the inequalities caused by the pandemic thus requires not only short-term measures, but also long-term ones. In the shorter term, we propose businesses be given support, that the support be personalized and its implementation well-orchestrated. Government support alone would be limited and alternative funding options and sources should be considered (crowdfunding, microfinance, solidarity finance, etc.). Also, training should be used as a lever for resilience, equity and sustainability. All this should be accompanied by an improvement in the business climate, especially in the southeastern Mediterranean.

Another imperative is to halt the deterioration in the living conditions of thousands of households, while a large proportion of workers in Arab countries do not benefit from any unemployment insurance scheme; private sector workers, including the informal sector, are particularly at risk. Promoting greater formalization of the economy is vital to ensure a minimum of protection for the most vulnerable workers. This is also the case with regard to broadening the membership base of social security schemes and promoting job loss indemnity.

The crisis associated with the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the mobilization of significant government resources to undertake health, economic...
and social responses. In this context, there are a number of macro-economic risks to be monitored, particularly with regard to public finances and fiscal space.

The inequalities caused by the pandemic may not only occur in the short term, but are also likely to last over time.

In the longer term, the key lies in accelerating economic transformation in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region. Indeed, accelerating the structural transformation of economies is necessary in order to respond in quantity, but above all in quality, to the job demands of the millions of young people who enter the region’s labour markets every year. Moreover, young people (15-24 years old) and women seem to be over-represented in the jobs most at risk of automation, and therefore of disappearance. They need to be prepared for the labour market of tomorrow, when today more than ever, it is widely acknowledged that the world of work is experiencing an acceleration of these changes under the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Marco Cocciarini
Destination Manager & Tourism Business Developer, Ancona

Exactly 20 years ago I was reading a post published by WWF (World Wildlife Fund) about the opening of the annual Berlin tourism fair in which the big players of organized tourism were warned about the environmental and cultural risks that mass tourism posed for the Mediterranean tourist destinations over the following twenty years. It predicted for 2021 that total tourist arrivals would exceed 350 million a year and that this figure would mean a substantial destruction of the ecosystems in these territories. If we consider that the overall figure for Europe, source UNWTO, for 2019 (pre-Covid) was 746 million arrivals, we can now make some concrete assessments on the actual environmental, cultural and ethical sustainability of the “mass” tourism model. Multiple factors have led to these high numbers. The first is the development of air traffic following the affirmation of the “low cost” model, which democratized the possibility of travelling by transferring the costs, both economic and environmental, from the tourists themselves to the local communities. Another determining factor was the dizzying growth of cruise traffic. In both cases there are entire economies that have sprung up and are thriving right around the hubs of these two types of transport. In addition to these, there are other two factors that have contributed substantially: the “aerification” of the more “famous” urban centres in particular and the impact of social media and reviews on tourists’ purchasing choices. Then came Covid-19.

Mediterranean Tourism Brand: A Recipe for Dealing with Covid-19

The entire world’s tourism sector found itself completely unprepared for the coronavirus epidemic, which was particularly the case for the Mediterranean area because of the inherent fragility in the long-term unsustainability of mass tourism. In fact, this type of tourism is particularly sensitive to uncertainty and insecurity, based precisely on distribution models that focus on “all inclusive” and “no worries.” In fact, it should be noted how the Arab Spring had already had a strong impact on Egypt and Tunisia.

The first thing that the pandemic has made everyone realize, including mass tourists, is that environmental, ethical and social choices and the purchase of tourist services that are not centred on individual responsibility are no longer sustainable. Therefore, if fear has begun to move individual consciences towards more responsible tourism, now is the time to rethink the entire Mediterranean tourism offer. From the handbook of the European Travel Commission (2020), we ascertain the main trends that can help us to define key concepts that are useful for the entire Mediterranean Basin.

In addition to the obvious purchasing choices focused on active tourism, in open and non-crowded spaces, the growing desire to show oneself, especially on social media, as safe and responsible is very important, and has actually become a major factor. In short, new influencers will no longer have to adapt to glamorous destinations but rather to niche destinations, where well-being and attention to the impact on the environment are the keywords.

The transition is epic and there can be only one answer: unite. Let’s assume that the tourist destinations of the Mediterranean were united under a single umbrella brand where local peculiarities are kept and preserved but unnecessary parochialism is overcome, what would we get?

Mass tourism is particularly sensitive to uncertainty and insecurity, based precisely on distribution models that focus on “all inclusive” and “no worries”

I have tried to analyze the hypotheses by working on three themes.

**Digital, Sustainable and Shared Tourism: Three Recipes for Real Cooperation between the Tourist Destinations of the Mediterranean**

The first of the great challenges that the Mediterranean must take up to transform itself into a tourist destination is that of the widespread digitalization of services, meaning not only the accommodation facilities in Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) but also, and above all, the suppliers of tourist experiences that are increasingly becoming the real reason for choosing a destination by relegating accommodation (and catering) to simple commodities. Functional but simple and economic technological tools must be adopted in order to be truly inclusive towards all realities, regardless of technological skills and tourist flows. Making everything bookable online allows you to develop the entire destination based on the unique and unrepeatable attractions that each shore of the Mediterranean has to offer, overcoming linguistic and logistical barriers and helping to perceive all destinations as safe, even in terms of health. This leads to the creation of dynamic interrelations between destination and tourist in real time. Both of these features involve an exchange of data, and managing this data becomes the key to managing target strategies.

A good example of data management in tourism could be the Onlylyon CRM tool from the city of Lyon. Onlylyon has developed its first city-scale CRM tool. This has been used to gain a greater understanding of visitors, and to improve the way they are guided around the city. The principle of Onlylyon Experience is to compile a common database of customer-related information (currently containing close to 2 million contacts). Onlylyon Experience resides in its extensive knowledge of the entire area, which means that it is able to provide visitors with highly relevant information and advice. The messages being sent out to visitors aim to enhance the customers’ experience and enable them to truly enjoy all aspects of the city. This system can also be used to send itinerary suggestions, thus reducing traffic in congested zones during peak periods.2

The second challenge is to expand the areas used for tourism, not only as described above, by digitalizing the experience providers, beginning with those in the less developed tourist areas and hinterland, but above all by finding new activities to be carried out in open spaces, in contact with nature, possibly in an active way, thus generating well-being for oneself and for the host community. Sustainable tourism also means striving for “well-being tourism,” based on doing something in the destination of choice so it can be configured as a sporting or even hiking/walking tour activity to extend the concept of experiential tourism, in which one is an active part of the performance of the host. This too could allow the Mediterranean destinations of mass tourism to upgrade their hospitality proposal by extending the flows beyond the summer

2 Find out more at: www.onlylyon.com
season and above all by spreading the economic benefits of these flows throughout the territory.

More and more travellers are asking to be protagonists of their experiences and love solutions combining tourism, entertainment, education and relational well-being with locals. The Artès Project proposes some small but useful innovations and, just as salt is useful in the kitchen (you only need a little to give flavour), the methodological system of the Storyliving Experience disciplinary conceived by Artès can help raise the perception of an innovative offer that is more attractive but safe and of high quality and professionalism. This can help bring new flows of higher-value “experiential” tourists to Italy, motivated to have special experiences tailored to be truly memorable, unique and unrepeatable. Each story is designed around a special passion shared between the “Artès Operator” and the prosumer (proactive consumer).³

Travellers are asking to be protagonists of their experiences and love solutions combining tourism, entertainment, education and relational well-being with locals.

The third challenge is the shared understanding between the Mediterranean destinations which, it is hoped, can collaborate with each other to develop products, commercial and logistic synergies, and the tourists themselves who, it is hoped, can collaborate with each other to spread the growing sense of responsibility that each of us should have towards the environment and the community we are about to visit. An example of this could be the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO). Originally established in 1989, it is headquartered in Barbados and operates offices in New York and London. The CTO serves as the tourism development representative office for more than 30 countries and territories, and a myriad of allied private sector members from the Caribbean. The natural beauty and the year-round warm weather draws many visitors from around the world to the Caribbean. With a large number of visitors each year, the CTO is missioned to provide the services and information needed for developing sustainable tourism for the social and economic benefits of the Caribbean countries.

Everything starts from the individual choices of those who will be the new tourists, and who have been affected by the pandemic, not so much in economic but psychological terms.

The CTO has been working with various countries and territories to provide instruments for collaboration in tourism. Their instruments are critical in maximizing economic results while minimizing the adverse social and psychological impact on the integrity of the Caribbean countries.⁴

After all, everything starts from the individual choices of those who will be the new tourists, and who have been affected by the pandemic, not so much in economic but psychological terms. This event has radically changed our approach to travel and we are still struggling to recognize it. The younger generations, from millennials onwards, are the custodians of this new approach and with their purchasing choices they will shape the future strategies of Mediterranean tourist destinations.

Bibliography


³ www.progettoartes.it/turismo-esperienziale-professionale/

The Education Paradox in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean – Youth, Human Capital and Transition to Work

Nicola Scarrone
European Training Foundation, Torino

This article aims to demonstrate that education is a success factor in the southern and eastern Mediterranean (SEMED) region and that if certain conditions hold true, it can act as a driver for growth, development and inclusion. Relevant skills, especially digital and green, are a prerequisite to achieving economic revival and moving towards a more sustainable and equitable labour market. The findings in this article are based on the recent ETF report (2021), “Youth in transition in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean: Identifying profiles and characteristics to tap into young people’s potential,” which included case studies in Egypt and Jordan. The report takes the status of the outlook for young people in the region in relation to the changing labour market and social conditions and offers policy reflections to improve the situation.

Regional Overview: Persistently High Youth Unemployment, the Gender Gap and Underutilization of Human Capital

For the young people in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region, the labour market situation presents several challenges and a shortage of economic opportunities, Israel being an exception to the rule. Unemployment rates in the region are much higher for young people than for the total population and, conversely, employment rates are much lower than for the total population, showing steady or negative trends over the past decade. Youth unemployment across the Arab Mediterranean countries (AMCs) is among the highest globally, providing a major challenge for policymakers in these economies. The figures further worsen in the case of young women, in spite of a much lower activity rate in the first place: less than 20% participate in the labour market in all AMCs, and those who do, are almost twice as likely to be unemployed than men. In Algeria, Jordan and Palestine, not even one in ten young women are active in the labour market, and of these, more than one in two faces unemployment, reaching rates as high as 67% in the case of young Palestinian women.

What sets the region apart from most other parts of the world is a high unemployment rate among tertiary educated youth. Although in recent decades, it can be observed that countries in the region have made significant progress in expanding access to education, especially among women, the improved education level of the population in the region has not translated into better labour market outcomes. The perceived mismatch between labour demand and the supply of graduates has been a central driver behind unemployment for many countries in the region, creating a paradox whereby AMCs exhibit an inverse correlation between educational attainment and employment. In other words, increased levels of education appear to lead to

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1 The southern and eastern Mediterranean region stretches from Morocco to Syria. This article covers Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine* and Tunisia. *This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the member states on this issue.

2 Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia.

3 Literacy levels, overall educational attainment and tertiary education rates have risen substantially.
**CHART 24**

**Unemployment Rate in 2019, Population 15+ and Youth**

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**CHART 25**

**Activity Rate in 2019, Population 15+ and Youth**

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higher unemployment rates, implying that youth are not receiving an adequate return on their investment in education. The latter holds especially for women, who achieve higher levels of educational attainment than men, but have failed to attain better labour market outcomes (the unemployment rate of women with tertiary education in 2019 exceeded 30% in the majority of SEMED countries, reaching a worrying 48% in Palestine). Higher education qualifications are often poorly used, either through underqualified employment or because young women with university degrees withdraw completely from the labour market. Unemployment, however, does not provide the full picture of the real situation of youth in these countries. Among the large youth cohorts in SEMED, there is a significant share who are neither in education nor employment. The region is in fact also characterized by high rates of NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training), whereby many young people are excluded from the market, are inactive or disengaged (more than one in four youths in all AMCs). A remarkable percentage of NEETs in the region is composed of inactive, mostly educated females, due to the dominant traditional role of women as caregivers, who often disengage from the labour market to cater to family and home duties. Therefore, there is a great deal of youth labour underutilization across the countries of the region, with an especially high youth labour underutilization rate for women.4

The inability of the economies to generate enough decent formal work for the growing number of youths is one of the main driving forces behind the precarious labour market situation. Many young people who enter the labour market are forced into the informal

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4 The youth underutilization rate in this context is defined as the sum of the non-utilized labour potential (unemployed and inactive non-students) and the underutilized potential of young workers in precarious situations (such as a lack of contract, social security and benefits, long working hours, etc.). The youth labour underutilization rate reached 46% in Palestine, 44% in Tunisia, 34% in Jordan and 26% in Lebanon, with a consistently higher youth underutilization rate among females compared to males, across the countries (DIMOVA, R., ELDER, S., and STEPHAN, K. 2016, Labour market transitions of young women and men in the Middle East and North Africa, ILO)
economy (48% of employed youth in Jordan, 60% in Lebanon, 92.2% in Egypt, 86.1% in Tunisia and a staggering 95% in Palestine in 2015\(^5\)), with poor working conditions and limited social security. Many youths also end up in jobs which are not in line with their skills and qualifications with high occupational mismatches; a situation that suggests the rigidity of the education systems. As a result, many higher-qualified graduates have to accept positions below their level of formal qualifications or remain unemployed. In addition, vertical mismatch is reflected in the significant increase in university enrolment, which is not sufficiently matched by demands from occupations requiring higher levels of education. The private sector, which elsewhere in the world is an important driver of youth employment, is underdeveloped in the region. SEMED countries have, historically, largely relied on the public sector as a source of employment. In recent decades, however, the large public sectors have been shrinking considerably, thus offering little in the way of new openings for young people (especially true for women, given their high tendency to work for the public sector). Concurrently, the large industries that were recently privatized are still trying to find their way in a competitive international environment, while small businesses often operate in the informal economy and lack the resources needed to help young people transition from school to work.

Education as a Success Factor in Egypt and Jordan

Building on more in-depth evidence regarding the situation of young people in two case studies, Egypt and Jordan, the report points to innovative findings on the role of education, which put in question the traditional yet recurrent labour market analysis. In both country-case studies (Egypt and Jordan), the fact that young university graduates display both higher unemployment rates and employment rates suggests that youth with tertiary education face strong challenges in entering the world of work, but also that higher education pushes young people to enter the labour market (either as employed or unemployed), and therefore keeps them active and possibly engaged.

NEETs aged 15-29 years old constitute one-third of all young people in both pilot countries (8 million in Egypt and 0.9 in Jordan), with the majority of them being women. However, the situation is changing over time, revealing important shifts among young people. Egypt, for example, shows increasing percentages of students to the detriment of the share of caregivers. These changes occurred differently in various sub-groups: between 2010 and 2016, the percentage of women in higher education increased by 10 p.p., and the share of homemakers dropped by 15 p.p. The latter may suggest important upcoming labour market shifts in relation to gender, with significantly more young women in education, who could potentially enter the labour market in the near future. In fact, in spite of a fairly stable youth NEET rate in Egypt between 2010 and 2016, taking a closer look at the gender dimension reveals an important trend: in this period the share of NEETs among women has been steadily falling, while young men are experiencing the opposite: they are significantly less often employed and more often unemployed. This implied a significant reduction in the NEET gender gap: in 2010, the difference was 52.4 pp, whereas in 2016 it halved to 28.5 pp.

A two-step cluster analysis classifying NEETs into major segments shows that Egypt and Jordan display similar characteristics: the most important distinction is in fact gender, as women constitute more than 70% of the NEETs aged 15-29 in both countries. The typical NEET profiles consist of either single unemployed men actively looking for work, or married caregiving women who have disengaged from the labour market: most female youths not in employment or education are caregivers (75% and 87% in Egypt and Jordan respectively in 2016) and have a family, while the majority of young NEET men never married and declare themselves as unemployed (63% in Egypt and 75% in Jordan in 2016). The discouraged workers consist mainly of men (around 70% of the category in both countries in 2016), and more often people with primary education. In both countries, the effect of education on the probability of being NEETs is U-shaped: the likelihood of becoming a NEET increases for those with no education and higher levels

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6 Microdata quantitative analysis of Labour Force Surveys in Egypt and Jordan (2010-2012-2014-2016), online consultation meeting with stakeholders, interviews with key experts in each of the SEMED countries concerned, and two ad-hoc, small-scale surveys with youth in Egypt and Jordan.

7 NEETs are classified as unemployed caregivers, discouraged workers (“inactive” not employed and not looking for a job), disabled and other (not specified).

8 This statistical technique identifies groups of respondents that exhibit similar response patterns, taking into account various attributes, i.e. not only those related to the labour market itself (such as being unemployed), but also social and demographic. It allows all young NEET people to automatically be grouped in a way that maximizes the differences between groups and minimizes the variations within a group.

9 In Egypt, the category of “discouraged worker” has increased significantly, rising from 3.4% for men in 2010 to 25.3% in 2016. This implies that a large portion of Egyptian youth are inactive and not looking for a job, thereby signalling a deterioration of the labour market situation (or at least of its perception), especially for young men.
of education, while primary and general high-school graduates display lower rates.
To explore the correlation between educational attainments and the probability of certain labour market outcomes, several logistic regressions were applied to LFS data. The main conclusion of these analyses is that education is a success factor in both countries in terms of employment chances, albeit in different ways. Not all is gloomy, then. In Egypt, a person with tertiary education has the highest chances of being employed: almost 13 times more likely than a person with general secondary education. A similar situation, with a much lower odds ratio, is noted for below primary, again suggesting the U-shaped effect of education. The next important predictor is gender: being a man increases the probability of employment by 595% compared to being a woman. The same holds in Jordan, where young men are 16 times more likely to be employed than women. In Jordan, however, vocational education is the pathway that yields the highest return among all education levels: youth with secondary VET are 349% more likely (almost four times) to be employed than those with no education, while people with tertiary education are 238% more likely. On the other hand, the educational attainment of the household head is inversely proportional to the likelihood of being employed for a young person, as the latter decreases when the education level of the household head increases. This seems to be clearly linked to the need to find a job due to the socio-economic context of the family.

Regional Policy Reflections in Times of COVID

COVID-19 has generated a massive disruption in youth’s access to education and employment opportunities, making the complex situation in the SEE-MED region even more challenging. The resetting effect of the pandemic, however, could also represent an opportunity to accelerate the transformation toward new development models, based on a so-

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**CHART 29**

*Probability of Being Employed, Youth Aged 15-29 Year in 2016 – Results (odds ratios) of Logit Regressions*


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10 When the family head has no education, the probability of being employed for a young person is 53% and 83% higher than when the household head has secondary education, in Egypt and Jordan respectively, and 32% - 73% higher when the household head has primary education.
The rise in new forms of youth employment\textsuperscript{11} (e.g. the gig and platform economy\textsuperscript{12}), emerging sectors, new technologies, accelerated digitalization of jobs and new forms of digital learning are all opportunities that governments need to grasp to provide new prospects for younger generations. Fostering the transitions toward more digital and green systems comes with both opportunities and uncertainties. Building up the resilience of individuals and companies and developing agile, coordinated and targeted public policies will be key to tackling youth unemployment and improving the quality of existing jobs.

Specific support will be needed for new graduates and young women who, as shown by the most recent studies on the topic, will be disproportionately affected by COVID-19.\textsuperscript{13} Different national and international programmes have tried to address this with limited success: coordination among different initiatives has proven to be difficult. While this has negatively affected some results, several successful policy initiatives have also appeared in the region, primarily addressing youth skills and the transition from school to work, as well as reinforcing the public-private dialogue to engage in partnerships that can align the education system with labour market demands. Young people need to develop the skills needed to adapt to the rapidly evolving labour market needs. Education should increase its relevance by focusing on competencies for the 21st century and sectors with job creation potential. New technologies and new forms of employment are rapidly gaining ground in the region, and, as a rule, youth are at an advantage.\textsuperscript{14}

Basic digital skills, given their increasing importance in shaping the future of work especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, could be critical in upskilling and reskilling unemployed or inactive youth for their immediate labour market integration. Despite the unprecedented disruptions, the pandemic created opportunities for sectors such as ICT, e-commerce, finance and insurance. Digital skills will allow young people to benefit from the acceleration of digitalization, playing a vital role in school-to-work and work-to-work transitions and keeping young people and adults in their jobs. Unfortunately, the education systems of most of the AMCs have not been able to keep up with the shift towards high-tech sectors, where continued investments in education, innovation and connectivity by both the government and private sector are needed to enhance job creation in the context of high global integration and rapid technological change.\textsuperscript{15} In this regard, it might be useful to consider the key competences adopted in the EU Key Competences Framework and incorporate them in the education system. At the same time, governments need to ensure that their economic stimulus policies and measures are aligned with ambitious digital and wider environmental protection goals, for example, through measures promoting private investment in economic transformations and technological innovations such as renewable energy, smart green cities, green public transport systems and digital solutions. Such sectoral policy measures could form the basis of economic revival and represent a shift towards a more sustainable and equitable labour market.


\textsuperscript{12} The conditions offered by the gig and platform economy are intertwined with local situations and sometimes increase youth precariousness. More often, they provide jobs to young people who, alternatively, would have remained jobless or disengaged from the market. However, they pose serious risks related to job insecurity, such as unstable wages, low bargaining power and atypical working hours, all of which lead to unstable livelihoods.


\textsuperscript{14} In Tunisia, for example, a gaming community of at least 600,000 players is growing steadily. Starting as amateurs, they have formed the basis for a start-up gaming industry in the country. The country is on the verge of developing a thriving gaming industry (like South Korea), which could help create thousands of jobs: there are now five companies which are dedicated to gaming development and some of them, such as Digital Mania, are worth more than $1 million and are offering employment opportunities to youth. However, this requires state-of-the-art training and a more conducive business environment, allowing online payment and freelancer status. The industry is also attracting young women, though to a lesser extent. Tunisian gamers could help revitalize the economy and lead the country’s digitalization.

Impact of COVID-19 on Health Systems in the Mediterranean

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Since January 2020, the world has been experiencing the worst public health crisis in recent history, with the COVID-19 pandemic affecting hundreds of millions of people in more than 200 countries and territories around the world. The pandemic is challenging health systems, economies and societies around the world and creating unprecedented disruption for the global health and development community. Additionally, it is exposing the fallacy of the Western superiority paradigm; the gold-standard responses were those in East Asia and Pacific, by countries like Singapore, South Korea, China and Vietnam. Wealthier has not been healthier, at least with respect to COVID-19.

The Mediterranean is a dynamic region with diverse social, economic and demographic conditions, spanning countries in southern Europe, the Levant and North Africa regions. Countries of the Mediterranean have demonstrated different responses to the pandemic, particularly during its first wave. Italy and Spain became, at that time, the epicentres of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe. These countries – rated as some of the best prepared in the world to combat infectious diseases – have dramatically lagged behind, as they failed to recognize the magnitude of the pandemic and make decisions in real time, as the crisis was unfolding. While middle-income countries of the Mediterranean, from the Balkans to the Levant and North Africa regions managed the first wave well, despite having public health systems and economies that could not sustain the pressures of a prolonged outbreak.

In particular, the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) which is the focus of this paper encompasses 22 countries that vary in terms of population health outcomes, health system performance and level of health expenditure. Despite the varying levels of health system preparedness, the strict containment measures implemented in the very early stages of the outbreak have proven efficient in limiting human losses and the spread of the pandemic in the region, particularly during the first wave, in comparison to western Europe and the US (OECD, 2020). As new cases of COVID-19 continue to surge, countries have struggled to mitigate the public health and economic impacts of the virus, while the influx of patients continues to stretch the limits of national health systems. Responses have been particularly limited in countries that are facing conflicts and unrest.

Impact of the Pandemic on Health Systems

As of 24 May, 2021, the 22 countries of the EMR have reported a total of 9,862,629 cases, which represent about 6% of the global count, with 197,947 associated deaths (a case fatality rate (CFR) of 2%). The country that has reported the highest number of total cases in the region is Iran (2,823,887 cases; 28.6% of the region’s total), followed by Iraq (1,164,149; 11.8% of the region’s total) and Pakistan (897,468; 9.1% of the region’s total). Iran also reported the highest number of total deaths (78,381; a CFR of 2.8%) followed by Pakistan (20,177; a CFR of 2.2%) and Iraq (16,158; a CFR of 1.4%) (Charts 30 and 31). When factoring population size, a different trend is revealed: Bahrain has the highest total confirmed cases per million population followed by Lebanon and Qatar; whereas Lebanon has the highest total confirmed deaths per million followed by Tunisia and Iran.
The highest CFRs were reported by Yemen (19.6%) followed by Syria (7.2%) and Sudan (7.0%), while the lowest CFRs were reported by Qatar (0.3%) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – amounting to 0.3% – followed by Bahrain (0.4%). Testing strategies, and testing rates vary widely with the UAE and Bahrain having the highest number of tests conducted per 1 million population (WHO EMRO, 2021).

Although most countries in the Mediterranean have not been among those worst affected by COVID-19, as reflected in the relatively low number of deaths from COVID-19, the pandemic has seriously tested their public health capacities, exposing pre-existing weaknesses in health systems, as well as disparities in access to health care in several countries, particularly in conflict-affected settings (Al-Mandhari et al., 2021). At the same time, the pandemic has accelerated reform in a few important areas. These are further discussed below:

**Challenge of Upscaling Health Systems to Respond to the Outbreak while Protecting Health Workers**

With the healthcare sector being the epicentre of this unprecedented global pandemic, the surge in demand has put most health systems under immense pressure and stretched others beyond capacity; countries with fragile healthcare services and infrastructure have been affected the most. Countries are leveraging different strategies to repurpose health systems, ranging from rapid hiring, training, incentivization and certification of health workers, to the freeing up of bed space and staffing resources to accommodate surges in infected patients, to suspension of non-essential health services, to the expansion of health infrastructure and augmentation of testing capacity (Duran & Menon, 2020).

Furthermore, the pandemic has taken its toll (mental, emotional and physical) on the provider workforce. In a systematic review of infection and mortality of healthcare workers from COVID-19, the region had the highest case fatality rate (5.7 deaths per 100 infections) (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2020).

**Disruptions in the Delivery of Essential Health Services and the Medical Supply Chain**

Countries in the region have been struggling to achieve a balance between fighting the COVID-19...
pandemic and maintaining essential health services, especially for the most vulnerable populations. An estimated 75% of essential health services have some level of disruption in 13 countries of the EMR, mostly affecting routine immunizations, dental services, rehabilitation services and family planning. Countries have also reported the postponement of non-communicable disease programme activities (WHO, 2020). Additionally, 26% of countries have reported partial or complete disruption of cardiovascular emergency care since the pandemic (WHO, 2020).

Alternative strategies such as hotline support, teleconsultations (more common in high-income countries), novel approaches to ensure the supply of medicines, and redirection of patients to alternative healthcare facilities, are being used in many countries to overcome service disruptions (WHO, 2020). While disruptions in essential health services have decreased recently, levels still reach 40% in some countries (WHO, 2021). In addition, the pandemic has exposed the fragility of the medical supply chain, with shortages of personal protective equipment, ventilators and diagnostic tests in all countries.

**Exacerbation of Inequities, Exclusions and a Lack of Transparency in Health Systems**

The containment policies implemented by countries have further exacerbated health and social inequities (Al-Mandhari et al., 2021); those living in poverty and crowded conditions are at higher risks of infectious disease outbreak, yet they are unable to effectively use preventive and protective measures against infection. This raises concerns in a region which hosts the largest number of displaced persons in the world, with conflict and insecurity affecting more than half of the countries. Additionally, efforts to address the social and economic determinants of the pandemic have remained challenging and unsatisfactory, with long-term implications on health.

For COVID-19 vaccination, the contrast between countries globally, as well as within the Mediterranean, is striking. For instance, at the start of the vaccine roll-out, 80% of all global vaccines had been administered in just 10 countries, while only around 1% of the region’s almost 600 million population had received a first coronavirus vaccine shot. As of 24 May, 2021, all countries in the region have started vaccinating their populations. However, vaccination coverage is still
low, with only eight countries (UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan and Palestinian territories) reporting more than 10 doses per 100 inhabitants. Additionally, less than 5% of vaccine doses in the region have been administered in the countries facing severe or very severe humanitarian crises, reflecting major inequalities in roll-out. Furthermore, in war-affected countries or those with high levels of corruption, weak health systems and a lack of accountability, there is no guarantee that the vaccines will end up going to those who need them most (Essa, 2021). This crisis further emphasizes the importance of underlying structural issues facing health systems, such as transparency and the fight against corruption, effective public procurement and open government approaches.

Exposure of Inefficient Curative-oriented Service Delivery Models with Inadequate Engagement of Private and Non-state Sectors

The pandemic revealed the inefficient service delivery models in the region which are oriented towards hospital provision and not well aligned with a high non-communicable disease profile in most countries. This also reflects the underinvestment in primary healthcare, prevention and public health, which makes health systems more vulnerable to pandemics. This has been exacerbated by the historically low investment in the region’s healthcare sector. Additionally, in most Mediterranean countries (except Lebanon), the healthcare system is mainly public, but with an increasing private sector prevalence. Countries from the region have engaged with the private sector in different ways and to varying degrees in the fight against COVID-19. At the same time, the pandemic demonstrated that systematic and comprehensive engagement with non-state actors seems to be absent from countries’ national response. Furthermore, country efforts have overlooked the important role that other actors such as civil society can play in extending critical services and providing social support and care to vulnerable populations.

Ineffective Use of Information Technology in Order to Make Informed Data-driven Decisions

Comprehensive and reliable data are critical to understand the implications of a health crisis, generate meaningful epidemiological research and develop prompt and contextualized responses (Wehbe et al., 2021). Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies longstanding underinvestment and undervaluation of routine sources of data, a dearth of available disaggregated data and challenges to data sharing across several countries of the region. The pandemic can serve to push for more comprehensive, robust, disaggregated and publicly available evidence (Wehbe et al., 2021).

Acceleration of Progress towards Multisectoral Action and Digital Health

The pandemic is also accelerating some reforms that would have otherwise taken longer. For example, it has triggered efforts towards multisectoral action – a longstanding problem in the region, where siloed ministries and vertical information flows are the norm. While the majority of countries have established national multisectoral coordination mechanisms, permanent multisectoral structures and mechanisms are preferred for their improved chance of sustainability and longevity. The coronavirus outbreak has also hastened the move towards digital health. Several countries have leveraged innovative tech solutions in areas such as contact tracing or online consultations. Yet, there are still wide variations in the readiness of individuals, businesses and societies to embrace a more digitized future.

Implications and Lessons: A Call for Action

At the Country Level

A new vision is needed if we are to strive for health systems that are accessible for all, affordable, of high quality, inclusive, equitable and contribute to the achievement of social justice and prosperity. We need to:

— Develop and update a multi-sectoral emergency preparedness plan encompassing the following main dimensions: stewardship and governance, information management systems, human resources, medical products and supplies, financing, service delivery and community preparedness;

— Scale-up public health system capabilities and human capacity for a more proactive and swift response;
— Re-orient predominantly sick care and curative-oriented health systems towards preventive and primary care;
— Enhance government stewardship and leadership capacity to steer a whole-of-government and whole-of-society response;
— Adopt a Health in All Policies approach and institutionalize multi-sectoral mechanisms with clearly delineated roles, responsibilities and decision-making authorities;
— Incorporate multiple accountability systems and enforcement tools to increase accountability and reduce corruption in health systems;
— Strengthen and institutionalize the use of evidence in health policymaking and practice, invest in robust health information systems and continue to harness and capitalize on technological and data innovations to generate more relevant, timely and high-quality data to inform decision-making.

At the Regional Level

While individual countries of the region might be implementing some protectionist strategies during the pandemic, there is a need for more cooperation, coordination, solidarity and support between countries of the region to effectively control the situation. This requires dialogue across regional member states to agree on key measures as a basis for strengthening forms of cross-border cooperation.

At the Global Level

The COVID-19 pandemic reminds us that no country acting alone can respond effectively to health threats in a globalized world. Global governance is necessary to coordinate the global health response. Yet, global governance systems have failed to inform the fair production, procurement and distribution of resources needed to test and treat COVID-19 infected individuals, revealing deep fissures in global health governance. The ongoing battle for scarce vaccines also highlights the lack of legally binding mechanisms that hold market actors accountable for failing to act for the public good, and the absence of global mechanisms for coordinating the pooling and sharing of resources (Ekström et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to transform the global health governance landscape, as well as establish and update global governance mechanisms that better reflect the contemporary geopolitical order and truly encourage international collaboration across countries and sectors.

References


Food Security in the Mediterranean Region: Ensuring Food Supplies in Times of Pandemic

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COVID-19 has raised serious concerns about food security in the world. As early as June 2020, the chief economist of the World Food Programme (WFP), Arif Husain, titled an opinion piece published by the New York Times: “After the Pandemic, a Global Hunger Crisis.”\footnote{Husain, Arif, “After the Pandemic, a Global Hunger Crisis?”, The New York Times, 12 June, 2020. www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/opinion/coronavirus-global-hunger.html} At the time of writing (April 2021), IFPRI has just published a report stating that “COVID-19 caused widespread loss of livelihoods and incomes, threatening the food security, health and nutrition of poor and marginalized people around the world.”\footnote{Swinnen, Johan and McDermott, John, (eds.) COVID-19 and global food security, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), 2020. www.ifpri.org/publication/covid-19-and-global-food-security} Food security is indeed multidimensional and the pandemic has impacted several of these dimensions in multiple ways and will continue to do so. In addition, these impacts are quite variable in time and space, depending on the specifics of local situations. What about the Mediterranean region? The purpose of this essay is to answer this question. The main focus will be placed on ensuring food supplies in southern Mediterranean countries, because the political and geopolitical stakes involved are huge. But in addition to these concerns about availability, we will also consider the issues linked to another “pillar” of food security,\footnote{We refer here to the definition of food security formulated by the UN Committee on Food Security in 2009: Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The four pillars of food security are availability, access, utilization and stability.” This definition is the result of long debates, negotiations and compromises. It expresses the current international consensus on the multiple dimensions involved. All of them have already been, and will continue to be, affected by the pandemic.} namely access to food, because these issues are also important on both the North and South shores of the common sea. In addition, they may be even more important than availability issues in terms of human welfare. After a review of the impacts of the pandemic on these two aspects of food security, we will reflect on the future: what can we expect in terms of future threats and what policy implications should be derived from these threats?

**Impact of COVID-19**

**On Availability**

The pandemic has affected food supplies in various ways; the most immediate impact has been due to disrupted logistics caused by the various sanitary measures taken by governments restricting the movements of people and goods. These have directly affected agro-industries and the various food value chains. Such difficulties have been reported in the cases of Turkey, Albania, Morocco and Egypt in particular.\footnote{Much of the empirical evidence quoted in this essay is derived from a report prepared by CIHEAM in 2020, based on a review of the literature, on the consultation of various documents and data available on the Internet and on interviews with knowledgeable experts from a selected set of southern and eastern Mediterranean countries (Albania, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey) [CIHEAM, The COVID 19 Pandemic: Threats on Food Security in the Mediterranean Region, 2020].} In Tunisia, a survey of agro-food enter-
prises indicated that 80% of them had faced import or supply problems. With a progressive relaxation of the sanitary disciplines, in addition to the widespread exemptions from these given to workers in the food supply chains, these negative impacts of the pandemic have subsequently diminished. In addition, there are signs that consumers have adapted their behaviour to the new situation, in particular with the development of home delivery, notably in the case of Tunisia.

Export restrictions imposed by traditional suppliers have been a major cause for concern in several southern Mediterranean countries, which are heavily dependent on imports for the supply of basic food stuffs

Export restrictions imposed by traditional suppliers have been a major cause for concern in several southern Mediterranean countries, which are heavily dependent on imports for the supply of basic food stuffs (cereals, vegetable oils and sugar in particular). And indeed in the spring of 2020, several “Black Sea” exporters, such as Russia, the Ukraine and Kazakhstan, which are important suppliers of wheat for southern Mediterranean countries, notably Egypt, introduced or seriously considered introducing export restrictions. Even Romania, the second-biggest wheat shipper in the EU and one of Egypt’s main wheat suppliers, banned wheat exports to countries outside the EU. These measures were rescinded or liberally relaxed at the end of May. But they did raise fears in our selected countries. Accordingly, the government of Algeria, for instance, was able to purchase 2.55 million tons of wheat between December 2019 and April 2020, which was well in excess of what had been planned for the 2019-2020 campaign. And this was done during a period when the Algerian government had decided to reduce its overall import bill from 44 to 31 billion US dollars because of balance of payment concerns. On 22 March, it decided to exempt the food sector from that reduction imperative. Morocco also increased its imports of cereals, barley and wheat in particular. Similarly, Albania increased its imports of cereals, pulses, milk and eggs during the first quarter of 2020 compared to the same period a year earlier. Even Turkey, which is traditionally a net importer of wheat, managed to keep importing. Domestic agricultural production has also been impacted by the pandemic. Input shortages during the planting season have been reported in some countries (e.g. Turkey). Similarly, the price of fertilizer increased in Albania, but this hike was also due to the devaluation of the Lek. In Morocco, the grain harvest was well below normal but this was due to a severe drought, not the COVID pandemic. Some impacts were positive. Generally the workforce remained available at the farm level. It was even higher than normal in some places, notably Albania, because normal seasonal migration flows to Europe, mainly to Italy in the case of Albania, were disrupted. In remote areas of Algeria, customary organizations have been mobilized to contribute to the harvest.

Retail stores were, on the whole, well prepared for the surge in demand. The stabilization of prices was also made easier by the numerous closures of hotels, restaurants and cafés and the drastic reduction in the number of foreign tourists

In several countries, Algeria and Turkey in particular, serious actual or feared disruptions have been reported in the livestock sector: shortages in Algeria of pasteurized milk sold in plastic bags, a product popular among the poor; the devaluation of the Turkish lira, which coincided with the COVID crisis, led to increases in the cost of imported livestock feed, a major input for this sector. The magnitude of the actual impact on domestic production is not clear. In Tunisia, it was reported that the harvest of fruits and vegetables, notably apricots,
peaches and tomatoes, in coastal areas such as the Cap Bon and Sahel regions had been threatened by labour shortages.

**On Access and Price Stability**

At the beginning of the pandemic, many countries experienced a phenomenon of panic buying by consumers fearing the disruption of food supply chains. This led to massive and unreasonable purchases of storable products such as flour, pasta, rice, semolina, pulses, milk powder, sugar and oils. Temporary shortages and consumer price hikes were reported in several countries. Generally, however, these did not last long as governments intervened quickly to stabilize prices through different actions, and they advertised these actions in order to reassure consumers. In addition, this period coincided with the beginning of Ramadan, traditionally a time of increased purchases of food in the countries considered here. As it happened, retail stores were, on the whole, well prepared for this surge in demand. The stabilization of prices was also made easier by the numerous closures of hotels, restaurants and cafés and the drastic reduction in the number of foreign tourists.

The greatest impact of the pandemic on demand is the result of drastic reductions in incomes through multiple channels related to the major global economic crisis. The most vulnerable sections of the population are most affected. Their food security is most at risk, as they spend a disproportionate share of their income on food expenditures. These impacts have been felt on both sides of the common sea. In the North, the most dramatic development has been the explosion in the number of people using various forms of food banks (“e.g. “Restos du Coeur” in France, FESBAL in Spain, Rete Banco Alimentare in Italy). In the South, governments responded to these shocks in a variety of ways, as illustrated by the various examples mentioned in the CIHEAM report quoted above.

Several countries of the region are extremely dependent on food imports and this situation will worsen.

But the greatest impact of the pandemic on demand is the result of drastic reductions in incomes through multiple channels related to the major global economic crisis: reductions in remittances from family members working abroad, reductions in export revenues, reduction in domestic employment particularly in the informal sectors as well as in some very vulnerable economic sectors, such as tourism and air transportation. The most vulnerable sections of the population are most affected. Their food security is most at risk, as they spend a disproportionate share of their income on food expenditures. These impacts have been felt on both sides of the common sea. In the North, the most dramatic development has been the explosion in the number of people using various forms of food banks (“e.g. “Restos du Coeur” in France, FESBAL in Spain, Rete Banco Alimentare in Italy). In the South, governments responded to these shocks in a variety of ways, as illustrated by the various examples mentioned in the CIHEAM report quoted above.

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5 None of our seven countries were among those where, according to the FAO, “prices of one or more basic food commodities are at abnormally high levels in main markets, which could negatively impact access to food at national level” www.fao.org/giews/food-prices/home/en/

6 For examples of specific measures in various countries, see the CIHEAM report quoted above.
Future Threats and Policy Implications

It is impossible to predict how long the pandemic will last and how deep the economic crisis and its various impacts on food security in specific countries will be. One thing is for sure however: the orders of magnitude involved are unprecedented. Public authorities will need to monitor these developments very closely and be prepared to intervene, perhaps massively, bearing in mind the fragility of public finances in many southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. So, effective public policies to ensure food security will be called for. Undoubtedly, governments will legitimately strive to secure adequate supplies of food through domestic production and imports.

But the main policy challenge for public authorities will be to ensure access for the most vulnerable sections of the population in both urban and rural areas. As already indicated, governments of the region have a rich experience in this domain. Yet, effectively targeting the poor is always difficult. Useful lessons can be learnt from recent innovative policy experiments in other regions, notably in sub-Saharan Africa. These are based on the recognition that the livelihood systems of poor households are complex and often change rapidly. They need to be monitored closely and frequently. In this respect, the use of new “high frequency” household survey instruments has proven to be very effective in several cases. Similarly, IFPRI has reported that a host of diverse innovations, involving governments and private actors, have been observed in food supply chains around the world in recent months.

In conclusion, southern and eastern Mediterranean countries have weathered the pandemic crisis relatively well. The number of cases and the number of deaths appear quite moderate when compared to other countries and other regions. Several countries, notably Israel and Morocco, launched vigorous vaccination campaigns and, globally, the food security crisis has not been very severe. Yet, the concern for the future remains very serious. Several countries of the region are extremely dependent on food imports and this situation will worsen. And the weakest sections of the population are very vulnerable. Strong and innovative public policies will be called for to ensure food security for all.
The Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (UN) recognize food security and nutrition as priorities for the global development agenda. Fish\(^1\) plays an important role in global food provision and is a key source of protein, accounting for 20% of animal protein consumed by humans. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that in 2019, world capture fisheries and aquaculture production (excluding aquatic plants) was 178 million tonnes; with aquaculture production reaching 48% of the total, up from 13% in 1990.

In fact, while world capture fisheries have remained stagnant at around 90 million tonnes yearly over the last few decades, aquaculture production has continued to grow. Most of the aquaculture production and growth has taken place in East Asia, although, southern and eastern Mediterranean countries\(^2\) have also seen a significant development, collectively increasing production in the region by 160% over the last decade. In contrast, the European Union (EU) Mediterranean countries saw only a 7% increase since 2010.

According to the FAO, Mediterranean countries produced over 6.6 million tonnes of fish in 2019\(^3\) from aquaculture and capture fisheries, including inland activity and in other seas. Of this total production, 31% was from the Mediterranean Sea.

Marine Aquaculture in the Mediterranean Sea

Of the 2 million tonnes of marine fish production in the Mediterranean region in 2019, 43% came from aquaculture. Despite the slight predominance of capture fisheries as the main production source, aquaculture is highly significant for several Mediterranean countries and plays an increasing role in fish supply. In fact, while marine fish production in the region increased by 15% compared to 2010; this was entirely due to aquaculture (+71%) as capture fisheries declined by 8%.

Mediterranean marine aquaculture is dominated by finfish, comprising 83% of the total production, followed by molluscs (16%). This contrasts with the situation back in 2000, which saw a more balanced production between fish and molluscs. The sector is also heavily concentrated in the region, with Egypt producing 31% of the total quantity in 2019, followed by Turkey (29%), Greece (14%) and Italy (12%).

Main Marine Aquaculture Species in the Mediterranean Sea

Gilthead seabream (Sparus aurata) and European seabass (Dicentrarchus labrax) are the most commonly farmed species in the Mediterranean Sea, at 464,000 tonnes and USD 2.24 billion in 2019. More than 95% of the world’s seabream and seabass production comes from aquaculture, of which

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\(^1\) In this article, fish includes seafood, and both words are used indistinctly.

\(^2\) In this article, we focus on the Mediterranean Sea without considering the Black Sea because of the significant differences between the two basins; we also consider all the Turkish marine aquaculture as Mediterranean even if part of its production takes place in the Black Sea.

\(^3\) It should be noted that several Mediterranean countries have capture fisheries and aquaculture production in other sea basins (e.g. France, Morocco and Spain).
TABLE 11  
**Capture Fisheries and Aquaculture Production in Mediterranean Countries (2019)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mediterranean aquaculture (tonnes)</th>
<th>Mediterranean aquaculture over total production (%)</th>
<th>Capture fisheries (tonnes)</th>
<th>Capture fisheries over total production (%)</th>
<th>Aquaculture (tonnes)</th>
<th>Other aquaculture (tonnes)</th>
<th>Total seafood production (tonnes)</th>
<th>Mediterra- nean aquaculture over total production (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>4,541</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>16,769</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>5,938</td>
<td>2,772</td>
<td>13,251</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>2,180</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>13,360</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>2,136</td>
<td>2,625</td>
<td>2,611</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1,108</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>15,925</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>109,260</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>15,925</td>
<td>64,019</td>
<td>80,506</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>8,025</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>48,460</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>8,025</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>80,506</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>272,223</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>773,353</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1,060,739</td>
<td>2,392,118</td>
<td>3,481,754</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>15,617</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>84,555</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>154,957</td>
<td>674,618</td>
<td>829,573</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>126,383</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>560,905</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>560,905</td>
<td>82,232</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>3,545</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>31,498</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3,545</td>
<td>1,070</td>
<td>5,611</td>
<td>94%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>106,632</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>360,384</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>106,632</td>
<td>174,689</td>
<td>281,321</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>220</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2,610</td>
<td>2,639</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>4,041</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>37,620</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
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<td>1,531</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>1,130</td>
<td>1,810</td>
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<tr>
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<td>192</td>
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<td>1,715</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>23,651</td>
<td>26,651</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6,170</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>75,926</td>
<td>80,492</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>914</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1,546</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>914</td>
<td>107,477</td>
<td>118,424</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>43,843</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>327,346</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>246,705</td>
<td>644,720</td>
<td>891,445</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>21,848</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>90,431</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>90,431</td>
<td>107,477</td>
<td>320,845</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>255,668</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1,015,522</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>355,668</td>
<td>431,572</td>
<td>783,138</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>882,111</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3,481,754</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>3,481,754</td>
<td>6,011,860</td>
<td>6,605,779</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FAO.
97% is produced by Mediterranean countries. The main producers are Turkey and Greece, while the main consumers are Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Turkey. Initially, this activity suffered from slow development due to difficulty in producing large quantities of good quality fry. Improvements at hatcheries in the late 1980s lead to the increased supply of juveniles, and since 2009, the production of sea-bass has increased by 115% and seabream by 95%. This increase was mainly due to Turkey, which increased production of both species (+217%).

Despite the slight predominance of capture fisheries as the main production source, aquaculture is highly significant for several Mediterranean countries and plays an increasing role in fish supply.

Other important farmed species in terms of quantity are mullets and mussels. Mullets (*Mugil cephalus*) are farmed almost exclusively by Egypt. The expansion of mullet farming is limited because it depends mainly on wild fry. Mediterranean mussel (*Mytilus galloprovincialis*), at 99,200 tonnes in 2019, is the fourth most farmed species in the region. The main producers are Italy (62% of the region’s production) and Greece (24%).

In terms of value, bluefin tuna represents 6% of the total production value, while overall contributing to less than 1% of the quantity.

### Country Profiles

**EU Countries**

While seafood consumption in EU countries has traditionally been high, averaging around 25 kg per capita per year, only around one third of the seafood consumed is produced in the EU. The main species consumed are tuna, cod and salmon.

**Greece** is the third biggest producer in the Mediterranean region, accounting for 14% of the total production in weight (126,400 tonnes) and 16% in value (USD 561 million) in 2019. The production of seabream and seabass amounted to 55,452 tonnes and 41,237 tonnes, respectively. Other significant productions include Mediterranean mussel and red porgy.

**Italy** is also one of the top producers in the region, contributing 12% in weight and 10% in value in 2019. The main species are mussel (62,000 tonnes), rainbow trout (33,000 tonnes), Japanese carpet shell (31,000 tonnes), seabream (7,400 tonnes) and seabass (5,700 tonnes).

**Spain** is the fifth most important producer in the region, accounting for 5% of the total production in weight and 9% in value in 2019. Around 20% of Spain’s total aquaculture production comes from the Mediterranean Sea.
Products include seabass (16,300 tonnes), seabream (9,700 tonnes) and bluefin tuna (above 1,000 tonnes in recent years). Three-quarters of the seabream and seabass production takes place in the Mediterranean, while the majority of mussel and turbot production is in Atlantic waters.

In Croatia, the main farmed species include seabream (6,750 tonnes), seabass (6,100 tonnes), common carp (2,450 tonnes), and bluefin tuna (1,400 tonnes). France contributes to 2% in weight and value of the aquaculture production in the region (like Spain, most aquaculture production takes place in Atlantic waters). In the Mediterranean Sea, the chief species produced are mussel and Pacific cupped oyster. Cyprus produces mainly seabream and seabass; 5,200 tonnes and 2,800 tonnes in 2019, respectively. Malta’s farmed bluefin tuna production has stood at over 8,000 tonnes in recent years, while seabream production reached around 2,000 tonnes. Slovenia relies mainly on imports for its seafood supply, largely due to the country’s short coastline (46 km). In addition to trout farming, aquaculture comprises mainly mussel (800 tonnes) and seabass (90 tonnes) production.
North African Countries

The main fish production in most North African countries comes from capture fisheries, while for Egypt and Israel, aquaculture is the main source of seafood. Seafood consumption varies greatly by country.

**Egypt** is the largest producer of marine aquaculture in weight and second in value in the region. The main species are Nile tilapia (876,000 tonnes), mullets (157,000 tonnes), other cyprinids (65,000 tonnes), common carp (30,000 tonnes), seabream (16,000 tonnes) and seabass (14,000 tonnes).

**Morocco**’s seafood production comes mainly from capture fisheries, with aquaculture representing less than 0.1%. **Tunisia** produces about 18,000 tonnes of seabream and almost 3,000 tonnes of seabass. **Algeria** produces almost 1,000 tonnes of freshwater cyprinids; the production of other species is very limited.

Other (Eastern) Mediterranean Countries

This group represents a very heterogeneous set of countries, characterized by low to medium seafood consumption per capita.

**Turkey** is the top marine aquaculture producer in terms of value and second in quantity, producing 255,000 tonnes valued at USD 1 billion in 2019. The main species cultured are seabass (137,000 tonnes), seabream (99,700 tonnes), rainbow trout (9,400 tonnes) and mussels (4,170 tonnes), all showing increasing production trends. The sector has undergone significant development over the last few decades (+615% compared to 2000) and has become a key source of exports.

Of the 17,000 tonnes of **Israel**’s aquaculture production in 2019, 3,500 tonnes were marine and almost entirely of seabream (3,000 tonnes) and red drum (370 tonnes). **Albania** has expanded its aquaculture production over the last decade, from 300 tonnes in 2000 to 6,300 tonnes in 2019. Essentially, three marine species are cultured: seabream (2,450 tonnes), mussels and seabass (around 1,000 tonnes each). **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Montenegro** and the **Syrian Arab Republic** are all minor players, together contributing less than 1% of the total marine aquaculture production in the region.

Key Economic Indicators of the Mediterranean Aquaculture Sector

Based on data from the latest STECF report on the EU aquaculture sector, there are an estimated 1,500 aquaculture companies, employing more than 12,000 people in the EU Mediterranean region. With a production of around 330,000 tonnes and a value of over USD 1.5 billion, the sector generates a gross value added (GVA) of USD 375 million and a gross profit of USD 110 million.

Growth in the seafood industry will continue to be fuelled mainly by aquaculture, despite criticism from environmental groups and consumer concerns regarding the health and safety aspects of farmed products.

Considering that EU aquaculture represents slightly less than 40% of the total marine aquaculture in the Mediterranean and that the species cultured and techniques used by the big producers are rather similar, with perhaps the exception of Egypt, it can be assumed that the Mediterranean aquaculture sector employs more than 30,000 people, generating a GVA of around USD 1 billion and a gross profit of USD 300 million. Not to mention the important contribution of aquaculture to food and nutrition in the area.

Prospects for the Future

In December 2019, the European Commission launched the European Green Deal, the EU’s new growth strategy, which aims to cut pollution and carbon emissions, boost the efficient use of resources and restore biodiversity. The European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy, and the strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture emphasize the potential of aquaculture as a major contributor to building a sustainable and responsible food system, in particular as a low-carbon footprint source of protein. As such, the aim is to fur-
ther boost low environmental impact aquaculture, such as the production of low trophic species (micro and macro-algae), unfed production systems (such as filter feeders, e.g., molluscs), organic aquaculture and integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA).

The global seafood market has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic throughout most of 2020 and early 2021. Yet, while the HORECA sector worldwide has been hard hit by enforced lockdowns and other restrictions imposed to reduce the spread of the virus, per capita fish consumption rates remain high and are expected to continue to grow, in particular in developing nations. Growth in the seafood industry will continue to be fuelled mainly by aquaculture, despite criticism from environmental groups and consumer concerns regarding the health and safety aspects of farmed products. As the main costs in aquaculture are feed and fingerlings, the sector has the opportunity to reduce costs through technology, research and innovation (e.g., genetics, feed substitution and disease management). Lower production costs will allow for an increase in supply, while keeping prices down. Concerns about the impact of fish meal are being addressed by harvesting from sustainable sources and improving the feed conversion, thanks to new technologies and substitutions in the feed ingredients. Increased use of labelling and certification programmes (Marine and Aquaculture Stewardship Councils, organic production, etc.) also help to reduce the impact of the sector and promote consumer confidence in aquaculture products.

**Bibliography**


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The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the scope of action by cities as key local agents. When they were able to act, their role proved decisive. This is particularly noteworthy at a time when local authorities in the Mediterranean are very unequally endowed with resources from one country to another, depending on the maturity of the decentralization framework (financial endowment from the national level), and in an unprecedented period during which local revenues have been declining everywhere (usage and occupancy fees, trading licences). So what will remain of the pandemic for the cities in this region? Will the agile processes implemented as a matter of urgency last? And will the new awareness change the way cities are planned and managed?

Nearly Identical Municipal Responses, but Unequal Resources

To fight the Covid-19 pandemic, local authorities were all put to the test to respond and take action on five shared fronts: fighting the spread of the virus, support for healthcare workers, continuity of municipal services, enforcing national measures on the local level, and solidarity towards the most underprivileged. They are detailed below with concrete examples illustrating this common “block” of measures implemented by Mediterranean municipalities (or unions of municipalities). The portal www.citiesforglobalhealth.org/ has made it possible to collect and analyse the feedback published by the cities of Jezzine (Lebanon), Hebron (Palestine), Tetouan (Morocco), Sfax (Tunisia), Barcelona (Spain), Dubrovnik (Croatia) and Tirana (Albania). Even if the measures taken by the cities are ultimately very similar, demonstrating a real desire to respond in an emergency, the sources consulted reveal that the means to implement them are very unequal. The city of Hebron deplores its shortage of human, financial and technical resources to carry out sterilization and cleaning in public places and the impossibility of dissuading merchants from gathering at marketplaces. The experience of Sfax is interesting: in order to make up for the lack of municipal technical staff, and in view of the city’s growing need to support the population on the social, healthcare and psychological levels, the municipality’s actions have been undertaken by a “Volunteer Committee” established as a force to provide rapid intervention and support for the city government’s efforts, according to a daily work plan supervised in the spring of 2020 by the committee’s chair, under the direct supervision of the mayor.

What Will Remain? Lessons Learned by Cities

Municipalities, with or without sufficient means, rose to the occasion, showing responsiveness in the emergency and making it known through social networks or their websites, or through international organizations such as UN Habitat and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). In terms of learning, it is too early to assess the situation, but we can already guess that improvisation in implementing
certain measures since the spring of 2020 has revealed both a real capacity for agility on the part of cities, which acted quickly, and at the same time, a lack of experience in organizing a structured response to the crisis. Cities realized that few of them had a municipal emergency and recovery plan in place for an exceptional crisis. Covid-19 brought decision-makers face to face with an epidemic situation, a phenomenon the memory of which has been forgotten by a large majority of countries in the world, and invited them to be better prepared, to better adapt and to “get back on their feet” if other health crises were to occur in the future.

Even if the measures taken by the cities are ultimately very similar, demonstrating a real desire to respond in an emergency, the sources consulted reveal that the means to implement them are very unequal.

As we know, Covid has also triggered a reawakening of debate among experts and the general public since the spring of 2020, to the point of making the city the source of all evils, after a historically long consensus on its obviousness in the eyes of experts. Although the city still has a bright future ahead of it and “de-urbanization” is not observable as a structuring phenomenon (but rather as a temporary one in the case of the peaks and waves of the pandemic), the virus and its spread accelerated by globalization, has both put a large number of mobilities, including urban ones, on hold and revealed that many territories no longer have autonomy as soon as their borders are closed off.

In the Mediterranean region, is there evidence that mayors and their technical teams have begun to imagine other local policies beyond emergency responses to Covid-19? This is not easy to answer, as it would require a rigorous survey protocol (interviews with elected officials and technical services) and technical documentation that is not easily accessible to the general public. However, some interpretative elements can be proposed with caution.

In the field of mobility, Covid-19 will leave its mark, since it has accelerated transformations that were already in the making, at least in northern Mediterranean cities, with a growing share of active modes (walking, cycling and scootering) and experiments (temporary cycle lanes, shared bicycle repair stands, closure of roads to cars, as in Barcelona, Milan and Marseille). In terms of housing, some cities have started to think about specifications for the production of new housing (greater multi-orientation, more generous minimum surface area for each type of housing, compulsory shared spaces, high-level digital access, shared office rooms for the inhabitants).

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**TABLE 12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergency Measures</th>
<th>Example City</th>
<th>Complexity of the Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deterring the spread of the virus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of masks</td>
<td>Jezzine, Hebron</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disinfection of public places and public transport</td>
<td>Tirana, Jezzine, Tetouan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating data and liaison with national Covid monitoring</td>
<td>Jezzine</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for healthcare workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare for children of healthcare workers</td>
<td>Tetouan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity of municipal services and compensation for disruptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleanliness and sterilization of rubbish bins</td>
<td>Tirana, Jezzine, Tetouan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markets and lorry transport of essential agricultural products</td>
<td>Tetouan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforcing national measures on the local level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal police</td>
<td>Tirana, Jezzine</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity towards the most disadvantaged and affected social groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support schemes for shops and local producers</td>
<td>Dubrovnik</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid for paying housing rent</td>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting food aid and providing free meals</td>
<td>Tirana</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the local economy</td>
<td>Dubrovnik</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary table of municipal response measures in the Mediterranean (data collected and processed by the author).
Regarding local production guaranteeing greater autonomy in the event of a pandemic and better mitigating carbon emissions, it is difficult to identify cities that have put in place municipal incentives for start-up companies producing locally, enhancing know-how, and demonstrating lower environmental and social costs than goods transported from far away. Mediterranean cities would undoubtedly have a card to play next to an Asia that is hegemonic in goods and supplies of all sorts. The relaunch of mask and respirator factories in Tunisia, Morocco and France in 2020 showed the need. The revival of the economy will undoubtedly depend on the capacity of the public authorities to stimulate and encourage local entrepreneurship (through support, land, wasteland to be reclaimed and made available, subsidies and subsidized loans).

Pathways to a Stimulating Future

The Covid-19 health crisis has made us revisit the crucial question of the resilience of Mediterranean cities, including their informal settlements, and of their inhabitants and decision-makers in relation to a globalization that is showing its limits, its excesses and its threats to the global climate. It also confronts national decision-makers and mayors with their responsibilities not to contribute at their level to relaunching on a high-carbon course, a “cocktail” with well-known ingredients (long goods and merchandise channels, low prices allowed by the global market, and logistic and digital circuits increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few conglomerates).

While the drop in road and air traffic has seen a reduction in CO₂ emissions and an improvement in air quality that seemed unimaginable, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the sector’s long-term trajectory and its necessary decarbonisation will be written in the coming months and years: a return to the private car or a cycling boom, a drop in environmental standards or the emergence of the electric vehicle, green counterparts to the economic rescue of aviation… After managing the emergency, the period of counter-cyclical investments and recovery could lend priority to the agri-food chain for more productive land around cities, greener technologies in energy and mobility, and securing essential goods.

Sources and Bibliography


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In 2020, transport in the western Mediterranean was undeniably impacted by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Population lockdowns, the need to ensure health safety in operations for both passengers and workers, and the changed production and consumption patterns resulting from the unexpected situation have subjected transport and logistics to a genuine stress test to adapt to the new scenarios and contingencies.

Freight transport has largely adjusted to the new conditions. Although in the first few months of the pandemic, activity in the flows between the two shores of the Mediterranean declined, by the end of the year, the volumes being handled had bounced back. In contrast, months into the pandemic, passenger flows remain far below the levels of previous years, when they have not dried up altogether.

However, in addition to the direct effects of the pandemic on these flows and their organization, 2020 abruptly exposed the real and continuous process of transformation that transport has been undergoing for years and will continue to face in the future. The energy transition, process digitization, and the ability to adapt to disruptive events, already on the agenda of decision-makers in the past, took on renewed importance in 2020. These three processes – energy transition, digitization, and adaptation to disruptions, especially, in this latter case, to the effects of climate change – are emerging as a new paradigm that will guide transport planning in the coming years. Yet all three processes are subject to high levels of uncertainty.

In the western Mediterranean, the need to consider the elements of this new paradigm in transport planning is even more important, if possible, due to the region’s position in global supply chains, the still incomplete process of economic integration between the two shores, which retain highly different levels of development, and the projected effects of climate change, which indicate that the Mediterranean Basin will be one of the most heavily affected regions. This context calls for new policies – in many cases, already outlined – but also new tools for planning and action capable not only of taking into account the various spaces, scales, and development levels at which transport flows and the related infrastructure are inserted in the western Mediterranean, but also of managing the foreseeably high levels of uncertainty.

Decarbonization, Digitization and Adaptation: Challenges and Uncertainties

As noted, parallel to the evolution of the pandemic and the adaptation of transport to keep supply chains running at the most critical times, the planning and forecasts for the “new normal” clearly reflect the transformation process that the transport and logistics sector is facing. Proof of this process of accelerated change can be found in both communications of the European Commission explaining the need for major changes in how transport is organized and the revision of the Trans-European Transport Network, begun in April 2019, as well as in a range of other initiatives, plans and processes already underway from previous years. In this con-
text, three vectors can be identified as the driving forces of these changes. The decarbonization pro-
cess, the digitization of transport and society, and
the need to adapt to new disruptions, especially
those arising from climate change.
The decarbonization of transport had already begun
prior to the onset of the health crisis and had been
included in transport measures and planning. In
fact, the EU’s European Green Deal,\(^1\) published in
late 2019, and its Sustainable and Smart Mobility
Strategy,\(^2\) from December 2020, simply redouble
its ambition to achieve the reductions in greenhouse
gas emissions to which it committed under the
2015 Paris Agreement. This ambition is reflected in
the proposal to achieve climate neutrality by 2050,
a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by
2030 compared to 1990 levels, and, specifically in
the case of transport, a 90% reduction in CO\(_2\)
emissions by 2050. The strategy is based on making all
modes of transport more sustainable, accepting
that all must contribute to future mobility, making
sustainable alternatives more generally available,
and providing suitable economic incentives, espe-
cially through the integration of external costs.
South-western Mediterranean countries are in a
similar situation, albeit with different levels of ambi-
ton and measures, in keeping with their situation. In
Morocco, for instance, the proposed reduction in
greenhouse gases is 17% compared to the project-
ed emissions for 2030 in a business-as-usual sce-
nario. The measures largely focus on actions related
to the vehicle fleet, urban transport, and improved
logistics efficiency.\(^3\) The Maghreb countries’ de-
velopment prospects – especially the growth of urban areas, the degree
of informality in the transport sector,
and the lack of access to financing
are obstacles to progress on
more ambitious decarbonization
processes.

As the need to decarbonize transport has become
apparent in recent years, a new technological para-
digm has emerged in the production and transport
sectors based on digitization. It consists of the
adoption of innovative – and now sufficiently ma-
ture – technologies capable of transforming many
of the processes linked to transport, from the driv-
ing of all types of vehicles to the management and
exchange of information and documents. Digitiza-
tion also entails major changes in the production
and consumption processes of the system itself.

The Maghreb countries’ development
prospects – especially the growth of urban areas, the degree of
informality in the transport sector,
and the lack of access to financing
are obstacles to progress on
more ambitious decarbonization
processes.


\(^5\) IMO. Initial Draft Submission to the International Maritime Organization Entitled “Proposal to Designate the Mediterranean Sea Area, [or Parts Thereof], as an Emission Control Area for Sulphur Oxides [and Particulate Matter].” REMPEC/WG.45/INF.10, 2019.
and, thus, in its logistics organization. The European Commission highlighted the opportunities posed by the incorporation of these technologies into transport in its communication on the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, which considers the need to leverage digital solutions and smart transport systems to dramatically improve the functioning of the entire transport system, including its environmental aspects. It also emphasized the need to put measures into place to enable favourable conditions for the adoption of these technologies, amongst which data availability, access and exchange are key.

This is also reflected in the process being undertaken, at the time of writing, to revise the Trans-European Transport Network. One of the current identified problems is the network’s lack of preparedness for the adoption of technological changes, as infrastructure planning has traditionally focused on physical aspects and the need for new structures to enable the deployment of automation and other innovative technologies in the field of transport.

The countries on the southern shore also consider digitization to be key to the development and well-being of their societies in general and of transport in particular. However, the process of digitization and the adoption of new technologies in both the Maghreb and Africa as a whole will require major efforts to train human capital, prepare businesses, and provide financing.

Still, if 2020 has shown us anything, it is society’s and, in particular, the transport sector’s exposure to disruptive situations. The emergence of Covid-19 required a process of rapid adaptation of the transport system to unexpected situations that dramatically altered how things had worked until then. The need to adapt the transport system to potential new disruptions is even clearer in light of the potential effects of climate change. Indeed, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s report on the oceans and the cryosphere, as well as the first report on its specific effects in the Mediterranean, shows the impact that upticks in extreme weather events in the coming years could have on infrastructure, operations and services in the Western Mediterranean and ranks the Mediterranean as one of the regions most affected by the increasing frequency of such phenomena.

If 2020 has shown us anything, it is society’s and, in particular, the transport sector’s exposure to disruptive situations. The need to adapt the transport system to potential new disruptions is even clearer in light of the potential effects of climate change

The need to put adaptation measures into place is included in the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change from February 2021, as well as in several sectoral proposals on the various modes of transport drawn up in recent years that stress preparedness for adaptation, assessment of climate risks and vulnerabilities, the identification of and options for adaptation, and their assessment, implementation and monitoring. Growing knowledge and awareness of the possible effects and adaptation options clearly make the dissemination and

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sharing of information and knowledge amongst the various stakeholders vital. This is even more essential in the Mediterranean, where these stakeholders share common challenges and threats. The energy transition, the digitization process, and adaptation to climate change and other disruptions are the three vectors that are shaping and will continue to shape in the immediate future the transformation of the transport and logistics sector. These processes are highly uncertain themselves in terms of the form, pace, and intensity they will take on at different time horizons. On a western Mediterranean scale, they must be considered in context (sharp social and political contrasts, as well as with regard to financial capacity) and efforts must be made to cooperate globally and regionally in planning the actions to be taken to address them. Otherwise, the transport and logistics systems on each shore could evolve in clearly divergent ways, which would even further complicate the already difficult process of Mediterranean integration.

New transport planning needs and tools

In this context, there is a need to search for and develop appropriate tools to deal with the challenges and uncertainties posed by a transport system, such as the western Mediterranean one, that could potentially diverge between the two shores if an integrated approach is not taken. Certain premises must be taken into account in order to frame planning needs in terms of the western Mediterranean as a whole, namely:

— Coordination of logistics chains, whose different segments must no longer be considered independent: coordination needs for information flows, the energy transition, etc.
— Structures for coordination and cooperation between infrastructure and service operators to adapt to changes in ways that enable joint responses to shared challenges: responses to disruptions or adaptations, the ability to share information and define strategies, and joint policies.
— A regional governance system capable of intercontinental and international, but also inter-scale and intermodal integration.

In this regard, one tool for transport planning and governance is multimodal corridors, since they enable the adoption of different kinds of measures, technologies and solutions of varying scales across the infrastructure used to channel the major logistics chains, flows and transport routes, whilst also facilitating coordination between different territories and other corridors. This has been the case, for example, of the European Union in the development of the Trans-European Transport Network, in which the core network’s corridors are defined thusly:13

“42. In order to implement the core network within the given time scale, a corridor approach could be used as an instrument to coordinate different projects on a transnational basis and to synchronise the development of the corridor, there by maximising network benefits. […] Core network corridors should help to develop the infrastructure of the core network in such a way as to address bottlenecks, enhance cross-border connections and improve efficiency and sustainability. They should contribute to cohesion through improved territorial cooperation. 43. Core network corridors should also address wider transport policy objectives and facilitate interoperability, modal integration and multimodal operations. This should allow specially developed corridors which are optimised in terms of emissions, thus minimising environmental impacts and increasing competitiveness, and which are also attractive on account of their reliability, limited congestion and low operating and administrative costs. The corridor approach should be transparent and clear and the management of such corridors should not create additional administrative burdens or costs.”

In keeping with these two articles of the EU regulation, the figure of a corridor coordinator is es-

established to “facilitate measures to design the right governance structure and to identify the sources of financing, both private and public, for complex cross-border projects for each core network corridor.”

The emergence of Covid-19 also served to underscore, if not accelerate, a series of transformations and mutations facing the transport and logistics sector in the coming years.

In a similar strategy, UNCTAD promotes trans-African road corridors as development tools for the continent’s countries. Although the efforts are mostly focused on the completion of often non-existent physical infrastructure, tools for corridor governance and management are nevertheless considered key to achieving the full implementation of regulations, policies, information technology, harmonization and simplification of information exchanges. All, it must be recalled, in a completely different political and social and economic development context from that of the European Union.

One of the corridors that UNCTAD is considering is the Cairo-Dakar corridor, which runs along the entire southern Mediterranean coast and part of the African Atlantic to the capital of Senegal. This road infrastructure is part of the Trans-Maghreb Multimodal Corridor, defined by the UMA in the 1980s and promoted by GTMO 5+5, which is the cornerstone for ensuring overland trade between the countries of the region. The efforts of the last few decades have considerably modernized the land infrastructure, and much of the road and rail network is now high-capacity. Nevertheless, important missing links must still be addressed – especially at the cross-border sections – for continuous infrastructure between the countries to be achieved. A more extensive modernization of the network of ports and terminals for modal interchange is also needed, since, despite the development of new infrastructure, some ports still lack the necessary infrastructure to manage current flows.

The modernization of this corridor’s infrastructure, as well as its operation, management and governance, is vital to the process of transforming transport in the Maghreb. Its development can largely ensure the capacity needed for the Maghreb countries to successfully tackle the decarbonization, digitization and adaptation processes already underway in the transport sector. Success in the adoption of these processes will depend on the optimal insertion of the Maghreb transport system into regional and global logistics chains and flows, especially those linking North Africa and the European Union. In this regard, it is essential to put into place adequate planning mechanisms that make it possible to establish the Trans-Maghreb Corridor as an infrastructure inserted on equal technical footing in other broader networks. Hence the need to conceive of the corridor as a planning and coordination tool for various measures affecting different spaces, scales, modes or technologies.

The challenges of achieving this conception of the trans-Maghreb corridor as a planning and coordination tool are considerable. For instance, unlike in the European Union, there is a lack of political integration amongst the Maghreb countries. But the challenges involved in effectively adapting the corridor to the new conditions required by transport are no less daunting. In addition to the uncertainty surrounding technological developments related to decarbonization, digitization and the effects and pace of climate change, the process will require financing that the countries are unlikely to be able to provide.

The European Union’s aim of becoming a global leader in the process towards sustainability, expressed in the European Green Deal through, amongst other measures, technical and financial cooperation with its neighbours to the south and with Africa as a whole, must make the transformation of the Maghreb transport sector one of its main pillars. This is also reflected in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, which recognizes transport as a key sector in the neighbourhood policy and

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sets out the intention to strengthen this policy by providing technical support and cooperation and expanding the Trans-European Transport Network. This latter element is seen as key to the extension of European transport policies to its Mediterranean neighbours and, especially, the Motorways of the Sea, which are part of the Trans-European Transport Network. The extension of this network and consideration of relations with the Trans-Maghreb Multimodal Corridor must contribute to the transmission and structuring of instruments, tools, technologies and solutions, including financial ones, as similar as possible to those used in the European Union. This orientation in the area of transport towards the Maghreb and, by extension, towards Africa as a whole should be the guarantee that the transport systems on the two shores of the Mediterranean do not develop in divergent directions in the coming years in a way that would pose a new obstacle to Euro-Mediterranean integration and hinder improved relations with the rest of Africa.

Conclusions

The emergence of Covid-19 in 2020 not only disrupted logistics and supply chains and passenger flows, but also served to underscore, if not accelerate, a series of transformations and mutations facing the transport and logistics sector in the coming years. Decarbonization, digitization, and adaptation to climate change and other possible disruptions are the three vectors of important transformations, processes that are themselves subject to high degrees of uncertainty. Whilst a variety of policies and instruments exist to satisfactorily cope with and adopt these processes, not all countries are in a position to implement them equally and at the same pace. In the case of the western Mediterranean, the political, social and economic differences between the two shores could lead the development of their respective transport systems to diverge so substantially that it ends up preventing their integrated operation, for both freight and passenger flows between the Maghreb and the European Union. Whilst the latter has equipped itself with instruments that allow it to vie for global leadership in the promotion of these processes, the Maghreb countries, despite their ambitions, lack the technical and financial means needed to develop them to the same level as the European aspirations.

In this context of systemic disruption, with great uncertainties with regard to the pace, technologies, impacts and evolution, the operation and adaptation of transport and logistics requires enhanced cooperation and joint and coordinated planning tools. Transport corridors have emerged in both Europe and the Maghreb as appropriate tools for coordinating and managing the new challenges. The Trans-Maghreb Multimodal Corridor is not only an infrastructure that must guarantee the flows between the countries it crosses, but also a planning and coordination tool for the transport sector’s transition. For this to work, right now the various European transport policies must include technical and financial support for this infrastructure. Otherwise, new obstacles between the two shores of the western Mediterranean could arise as a result of transport systems on divergent technological paths.
A Post-Carbon Energy Economy: Implications for the Mediterranean Countries

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The Mediterranean region is one of the main climate change hotspots, and pushing forward the energy transition to renewable energy sources will be crucial to counter global warming and environmental degradation. However, fossil fuels continue to represent the main energy source, while renewable energy sources satisfy only a marginal share of total demand.

The green energy transition is a chance for the Mediterranean countries, and post-Covid-19 recovery plans can play a fundamental role for developing a new sustainable model of economic development. Like the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change has no borders. There is a fundamental need for an approach that goes beyond national borders, as only policies on a global scale can provide a solution to the problem of climate change.

The Need for a Global Strategy

Currently, renewable energy sources represent only 25% of world electricity production (Chart 36). This means that about 64% of electricity is produced by fossil fuels. Another important aspect is that coal, which is the most polluting fossil fuel, continues to represent the main energy source in electricity generation, with a share of about 38% in 2018 (IEA, 2020). If we consider world CO₂ emissions from fuel combustion, coal is the main polluter, with a share of 44%, followed by oil (34%), and natural gas (21%).

Yet half of total CO₂ emissions are produced by three countries: China (28%), the United States (14.6%), and India (6.8%). China has increased renewable energy, but continues to invest in coal-fired power plants. In European countries, CO₂ emissions have significantly fallen over time, because EU Member States have agreed on higher renewable energy targets. Indeed, in December 2019, the European Commission presented the European Green Deal, proposing a package of measures for decarbonizing the EU’s economy by 2050, in line with the Paris Agreement. Moreover, even if Europe reduces its emissions to zero, the problem of climate change would not be solved, because Europe represents only 8% of world CO₂ emissions. Implementing a global strategy is fundamental for decoupling economic growth from climate change.
**The Mediterranean Countries**

Diversity and inequality are the main features of the Mediterranean area, which comprises 25 countries that vary greatly in economic development and energy consumption. Population growth has been very rapid, particularly in North African and Middle Eastern countries, while the more advanced European countries have witnessed a sharp reduction in growth rates. Increasing population and economic development has led primary energy consumption in the Mediterranean region to more than double, rising from about 393 million tons of oil equivalent (Mtoe) in 1971 to about 978 Mtoe in 2016 (Bartoletto, 2020).

We are far from a decarbonized economy, and national or regional policies are not enough to fight climate change.

North African and Middle Eastern countries have been affected by a sharp increase in energy consumption, triggered by consumer subsidies, which have led to overconsumption. In the countries of North Africa, total energy consumption rose more than tenfold, from about 18 Mtoe in 1971 to 185 in 2016. While in 1971, North Africa accounted for only 4% of total consumption of the Mediterranean area, that figure has since risen to 19%. On the other hand, while EU Member States accounted for 81% of total consumption in 1971, by 2016 their share had fallen to 59%. Considering just the Latin area, in its strictest sense (Italy, France, Malta, Portugal and Spain), the reduction is even greater, from 80% to 55%.

If we consider per capita energy consumption, the gaps are considerable. In France, per capita consumption is 10 times higher than in Morocco, which is the country with the lowest per capita consumption, along with Syria. There is not only a divergence between the countries of the North and those of the South, but even within the individual areas the differences are considerable. However, the gap is narrowing, as shown by the estimation of the Gini index (Bartoletto, 2020).

**Energy Consumptions by Fuel**

The Mediterranean region is considered a major hot-spot of climate change, whose negative effects could be both substantial and numerous. Climate change is aggravating the problem of water shortages, which have already hit many African cities. There is a risk that in the coming years new conflicts will be triggered by the lack of food and water.

The energy balance of the Mediterranean region is also dominated by fossil fuels, although coal plays a limited role, and there has been a significant growth in the use of renewable energy in European countries. Oil remains the main energy source, with a 37% share of the total, followed by natural gas, with a 28% share, and nuclear, with a 12% share. Yet about 86% of nuclear consumption is concentrated in France, which has a higher percentage of nuclear-generated electricity than any other country in the world.

Coal consumption has decreased from 17% in 1971 to 10% in 2016, and it is mainly concentrated in Turkey, Israel, Morocco and the countries of the former Yugoslavia, which account for the highest proportion of coal consumption with respect to the other countries of the Mediterranean region.

Renewable energy represents 11% of total energy consumption, about three percentage points lower than the global level. However, the progress of renewables in electricity production is significant, while in other end uses it still falls short of expectations (OME, 2020).

As the Mediterranean region is currently experiencing a sharp increase in population, it is expected that in the coming decades there will be a strong rise in the demand for energy, especially in southern Mediterranean countries. Thus a major effort is required to accelerate the transition to a low carbon economy.

**The Growth of CO₂ Emissions**

Despite the increase in renewable energy, CO₂ emissions have doubled from 1971 to the present. Almost half of such emissions are produced by countries belonging to the EU. Indeed, France, Italy and Spain produce about 42% of the Mediterranean region’s total emissions.
It is expected that in the coming decades there will be a strong rise in the demand for energy, especially in southern Mediterranean countries. Thus a major effort is required to accelerate the transition to a low carbon economy.

If we consider CO₂ growth rates, there has been a reduction, which is mainly due to European countries, while in other areas, the growth has been considerable. In North Africa, during the period 2004-2016, CO₂ emissions increased by 52 percent (Table 13). The growth would have been even higher without the Libyan crisis. The highest growth rate was registered in Algeria (73.8%), where oil and gas consumption rapidly increased over the same period. High growth rates (above 50 percent) were also registered in Egypt and Morocco, despite government efforts in both countries to increase production of renewable energy. In Tunisia, too, growth was sustained (32.6%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 13</th>
<th>Growth Rates of CO₂ Emissions in North Africa (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Africa</td>
<td>178.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>273.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>131.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>391.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>110.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>118.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bartoletto (2020).

Morocco is primarily focusing on solar and wind to generate electricity for sustainable and lasting development, since it has no oil and gas reserves, but a high potential for solar energy.

Despite these policies, CO₂ emissions increased by 51% from 2004 to 2016, since coal, which is the most polluting fossil fuel, continues to represent about 22.5% of total primary consumption, and coal imports have greatly increased over time.

A similar pattern may be observed in the Middle East, where Lebanon recorded a growth of 53%, and Jordan of 43%. By contrast, in Israel, there has been a significant reduction in growth rates of CO₂ emissions.

With respect to North Africa and Middle East countries, the pattern of CO₂ emissions for European countries that are part of the Mediterranean region is completely different. Indeed, in single European countries, CO₂ emissions have significantly fallen over time.

In order to establish whether the gap between different countries of the Mediterranean region is narrowing, we calculated the Gini index on per capita CO₂ emissions for the period from 1971 to 2016.

The estimation of the Gini index confirms that the reduction in the gap also concerns per capita CO₂ emissions, as well as per capita energy consumption as seen above. We can conclude that the growth in total CO₂ emissions in North Africa and Middle Eastern countries is due not only to population growth, and increase in per capita energy consumption, but especially to the increasing share of fossil fuel consumption. The growth in North Africa and the Middle East, and contrastingly, the reduction in European countries, is leading to a reduction in the divide between developed and emerging countries within the Mediterranean region.

**Energy “Insecurity” in the Mediterranean Region**

New tensions characterize the Mediterranean region, stemming from the recent fighting between Israel and Palestine, the war in Libya and Syria, and the dispute between Greece and Turkey for the control of waters.
off the coast of Cyprus, where the subsoil is rich in hydrocarbons. Despite the 1995 Barcelona Conference and the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008, the “energy insecurity” of the Mediterranean region highlights the weaknesses of the Euro-Mediterranean integration process.

The Mediterranean region plays a strategic role for energy due to the presence of Libya and Algeria, which have large oil and gas reserves, and the discovery of new offshore gas fields in Egypt, Israel and Cyprus. The strategic role of the Mediterranean region is reinforced by the presence of pipelines that transport oil and gas from the Middle East, Russia, Azerbaijan and other former Soviet Union states to Europe and other consumer countries. The Mediterranean region also plays an important energy transit role, due to the presence of strategic choke points for the maritime traffic of oil tankers, such as the Suez Canal and the Turkish Straits.

The Covid-19 pandemic has upset world energy markets, causing a decline in energy demand, as well as in prices, with specific economic and political repercussions on countries heavily dependent on revenues from oil and gas exports. Oil and gas producing countries could experience political instability, as they feel the effect of a transition to low-carbon energy production. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, Algeria and Libya, for example, are dependent on their exports just as the European countries, Turkey, Morocco and other energy importers remain vulnerable to their external suppliers and to price shocks. Global policies have to consider the close interdependence between producer and consumer countries, to avoid the drop in oil prices and decarbonization of the economy having serious social and economic consequences.

Conclusions

The Mediterranean region is still characterized by a high dependence on fossil fuels in different ways. Regulatory and financial incentives are critical to attract investments in renewables. Climate change has no borders, and post-Covid recovery plans are fundamental to push forward the climate agenda at the political level. To reduce CO₂ emissions, the revision of an obsolete system of emissions will be crucial. At the same time, negotiations at international level are fundamental, especially for those countries whose revenues are mainly based on oil and gas exports.

Global policies have to consider the close interdependence between producer and consumer countries, to avoid the drop in oil prices and decarbonization of the economy having serious social and economic consequences.

In securing energy supplies, interactions between exporters, importers, producers and consumers are of key importance.

Recent fighting between Israel and Palestine, the war in Syria, and the recent epilogue of the war in Libya remind us once again of the strategic importance of the Mediterranean and the need to implement Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

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This article attempts to assess the current status of digital education in Mediterranean countries and reflects on the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) integration in education and training and its relevance for education reforms in the region. It also seeks to summarize the state of the art of digital education in the Mediterranean and identify the barriers towards cooperation between the MEDA countries.

**Introduction**

Digital education resources and practices are increasingly being leveraged to facilitate cost-effective and equitable access to quality education. This paper argues that despite the real differences among the Mediterranean countries, a shared will and intention towards ICT integration in education can be acknowledged. The paper will first give a general overview of digital education in the Mediterranean countries, and then look at the challenges of a fully cooperative digital policy in education.

In this study, we used the geographical definition of Mediterranean countries, i.e., the 22 countries that border the Mediterranean Sea: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Slovenia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. Throughout its millennial history, the Mediterranean has been a strongly significant cradle of education, the most valuable intangible capital for an individual or society of any one country or region. In current times, the region is under great strain (overpopulation, urban expansion, water scarcity, political turmoil, economic crises, etc.) and, as a consequence, is dealing with acute socio-political, ecological, financial and cultural challenges. The region has witnessed a drop in productivity and a high rate of unemployment.¹ Such challenges need to be addressed by education in an integrated, pragmatic, yet innovative way; digital education, as such, could enhance the ability of learners to think, work and act together for their own fulfillment and identify pioneering solutions. A long-term solution to such predicaments is education that targets the achievement of sustainable development.

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tional economies where recent political turmoil has led to serious problems. The current level of economic integration in the EU-Mediterranean region is still considered to be low, and regional trade integration between Mediterranean countries still inadequate.

A comprehensive review of education policies reveals that Mediterranean countries rarely feature as a group around which analytic and systematic studies of education systems are planned. Instead, there are individual case studies of countries around the Mediterranean Basin or even comparative analyses between two or three countries in the region. Most countries’ economies are heavily reliant on agriculture and there is inadequate access to education in rural areas; a gender divide for applying for and accessing education; modest education systems and limited professional aspirations, which influence career prospects.

**Internet Penetration: France and Spain in First Place**

According to UNESCO, 90% of internet users live in industrialized countries. There is a strong correlation between the level of industrial development and access to information: “The asymmetries that affect the global distribution of people connected to the internet are particularly flagrant.” In the last decade, the penetration of technology in the region has spread quickly, although remaining a challenge in many countries. The growth rate has varied dramatically between countries, and there are still discrepancies. In 2019, all European Med countries, Israel and Lebanon had a usage rate above 70%. The number of internet users in Israel increased by 297,000 (+4.3%) between 2019 and 2020. Internet penetration in Israel stood at 84% in January 2020. Syria and Egypt were the countries with the lowest internet usage rate. Internet penetration in Syria stood at 47% in January 2020, in Egypt it stood at 57.3% in January 2021 and in Albania it stood at 69.6% in January 2021.

In contrast to Europe, North African countries’ internet usage started increasing only at the beginning of the 21st century. The number of internet users in Tunisia increased by 48,000 (+0.6%) between 2019 and 2020 and internet penetration stood at 64% in January 2020. Tunisia and Morocco have outperformed their North African peers, but are still to breach the 70% threshold. The poorer performers were Syria and Algeria, with 69.6% in January 2021. From 2013 to 2015, however, Algeria’s internet usage rate more than doubled, and by 2015 it had caught up with Egypt (57.3% in January 2021).

**E-Learning Initiatives for Teachers and Trainers in the Mediterranean Region**

While some countries in the North have started offering e-learning courses and achieved varying degrees of success, other institutions and newly established online or hybrid educational organizations in the Middle East (ME) are in the early phases of trying to get students and their parents to accept and adapt to the concept of digital education, and are still at the very early stages of setting up such programmes. Steps have been taken towards overcoming the challenges, towards a possible enhanced future of e-learning. The European Training Foundation (ETF) has produced several reports on teacher and trainer training in the Mediterranean region, describing regional practices and identifying major problems, as well as the actors and institutions involved.

**Projects and E-learning Plans and Initiatives and Teacher Training**

Several countries have started implementing programmes in education by integrating ICTs from the

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3 All the data for this paragraph is from [https://datareportal.com/](https://datareportal.com/)
very beginning. For instance, Tunisia’s 1999 Family PC programme provided each household with a computer and an ADSL connection. In Lebanon, the national strategy for integrating ICTs was supported by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Union (EU).

The *Grande école du numérique*, was launched in 2015 in France as a network of over 400 certified training programmes open to everyone. The programme aims to meet the rushing demand for digital skills in the labour market and re-include those excluded from employment and/or training. Nevertheless, other countries like Syria and the Occupied Palestinian Territories were left behind in terms of infrastructure improvement and do not currently have any plans to remedy this. Some projects have been deferred because of the political situation.

At a wider level, some projects have been implemented in the MEDA region, as listed below:

**a) IntraMEDnet project**

Financially supported by the European Union as part of the Interreg III B Archimed programme, scientists from different institutions of the Mediterranean Area (Greece, Cyprus and Italy) take part in this project intended for developing related educational modules, which have been combined in a virtual classroom on the Internet. The aim was to create integrated educational units. To identify the educational needs and excellencies of the group’s associates, they started by identifying the general thematic areas of common interest, before the partners developed learning objects for each area, which have been taught in the general curricula of involved institutions. The learning objects can be shaped to support self-directed and/or instructed problem-based learning. The project also considered enhancing these virtual connections and collaborations between universities and research centres of the Mediterranean Area to share the learning process and support research collaborations.

**b) OpenMed project**

The OpenMed project, supported by the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education programme of the European Union during the period 2015-2018,
has aimed to expand participation in and adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER) and Open Educational Practices (OEP) as a bottom-up approach to sustain the modernization of the Higher Education sector in the southern Mediterranean. The project involved an international group composed of five partners from Europe and nine from southern Mediterranean countries. The project’s goals were:

— Clarifying the justification for the provision of high-quality OEP and OER in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
— Investment in infrastructure to ease process development and ways to transition materials and programmes
— Piloting course accreditation schemes through institutions that may be a useful means of promoting OEP as a reputable form of learning, where national educational authorities do not recognize online education
— Supporting staff needs to help them find ways to integrate OER with their official academic learning resources.7

c) The MEDA-ETE project
The MEDA-ETE project (Euro-Mediterranean Partnership’s Education and Training for Employment) was launched in the 1995 Barcelona process, and in the political, economic and social partnership which had started between European Union countries and 10 states of the Mediterranean Area (Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia). The MEDA programme represents the main financial mechanism for the partnership. The project’s objective is to support the MEDA partner countries in the development and implementation of relevant politics in education and technological training, which can help promote the development of human resources through a regional dialogue approach between the associated countries. Education and training have been identified as key tools for endorsing economic and social growth in the MEDA region and growing competitive economies in open markets.8

Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (MSESD)

Education is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development and an essential tool for good governance and the promotion of democracy. Despite the diversities and the serious socio-economic, environmental and geopolitical challenges, the strategy succeeded and was an achievement of the Mediterranean region. The utmost respect for education and a genuine will for supporting it is a prerequisite for sustainable development and progress. The Tbilisi+35 Conference (6-7 September, 2012) Communiqué 9 acknowledges the achievements of environmental education (EE) and education for sustainable development (ESD) at the regional level. Article 33 recommends strengthening and upgrading international mechanisms, organizations and institutions for transferring knowledge, technologies and innovations, for creating viable ESD capacities worldwide. The principles of the ESD, “apart from the traditional ones, should include among other things, brainstorming, debate and argumentation, conceptual and perceptual mapping, philosophical inquiry, value clarification, simulations, scenarios, modelling, role-playing, games, ICT, case studies, learner-driven projects & Project-based Learning (PBL).”9

Barriers towards a Mediterranean Digital Education System

The Mediterranean is a multifaceted group that cannot be assembled into one group. Starting from the divergent histories characterized by imperial and nationalistic ambition, inequality of power and economies, political turmoils, varied cultures, religious and linguistic dissimilarities make it difficult for anyone to speak prudently without resorting to the plural form – the Mediterraneans.

7 OpenMed, www.openmedproject.eu/
So, Is It Easy to Speak about a Mediterranean Digital Education Plan or Policy?

Although the region has strong human, economic and agricultural resources, in the context of the major gap between and within countries as we have illustrated above in terms of digital readiness, political and economic turmoil, and even education systems, it seems unrealistic to talk about an e-learning system for the entire group. For instance, a comparison between France and Syria regarding political institutions, technology, culture, education and health shows a huge divergence. We cannot determine whether the relatively poor countries with per capita GDP below the average can catch up with the richer countries of the Mediterranean regarding digitalization of the education sector. While in France and Israel, about 80% of schools have computers, and over 70% of these are connected to the Internet, most by high-speed connections, in Syria, secondary and primary schools have computer equipment, but few are connected to the Internet. In Lebanon, the number of schools with internet access is still below the average. In terms of personal data protection, the Mediterranean region is where the population’s confidence is the lowest in the world. Moreover, even among the members of the MEDA region, there is a huge gap between countries of the MENA region and Euro-Mediterranean countries. Therefore, it is requisite to have suitable regulations regarding personal data confidentiality, data governance and digital security in the region through the establishment of all-encompassing development plans that can ensure social and territorial cohesion between countries. Another indicator that widens the gap within the MEDA countries is the digital divide and its impact on the development of Mediterranean countries. One crucial stakeholder in making any ICT effort successful is the effectiveness of the public sector. That is the role of governments. The success of any ICT development effort is determined by the extent of the government’s commitment. The digital divide has often been attributed to these disparities between governments’ efforts in ICT policies, ICT infrastructure and the availability and use of specific applications, such as banking, education or health, to the implementation of electronic government (e-government). Each type has its own trends that vary across countries and regions. According to the UNESCO report, this digital divide feeds a second divide: that of knowledge. The fact that this divide exists between countries of the North and the South is no surprise.

Conclusions

Several MEDA countries are already providing good ground for integrating ICT into their education and training systems; however, the situation varies considerably from one country to another, in terms of infrastructure, penetration rate, services ranging from telecommunications such as internet connectivity, Mobile Network Operators, fibre optic backbone, data and media services, teacher training programmes and initiatives for digital education. All these indicators and many other contextual factors should be considered when designing an e-learning system for the region. If the aim is to build a way out for the entire Mediterranean region, all these differences and limitations will shape the choice of the digital education policy and ICT integration plans as it must be compliant to the availability of infrastructure and the skills of human resources, including teachers, administrators, technicians, managers and learners.

Other Resources

Arab Public Feelings about Normalization of Arab Countries with Israel

Michael Robbins
Princeton University

Late 2020 and early 2021 witnessed a flurry of agreements between Israel and Arab states. The so-called Abraham Accords were signed between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, respectively, in September 2020, while Sudan reached a settlement a month later. In January 2021, Morocco followed suit, leading to twice the number of Arab countries signing formal accords, as compared with the previous 73 years since Israel’s founding. These normalization agreements were officially greeted with much fanfare, including cultural and business exchanges, but how are they viewed by ordinary citizens living across the region?

Policy Coordination with Israel

The Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network giving voice to ordinary citizens across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). It is the largest and longest-standing project of its kind in the region. In 2018-19, shortly before the normalization agreements, the Arab Barometer surveyed citizens across 12 MENA countries, including more than 80 percent of the region’s citizens. The results reveal that few are in favour of rapprochement with Israel. These normalization agreements were officially greeted with much fanfare, including cultural and business exchanges, but how are they viewed by ordinary citizens living across the region?

Yet, Israel’s neighbours also tend to be the countries where publics are somewhat more likely to say it is good that some Arab countries are coordinating their foreign policies with Israel. In Palestine, 24 percent hold this view, while 23 percent do in Egypt, 19 percent in Lebanon, and 14 percent in Jordan. Meanwhile, those in the Maghreb are less likely to believe this strategy is beneficial, including just 13 percent in Morocco, 12 percent in Algeria and 9 percent in Tunisia and Libya, respectively.

Israel as a Strategic Threat

When asked about which country posed the greatest threat to stability in one’s country, Israel is listed more often than any other country across the region. Again, this view is particularly widespread in Israel’s neighbours. Overall, 79 percent in Lebanon, 63 percent in Palestine, 54 percent in Egypt and 42 percent in Jordan name Israel as the biggest threat to stability in their country. However, in countries that are further removed, such as those in North Africa, Israel is listed far less frequently. In Morocco (27 percent), Algeria (21 percent) and Algeria (21 percent) citizens are far less likely to name Israel as the primary threat to their country’s stability.

Views about the threat Israel represents do appear to be changing in certain countries, however. In Egypt, youth aged 18-29 are significantly less likely (-8 points) to say Israel represents the primary threat to their country’s stability than older Egyptians. An even larger gap exists in Jordan (-17 points), while five-point gaps are also found in Morocco and Iraq, respectively. A key exception, however, is Palestine, where youth aged 18-29 are ten points more likely to say Israel represents the greatest threat compared with those who are older.
These results imply that on the eve of the Abraham Accords, views of Israel were overwhelmingly negative. Few Arab citizens, regardless of age or geography, held positive views towards Israel or wanted to strengthen relations with the country. Instead, most Arab publics viewed Israel through a strategic lens. Those who live in bordering countries were deeply worried about Israel as a security threat, but were also more likely to favour engagement with their neighbour out of strategic necessity. Israel represents a reality they must coexist with, and their publics were somewhat more likely to want coordination to address this perceived threat to their security. Meanwhile, those living in countries farther removed are less likely to see Israel as a key security threat and thus appear less likely to see a logical reason for direct engagement.

**Views of the Abraham Accords**

After the normalization agreements between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, respectively, the Arab Barometer surveyed seven Arab countries – Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon – about their views towards the normalization agreements between the UAE and Israel and Bahrain and Israel. Given the long-standing hostility towards Israel, it follows that the attitudes of ordinary citizens were highly unfavourable towards these accords. Of the seven countries surveyed, only in Lebanon and Iraq did more than 10 percent say they favoured or strongly favoured these agreements. Elsewhere, favourability toward the Abraham Accords was just 9 percent in Morocco and Algeria, 8 percent in Tunisia, 7 percent in Libya and 3 percent in Jordan.

In Lebanon, 20 percent of citizens support these agreements. However, this support is primarily driven by the country’s Christian population. Half of Christians in Lebanon are in favour of the Abraham Accords, while members of the country’s other main sects – Sunnis (6 percent), Shias (less than 1 percent), and Druze (11 percent) – hold attitudes similar to Arab citizens in the other countries, where fewer than one-in-ten favour these agreements. Levels of support among Christians are likely driven by the strong association between former US President Donald Trump and the Accords. Trump is relatively popular among Lebanese Christians, with 44 percent having favourable views of his policies toward MENA, compared with fewer than 10 percent for the other main sects.

Those who live in bordering countries were deeply worried about Israel as a security threat, but were also more likely to favour engagement with their neighbour out of strategic necessity.

The second exception is Iraq, where 24 percent are in favour of the Abraham Accords. Again, however, there are major differences within communities in Iraq. Among the Kurdish community, a full 48 percent favour these agreements, compared with just 19 percent of the Arab population. Given the relatively strong economic links between Israel and the Kurdish region of Iraq, it is unsurprising that Kurds are more likely to view Israel favourably relative to other citizens. So, while Iraqis are somewhat more willing to support this normalization process than other countries surveyed, there remains a stark divide by ethnicity within the country.

**Support for Normalization between Morocco and Israel**

In most countries, levels of support for the normalization agreement between Israel and Morocco is similar to the Abraham Accords. In Libya (9 percent), Tunisia (7 percent), Jordan (6 percent) and Algeria (5 percent), fewer than one-in-ten citizens are in favour of the normalization agreement between Morocco and Israel. Meanwhile, in Lebanon (14 percent) and Iraq (21 percent), favourability is again somewhat higher.

As with the Abraham Accords, support is divided in Lebanon and Iraq within different communities. In Lebanon, support remains significantly higher among Christians (32 percent) than among other sects, where support does not exceed 10 percent. In Iraq, support remains highest among Kurds (47 percent) compared with just 16 percent of Arab citizens.
However, by far the most important exception is Morocco itself. Overall, 41 percent of citizens say they favour or strongly favour their country’s normalization agreement with Israel, which is 32 points higher than for the Abraham Accords. To a large extent, this shift can be explained by the fact that in the wake of announcing the agreement, the US officially recognized Morocco’s territorial claim over Western Sahara. Although not legally binding internationally, having US backing is a major step towards the formal legitimation of this long-standing Moroccan ambition. As a result of this trade-off, citizens appear to have significantly warmed to the idea of peace with Israel.

Conclusions

Throughout the Arab Middle East, Israel remains overwhelmingly unpopular. Even in Egypt and Jordan, countries with long-standing peace agreements with Israel, the peace remains cold, with most citizens in these countries rejecting closer relations with Israel and continuing to see Israel as the greatest threat to stability in their country. Given widespread sympathy for the Palestinian cause across MENA and continuing concern about Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians, it is unlikely that popular views will change dramatically as a result of the recent normalization agreements.

However, findings from the Arab Barometer make it clear that publics across MENA view relations with Israel largely through the lens of strategic interests. Although neighbouring countries are the most likely to fear Israel as a threat to stability, they also tend to be the countries that are more likely to favour greater policy coordination towards it. In other words, Israel is not popular, but does represent a reality that their governments need to address.

The differences within countries toward the recent normalization agreements paint a similar picture. Lebanese Christians, who saw their strategic interests more closely aligned with the Trump Administration, gave stronger backing to the normalization accords that took place before the US election. In surveys conducted after Joe Biden became President, support for the normalization agreement with Morocco fell as Trump receded from the world stage. Meanwhile, in Iraq, Kurds are more likely to support normalization with Israel given their long-standing links with the country.

In Morocco, citizens appear to have clearly understood the trade-off between US recognition of Western Sahara and the country’s leaders normalizing relations.

In Morocco, despite historically low views of Israel and a rejection of the Abraham Accords, citizens appear to have clearly understood the trade-off between US recognition of Western Sahara and the country’s leaders normalizing relations. Although support for normalization itself is likely low, the resulting benefits – a much stronger legitimation of the country’s claim over Western Sahara – made citizens far more likely to favour the agreement compared with the Abraham Accords.

In sum, it is unlikely that normalization agreements with Israel will serve to win over the hearts and minds of citizens across the Arab region. Support for such agreements is likely to be tenuous and conditional, but if the tangible benefits are large enough, then citizens are likely to cautiously favour such agreements. However, if these benefits are limited or do not clearly materialize, then support is likely to be low or quickly recede. In all likelihood, over time, there will remain, at best, a cold peace between Israel and Arab citizens in MENA, especially with a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians becoming ever more remote.
Gender at the Intersection: Intersectional Feminisms to Understand the Present of the Mediterranean

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Euro-Mediterranean societies are continuing their journey to becoming more inclusive and egalitarian despite the many challenges present across the region. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are still being keenly felt in different ways throughout the multiple and varied Mediterranean territories – a pandemic that, as highlighted by the UN, is not gender-neutral and has deepened all sorts of inequalities, including gender-based ones.1 Ever since the pandemic emerged, grassroots organizations have proven their resilience and inventiveness in tackling its negative effects, and local and regional institutions and governmental bodies have implemented emergency plans, coming up with tailor-made budgets, policies and an array of strategies in response. 2020 was a global turning point that led to hasty responses. In 2021, it is time to make room for deliberations and actions that take into account the effects of the pandemic, but which also go beyond them by considering the complexities inherent to each country and each region of the Euro-Mediterranean, and which appreciate all of their strengths in order to positively contribute to the transformations that are underway there. In this article, I argue that adopting an intersectional gender outlook is key to acknowledging such complexities and strengths. It is key to understanding the present of the Mediterranean in all its nuances. Only through a better understanding of our present will we be able to carry out lasting core transformations in our neighbourhoods, villages and cities, and which give space to alliances for a fairer and more equitable region.

Weaving the Way Forward

For some time now, all across the northern and the southern rim of the Mediterranean, multiple initiatives have led the way to a more feminist region, making room for its diverse voices to be heard, making its heterogeneity visible as a whole. Activists are launching campaigns, training and awareness-raising activities to highlight gender-based inequalities, and to improve the conditions of the most vulnerable social groups. Languages are being reshaped so that they can name the experiences and realities that the heteropatriarchal regime has, for so long, left hidden and unrecognized – namely those of women and girls, and subjects that do not fit in the gender binary, such as trans people. Grassroots movements have managed to pave the way for changes in laws, constitutional and governmental reforms, and the creation of new policies that encapsulate the desire for more egalitarian societies, whilst pushing for their attainment. In the 2020 edition of this very same yearbook, Beirut-based gender advisor Lina Abou-Habib claimed that a positive take on the pandemic might come from the fact that it led to “framing gender equality issues as political issues and as concerns to be debated in the public domain” (Abou-Habib, 2020: 161). Abou-Habib was specifically referring to the MENA region, but her statement might well be extrapolated to the whole of the Euro-Mediterranean region, problematic as this categorization may be.

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1 In the report “From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of Covid-19,” released by UN Women right after the pandemic outbreak, we read that “the impacts of crises are never gender neutral, and Covid-19 is no exception” (2020: 1).
One example of such a shift, and proof that governments are enacting changes, can be found in Catalonia. Following parliamentary elections, the Catalan government has incorporated a newly-created department: the Department of Equality and Feminisms, the plural declination being a statement of intent. As its Minister, Tània Verge, has stated, the Department seeks to incorporate the gender perspective as a cross-sectional axis in all of the governments’ actions, which means striving to include the experiences of social minorities – understood as those groups which do not hold political or societal privilege – such as women and girls, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, people who are part of the LGTBI community, and those belonging to groups that represent dissidence against the patriarchal norm. The department aims to put an end to all forms of gender-based violence (GBV) and the stereotypes and biases on which these types of violence are built; to contest the idea that gender equality concerns women only, and to promote the understanding that societies, because they are diverse, require diverse responses that take such heterogeneity into account. It is objectives such as these that the whole of the Mediterranean region should strive to attain.

Adopting an intersectional gender outlook is key to understanding the present of the Mediterranean in all its nuances. Only through a better understanding of our present will we be able to carry out lasting core transformations.

In her appearances and in the interviews that she has given since being elected, Verge has repeatedly stated the need to work from an intersectional standpoint. Intersectionality, as a concept, has received much critical attention of late. In the context of Catalonia, in her recently published book *Interseccionalitat: Desigualtat, llocs i emocions*, the activist and researcher Maria Rodó-Zárate traces a genealogy of the concept. The author situates its origin as a theoretical tradition in the work of black feminists in the US, in the 1970s and 1980s (see Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1989; Combahee River Collective, 1977), who sought to understand “the situation of structural discrimination and inequality to which black women were subjected, from a feminist and anti-racist perspective” (Rodó-Zárate, 2021: 17). Rodó-Zárate claims that today the term is used “to display how different axes of inequality, such as gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, functional diversity or age, are interwoven and configure concrete forms of discrimination and inequality” (18). Understood this way, the author acknowledges that prior to the emergence of the theory in the context of the US, other voices, belonging to other geographies, had developed epistemological frameworks operating upon the same basis.

In what follows, we shall explore how intersectionality, understood as an analytical tool, can help us to comprehend the plurality of the Mediterranean, not only to celebrate its enriching diversity, but also to understand its multi-layered and manifold inequalities, so that they can be most effectively tackled.

Several scholars have raised the alarm about the perils of intersectionality becoming a trend, as has happened with feminism: now co-opted by capitalism and emptied of meaning in many contexts. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Leslie McCall put forward an idea of intersectionality as an “analytical sensibility” that unfolds not only because the word “intersectionality” is inscribed in a text, but because it is “a way of thinking about sameness, difference and their relationship with power” so that “any kind of discrimination or inequality is seen as configured by several axes” (in Rodó-Zárate, 2021: 28).

What does it mean to look at the Mediterranean region from an intersectional perspective? How can we be attentive to the different forms of inequality that affect it?

**Situating the Plurality of the Mediterranean**

Feminist studies have highlighted the importance of situating our discourses, our actions, our thoughts and
beliefs, and our bodies. Contextualization is of paramount importance. Our subject position in the world matters, insofar as it determines how the distinct axes of difference listed above are interwoven. Our bodies also bespeak these axes. Through our bodies we experience the world, we relate with others, we get a sense of ourselves. Our bodies bear the imprint of our privileges and our oppressions, always active in context. They bear our age, our background, our names and surnames, which resonate differently in different scenarios. The Mediterranean is built upon multiple types of sociocultural and linguistic exchanges. Focusing on the transcultural fabric that these exchanges bring forward dilutes the fact that power relations also impact on the bodies that make such exchanges possible.

The Mediterranean space is sometimes thought of as monolithic, especially from the northern rim, permeated by an outlook that celebrates an unproblematic and all-encompassing Mediterranean identity. Considering it from an intersectional standpoint brings just such a construct into question, in that intersectional perspectives pay attention to the structural racism that criss-crosses the region, and to the many sorts of inequalities that operate within it to this day. If we want to make the Mediterranean a more equitable and fairer space, it is necessary to deploy analyses that consider all of these intricacies: analyses that avoid essentialisms and homogenizations, and that are situated pieces of knowledge.

This exercise will facilitate the realization that the Mediterranean is indeed a composite of plural collectivities, each framed within a particular genealogy. The way each of these collectivities seeks to counter the inequalities to which they are subjected and move forward is thus inextricably linked to their situated epistemology. Therefore, a plurality of ways to reach equality in each of the corners of the Mediterranean exists, paralleling the inherent plurality of the region. So it follows that there is not a single universal feminism, but rather feminisms. As argued by Rodó-Zárate, “intersectionality calls for several explanatory frameworks to be taken into account so that the complex configuration of social inequalities can be understood.” Such a configuration relates to the multiple axes of difference identified, and also to the varied and changing ways in which these axes are interwoven, and how they are contextually configured (96). To attain a thorough cartography of the present of the Mediterranean, it would thus be necessary to deploy an intersectional framework that allows for each specific context to reveal which of the axes plays a bigger role in the unfolding of its particular inequalities.

A picture of our present, as has already been made clear, revolves around the pandemic and its consequences. In the abovementioned article, Abou-Habib insists on the need to be “cognizant of the situation of gender equality, or rather inequality, in the region and the activism around it before the pandemic” in order to better assess the impacts of Covid-19, especially from a gender perspective (2020: 160). In this respect, she comments on the patriarchal legacy of the region, which “came into full play during the Covid-19 pandemic, as women’s vulnerability and burden increased exponentially against a system that, even before the pandemic broke out, was unable (even unwilling) to protect women and secure their rights and entitlements.” (162)

Looking towards a Better Future, from an Intersectional Perspective

In the Mediterranean, as anywhere else in the world, the pandemic has brought about greater job insecurity, a reduction in service provision and an increase in all sorts of gender-based violence (including cyberviolence), which particularly affects women and
The attendant economic downturn – the consequences of which are also gendered – and health crisis were prioritized, which lead to a situation in which other issues were seen as less important. Funds that had been set aside for countering GBV, as well as reproductive and sexual health services for women and girls, were diverted towards addressing more pressing matters.

This ties in with an idea put forward by many grassroots organizations that work from a gender perspective. In November 2020, the European Institute of the Mediterranean and the Euro-Mediterranean Women’s Foundation organized a round table with gender experts to shed light on the cartography of GBV in the region. During the debate, Ghida Anani, founder of ABAAD – a key figure in Lebanon working in solidarity with other organizations in the region – pointed out that:

“Activists, moments, civil society organizations and multilateral organizations should all foster keeping GBV at the heart of the priorities of governments when it comes to policy-making, and strive to counter the perception that GBV is a separate issue, as if it is separate from the public health agenda, the security and the peace agenda, and the economic agenda. It needs to be perceived as a pillar that can make any country healthy and have real prospects for the future.”

(IEMed and EMWF, 2021: 7)

Dispelling the perception that tackling issues such as GBV is not a priority connects with the change in the collective imagination that feminist stakeholders in the region are trying to enact: countering hegemonic masculinities, and working (with the whole of society) to put an end to gender stereotypes and the real and symbolic types of violence that accompany them. In line with what has been detailed above, the tools to achieve these goals need to be put into context, so that intersectional analytical frameworks can be put in place, for – let us remind ourselves once more – gender inequality and its consequences unfold differently in different scenarios.

All throughout the Mediterranean, regions face distinct problems, and have also developed tailored strategies to move forward.

Creating spaces in which common and specific challenges can be discussed, and successful practices can be shared from a framework that is attentive to each context’s nuances, is of the utmost relevance.

In the above-mentioned conversation with Anani, Egypt-based activist Mozn Hassan analysed the topic of GBV in relation with the pandemic and noted that its emergence in 2020 had to do not only with Covid-19 and the lockdown measures imposed as a result, but also “with the contraction of the public sphere that Egypt has been suffering for years” (IEMed and EMWF, 2021: 11). Along the same lines, advocacy officer at Women Now for Development Zeina Kanawati pointed to the need to understand GBV contextually, and in intersection with other issues: “[w]hen dealing with the Syrian context, one must remember that we cannot disconnect the violence that women are experiencing in 2020 from...”

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5 For more insights on the gendered impacts of the pandemic, see the “Women4Mediterranean Conference Report” by the Union for the Mediterranean. The report gathers the conclusions of the 5th UfM Women4Mediterranean Conference, held in 2020, which featured the participation of diverse stakeholders in gender equality and women’s empowerment in the Euro-Mediterranean region. For a detailed analysis of the (post)covid economic scenario through gender lenses in the western Mediterranean, see the report “Fostering women’s economic participation in the western Mediterranean” (IEMed and MedThink 5+5, 2021).

6 Some voices are referring to the current economic situation tied to the pandemic as the “pink recession” due to the fact that it affected sectors in which the majority of employees were women, and the effects were also gendered (see Matthewman and Huppatz, 2020).

7 Humanitarian organizations, such as OXFAM, have expressed the same concerns: “Each and everyone is valuable and has the same rights – regardless of gender, ethnic origin, sexual identity, religion or belief, disability, age, social status or position – this is the foundation of intersectional feminism. […] Anyone who sees existing inequalities and intersectional discrimination […] as marginal issues that are not pressing in times of crisis, is missing the point.”
the long history of GBV in this society, nor from the violence tied to the Syrian conflict” (15).8

The example of GBV shows that, all throughout the Mediterranean, regions face distinct problems, and have also developed tailored strategies to move forward. Creating spaces in which common and specific challenges can be discussed, and successful practices can be shared from a framework that is attentive to each context’s nuances, is of the utmost relevance. Intersectional perspectives will allow us to understand the Euro-Mediterranean reality in all of its complexity, thus opening the door to envisioning better, more inclusive and feminist societies.

We have seen how intersectionality is neither a response nor a mechanism to be implemented, but rather a tool to put in-depth analyses into practice. It is a way of looking at our region in order to critically consider the complexities and the resilience of its societies, and thus to envision both local and regional networks of solidarity, so as to ensure that the region is truly inclusive: an outlook that enables us to acknowledge the diversity of the Mediterranean as a transformative force.

Works referenced


8 Kanawati also highlighted the (gendered) digital divide, deepened due to the pandemic.
Beyond Talent Partnerships: Boosting Legal Mobility under the New EU Migration Pact

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On 11 June 2021, the European Commission launched its Talent Partnership Initiative, coined as a key endeavour under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum to promote mobility for third country nationals seeking employment or training in the EU. This happened almost 20 years (19 years and 11 months, to be precise) after the Commission had suggested a far-reaching harmonization of the admission by tabling a draft Directive on the “Conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of paid employment and self-employed economic activities” (COM(2001) 386 of 11 July 2001). As is well known, this legislative proposal, included a single application procedure for a residence permit – “worker,” did not have sufficient support among the Member States and was officially dropped a few years later.

In the meantime, however, the EU’s influence on legal migration routes was by no means negligible. Since 2003, a series of directives were passed, laying down the conditions and standards for entry and residence of third-country nationals in a number of particular domains, most prominently highly skilled workers, family members, students and researchers. This gradual harmonization eventually became what could be considered as quite extensive – possibly one reason why Member States in recent years have shown little appetite to cede sovereign rights to the community with regard to their national admission policies.

The New Pact on Migration and Asylum, introduced on 23 September 2020 as a programmatic document that focuses primarily on measures to improve border security, streamline the asylum and return systems, and thus prevent irregular migration (COM(2020) 609 final), relies heavily on cooperation with international partners, i.e. third countries, in order to achieve these migration and asylum management goals. Thus, it primarily caters to the “external dimension” of the common migration policy. The talent partnership initiative is supposed to provide direct support for mobility schemes as well as associated capacity building between designated partner countries and EU Member States, with the goal of matching skills of workers from third countries with the labour market needs inside the EU. Thus, it marks a more “friendly” counterweight to the otherwise control-oriented objectives of the Pact and was promoted as a “new approach to migration partnerships” and a “comprehensive EU policy framework.” Ever since the 2001 initiative, European Commissions have grappled with the goal of promoting pathways for legal migration towards work and training, establishing the Global Approach for Migration (GAM) in 2005, which was revamped as the Global Approach for Migration and Mobility (GAMM) in 2011. Within the GAMM, Mobility Partnerships became a concrete tool for establishing bilateral cooperation frameworks with third countries. However, offering legal migration opportunities was only a subordinate facet to seeking better migration control. The Talent Partnership initiative certainly does

1 The views set out in this article are solely those of the author and do not reflect the opinion of the Expert Council on Integration and Migration.
not represent a quantum leap in this respect. As many scholars and observers have noted, it remains part of the EU’s wider set of external migration policy instruments. Thus, the proposal “continues to frame the external dimension of EU migration policy, primarily as a means to achieve internal policy objectives. This resembles previous approaches to establishing ‘comprehensive’ agreements with third countries” (Rasche, 2021: 3).

**Fostering Legal Migration: Different Rationales**

Upon launching the Talent Partnership initiative, Vice-President and Commissioner Margaritis Schinas suggested that “well-managed, legal migration can bring great benefits to our society and the economy [and] play an important role in reducing the skills gap and boosting EU innovation potential. Talent Partnerships are a ‘triple win’ for all the parties involved.” By doing so, Schinas directly referred to the labour market and economic interests of both the EU and its Member States as well as third countries and their individual citizens, respectively. The second responsible Commissioner, Ylva Johansson, however, said that “replacing irregular migration with legal pathways should be our strategic objective,” thus indicating that the relationship between the two can be engineered and calibrated. This logic might be deemed overly optimistic in two ways. First, there is – so far – hardly any robust empirical evidence that the creation of legal avenues has brought about a reduction in irregular migration (cf. Beirens et al., 2019: 14-15). Second, despite the fact that legal migration can be seen as a shared competence between the European Union and its Member States, the Commission has no power whatsoever to propose legal instruments that have a direct impact on the number of workers or trainees to be admitted into Member States’ labour markets (cf. Article 79(5) TFEU).

Empirically, policies to promote legal migration for employment and training can have very different objectives. At least three rationales can be differentiated (cf. Beirens et al., 2019: 12-17). Destination countries in the EU enable the legal immigration of workers from third countries, firstly, if the demand for labour cannot be met from within the EU. Such a need is the basic prerequisite for European states to become involved – unless the mobility scheme in question serves purely developmental assets or bilateral goals of friendship. This would address a second set of motives. Facilitating the entry of citizens of another country is often an instrument of international diplomacy that intensifies relations between countries, affirms historical ties and fosters developmental goals or economic cooperation. In development cooperation, the case for legal migration is made on the basis of the expected benefits for countries of origin, such as remittances or skills transfer. Third, opening legal routes is often motivated by the desire to reduce irregular migration. The assumption here is that, according to the principle of communicating vessels, the use of irregular migration routes can be reduced or even prevented if legal migration channels for work and education purposes are expanded. However, this logic has considerable limitations, as legal pathways tend to be opened rather selectively, and usually against a restrictive background (in contrast to a principle of free movement, which largely abolishes the binary logic of “regular/irregular migration”). Furthermore, the selective approach usually involves both qualitative and quantitative matching problems in the sense that would-be migrants cannot fulfil the defined criteria within these schemes or that the quotas fall short of the demand. In partnerships with third countries, following a “carrot and stick” approach, new mobility schemes are often used as bargaining chips for enhanced cooperation on issues such as border control, return and readmission.

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What Way Forward?

The cooperation with third countries within the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, despite some novelty elements, can thus be considered a new performance of an old play. The EU remains committed to its logic of conditionality and combines offers for legal migration with the willingness of third countries to cooperate in other areas — or it focuses mobility initiatives on regions that are conspicuous in terms of irregular migration.

...for the European Union

As Commissioner Johansson’s quote above shows, the idea of “simply replacing” irregular migration with legal migration is still prominent, although the Talent Partnership approach seems to be making some progress away from such wood-cut pictures. Admittedly, when it comes to the European Commission’s ambition to design schemes for legal migration for work and training, the elephant in the room is its inability to act in legal terms and thus make any arrangements binding. The EU’s hands remain considerably tied — and the Talent Partnership initiative does not suggest that this will change fundamentally. There is still a lack of ideas concerning the role of the EU vis-à-vis the Member States, beyond funding, moderating, monitoring and evaluating individual Member States’ engagement with third countries. One of the challenges is to (better) manage expectations and make policy goals transparent. There are unrealistic ideas as to what can be achieved by launching and financing partnerships at EU level, particularly with regard to the number of individuals covered by these programmes. Thus, a key mistake is to set the gross budget of a project (sometimes several million euros) against the beneficiaries from third countries who eventually migrate — because this may sometimes lead to phantastic sums per migrant (making it easy for populist right-wing parties to condemn any initiative), while the qualitative, institutional and capacity-building dimensions remain somewhat unnoticed.

Furthermore, with regard to the significant financial resources earmarked for new projects, there are good chances for free riding, i.e. Member States submitting initiatives they would already be running under a common EU umbrella and co-financing them from the EU budget. While it is to be expected that Member States will favour as much flexibility as possible and minimal control from the Commission, the latter should try to define reasonable conditions and common goals that are suitable for the purpose — in order to emphasize its added value, but without putting the states involved in a Procrustean bed. Several considerations would be worthy of more intensive examination in the context of this highly demanding task:

— The EU could move further away from a quid pro quo logic of migration control, avoid negative conditionality and define functioning pathways towards employment and training for third-country nationals of all skill levels as an end in itself — primarily from demographic, labour market and development cooperation perspectives. Particularly, the rationale of fostering mobility for the sake of development and wellbeing in partner countries may — in the long run — prove to be an effective strategy to reduce global inequality and thus also to curb migratory pressures (cf. Fachkommission Fluchtursachen, 2021: 131-135). Understood as a framework that fosters development, the Talent Partnership initiative could be shaped more in the sense of the Global Skills Partnership (cf. Clemens, 2014), which has made its way into the catalogue of recom-

3 In that vein, a joint non-paper tabled by Belgium, Germany and Spain in June 2021 warned that programming within the framework of Talent Partnerships should be less rigid and bureaucratic than what Member States had experienced under the Mobility Partnership Facility.
— Perhaps the EU would be well advised to make future talent partnership projects more sector-specific (rather than skills-specific). Particularly in the context of the Mediterranean neighbourhood and African continent, a focus on resilient and sustainable sectors such as green energy, digital services, agriculture and food production, health and nursing, but also construction and engineering, as well as tourism and hospitality might be appropriate. In order to mitigate the brain drain and enable skills transfer, the demographic and labour market structures in the countries of origin, as well as their education and vocational training systems with regard to each individual “pilot sector” would have to be adequately taken into account.

Evaluations of the labour migration pilot projects indicate that the actual outcome in terms of beneficiaries was rather small while transaction costs and coordination efforts were high.

— The EU could also increasingly work towards a paradigm shift within the framework of its Talent Partnerships initiative, away from the image of “recruiting (already fully) qualified professionals” in a context of global competition for skilled workers, towards an idea of “training young talent.” This could result in admitting motivated young people with potentially poor vocational and professional perspectives in their countries of residence, who are not yet skilled, but who will receive vocational education, on-the-job training or upskilling – to make them either “home-grown skilled workers” with a perspective of full integration, or “returning experts” with a high potential for brain gain. Indeed, this perspective still seems to be underexposed, and it could be advisable to increase the involvement of the respective VET (Vocational Education and Training) systems and the associated public and private stakeholders in developing talent partnerships – both in EU Member States and in third countries.

— Last but not least, the Commission should strive to make promising schemes as “European” as possible, e.g. by trying to engage more than just two countries in partnerships. These could be EU Member States and third countries with similar sector-specific labour demands, vocational (training) systems, geographic locations or language regimes. In that sense, the German-led THAMM project (“Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa”), established under the EU Trust Fund for Africa, is a promising example, as it involves Belgium and potentially other Member States too; Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia as partner countries; as well as the IOM and ILO as international implementing organizations.

However, evaluations of the labour migration pilot projects run under the mobility partnership facility as well as under the EUTF indicate that – while expectations were (too) high – the actual outcome in terms of beneficiaries was rather small (from several dozen to a couple of hundred mobilities per project), while transaction costs and coordination efforts were high (Rasche, 2021; Stefanescu, 2020). It would be presumptuous to assume that talent partnerships will multiply the number of participants.

… and for EU Member States

While the Talent Partnership initiative can bring about (financial) incentives for EU Member States to engage, provide a developmental impetus for third countries and devise models that can be replicated, the highest potential for boosting legal mobility for third country nationals continues to lie with the EU Member States’ legal and institutional frameworks. Germany might be an illustrative example in that sense.4 Its general regime for labour mobility

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4 For a comparative perspective with France, Italy, Spain and Sweden see Beirens et al. (2019).
and the admission of third country nationals for remunerated activities has become increasingly universal and open over the past two decades – meaning that non-ascriptive markers (particularly skills and educational attainment) have become the paramount criteria for selecting workers, and that access was liberalized by lowering salary thresholds for the highly qualified and including skilled workers with equivalent training certificates (cf. Kolb 2017). However, particularly in the aftermath of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015/16, Germany started to foster labour mobility for nationals of selected third countries. This source-country particularism (through which nationals from particular third countries are preferred over others by law, regulation or other agreements) in some instances has multiplied the volume of mobile third country nationals from particular states. For reasons of space, only four examples are briefly presented here:

— The most prominent scheme, the so-called Western Balkans regulation, was introduced in 2015 as a result of a bargain in domestic politics based on how restrictions in Germany’s asylum policy towards nationals of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia could be “compensated” for. Thus, it was a political attempt to “trade” the asylum channel for a labour channel, to the benefit of nationals of these important source countries for asylum seekers. Under this extremely liberal framework, labour migrants have to demonstrate neither language ability nor formal skill sets or qualifications in order to be granted a (renewable) visa for work purposes. The key prerequisite is a valid job offer and subsequent approval by the Federal Employment Agency. Currently, up to 25,000 workers can be admitted per year.

— The “Triple-Win Migration” project was launched in 2013 and targets countries with a surplus of professionally trained nurses whose qualifications can be (partly) recognized in Germany, in order to alleviate the significant labour shortage in the nursing care sector. Candidates undergo linguistic and intercultural training. Once in Germany, they benefit from a swift procedure for recognizing their certificates and some undergo further training to adapt to the required standards. Ever since 2013, more than 3,000 (semi-) skilled workers from Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Tunisia and the Philippines have taken up work or adaptation training in Germany since 2013, most of them with the option of a longer-term or permanent stay. Beyond that, in line with the new Skilled Immigration Act, which came into force in March 2020, a “Skilled Worker Agency for Health and Care Professions” founded by the Federal Government started its work at the beginning of 2019 to further support the recruitment of care workers. For 2020 alone, there were call-off quotas for more than 1,200 skilled nurses, primarily from the Philippines and Mexico, to be referred to healthcare and nursing facilities.

— As a latest example, motivated by demands from the food-producing industries and in line with the EU’s seasonal workers Directive (2014/36/EU), Germany, for the first time in decades, signed a bilateral agreement with a third country (Georgia) for the recruitment of agricultural seasonal workers in 2020. Planned as a slightly cautious pilot scheme with 500 recruits, the initiative was boosted after the Corona pandemic had severely aggravated demand for harvest helpers on the farms: the quota was increased tenfold for 2021, allowing 5,000 Georgians to work in Germany for the season.

— Finally, public and private stakeholders are seriously exploring the possibilities for setting up pilot skill partnerships for vocational training with third countries, which would cover particular sectors (potentially with countries such as Ghana and the Republic of Kosovo; cf. Sauer and Volarević 2021; Rother and Setrana 2021). Provided that the numerous hurdles can be overcome and funding secured, the launch of such a scheme could take place as early as in the coming months.

This brief analysis shows that the Talent Partnerships initiative is providing important impetus for the debate within the EU, but that the Member States are where the action is. This is unlikely to change unless the latter are ready to forgo more of their sovereignty over admitting workers, in favour of more harmonized EU legislation.
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Migrants from Lebanon Continue to Set Their Sights on Cyprus, but for Most It Is a Hopeless Mission

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While the scale of oversea migration from Lebanon to Cyprus remains relatively limited compared to other Mediterranean routes,¹ the number of would-be migrants attempting the crossing has surged since Lebanon fell into an ongoing economic and political crisis beginning in late 2019. According to data provided by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), some 1,162 migrants – the vast majority of them Syrian refugees, with smaller numbers of Lebanese citizens, Palestinian refugees and other nationalities – attempted to reach Cyprus by sea from Lebanon between January 2020 and the beginning of June 2021, with 414 of those departing in 2021.²

By comparison, a total of 290 people were recorded as attempting the journey in 2019 and 490 in 2018. In terms of the number of boats departing, there were 17 vessels recorded in 2019 and 21 in 2018, while in the period of July to October 2020 alone, some 30 boat departures from Lebanon were reported.³

While the numbers attempting the sea crossing have increased, the majority of would-be migrants did not make it to Cyprus: of those who have departed since January 2020, UNHCR reports reveal that only about one-third of them had successfully landed. The others were either intercepted by Lebanese authorities before reaching international waters, turned back by Cypriot authorities, drifted to Syria, or ran into trouble and were rescued at sea. Thirteen people died trying to make the journey.⁴

A Long-standing Issue

While the numbers have grown over the past two years, human smuggling from Lebanon is not a new phenomenon. At least as far back as 1999, Cypriot authorities were complaining of migrants entering the country illegally by sea from Lebanon.⁵ In the impoverished city of Tripoli in north Lebanon, in particular, young men and families have long seen the sea route as a way out of their circumstances, sometimes with tragic consequences. In 2018, five-year-old Khaled Nijmeh, the son of a Palestinian mother and Syrian father living in Lebanon, drowned after the overcrowded smuggler boat the family had boarded capsized en route from Lebanon to Cyprus.⁶

While it is the stories of tragedy that usually make the news, last summer when I interviewed a number of young people in Tripoli who were contemplating the journey,⁷ all of them knew or had heard of people

¹ https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean
² Data provided via email by UNHCR
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ www.lnf.org.lb/publicat.html#a4
who had successfully made the journey to Europe via smuggling.

While the numbers have grown over the past two years, human smuggling from Lebanon is not a new phenomenon.

Some had even done it themselves, like 27-year-old Ahmad Harouq from Tripoli’s Bab al-Tabbaneh neighbourhood, who told me he had made his way to Europe in 2015. Rather than going via sea to Cyprus, Harouq had flown to Turkey and then bought a spot on a smuggler vessel headed to Greece. From there, he said, he had gone overland to Germany and finally Sweden. There, he applied for asylum but was eventually rejected and sent back to Lebanon. Despite that experience, Harouq said he was thinking of trying again, possibly by way of Cyprus. “I decided to leave [Lebanon] because the situation wasn’t good, and until now it’s not good,” he said.

Increasing Push Factors

In fact, the situation is now considerably worse, with some 55% of Lebanese estimated to be living below the poverty line and 89% of Syrian refugees below the extreme poverty line in 2020. The existing financial crisis has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the August 2020 Beirut port explosion, which killed more than 200 people, wounded thousands and displaced as many as 300,000, at least temporarily, from their homes.

UNHCR said in a statement that from its staff’s interviews with would-be migrants who were intercepted, rescued or returned to Lebanon, “it is evident that these are desperate journeys undertaken by people who see no way of survival in Lebanon as the socio-economic situation is continuously worsening.”

The main reasons they cited for leaving, the agency said, were “inability to survive in Lebanon due to the deteriorating economic situation, lack of access to basic services and limited job opportunities in Lebanon, [and] having relatives or community members in Cyprus.”

Who Is Attempting the Journey?

In a letter addressed to Council of Europe (CoE) Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović in March 2021, Cypriot Interior Minister Nicos Nouris said that 472 migrants had landed on the shores of Cyprus in 2020, of whom 400 were Syrian and 72 Lebanese. Another 210 Lebanese who had attempted to land were sent back because they said their intended final destination was Italy, not Cyprus, he added. Euromed Rights reported that of the would-be migrants who had attempted to leave Lebanon for Cyprus by boat, some 20% were Lebanese citizens and the rest primarily Syrians.

While the journeys are largely driven by economic desperation, the irony is that this route is largely out of reach for the poorest of the poor. According to interviews I conducted in Tripoli, before the Beirut port explosion, smugglers were charging around $1,000 per person for the trip, to be paid in US dollars (USD), while a Lebanese citizen who made the trip in September said he had paid in Lebanese lira the equivalent of $1,500 at the black-market exchange rate at the time. A Syrian refugee who attempted the

8 Interview conducted in Tripoli, July 2020
11 Statement provided via email by UNHCR
12 Ibid.
journey in November said he had been charged $2,500 in USD; however, in his case, the would-be smuggler had disappeared after receiving a $500 deposit.\textsuperscript{15}

These amounts are out of reach for the majority of Lebanese and certainly for most Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Those I spoke to who had made or attempted to make the trip had borrowed money or sold household items, such as furniture, and valuables like gold and, in one case, a laptop.\textsuperscript{16}

Two young Lebanese men who I interviewed last summer as they were preparing to make the trip were a university student and a recent graduate discouraged by the lack of opportunities in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{17}

Like many migrants coming from Lebanon, these young men saw Cyprus as a way station \textit{en route} to mainland Europe. For others it is the intended final destination; as in the case of Shamseddine al-Kerdli, a Lebanese barber from Tripoli who arrived in Cyprus with his three children in September. Kerdli said he had multiple family connections in Cyprus, including an older brother who had been living there for more than 20 years and had taken the Cypriot nationality.

“I don’t need anything from anyone – my siblings are there,” Kerdli said. Nevertheless, after spending a few days in a crowded reception centre upon their arrival, he and his children were sent back to Lebanon.\textsuperscript{18}

**Cypriot Pushbacks Raise Human Rights Concerns**

Amid the surge in smuggler boats arriving in the summer and fall of 2020, Cypriot authorities began to carry out a policy of forcibly pushing vessels back before they could reach the shore, a policy that has been sharply criticized by human rights groups. Human Rights Watch reported that Cypriot coast guard patrols had “summarily pushed back, abandoned, expelled or returned more than 200 migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers coming from Lebanon during the first week of September 2020 without giving them the opportunity to lodge asylum claims.” In some cases, the report stated, coast guard vessels tried to prevent smuggler boats from landing by brandishing weapons and circling their vessels at high speed to create waves; in one case, a coast guard vessel rammed a wooden boat full of migrants. Others were allowed to disembark but later were loaded on boats and sent back to Lebanon without having the chance to lodge asylum claims.\textsuperscript{19}

While the journeys are largely driven by economic desperation, the irony is that this route is largely out of reach for the poorest of the poor.

The CoE Commissioner for Human Rights has also raised concerns about the pushbacks, noting that “when persons at the border are returned without individual identification or procedure, Member States cannot establish whether they may be sending them back to human rights abuses. This may lead to violations of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the UN Refugee convention. Moreover, collective expulsions of migrants are prohibited under Article 4 of Protocol 4 to the ECHR and as such, cannot be tolerated.”\textsuperscript{20}

The Cypriot Interior Minister, in his response, noted that the country is “facing huge challenges concerning arrivals of irregular migrants on the island,” both by sea and over land from Turkish-controlled Northern Cyprus, with some 4% of the population now being asylum seekers and protection holders. However, he maintained that the migrants who

\textsuperscript{15} Interviews conducted in 2020 and 2021
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Op. cit., SEWW, 21 September 2020
\textsuperscript{18} Interview conducted in May 2021
were sent back had not requested international protection.\textsuperscript{21}

**Increased Efforts to Stop the Departures**

It appears that, at least in some cases, Lebanese authorities have looked the other way and allowed smuggler boats to depart. Kerdli recalled that the boat he crossed in had encountered a Lebanese Army marine patrol that ultimately let them go. "I told them, 'The President told us: if you don't like the situation, leave. Well, we're leaving,'" Kerdli recalled, referring to a controversial November 2019 speech by Lebanese President Michel Aoun in which he suggested that protesters should emigrate.\textsuperscript{22}

However, Lebanese authorities appear to have stepped up efforts to stop smuggler boats from leaving Lebanese waters, since Cypriot and Lebanese authorities met in October 2020 to discuss a readmission agreement for irregular migrants, with promises to "swiftly turn away boats proven to have left Lebanon and send them back to where they have departed from."\textsuperscript{23}

In the spring of 2021, the Lebanese Army and Internal Security Forces have regularly issued communiqués announcing that they have stopped smuggler boats, mainly carrying Syrians, from leaving Lebanese waters.\textsuperscript{24}

On 1 June, Lebanese General Security reportedly deported 15 Syrian refugees, including five who had tried to reach Cyprus by sea but had been turned back by Syrian authorities. Human rights groups monitoring the case said that upon being returned to Lebanon, all 56 passengers on the boat had been detained by General Security. Most were released, but five who had entered Lebanon after 24 April, 2019 were deported to Syria, with Lebanese authorities citing a decision by the country’s Higher Defense Council authorizing deportation of Syrians who had entered the country irregularly after that date.\textsuperscript{25}

Corina Drousiotou, a coordinator and senior legal advisor with the Cyprus Refugee Council, noted that the number of boats arriving from Lebanon appears to have dropped off since last year.\textsuperscript{26}

"I think the pushbacks had an impact on it and I think there’s been a lot of pressure put on Lebanese authorities to make sure that they stop them," she said. She also noted that, while Syrian refugees would generally be granted asylum if they did succeed in arriving, the journey has fewer clear benefits for Lebanese migrants and even for Palestinians.

Lebanese authorities appear to have stepped up efforts to stop smuggler boats from leaving Lebanese waters, since Cypriot and Lebanese authorities met in October 2020 to discuss a readmission agreement

"Everyone should be given access to the asylum procedures," she said. "...But if they're fleeing for financial reasons they will be rejected. I consider it a shame for them to endanger their lives and their families’ lives and pay so much money for something that’s not going to end in finding a solution for their situation."

\textsuperscript{21} https://rm.coe.int/reply-of-mr-nicos-nouris-minister-of-the-interiorof-cyprus-to-the-lett/1680a1cb15
\textsuperscript{24} https://twitter.com/LebarmyOfficial/status/1395305194989162497
\textsuperscript{26} Interview conducted in April 2021
Towards a Renewed Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: The Cultural Dimension of Sustainable Development in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic constituted a disruptive event that plunged both shores of the Mediterranean into a severe social and economic crisis. The pandemic also put international cultural relations in the region under strain. It is argued here that a more coherent integration of culture into the agenda of sustainable social and economic development should be promoted to enable a renewed partnership and revive the implementation of the EU’s strategic approach to international cultural relations in the Mare Nostrum.¹

The Impact of Covid-19 on Cultural Sectors and Relations in the Mediterranean Region

The health crisis triggered by Covid-19 and the containment measures put in place by public authorities have had negative effects on Mediterranean societies and economies. Governments in the region have seen their capacity to intervene reduced and their economies and societies weakened. Countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean seem to have been particularly affected because of their vulnerable economies and widespread social and economic inequality, particularly among women and young people (see e.g., Noferini, 2020:153; Kamel, 2020:125). Due to its inherently fragile and not very resilient nature, the world of culture and creativity has been among the hardest hit sectors, with obvious repercussions on the cultural relations and cultural diplomacy of the countries involved.

Firstly, the crisis has had a direct effect on the ability of cultural actors to produce culture and engage in international cooperation, with implications for the entire chain of cultural and creative value. In most Mediterranean countries, culture has been severely affected, with the widespread cancellation of cultural programmes and closure of cultural venues leading to a drastic drop in revenues. The almost total blockage of international mobility and the postponement or severe limitation of transnational cooperation have led to a downsizing of the international ambitions of the cultural and creative sectors. The situation is particularly serious in the southern neighbourhood countries, where cultural professionals were already living in a difficult social and economic context. The enjoyment of culture by citizens on both sides of the Mediterranean has also been affected. While many have found it impossible to devote economic resources to cultural consumption, almost everyone has seen access to culture prevented or extremely limited (Isernia and Lamonica, 2021).

Secondly, the crisis generated by Covid-19 also had repercussions on the institutional capacity of governments to practice international cultural relations in the Mediterranean. For example, data tells us that the cultural representation and cooperation activities of EU Member States in the southern Mediterranean countries were limited during the general lockdown months of 2020 and 2021. A vast majority of EU Member States’ cultural institutes have had to close their offices, at least partially; moreover, the economic damage inflicted on some of these organizations – which, as in the case of the British Council,

¹ This short essay was inspired by the author’s participation in a knowledge sharing workshop organized by EUNIC Global in April 2021
also link their operations to income from teaching or certification activities – raises fears that there may be medium-term repercussions on the funds available and on the organization of cultural and cooperation activities.\(^2\)

**Policy Responses to Support the Cultural Sectors and Relations in the Mediterranean Region**

In all Mediterranean countries, public authorities put in place measures to support the creative and cultural sectors during the pandemic. The nature and extent of these measures varies greatly from country to country, although evidence suggests that most of these have been of an economic and direct nature. Alongside public intervention, there has been a proliferation of initiatives by the private and philanthropic sectors and non-governmental organizations, ranging from the establishment of emergency funds to the provision of training and digital infrastructure. Finally, civil society has played an advocacy role in several countries, which has proved crucial in convincing governments to adopt specific measures in favour of culture.

In general, it can be said that most policy measures, whether public, private or non-governmental, have been aimed at ensuring the economic survival of the cultural world and the social survival of its protagonists. The focus of the measures has been largely domestic and there was little effort to restore and support international cultural relations in the Euro-Mediterranean region. A couple of examples come from the most sensitive phase of the 2020 general lockdown. In Morocco, the French institute launched an initiative in favour of the local cultural and creative scene, providing direct financial assistance and technical support to cultural projects targeting social groups with little access to culture. In Tunisia, the Tfanen – Tunisie Créative programme readily joined the government’s cultural revitalization fund through the reallocation of European funds. Again, the aim of the intervention was to ensure the economic survival of operators in the sector and to support the revitalization of Tunisia’s creative and cultural economy (Isernia and Lamonica, 2021:37-39). Despite the efforts made by both governmental and non-governmental actors, data suggest that available resources are not sufficient to support the creative and cultural sectors at the domestic level, and certainly not to revitalize international cultural relations in the region. It is therefore necessary to find a new policy framework to build a shared commitment and, consequently, mobilize adequate resources. It is argued here that this is possible through a concerted initiative to integrate the cultural dimension into Mediterranean social and economic development policies.

**The Cultural Dimension of Sustainable Development**

The policy framework of reference can only be the one resulting from the adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda. For some time now, various cultural actors and international organizations have been fighting for the integration of culture into the social, economic and environmental dimensions of the Agenda, which acknowledges that “all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development.”\(^3\) Culture is relevant to all sustainable development goals (SDG), both in its role as a driver and as an enabler (Vries, 2020). For example, culture can strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities (SDGs 1,4,5,10,11), empower citizens through education, capacity building and awareness raising (SDGs 1,8,10,11), contribute to sustainable economic growth, job creation and the reduction of inequalities (SDGs 1,5,8,9,12), or simply enhance tangible and intangible cultural heritage and sustainable tourism (British Council, 2020).

*Culture and Sustainable Development in EU Policy Making*

The idea that culture is a driver and enabler of development is not alien to European policy making. Since

\(^2\) To learn more about the global impact of Covid-19 on EUNIC members, see: www.eunicglobal.eu/news/impact-of-covid-19

\(^3\) *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* Resolution adopted by the General Assembly. 2015:10. Available at: http://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda
Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the European Union has progressively taken over and integrated the cultural dimension of sustainable development into its policies. Under the general framework of the New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 and the New Commission 2019-2024 Political priorities, the EU's strategic approach to sustainable development has been complemented by key initiatives addressing the role of culture. These include the New European Agenda for Culture, the amended Council Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022, and the Council Resolution on the cultural dimension of sustainable development.

The New European Agenda for Culture is already articulated in social and economic dimensions that cut across external relations priorities. The agenda is clearly linked to the broadening of the priorities of the Council work plan for culture 2019-2022 — which already gives emphasis to international cultural relations — to include the relationship between culture and development. This amendment was introduced in May 2020 in accordance with the provisions of the Council resolution on the cultural dimension of sustainable development. The resolution recognizes that culture can play an important role in the pursuit of economic, social and environmental sustainability objectives.

Finally, the relationship between culture and economic development is at the heart of the EU’s strategic approach to international cultural relations, which recognizes the role of the creative and cultural sectors in stimulating inclusive growth and job creation in Europe and partner countries and identifies culture as a key sector for development cooperation.

The Role of Sustainable Development in the New Agenda for the Mediterranean

The latest developments concerning the European Union’s partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood confirm the key role played by economic and social development in Euro-Mediterranean relations, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic. In February 2021, the European Commission issued a joint communication with the aim of proposing a New Agenda for the Mediterranean to renew bilateral and regional cooperation.

The new agenda stems from the awareness that the pandemic has generated a global economic and social crisis, which, to be resolved, requires enhanced cooperation in the Mediterranean, an area characterized by strong interdependence and common vulnerabilities. The novelty of this renewed partnership is the centrality given to sustainable development in the economic, social and environmental fields, and the explicit reference to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal.

Consequently, the Commission’s approach, also confirmed by the Council’s latest conclusions, is based on concerted international and transnational actions in strategic areas such as human development — with particular attention to vulnerable groups.
including young people and women – socio-economic resilience aimed at strengthening and creating sustainable and inclusive economies, and ecological transition. Such an ambitious agenda will be supported during the next multiannual financial framework period (2021-2027) by the newly established Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

Conclusions: Time to Revive the EU’s Strategic Approach to International Cultural Relations

The pandemic has severely affected the social and economic fabric of all Mediterranean countries. Culture has not been spared, both in its domestic and economic dimensions and in its international and relational projections. The integration of culture into the dynamics of social, economic and environmental development could act as a driving force for recovery and innovation in the region. This approach would benefit from the presence of an articulated policy framework that regulates the EU’s strategy for sustainable development and places it at the heart of the future Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

However, despite wide convergence, at present there seems to be no explicit coordination between the direction taken by the European Union and its Mediterranean partners towards sustainability and the implementation of the EU’s strategic approach to international cultural relations. For example, the new Agenda for the Mediterranean and the inter-institutional negotiations for the implementation of the new NDICI do not refer to the strategic approach, which should be the natural testing ground for strengthening the relationship between culture and development.

The EU’s strategic approach to international cultural relations is meant to foster cooperation in support of the common good by building shared consensus in a trust-conducive and mutually beneficial setting based on a “process of consultation and collaboration between EU and third country stakeholders” (Lamonica and Murray, 2021:8). A better integration of this framework for action with development-related policy and planning would contribute to the renewal of Euro-Mediterranean relations while making culture salient again on the EU’s external relations agenda.

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Investments in Cultural Infrastructure in the Gulf Countries

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Like everything else in the world that was affected by the coronavirus pandemic, the arts and culture sectors of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries screeched to a crashing halt for most of the past year. Gulf cities, Dubai and Doha in particular have been home to branches of the world’s most iconic brand names in the international culture scene – the Louvre, Guggenheim, Christie’s, and Sotheby’s, to name a few – whose names remained emblazoned on the building façades, while their interiors lay empty, hollow, devoid of people and profit. Similarly, the Gulf’s many other public cultural offerings – art fairs, film festivals, and museum and gallery exhibitions – were postponed or cancelled, effectively stalling Gulf governments’ long-term plans to create country-specific art and culture “sectors,” as part of their “2030 Vision” for non-hydrocarbon-based economic futures.

The arts and culture sectors of the Arabian peninsula have been instrumentalized by Gulf governments as they seek to harmonize each pillar of the nation in the service of diversifying GCC state economies away from hydrocarbons towards tourism and a more knowledge-based future. Because the Gulf’s art and culture sectors are almost entirely state-sponsored projects, and because they are intimately intertwined with these states’ nation-building efforts, the domino effect of one part of the economy over the other was palpable. Over the past year, GCC museums and galleries, like so many of the world’s cultural institutions, have had to innovate and come up with creative ways of remaining relevant during the pandemic period, which can only too easily introduce institutional, existential crises. Much of these innovations in the arts and culture sector were related to new ways of conducting operations online, with museums reaching new audiences and galleries presenting some semblance of their former selves in digital space.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, events on the Gulf’s cultural calendars were positioned as key attractions for tourists and visitors from all over the world, many of whom go on holiday in the Gulf specifically, while others take advantage of Gulf airline stopover deals to spend a few days in the region on their way to and from destinations further afield. Cultural tourism was building a head of steam and working towards seriously diversifying Gulf state national economies, as enshrined in each country’s national visions.

The arts in the Gulf have always been carefully curated by the state. Since their independence from British protectionism in the 1960s-1970s, the Gulf states have worked towards shaping their tangible and intangible infrastructure over the past 40-50 years, from physical landscapes and the nationwide urban planning of buildings, roads, and metro systems, to full-scale cultural landscapes, educational and cultural institutions, museums and galleries. The Gulf states’ cultural scene today seeks to rival that of the most prestigious international ones in terms of scale, industry and artist attraction, and ultimately market establishment and profits.

Despite the physical inactivity and the seemingly drastic outlook for the future of the Gulf’s art and culture landscape, there were several virtual initiatives that took place over the past year that introduced the Gulf to the future of cultural activities: both digital and virtual. The Qatar Children’s Museum was launched virtually in 2020, and engaged with its target audiences through a variety of online
activities, and the 3-2-1 Qatar Sports and Olympic Museum will officially launch in 2021, and had already begun communicating with its target audiences far in advance of a physical launch. Furthermore, partnering with online platforms such as Google Arts and Culture, many GCC museums and galleries are now providing virtual portals to the interiors of their buildings as well as to their collections, a vast array of which can now be accessed online. The Gulf’s museum collections are now available for virtual public consumption all around the world, allowing Gulf states to share their cultural treasures with international virtual visitors and to have far-reaching influence beyond their borders – bearing in mind that such access is the privilege of the technologically and culturally connected.

The Gulf states’ cultural scene today seeks to rival that of the most prestigious international ones in terms of scale, industry and artist attraction, and ultimately market establishment and profits

The Gulf states’ cultural sectors do more than contribute to diversifying hydrocarbon-based economies; they are also the region’s prime agents of nation branding and cultural diplomacy efforts, imbuing the Gulf states with significant influence and reorienting their image towards one that is more global and culturally connected. Every year, for instance, Qatar hosts an “international year of culture” honouring its diplomatic and cultural relationship with a different country. In 2020, Qatar honoured France with a programme that included a variety of exhibitions, festivals and events in both nations. As just one example of these bilateral cultural activities, we have France’s contemporary art centre and Qatar’s Mathaf: the Arab Museum of Modern Art cooperated to co-curate an exhibition of contemporary art at the Palais de Tokyo titled “Our world is Burning,” featuring works by a variety of artists.

The past year introduced some serious cultural surprises in the Gulf states, one of which was the new and hitherto unlikely diplomatic and cultural relationship established between the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Israel, as part of the US-brokered Abraham Accords.¹ The diplomatic deal instantaneously normalized relations between the two Gulf countries and Israel, and paved the way for Morocco and Sudan to acquiesce in a similar manner. The accords were rapidly manifested in a variety of large-scale and unprecedented public events, including the first flight carrying Israeli tourists to the UAE; the first time Israeli artists were ever invited to hold an exhibition in the UAE; the inclusion of an Israeli pavilion at the now-postponed Dubai Expo 2020; the opening of a Holocaust memorial exhibition in Dubai; the establishment of a joint film festival that takes place alternately in Israel and the UAE; among a multitude of other culture-based activities.

Testament to the deeply political nature of national art sectors, all these cultural efforts were sponsored by their states. The Al Qattara Cinema event, for instance, was established through an agreement between the Abu Dhabi Film Commission and the Israel Film Fund (IFF), and was organized by the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), in collaboration with Image Nation and Jerusalem Sam Spiegel Film School (JSFS). Another surprise in the Gulf’s art and culture sector came in the form of the government of Dubai’s announcement regarding “the first cultural visa in the world,”² 1,000 of which will be granted to artists every year. Over the past year, the Dubai Culture and Arts Authority granted 69 “golden visas” to foreign artists and intellectuals, allowing them to have a ten-year residence in the UAE, in the hope of contributing to a more stable environment for artists to operate in. The Gulf states attract millions of migrant workers, with the UAE and Qatar home to the majority of these – anywhere between 80-90% of their populations are foreign residents. Long criticized for their lack of pathways to citizenship for many long-term residents, Qatar and the UAE have instituted extraordinary expansions in their visa regimes and a relaxing of stringent visa policies.

In early 2021, a further diplomatic thaw was reached between Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, on the one hand, and Qatar on the other, after a four-year-long air, sea and land blockade by the former three GCC countries over the latter, in what came to be known as the “GCC crisis” or the “blockade of Qatar.” This year will be the first time in a while that the cultural connections between the disputing countries will resume, and for each country to again begin accepting submissions from, and to participate in, each other’s festival and exhibition opportunities. Yet another of the past year’s cultural novelties is Saudi Arabia’s inaugural Red Sea Film Festival. Postponed from March to November 2021, this will be the first large-scale event of its kind in a country that had previously outlawed cinema for over three decades. Along with all other aspects of the country, “as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s economic and social reform plan, Vision 2030, the kingdom has taken a top-down approach to developing the country’s arts and culture sector.” The kingdom’s public reimagination of itself is occurring through the physical and cultural infrastructure currently being built along its Red Sea coast. In parallel with the now-famous technology-based city, NEOM, Saudi’s dramatic cultural strides are the direct result of government mandate.

The governments of the Gulf’s young nations, all monarchical families, have demonstrated that creating a narrative is just as important as creating physical infrastructure in the interest of nation-building. These states have shaped images of themselves through their cultural landscapes, and have maintained strong relationships with respected international cultural institutions. Gulf governments are welding together physical infrastructure and narrative construction in all their star projects and partnerships with international entities. With funding drying up in other parts of the world, especially over the past year or so due to the pandemic, the Gulf states have thus far maintained a robust grant-giving policy, especially in relation to the film sector. Institutions such as the Doha Film Institute in Qatar, the Abu Dhabi Film Commission in the UAE, and now the Red Sea Foundation in Saudi Arabia are shaping the future of the film industry, not only in their countries, but also across the region and internationally as well, challenging traditional cinema centres like Egypt and Lebanon. As the surrounding region is mired in geopolitical turbulence and as Middle Eastern countries continue to experience unrest and conflict, the Gulf states have remained “islands of efficiency,” attractive, stable and wealthy centres for the development of (state-led) art and culture in the region.

The governments of the Gulf’s young nations, all monarchical families, have demonstrated that creating a narrative is just as important as creating physical infrastructure in the interest of nation-building.

Bibliography


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Social Movements and Uprisings, 10 Years after the 2011 Spring: The Characteristics of the Crisis of Politics in the MENA Region

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As of 2018, a second round of the Arab Spring has emerged in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon and Iraq. It is taking place among a sort of general indifference that seems to be linked to the disappointments following the 2011 uprisings, particularly in Western opinions, fuelled by the migration issue and the development of terrorism. This indifference also concerns the citizens of the countries in the region, although the Arab Spring has achieved undeniable success. Abdelaziz Bouteflika was unable to stand for a fifth presidential term and, more importantly, the Sudanese uprising removed a Muslim Brotherhood president: Omar al-Bashir. In Iraq and Lebanon, the uprisings forced the resignation of their respective prime ministers.

Despite this, Arab citizens do not seem ready to remobilize as massively as in 2011. The example of Egypt is significant in this regard. While the authoritarian and repressive lockdown of the political space is far more intense than under the presidency of Hosni Mubarak, calls to take to the streets have met with no success. It would be wrong to think that this is only due to the fear of repression. Today, the “demand for state security” is at the top of the agenda not only for Egyptian society but for all societies in the region, including Tunisia, and it seems to exceed the demand for freedom and democracy that emerged in 2011. The balance between freedom and security seems to be very difficult to strike in this region of the world, which is discovering political democracy at a time when the latter is experiencing a deep crisis throughout the world. Changing the leadership at the highest state level is not the same as questioning the logic, meaning and impact of a political and economic system. In this respect, the Tunisian example is conclusive. Representative democracy has not fulfilled the social promises related to employment and social and regional equality, indeed, quite the contrary. The current institutional crisis between the three political powers (Presidency of the Republic, Assembly of the Representatives of the People and Government) heightens the process of debilitation of the State and its health, education and social services.

The Social and Political Uprisings of 2018-2020: Characteristics and Outcomes

It would be wrong to link the current stalemate of the 2018-2020 uprisings solely to the COVID-19 crisis, although the latter obviously played a role. In fact, it is their mixed results that have dampened the momentum of the uprisings’ actors. Despite its exceptional longevity, the Algerian Hirak has gradually evolved into a popular force of peaceful opposition, expressing its opinion on various government decisions at each demonstration. It is therefore not surprising that the new president Tebboune has agreed to reform the constitution and organize new legislative elections. It is as if questioning the army’s political role and the regime’s rentier characteristics were less on the agenda than this reform dynamic. The victory of electoral abstention in the presidential and legislative elections and the results of the latter show the weakness of popular support for the cosmetic reforms of the Algerian regime and the absence of a political translation of the Hirak.

The Algerian Hirak was unable to challenge the rentier political and economic system, and the same applies to the Iraqi and Lebanese mobilizations. What
can peaceful popular uprisings do to change political systems that are firmly anchored in clientelist and rentier interests, built in conjunction with regional and international forces from their own perspectives and interests?

In this regard, the example of Iraq is highly significant. The nationwide protest movement of autumn 2019 had political and social demands relating to public services, employment, spiralling social and regional inequalities and corruption. The uprising, which was bloodily suppressed, was driven mainly by youth and was not imbued with a community spirit. It is a clear demonstration of the failure of the post-2003 “democratic” reform. The latter led to the confessionalization of political life, the considerable weakening of the state security services and the multiplication of militias. However, the protest of Iraqi youth was made in the name of the Iraqi nation and against both American and Iranian interference. Similarly, while the Shiite community was the “privileged” one of the post-Saddam American order, the uprising revealed the social and political divisions that cut across it between a frustrated and abandoned rank and file and the highly privileged elites.1

The same can be said for the Lebanese social uprising, which also denounces the communal clientelism of a political system built for decades on the confessional distribution of responsibilities. Preceded in 2015 by the mobilization linked to the rubbish crisis, the 2019 uprising was provoked by the government’s imposition of new taxes (notably on WhatsApp calls), unemployment and the deterioration of living standards linked to the devaluation of the pound. The terrible explosion in the Beirut port on 4 August 2020 testified to the deterioration of the services of a failed state, without leading to an in-depth questioning of the political system that runs it. Even though the “youth,” dominated rank and file of religious communities, especially Shiite, was part of the movement, the fear of civil war in connection with regional and international interventions led the uprising’s actors to prefer renegotiating the community contract rather than abolishing it. Thus, the American call for the demilitarization of Hezbollah fractured and challenged the initial unitary nature of the uprising. These are the impacts on the Lebanese uprising of the multiple conflicts in the region, heightened by the Sunni/Shiite division between Iran, the Gulf States, Turkey and Egypt.

Crisis of Politics in the Arab Region

For many Islamologists, the removal of Ben Ali in 2011 by popular pressure represented a momentous event in Sunni Muslim Arab history, marking the political imagination of Arab citizens. The departures of Bouteflika, Omar al-Bashir, Adel Abdul Mahdi and Saad Hariri confirm this analysis. However, the experiences of the region’s people have also been marked by the negative events that quickly followed 2011: the military coup of July 2013 that deposed the first democratically elected president in a country central to the region, Egypt; the civil wars and/or the collapse of the Syrian, Libyan and Yemeni states. As for the creation of Daesh, it can be considered the height of the debacle of the first Arab Spring. Political language gave way to violence and to identity and religious mobilizations. Far from expressing a cultural trait specific to these societies, such phenomena are local expressions of the general, worldwide crisis of language and political identity brought about by globalization and neoliberalism, above all, the questioning of states as the sole or even dominant centres of political decision-making.2

But they are also different for reasons specific to this region of the world and the fact that the authoritarian regimes of the countries in the region, aided by the major regional and international players, mainly the Gulf states and the USA, have fostered the language of identity and community of the many Islamist currents over several decades. The latter have reactivated an episteme that has its roots in an imaginary shared by all Muslims. The reasons for this alliance are multiple. Internally, Islamism has been used to weaken ideologies critical of neo-liberalism. Similarly, Islamic charities have compensated for the withdrawal of states from health and education and have allowed the renewal of the “authoritarian social pacts”3 that characterize the regimes in the region.

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The ideological offensive of the Gulf states via satellite TV in the 1990s completed this “great cultural transformation” towards the Islamization of minds. Thus, the dominant language available to the majority of the population became the language of Islam(ism) in its different variants and hybrids. This highly “performative” language, in turn, perverted social struggles by transforming them into identity struggles against the Other, whether it be the Christian or unbelieving West, the Shiite and Coptic neighbours or even the Sunni fellow citizens who are insufficiently Muslim because they live in jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic ignorance). It is therefore not surprising that Islamist movements were the big winners of the 2011 Arab Spring, either through the ballot box or violence. Contemporary Jihadism,\(^4\) says Nabil Mouline, has a double parentage: the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabi Salafism spread from Saudi Arabia.

**Crisis of Political Questioning in the MENA Region**

Several researchers\(^5\) have questioned the paradoxes of the 2011 Arab Spring, particularly the conjunction of revolutionary protest and reformist approach. In reality, this complex characteristic is not specific to the Arab uprisings at a time of “hybridization of politics.”\(^6\) The Arab Spring of 2011 highlighted the characteristics of social movements and uprisings in a globalized world: absence of ideology and centralized organization; myriad collectives and committees; multiplicity of leaders; distrust of institutional politics; sociological diversity of actors and demands; importance of the (new) media for international visibility, as in Tahrir Square in 2011; peacefulness and/or sporadic violence, etc. Researchers find it difficult to perceive the signs of the crisis of politics in the Arab region because they are in fact coupled with a crisis of political questioning, due in particular to the polarization regarding political Islam by specialists in the region. This phenomenon is the source of many misunderstandings and even errors of analysis. Thus, the social movements that heralded the 2011 uprisings were considered epiphenomena because they had no link with Islamist movements. Similarly, a large part of the academic field perceives political Islam as a social alternative to neo-liberalism, whereas this movement actually advocates a neo-liberalism corrected by the beneficence of the rich towards the poor, coupled with a social conservatism of great intensity. In Tunisia, the Ennahdha movement has not initiated any reforms related to health, poverty and education. The development of the country’s infrastructure has stalled and inequalities between regions have not been addressed. Even more than the absence of a social state, it is possible to speak of a negative vision of states, and from this perspective, the outcome of Omar al-Bashir’s 40-year reign in Sudan is significant: civil wars and partitions of populations between north and south, etc.

It is therefore not surprising that the intense demand for the State, both socially and in terms of security, is now emerging with such force in most societies in the region. If in Egypt, it is part of the consensus around Sissi’s military regime, in Tunisia, it reinforces the popularity of a party that clearly claims to be state-centric Tunisian nationalism, the Free Destourian Party (PDL). However, here too, it is clear that the polarization of the academic field on political Islam has led research to neglect the analysis of the multiple, contradictory reappropriations of the nation-state model in the Arab region. The existence of an Arab public space characterized by a common language (Arabic) and a dominant religion (Islam) is in fact structured around these different nationalisms without challenging them. Like the national constructions of European countries, the different states in the region have constructed multiple national political affiliations through their citizenship, nationality codes, borders, administrative apparatuses, courts, schools, security and military forces and conflicts. These constructions have sometimes been accompanied by powerful discourses around the national-state, notably in Egypt and Tunisia, and in other cases, around “other” entities, whether the “tribe,” the “masses,” and/or Arab nationalism.

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Appendices
MAP A.1a COVID-19: Cases and Deaths per 100,000 Inhabitants

Cumulative Cases per 100,000 Inhabitants as of 31 May 2021

- More than 10,000
- From 8,000 to 10,000
- From 6,000 to 8,000
- From 4,000 to 6,000
- From 2,000 to 4,000
- Less than 2,000

Cumulative Deaths per 100,000 Inhabitants as of 31 May 2021

- More than 250
- From 200 to 250
- From 150 to 200
- From 100 to 150
- From 50 to 100
- Less than 50

Own production. Source: WHO.
MAP A.1c: COVID-19: Deaths and Vaccination Campaigns

- **Albania**
  - Population: 2,854,190

- **Algeria**
  - Population: 43,055,050

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina**
  - Population: 3,301,000

- **Croatia**
  - Population: 4,087,500

- **Cyprus**
  - Population: 1,198,580

- **Egypt**
  - Population: 97,059,850

- **France**
  - Population: 9,053,300

- **Greece**
  - Population: 10,716,320

- **Israel**
  - Population: 9,053,300

- **Italy**
  - Population: 10,101,690

- **Jordan**
  - Population: 2,854,190

- **Kosovo (under UNSC Resolution 1244)**
  - Population: 1,264,230

- **Lebanon**
  - Population: 4,525,700

- **Libya**
  - Population: 6,777,450

- **Malta**
  - Population: 392,650

- **Mauritania**
  - Population: 4,525,700

- **Monaco**
  - Population: 302,690

- **Montenegro**
  - Population: 622,140

- **Morocco**
  - Population: 4,067,500

- **North Macedonia**
  - Population: 2,958,460

- **Palestine**
  - Population: 4,087,500

- **Portugal**
  - Population: 10,101,690

- **Serbia**
  - Population: 1,794,250

- **Slovenia**
  - Population: 2,958,460

- **Spain**
  - Population: 41,079,780

- **Syria**
  - Population: 331,070,130

- **Tunisia**
  - Population: 11,804,720

- **Turkey**
  - Population: 83,429,620

**Legend:**
- **Blue line:** Cumulative deaths
- **Red line:** Weekly reported deaths
- **Gray area:** Vaccination campaign

Own production. Source: WHO.
MAP A.2a | Suez Canal Corridor Area Project

**New Suez Canal Expansion**
- Construction began: August 2014
- First use: August 2015
- Date completed: December 2016
- Transit time: 11 hours
- Total length: 72 Km
- Width: 317 Km
- Medium depth: 24 m
- Vessels/Day (by 2013): 97

**Suez Canal**
- Construction began: April 1859
- First use: February 1867
- Date completed: November 1869
- Transit time: 18 hours
- Length: 193.3 Km
- Width: 280-345 m
- Medium depth: 22.5 m
- Vessels/Day (before expansion): 49

Own production. Source: Suez Canal Authority.
MAP A.2b | Shipping Traffic on the Suez Canal

**Number of Vessels**

Number of Vessels over the years 2011 to 2019. The number of vessels has increased from around 15,000 in 2011 to over 19,000 in 2019.

**Cargo Tonnes (millions)**

Cargo tonnage has also increased significantly from 0 million in 2011 to over 1,000 million in 2019.

**Cargo Tonnes by Direction (millions)**

Traffic direction is divided into North/South and South/North. The North/South traffic has been higher than the South/North traffic throughout the years.

**Number of Ships (ship type)**

Different types of ships are represented: Tankers, Container Ships, General Cargo, Passenger Ships, Ro/Ro and Car Carriers, LNG Ships, and Bulk Carriers. Each type shows its contribution over the years.

**Cargo Tonnage Destinations**

Cargo tonnage destinations are categorized into several regions: Red Sea, Aden and East Africa, North, West Europe and Baltic Sea, South East Asia and Australia, South Asia, S.E. Mediterranean and Black Sea, North Mediterranean, Far East, Arabian Gulf, West, S.W. Mediterranean, America, and Other Destinations.

Own production. Source: Suez Canal Authority.
MAP A.3  Algerian Constitutional Referendum 2020

Results

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>Invalid Votes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 70%</td>
<td>29.46</td>
<td>59.28</td>
<td>11.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 65% to 70%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 60% to 65%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 55% to 60%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 50% to 55%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Abstentions (%)</th>
<th>Voters (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 90%</td>
<td>23.14</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>From 80% to 90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>From 70% to 80%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 60% to 70%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 50% to 60%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 40% to 50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Own production. Source: Journal Officiel de la République Algérienne n°72, Autorité nationale indépendante des élections (ANIE).
MAP A.4 | Russian Trade with Mediterranean Countries

Russian Trade with Mediterranean Countries (in thousands USD) 2019

- More than 20,000,000
- From 10,000,000 to 15,000,000
- From 5,000,000 to 10,000,000
- From 3,000,000 to 5,000,000
- From 1,000,000 to 3,000,000
- From 500,000 to 1,000,000
- From 100,000 to 500,000
- Less than 100,000

Evolution of Russian Trade with Med Countries (1996-2019)

OWN PRODUCTION. SOURCE: UNCTAD.
MAP A.5a | The Bosporus Strait and the Istanbul Canal Project

**Bosporus Strait**
- Length: 31 km.
- Depth: 13-110 m.
- Width: 700-3420 m.
- Vessels/day: 118-125

**Istanbul Canal**
- Length: 45 km.
- Depth: 25 m.
- Width: 125-200 m.
- Est. vessels/day: 160-185
- Est. cost: €9.2-11.5 billion
- Date of completion: 2025-2026

Own production. Sources: Governorship of Istanbul, Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Turkey, Anadolu Agency.
The Montreux Convention (LDN-4015). Signed on 20 July 1936, by Australia, Bulgaria, France (depository State), Greece, Japan, Romania, Turkey, the UK, the USSR, and Yugoslavia. Ratified on 9 November 1936. Registered before the League of Nations on 11 December 1936. The Convention replaces the Treaty of Lausanne (LDN-701) of 24 July 1923 and gives Turkey control over the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles, and the Sea of Marmara, including the Turkish militarization of the straits, in exchange for guaranteeing the transit of naval warships and civilian vessels.

The entry into force of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in November 1994, prompted calls for the Montreux Convention to be adapted to be compatible with the new international regime. However, Turkey’s refusal to sign the UNCLOS implied Montreux remains in force without further amendment even with the approval by Turkey in 1994 of the Maritime Traffic Regulations for the Strait of Turkey and the Marmara Region to guarantee safe navigation and environmental protection, which were approved by the International Maritime Organization as they did not violate the principle of free passage (Art. 1 of Montreux). This has unlimited validity in time.

The Istanbul Canal Project. A new artificial sea route was unveiled by the Turkish Government in January 2018, aimed to alleviate increased traffic across the Bosphorus and to prevent risks posed by vessels carrying dangerous shipments through the Strait. In February 2021, the Environment and Urbanization Ministry announced Turkey would open the tender. In March 2021, the Turkish Government approved development plans for the construction of the Canal.

In April 2021, coinciding with the arrest of 103 retired admirals of the Turkish Navy who expressed their defense of the terms of Montreux, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, reiterated his commitment to the Convention but stressed that it would not apply to the planned Istanbul Canal, since it has been conceived to “give Turkey sovereign rights beyond the limitations of the Montreux Convention.”
The Productive Capacities Index (PCI) is a dynamic and multidimensional tool to understand the status of the productive capacity of a country. UNCTAD defines Productive Capacities as "the productive resources, entrepreneurial capabilities and production linkages, which together determine the capacity of a country to produce goods and services and enable it to grow and develop."

Productive resources are factors of production, including financial and physical capital. Entrepreneurial capabilities are investment/production skills, knowledge, technology, information, and relational linkages which enterprises have. Production linkages are flows among productive units of goods and services, knowledge, technology, and information and productive resources.

Own production. Source: UNCTAD.
Map A.7 | Internet Bandwidth and Broadband in the Mediterranean countries

International Bandwidth (Mbit/s) 2019
- Black: More than 7,000,000
- Dark blue: From 2,000,000 to 3,000,000
- Medium blue: From 1,500,000 to 2,000,000
- Light blue: From 1,000,000 to 1,500,000
- Light grey: From 1,000,000 to 1,500,000
- Light grey: Less than 100,000

Mobile Subscriptions (per 100 inhabitants)
- Red: Cellular mobile
- Orange: Mobile broadband

Own production. Source: International Telecommunications Union (ITU).
MAP A.8 | Fruit Production in the Mediterranean Countries

Total Production (tonnes) 
- More than 23,000,000
- From 15,000,000 to 19,000,000
- From 5,000,000 to 10,000,000
- From 1,000,000 to 5,000,000
- Less than 1,000,000

Import-Export (tonnes) 
- From 500,000 to 1,000,000
- From 100,000 to 500,000
- Less than 100,000

Diversification of Production (%) Based on the FAO Fruit Classification

- Apples and Pears
- Apricots
- Tropical Fruits
- Strawberries and Berries
- Cherries
- Dates
- Figs
- Citruses
- Grapes
- Kiwi Fruit
- Melons and Watermelons
- Peaches and Nectarines
- Plums and Sloes
- Others

Own production. Source: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
MAP A.9 | Foreign Direct Investment in Mediterranean Countries (2019)

Own production. Source: UNCTAD.

International Tourism Receipts (% of change 2019/2020)

- Less than -75%
- From -75% to -65%
- From -65% to -55%
- From -55% to -45%
- More than -45%
- Data unavailable

International Tourist Arrivals by Month (% of change 2019/2020)

Data unavailable

Tourism as % in Total Exports

- 2019
- 2020

Own production. Source: UNWTO.

International Tourist Arrivals by Month (thousands) 2019-2020-2021

Own production. Source: UNWTO.
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MAP A.11a | International Migrant Stock in Mediterranean Countries (2020)

MAP A.12 | Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

The Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)

- **Location**: Blue Nile, Benishangul-Gumuz region, Ethiopia
- **Construction**: 2011 (70% completed by July 2020)
- **Cost**: $4.6 billion
- **Dam dimensions**: 1,780 m long, 145 m high
- **Reservoir Dimensions**: 1,874 sq Km
- **Total Storage Volume**: 74 bcm
- **Electricity Generation Capacity**: 15,759 GWh/year

EGYPT. DROUGHT AND ACCESS TO WATER. With a population of 100 million, Egypt is 97% dependent on water from the Nile. Cairo estimates that its water supply will be drastically reduced by 36% during the five-year period expected to fill the dam and wants guaranteed access to water from Ethiopia if drought occurs during this period. Both Egypt and Sudan argue that Ethiopia aims to unilaterally “impose a fait accompli without considering the rights and interests of downstream countries” and claim a binding agreement through international mediation.

ETHIOPIA. POWER GENERATION AND ECONOMIC TAKE-OFF. Ethiopia is seeking to become the leading African producer and exporter of electricity at a cheaper price increasing national supply from 44% to 90%. The GERD is presented as an opportunity for regional economic development, constant water supply, drought and flood prevention and reduction of deforestation.

Ethiopia considers that the Egyptian-Sudanese position of preeminence on the waters of the Nile is unfair for the development of the upstream countries. Due to the absence of a Nile Basin agreement as a frame of reference, Addis Ababa believes the 1959 Declaration of Principles is sufficient to demonstrate the no-harm principle and is in favor of resolving disputes through ad hoc negotiations.

SUDAN. FLOOD RISK. Sudan relies more on groundwater than the Nile as its main water source. Khartoum is mainly concerned about the GERD’s potential impact on its three major dams on the Blue Nile and main Nile and because of flooding that could result from faults in the construction or operation of the GERD, or in the event of a collapse. In this sense, Sudan wants Ethiopia to provide more assurances regarding the management of the GERD’s reservoirs and its safety standards.

Own production. Sources: Nile Basin Initiative, GERD Coordination Office, Middle East Eye, United Nations.
Chronologies

Chronology of Major Conflicts and Political Events

January 2020

Spain and Malta appoint new prime ministers. France begins social dialogue to put an end to the protests over the pension reform. In Italy, the leader of the Five Star Movement (M5E, populist) resigns and Emilia-Romagna and Calabria hold elections. In Slovenia, the coalition government collapses. Croatia assumes its first European Presidency and holds the second round of its presidential elections. There are protests in Montenegro and Serbia. Serbia and Kosovo reestablish air links. The Prime Minister of North Macedonia resigns. Albania approves legislative modifications. Greece sees the election of its first female president. In Syria, thousands head towards Turkey fleeing the offensive on Idlib. Lebanon unveils a new government. Turkey authorizes the deployment of troops in Libya. Tunisia appoints a new prime minister. Algeria appoints a new government and announces a constitutional reform. Morocco approves the demarcation of maritime boundaries and the creation of its Exclusive Economic Zone (ZEE).

Spain

- On 4 January the Central Electoral Commission suspends the President of the Catalan regional government Quim Torra’s MP status. In December 2019, Torra was sentenced by the High Court of Justice of Catalonia to an 18-month ban from holding public office for disobedience. On 27 January, the Catalan Parliament withdraws Torra’s MP status.
- On 7 January Pedro Sanchez is sworn in as Prime Minister. Sanchez will preside over a coalition government formed by the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) and Podemos (left-wing).
- On 9 January the Supreme Court refuses to recognize the Catalan pro-independence leader Oriol Junqueras as a European MP following his prison sentence in October 2019 for sedition. On 10 January the European Parliament strips Junqueras of his MEP status.

France

- On 7 January dialogue begins between the government and trade unions to put an end to the mass protests that have taken place since 5 December 2019. On 10 January the government temporarily scraps the fixed retirement age in the contested pension law reform.
- On 24 January France confirms its first case of COVID-19 in Bordeaux. During the days to come, Finland, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Italy all confirm their first cases and the WHO declares a global health emergency.
- On 26 January the Interior Minister Christophe Castaner reports a 130% increase in racist and xenophobic acts in 2019, reaching a total number of 1,142.
- On 28 January three new cases of suicide in the National Police Force are reported in January, adding to the 59 in 2019, attributed to precarious working conditions, high levels of anxiety and a lack of police resources.
- On 28 January clashes break out between police and firefighters during a demonstration by the fire service in Paris demanding better pay and conditions.

Italy

- On 19 January the Sardines citizen protest movement brings 35,000 people together in Bologna in protest against Matteo Salvini, the leader of the far-right League party.
- On 22 January Luigi Di Maio resigns as leader of M5E amid a major party crisis, although he will continue as Foreign Minister.
- On 26 January the Democratic Party (PD, social democratic) wins in Emilia-Romagna’s regional elections. In Calabria, victory goes to the coalition of Forza Italia (FI, right-wing) and the far-right parties, The League and Fratelli d’Italia (FdI).

Malta

- On 8 January some 500 immigrants are evacuated after a fire breaks out at a reception centre in Marsa.
- On 11 January the Labour Party (PL) elects Robert Abela as its new leader and Prime Minister following the resignation of Joseph Muscat in connection with the murder of the journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.
- On 14 January the former leader of the Nationalist Party (PN), Simon Busuttil, is appointed Secretary General of the European People’s Party (EPP, centre-right).
- On 17-20 January, respectively, the chief of police, Lawrence Cutajar, and...
Minister for Gozo, Justyne Caruana, resign in connection with the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia.

Slovenia

- On 27 January the Prime Minister Marjan Sarec resigns putting an end to the coalition government between the List of Marjan Sarec (LMS, social liberal), the Social Democrats (SD), the Party of Modern Centre (SMC, liberal), the Party of Alenka Bratusek (SAB, centrist) and the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS, social liberal).
- On 31 January the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) declares it lacks jurisdiction to rule on the border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia, urging both parties to resolve their differences in accordance with the 2017 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague.

Croatia

- On 1 January Croatia takes over the EU Presidency with the priorities of negotiating relations with the United Kingdom, agreeing on the 2021-2027 financial framework and the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), increasing the Union’s international influence, relaunching the enlargement process, the eurozone and the Schengen Space and reforming the asylum system.
- On 5 January Croatia holds the second round of its presidential elections. The former Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic, from the Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP) claims victory over the outgoing President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, from the conservative Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ).
- On 28 January the Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic sacks the Health Minister Milan Kujundzic after information comes to light indicating he misrepresented figures in his property declaration.

Montenegro

- On 27 January there is unrest in Cetinje following a demonstration against a new Law on Religious Freedom, under which property belonging to the Orthodox Church whose ownership prior to December 1918 cannot be proved will be expropriated.

Serbia

- On 8 January, for the 58th Saturday, a demonstration in Belgrade calls for the resignation of the President Aleksandar Vucic and his government, accusing them of corruption and authoritarianism. The rallies continue throughout January and February.

Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 20 January Serbia and Kosovo reestablish air links for the first time in 21 years.

North Macedonia

- On 3 January the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev resigns following the European Council’s decision in October 2019 not to open accession talks with the country. He is replaced by the Interior Minister Oliver Spasovski.

Albania

- On 14 January the three main political parties agree to undertake the electoral reform needed to start EU negotiations.
- On 20 January the opposition Democratic Party (DPS, conservative) and Socialist Movement for Integration (DUI, social democratic) criticize the appointment of Artur Metani, a former State Attorney and linked with the Socialist Party of Albania (PSS), as the High Inspector of Justice.
- On 31 January the approval in a council of ministers of several modifications to the penal code and laws regulating the justice system and police force aimed at combating corruption and organized crime, are criticized by different rights and freedom groups over the lack of transparency of the process.

Greece

- On 2 January Greece, Cyprus and Israel sign a deal to build the Eastmed gas pipeline to transport gas to Europe from the Leviathan and Aphrodite gas fields, thereby reducing dependence on Russian gas.
- On 17 January Greece threatens to veto all agreements on Libya reached at the Berlin Conference if the maritime border deal signed by Turkey and Libya is not annulled.
- On 22 January Katerina Sakellaropoulou is elected President of Greece by the Parliament.
- On 22 January thousands gather in Lesbos, Chios and Samos to demand thousands of refugees be moved to the Greek mainland and denounce plans to replace the refugee camps with Immigration Detention Centres (IDC).

Turkey

- On 2 January the Parliament authorizes the deployment of Turkish troops in Libya to support the Government of National Accord (GNA). The decision is condemned by Egypt and met with concern by the EU and US.
- On 6 January 18 people are handed down life sentences for their role in the failed coup attempt in 2016.
- On 13 January the Republican People’s Party (CHP, Kemalist) demand a parliamentary committee be formed to investigate the political links of the Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen’s movement.
- On 25 January an earthquake measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale leaves 29 dead and more than a thousand injured.

Cyprus

- On 30 January the UN Security Council renews the mandate of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

Syria

- On 3 January in the context of the escalation between the US and Iran, Syria condemns the US attack in Baghdad which killed the Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, the Quds Force commander, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy chairman of the Shia militia Popular Mobilization Units.
- On 4 January the UN reports that approximately 300,000 displaced people are heading towards Turkey fleeing...
the attacks to control Idlib, which have been ongoing since December 2019. On 24 January, Ankara raises the number to 400,000.

- On 12 January Turkey agrees to a ceasefire in Idlib ordered by Russia on 9 January, which fails to put an end to the violence in the province.
- On 26 January government forces backed by Russia reach the outskirts of Maarat al-Numan, Idlib.

**Lebanon**

- On 10 January there are clashes between supporters and opponents of the mayor of Beirut Jamal Itani and Ziad Shebib, both accused of corruption by Lebanese protest movements, which continue to demonstrate throughout January.
- On 21 January after months without a cabinet, the Prime Minister Hassan Diab finally wins the support of the majority of political parties and that of the President Michel Aoun for his technocratic government.

**Jordan**

- On 10 January thousands of Jordanians protest against the possibility of the National Electric Power Company (NEPCO) purchasing Israeli gas.

**Egypt**

- On 16 January Egypt and Sudan announce progress in negotiations in Washington on the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.
- On 22 January the Parliament unilaterally approves the demarcation of Moroccan waters and creation of its EEZ, despite the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea requiring the consent of affected third-party countries. The extension encompasses an area off the coast of Western Sahara, which includes the underwater volcano, Tropic, with enormous mineral reserves and overlapping Spain’s 2014 request to the UN to extend its waters to the maximum permitted of 350 nautical miles, which is still under study.
- On 11 January the rival powers of Tripoli and Tobruk agree to the ceasefire proposed on 8 January by Russian and Turkey.
- On 19 January the Berlin International Conference on Libya agrees to push forward a process to end the war which includes creating an international committee to monitor the agreed ceasefire and the arms embargo imposed by the UN in 2011. The EU announces the European Council’s agreement to restart Operation Sophia to oversee the embargo.

**Algeria**

- On 2 January 76 people who took part in the protests that led to the fall of Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April 2019 are released.
- On 2 January the Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerrad unveils his government, in which Sabri Boukadoum, Belkacem Zgmati and Abderrahmane Rauia, continue as the Foreign, Justice and Finance ministers, respectively.
- On 8 January the President Abdelmajid Tebboune announces the creation of a committee tasked with reviewing the Constitution.

**Morocco**

- On 3 January the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports that 1,283 migrants died trying to reach Europe in 2019, while a further 110,669 succeeded in entering the EU.
- On 13 January the members of the new Commission led by Ursula Von der Leyen are sworn into the posts.
- On 14 January the European Commission (EC) asks the CJEU to stop the judicial reforms in Poland and suspend the functioning of the disciplinary chamber of the Polish Supreme Court.
- On 15 January the European Parliament approves the European Green Deal presented by the Commission.
- On 31 January the United Kingdom officially leaves the EU and the transition period begins that will bring Brexit to completion on 31 December 2020.

**February 2020**

In Spain, the farming sector demonstrates in protest against its precarious situation. In France, Emmanuel Macron outlines a plan to tackle “Islamist separatism.” Italy becomes the European country most affected by the coronavirus from Wuhan. Slovenia appoints its Prime Minister. In Croatia, the new President takes office. Territorial tensions are reignited between the entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The protests continue in Montenegro against the Law on Religious Freedom. The new Prime Minister in Kosovo announc-
es a number of major reforms. North Macedonia ratifies its NATO membership. In Greece, there are fresh protests against the IDCs and the arrival of thousands of refugees following Turkey’s decision not to stop them from entering the EU faced with the escalation in Idlib. Egypt’s former President Hosni Mubarak dies. The Geneva peace talks on Libya are suspended. The Tunisian Parliament approves the government of Elyes Fakhfakh. In Algeria, Said Bouteflika is sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment. In Morocco, thousands protest demanding greater social equality.

Portugal

• On 20 February the Parliament approves the legalization of euthanasia.

Spain

• On 5 February farmers demonstrate in Madrid to condemn abuse by distributing chains, demand the government defends Spanish interests in the CAP reform and denounce the lack of investment and depopulation of rural Spain.
• On 11 February the Parliament approves the draft law regulating the right to euthanasia.
• On 16 February thousands of people from Leon demonstrate to demand that the region be made an autonomous community and call for greater investment.
• On 18 February the Education Minister appeals to the courts over the government of Murcia’s decision to implement the so-called parental pin, which allows parents to decide if their children can access certain educational content.
• On 18 February the death is announced of Fernando Moran, the former Foreign Affairs Minister who signed Spain’s entry into the European Economic Community.
• On 26 February the former Justice Minister Dolores Delgado is appointed the country’s Attorney General.

France

• On 16 February the Health Minister Agnes Buzyn agrees to run as the Republic on the Move’s (LREM, liberal) candidate for mayor of Paris in the local elections, following the withdrawal of Benjamin Griveaux after the leak of sexual images involving the former candidate.
• On 18 February the President Emmanuel Macron outlines a plan to fight “Islamist separatism” to protect the values of the Republic.

Italy

• On 12 February the Senate withdraws parliamentary immunity from the League’s leader and former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, thereby allowing a trial to be held against him for kidnapping and abuse of power over his refusal to allow 131 immigrants aboard an Italian coast guard ship to disembark.
• On 26 February Italy becomes the European country most affected by COVID-19. The epidemic forces the cancellation of different events across Europe. Throughout February, Belgium, Croatia, Greece, Austria, Romania, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Monaco, North Macedonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Iceland and Switzerland all confirm their first cases.

Malta

• On 27 February the government and Parliament agree that women should represent at least 40% of the house.

Slovenia

• On 26 February the President Borut Pahor appoints the leader of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS, conservative) Janez Jansa as Prime Minister, following an agreement between the SDS, SMC, New Slovenia (NSI, Christian democratic) and DeSUS, thereby avoiding the holding of early elections.

Croatia

• On 7 February the Constitutional Court rules in favour of equal opportunities to adopt for heterosexual and same-sex couples.
• On 18 February Zoran Milanovic takes office as President.
• On 20 February the State Attorney Drazen Jelenic resigns after acknowledging being a Freemason.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

• On 15 February the Bosnian Serb member of the federal presidency Milorad Dodik once again pushes for a referendum on the Republika Srpska’s independence.
• On 24 February the Bosnian Serb Parliament demands the border between the country’s two entities be clearly defined following the Constitutional Court’s ruling to overturn a Bosnian Serb law that gives the Republika Srpska Republika ownership of all agricultural public property on its territory.

Montenegro

• On 15-16 February there are new mass protests against the Law on Religious Freedom.

Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244

• On 3 February the Parliament appoints the leader of Vetevendosje (left-wing nationalist) Albin Kurti Prime Minister, four months after the early general election.
• On 12 February the government revokes the almost 100% pay rise on ministerial salaries approved by the previous cabinet of Rasmush Haradinaj.
• On 14 February Serbia and Kosovo agree to restore railway links.
• On 26 February the government sacks Kosovo Telecom’s board of directors for poor results and corruption.

North Macedonia

• On 11 February the Parliament ratifies the country’s NATO membership.
• On 16 February the Parliament passes laws on Defence and Taxation, required for the accession process to move forward.
• On 16 February the Labour Minister Rasela Mizrahi is fired for refusing to use the country’s new name.
• On 25 February thousands are rallied by the opposition party the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organiza-
Social Democracy (EDEK) expels its sixth consecutive interest rate cut. On 26 February the trial begins against the former parliament speaker Trajko Veljanoski, the former ministers of transport and education Mile Janakieski and Spiro Ristovski and the former secret police chief Vladimir Atanasovski, over their involvement in the mob assault on Parliament in April 2017.

Albania

- On 13 February the opposition expresses its concern over the plans of Edi Rama’s government to allow the police to conduct surveillance activities without first obtaining authorization from the courts.
- On 17 February a donor conference to help Albania’s reconstruction after the earthquake in November 2019 raises 1.15 billion euros, 400 million of which is from the EU.

Greece

- On 18 February a national transport strike brings Greater Athens to a standstill.
- On 25-26 February violent clashes break out on Chios, Samos and Lesbos during protests against the government’s decision to create IDCs.

Turkey

- On 18 February the Criminal Court of Istanbul acquits nine defendants charged for trying to overthrow the government during the Gezi Park protests in 2013, among them the philanthropist Osman Kavala. Despite the decision, the prosecutor rules he be kept in jail over his alleged involvement in the failed coup attempt in 2016.
- On 21 February the lira plummets to its lowest level since May 2019, a day after the Central Bank approves the sixth consecutive interest rate cut.

Cyprus

- On 11 February the Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK) expels its MEP Demetris Papadakis for failing to align with party guidelines.

Syria

- On 14 February the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that over 800,000 people have been displaced since 1 December 2019 due to the Syrian regime’s offensive on Idlib.
- On 20 February the first clear confrontation between Turkey and Syria takes place, demonstrating the breakdown in dialogue between Ankara and Moscow.
- On 27 February Syrian army attacks on Turkish positions in Idlib leave at least 33 Turkish soldiers dead. Turkey responds to the attack with air strikes. As a result of the Syrian attack and in anticipation of increasing numbers of displaced people heading towards the Turkish border, Ankara announces it will not stop refugees from reaching Europe, thereby suspending the 2016 migration agreement.
- On 28 February the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg calls an emergency meeting at Turkey’s request to hold consultations under article 4 of the Washington Treaty, in light of the worsening situation in Syria. On the same day, Russia sends two frigates from the Black Sea Fleet to the Mediterranean.

Lebanon

- On 11 February Hassan Diab’s new cabinet survives a parliamentary confidence vote on his government’s programme, which includes far-reaching reforms to overcome the economic crisis.
- On 26 February the US announces sanctions against three people and 12 Lebanese entities for their alleged links with Hezbollah.

Egypt

- On 7 February the Egyptian student and gender rights activist Patrick George Zaki is arrested at the Cairo airport accused of spreading false news and inciting disorder.
- On 11 February Egypt’s population reaches 100 million people. The most populated country in the Arab world and second in all Africa is facing a demographic crisis as a result of the sustained increase in the birth rate since 1960.
- On 22 February the two children of former President Hosni Mubarak, Alaa and Gamal, are cleared of illicit share trading.
- On 25 February the death is announced of the former President Hosni Mubarak, ousted in April 2011.

Libya

- On 3 February after its stipulated three-year timeframe expires, Italy and Libya renew their 2017 migration deal.
- On 4 February representatives of the rival Tripoli and Tobruk governments arrive in Geneva to take part in a forum sponsored by the United Nations, aimed at continuing on from the Berlin International Conference on Libya held in January.
- On 18 February the negotiations of the Joint Military Commission on Libya are resumed in Geneva in an effort to agree on a ceasefire that will enable the political summit scheduled for 26 February to be held. The talks are interrupted hours later after Khalifa Haftar’s forces attack a boat in the port of Tripoli suspected of transporting arms from Turkey to the GNA.

Tunisia

- On 27 February five months after the elections, the Parliament approves the new government of the Prime Minister Elyes Fakhfakh, supported by Ennahda, Achaab, Attayar, Tahya Tunes and the parties of the National Reform group.

Algeria

- On 4 and 6 February the President Abdelmadjid Tebboune pardons 10,000 prisoners charged with minor offences.
• On 10 February Said Bouteflika, the brother and former advisor to the ousted Abdelaziz Bouteflika and two former intelligence chiefs are sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment.
• On 12 February the media magnate Mohamed Mokadem, close to former President Bouteflika, is placed in custody on corruption charges.
• On 20 February the President Abdelmajid Tebboune declares the 22 February a national day, marking the day the protests began against Abdelaziz Bouteflika.
• On 23 February some twenty demonstrators from the Hirak movement are sentenced to between three months and a year in prison.
• On 25 February Algeria confirms its first case of COVID-19.
• On 27 February the President’s son Khaled Tebboune is cleared of charges of corruption and influence peddling in connection with the businessman Kamel Chiji.

Morocco

• On 4 February six people are arrested accused of forming part of a terrorist cell that was planning to carry out attacks in the name of Daesh.
• On 9 February Abdellatif Ouahbi is elected the new secretary general of the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM, monarchist).
• On 23 February thousands gather to call for greater social equality and democratization in Casablanca, in a demonstration organized by the Social Front, an umbrella movement of the Moroccan left created in November 2019.

Mauritania

• On 19 February Mauritania cancels the international arrest warrants on the exiled opposition figures Mohamed Ould Buamatu, Moustapha Chafi and Mohamed Ould Debagh.
• On 25 February Mauritania takes over the presidency of the G5 Sahel.

European Union

• On 5 February the Enlargement Commissioner Oliver Varhegyi presents the new methodology proposed by the Commission for the enlargement process that will group the negotiation chapters into six thematic clusters. The Commission also renews its recommendation to open talks with North Macedonia and Albania.
• On 12 February the European Parliament resolves to support the Commission’s directives in negotiations for the future relationship with the United Kingdom.
• On 16 February the Munich Security Conference comes to an end, during which the French President Emmanuel Macron insists on the need for Europe to develop its own defensive structure.
• On 21 February the European Summit of Heads of State and Government ends without reaching an agreement on the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. The new allocations under the CAP following the withdrawal of the United Kingdom are one of the main stumbling blocks.
• On 26 February the French-Italian summit in Naples relaunches the Paris-Rome axis, established under the Quirinale Treaty in January 2018 to move towards revamping the EU and improving European coordination in matters of migration, climate change, budget stability, security and the fight against crime.

March 2020

With almost the entire planet affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the SARS-CoV-02 virus that originated in 2019 in Wuhan and already considered by the United Nations as the biggest crisis for humanity since the Second World War, most Euro-Mediterranean countries declare states of emergency. Italy and Spain are the two worst affected countries. France, postpones its pension reform and the second round of local elections. An earthquake hits Croatia. Serbia postpones its legislative elections. The coalition government in Kosovo collapses. The European Council authorizes the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, which also becomes a member of NATO. Tensions rise between Greece and Turkey over the new migrant arrivals fleeing the worsening situation in Idlib. Turkey launches its fourth military offensive in Syria. Lebanon declares bankruptcy. The fighting continues in Libya while the EU launches Operation Irini. Morocco officially approves its EEZ.

Portugal

• On 18 March Portugal declares a state of emergency for COVID-19, after reporting its first case on 2 March.

Spain

• On 3 March thousands of officers from the National Police Force and the Civil Guard demand wage parity with the Local Police.
• On 14 March Spain declares a state of alarm over COVID-19.
• On 15 March Felipe VI withdraws the financial allocation of his predecessor, Juan Carlos I, following revelations of the latter’s involvement in the Panamanian Lucum Foundation, which received 100 million dollars from the Saudi royal house.
• On 24 March Spain surpasses the figures offered by China for the number of COVID-19 deaths, thereby recording the second highest death rate after Italy.

France

• On 2 March new demonstrations take place in protest against the pension system reform that the government approved by decree after surviving two no-confidence votes in the National Assembly.
• On 14 March thousands of Yellow Vests protest in the country’s main cities.
• On 15 March France holds the first round of its local elections. The second round is suspended due to the pandemic.
• On 16 March the President Emmanuel Macron declares a state of emergency over COVID-19 and postpones the pension reform.

Monaco

• On 16 March Albert II becomes the first head of state to test positive for COVID-19, two days after the Principality closes its education and recreation centres.
Italy

- On 9 March the government announces lockdown measures over the increase in COVID-19 infections, which on 11 March is declared a pandemic by the WHO.
- On 19 March Italy surpasses the figures offered by China for the number of COVID-19 deaths. By the end of the month, only the US surpasses Italy as the most affected country.
- On 22 March Italy suspends all non-essential face-to-face activities. The worsening of the situation and inadequate European response to Italian requests leads Rome to seek assistance from China, NATO and Russia, whose troops cross the borders of the Atlantic Alliance member state to provide aid. The consequences of lockdown for southern Italy's fragile domestic economy give rise to the first incidents of looting and calls for rebellion, which the government attempts to counter with an emergency fund of 10 billion euros.

Malta

- On 7 March Malta confirms its first case of COVID-19 and on 13 March announces a nationwide lockdown.

Slovenia

- On 12 March after confirming its first case on 4 March, Slovenia declares a state of epidemic over COVID-19.

Croatia

- On 22 March Croatia is hit by an earthquake measuring 5.3 on the Richter scale, which affects Zagreb and leaves dozens injured, partially interrupting the COVID-19 lockdown measures.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 2 March the deputy leader of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA, Bosniak nationalist) Asim Sarajlic resigns following the leak of recordings that reveal corrupt dealings within the party.
- On 17 March after confirming its first case on 5 March, a state of emergency is declared for COVID-19.

Montenegro

- On 17 March Montenegro, the last European country to resist the spread of COVID-19, reports its first cases, despite its speedy declaration of a state of emergency on 13 February.

Serbia

- On 16 March Serbia declares a state of emergency for COVID-19 and, on 17 March, postpones April’s parliamentary elections.

Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 2 March Sierra Leone withdraws its recognition of Kosovo’s independence.
- On 13 March Kosovo confirms its first case of COVID-19.
- On 18 March the confrontation between the Prime Minister Albin Kurti and President Hashim Thaci, over the imposition of the state of emergency for COVID-19, leads to the dismissal of the Interior Minister Agim Veliu, member of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and supporter, like Thaci, of its implementation. On 25 March, the government collapses after losing a no-confidence vote filed by the LDK.

North Macedonia

- On 18 March North Macedonia declares a state of emergency for COVID-19 and postpones its legislative elections scheduled for 12 April.
- On 24 March the European Council authorizes opening accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania.
- On 27 March North Macedonia becomes a member of NATO.

Albania

- On 2 March thousands rally in Tirana, called by the President Ilir Meta, in protest against the government which they accuse of violating the Constitution, having links with organized crime and using the justice system reform to take control of all institutions.
- On 16 March the Parliament extends its emergency legislation for COVID-19 adopted after the first confirmed case on 8 March.

Greece

- On 4 March tensions rise on the Turkish border as the number of migrants trying to cross into Greece increases.
- On 20 March the government begins the transfer of 604 migrant arrivals on Samos, Chios and Lesbos to the Greek mainland. These add to another group of 436 migrants transferred during the previous days. All of them will be deported.
- On 22 March the government imposes a lockdown for COVID-19.

Turkey

- On 10 March Turkey calls for the 2016 migration agreement to be updated in light of the “new circumstances” in Syria, as well as greater support against Russia from NATO and the EU, which continues to condition its support on Ankara halting the flow of migrants.
- On 11 March Turkey reports its first case of COVID-19. In the following days, measures for a gradual lockdown are adopted.
- On 23 March the People’s Democratic Party (HDP, pro-Kurdish socialist) condemns the dismissal of eight mayors from the party accused of corruption and terrorism.
- On 30 March Turkey announces the death in Iraq of Nazife Bilen, member of the executive council of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), as part of the campaign against the PKK terrorist organization and affiliated groups.

Cyprus

- On 3 March Cyprus temporarily closes the crossings at Ledra Street, Astromeritis, Lefka and Dherynia to avoid the spread of COVID-19. On 15 March, after confirmation of its first case on 9 March, Cyprus declares a state of emergency.
Syria
- On 1 March Turkey launches its fourth military offensive in northern Syria, “Operation Spring Shield,” following the Syrian regime attacks on Turkish positions in late February.
- On 2 March the army retakes control of Saraqib, four days after Turkish-backed rebels captured the city.
- On 5 March Turkey and Russia agree on a ceasefire in Idlib, which includes a security corridor along the M4 highway between Aleppo and Latakia.

Lebanon
- On 7 March the Prime Minister Hassan Diab says the country must default on its foreign debt payment due to a major financial crisis, for which he blames institutional corruption. The announcement intensifies the citizen protests.
- On 16 March Lebanon declares a state of emergency for COVID-19.

Jordan

Egypt
- On 4 March Hisham el-Ashmawy is executed. He was arrested in 2018 in Derna for a number of attacks, including the bomb attack on the Italian consulate in Cairo and the murder of the public prosecutor Hisham Barakat in 2015.
- On 24 March Egypt steps up its COVID-19 lockdown measures.
- On 17 March the army reports it has killed six terrorists in Bir el-Abed, as part of the anti-jihadist offensive in Sinai.

Libya
- On 2 March the UN Envoy for Libya Ghassan Salame resigns and is temporarily replaced on 14 March by Stephanie Williams.
- On 14 March the GNA declares a state of emergency for COVID-19 and a unilateral ceasefire. On 21 March, the authorities in Tobruk announce a curfew and agree to declaring a ceasefire. On 24 March, Libya confirms its first case of COVID-19 and a day later the fighting resumes in Tripoli, where on 27 March around a hundred militia members are reportedly killed.
- On 26 March the EU launches Operation Irini to enforce the arms embargo to Libya.

Tunisia
- On 8 March a suicide bombing outside the US embassy in Tunisia leaves six people injured.
- On 10 March 10 Heart of Tunisia MPs leave the party, citing a lack of leadership and the failure to join the coalition government.

Algeria
- On 11 March the leader of the Democratic and Social Union (UDS) Karim Tabbou is sentenced to a year in prison. The opposition finger with links to the Hirak movement is scheduled to be released on 26 March after having already served his sentence, but on 24 March is ordered by an appeal court to remain in jail.
- On 20 March marks the first Friday since 22 February 2019 that the Hirak movement has not held a demonstration, due to the COVID-19 measure, following confirmation of the country’s first case on 2 March.

Morocco
- On 2 March Morocco confirms its first case of COVID-19. On 20 March, the country declares a state of emergency.
- On 30 March Morocco formalizes the laws extending its territorial waters and establishing its EEZ, which now overlaps waters claimed by Spain before the UN.

European Union
- On 4 March the EU closes ranks around Greece and Bulgaria faced with the new migrant arrivals following Turkey’s decision to suspend the 2016 migrant agreement.
- On 13 March the Commission presents its strategy to mitigate the consequences of COVID-19, make the best use of the flexibility offered by the Treaties to allow states to support their health and financial systems and making the EU budget available for the fight against the pandemic. On 26 March, the Parliament approves the measures. On 23 March, for the first time in history the states activate the “general escape clause” of the Stability and Growth Pact.
- On 15 March France calls on the EU to tighten border controls in the Schengen Area, faced with the decision by several countries to close their borders. On 16 March, the Commission closes the Union’s external borders for 30 days.
- On 18 March the ECB announces the purchase of 750 billion euros of public bonds and private assets to allow Member States to finance their stimulus packages faced with the effects of the pandemic.
- On 25 March France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Greece, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Ireland call for the issuance of so-called “coronabonds,” a common debt instrument aimed to alleviate the consequences of COVID-19.
- On 26 March, the Parliament approves the EU’s financial support to fight the pandemic. On 26 March, the Parliament approves the EU’s financial support to fight the pandemic.
- On 31 March the EU issues a warning to Hungary regarding the previous day’s parliamentary approval of a state of emergency that allows the Prime Minister Viktor Orban to rule by decree with no time limit put in place.

Arab League
- On 15 March Sudan votes against an Arab League resolution to close ranks around Egypt against Ethiopia in the dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile, which would make Ethiopia Africa’s biggest hydropower producer and exporter.
April 2020

After gaining relative stability with regard to their COVID-19 infection rates, a large share of European countries begin their respective relaxation of restrictions and approve unprecedented financial rescue packages. Italy and Malta declare their ports to be unsafe. Kosovo announces the removal of tariffs on Serbian imports and its President tasks the LDK with the formation of a new cabinet. Turkey steps up its prospecting activities in the eastern Mediterranean. In Syria, the United Nations reiterates the need to establish a ceasefire to be able to focus on the COVID-19 pandemic. In Lebanon, the anti-government protests intensify. Jordan begins its relaxation of restrictions. In Egypt, the Parliament expands presidential powers. In Libya, Khalifa Haftar announces he is taking political control of the whole country. Tunisia and Morocco extend their state of emergency. Morocco and Algeria order the release of thousands of prisoners and impose overnight curfews. In Algeria, General Abdelghani Hamel is sentenced to prison for corruption and the country criminalizes the spreading of fake news.

Portugal

- On 2 April Portugal extends its state of emergency for two more weeks, toughening its lockdown measures.

Spain

- On 4 April Spain extends lockdown until 25 April, when it extends the state of emergency again until 10 May.
- On 6 April 260 migrants storm the Melilla border fence. 
- On 22 April the government approves additional measures to support the economy in the face of the crisis sparked by the coronavirus.

France

- On 3 April a man stabs two people to death in Romans-sur-Isère, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, crying “Allah is great.”
- On 16 April France joins the United Kingdom and the US in demanding China give an explanation for its silence at the beginning of the COVID-19 pan-

demic, sluggish application of measures and engagement in misinformation.

- On 18 April clashes break out in Villeneuve-la-Garenne after a young man is injured when the police tried to arrest him for violating lockdown. Similar incidents take place over the following nights in other towns.
- On 23 April the Parliament approves 110 billion euros in aid to tackle the COVID-19 crisis.
- On 27 April three police officers are rammed in Colombe by a Daesh supporter who is then arrested.

Italy

- On 1 April Italy extends its state of emergency and lockdown measures until 13 April and then again until 3 May.
- On 7 April Italy closes its ports to migrant rescue vessels, declaring them as unsafe due to COVID-19.
- On 17 April the 146 migrants aboard the Alan Kurdi, which has been anchored off the coast near Palermo for more than 10 days, are transferred to a Red Cross ship to undergo quarantine in case of any COVID-19 infections.
- On 24 April the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte outlines lockdown easing measures in four phases.
- On 27 April Veneto’s governor and League party member Luca Zaia approves easing lockdown, a week ahead of the schedule set for all regions across the country.
- On 28 April Italy celebrates the completion of the road viaduct in Genoa to replace the Morandi bridge, whose collapse in August 2018 left 43 people dead.

Malta

- On 6 April Malta steps up security in the Hal Far migrant centre after eight people there test positive for COVID-19.
- On 16 April a criminal investigation is launched against the Prime Minister Robert Abela and members of the armed forces after the NGO Repubblika files a complaint against them accusing them of being responsible for the death of at least five migrants for failing to come to their aid after the closure of Maltese ports on 9 April, when they were declared unsafe due to COVID-19.

Croatia

- On 18 April Croatia extends its lockdown until 4 May.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 23 April the Constitutional Court rules that the age-based restrictions imposed by the Bosniak-Croat Federation are unconstitutional.

Serbia

- On 3 April Slovenia’s former Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčak is appointed as EU Special Representative for Serbia-Kosovo dialogue.

Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 1 April Kosovo announces that it will lift the 100% tariff on Serbian imports, after a year and a half of pressure from the EU and US.
- On 23 April the President Hashim Thaci tasks the LDK and its prime ministerial candidate Avdullah Hoti to form a government.

North Macedonia

- On 6 April North Macedonia extends its curfew. On 20 April, a plan for easing restrictions is announced as of early May.

Greece

- On 1 and 5 April the Ritsona and Malakasa migrant camps in Athens are placed under quarantine after residents test positive for COVID-19. On 21 April, Greece prohibits all migrant mobility until 10 May.
- On 19 April Greece begins evacuating hundreds of migrants from the Aegean Islands to the Greek mainland, and on 28 April announces that before the end of 2020 it will close the Samos camp, following several fires and incidents there.

Turkey

- On 12 April the Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu announces his resignation fol-
lowing the controversy caused by the curfew he enforced for the weekend, which gave people just two hours before it entered into effect. The President Recep Tayyip Erdogan rejects the resignation.

- On 14 April the Parliament approves a law that reduces sentences and allows for the release of some 90,000 prisoners, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- On 20 April a section of the new city hospital is opened in the Basaksehir district, Istanbul, with 2,682 intensive care beds. Another similar hospital has also been set up in the Sancaktepe district.
- On 20 April Mumtaz Senel, the mayor of Yesilova (CHP), is shot and wounded along with his wife at their home. Senel is an active opponent of the controversial project to turn Lake Salda into a mass tourist destination.
- On 22 April the Central Bank announces the eight interest rate cut in less than a year, in a measure to bolster credit and moderate the economic impact of the pandemic.
- On 27 April Recep Tayyip Erdogan announces a new three-day lockdown in 31 cities as of 1 May.
- On 27 April Recep Tayyip Erdogan expresses his support for Ali Erbas, Turkey’s leading cleric and president of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, who on 24 April stated that Islam “curses homosexuality,” a declaration that the opposition and Ankara Bar Association say could incite hatred. On the same day, Ankara’s public prosecutor opens an investigation into the Bar Association, on suspicion that they may have insulted Islam.

Cyprus

- On 19 April Turkey sends the drillship Yavuz to block 7 of Cyprus’ EEZ, a week after the Turkish Foreign Minister asserts that Turkey will continue drilling in waters under Cypriot sovereignty that have been claimed by Ankara.
- On 24 April Cyprus extends its suspension of commercial flights until 17 May. The ban does not include cargo and repatriation flights.

Syria

- On 9 April Daesh claims responsibility for 29 attacks in Iraq and 11 in Syria during the first week of the month, as it exploits the pandemic to step up its activity.
- On 17 April the Kurdish administration in northeastern Syria officially confirms the first COVID-19 death in the area, in Qamishli.
- On 21 April the government condemns airstrikes in Palmyra, which it attributes to Israel, during the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif’s visit to Damascus.
- On 22 April the trial begins in Koblenz against two former officers that deserted the Syrian army, charged with crimes against humanity in Syria.
- On 29 April the government extends the nationwide curfew imposed at the end of March to halt the spread of coronavirus.

Lebanon

- On 5 April a Syrian refugee sets fire to himself in Bekaa Valley in protest against refugees’ worsening living conditions under the COVID-19 restrictions.
- On 6 April the President Michel Aoun calls on the international community for assistance, faced with the country’s severe economic crisis, exacerbated by the pandemic and refugee crisis.
- On 9 April a riot breaks out in the Qubbah prison, a day after the police thwart a mass escape attempt in another prison in Bekaa Valley.
- On 22 April Lebanon becomes the first Arab country to legalize cannabis farming for medicinal and industrial purposes.
- On 24 April Lebanon’s money changers announce they are going on strike until 27 April, calling for an urgent intervention from the government and Central Bank, amid worsening social tension.
- On 27 April several days of clashes begin between security forces and demonstrators protesting against the devaluation of the Lebanese pound and soaring prices.
- On 30 April Germany designates Hezbollah a terrorist organization.

Egypt

- On 22 April the Parliament approves 17 amendments to the 1958 state of emergency law, which give the President powers to ban public and private assembly and control scientific research. The jurisdiction of military courts is also expanded.
- On 23 April the Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly announces an overnight curfew throughout Ramadan in an effort to contain COVID-19, a measure also adopted by other Muslim countries.
- On 28 April the President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi extends by three months the state of emergency imposed in April 2017 for the attacks in Tanta and Alexandria, due to the pandemic and insurgency in Sinai.

Libya

- On 5 April the former Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril dies of COVID-19.
- On 14 April the GNA takes control of Surman, Sabratha and al-Ajaylat.
- On 14 April the National Oil Company (NOC) estimates the losses resulting from the closure of oil facilities imposed since January by Khalifa Haftar at 4 billion dollars.
- On 28 April the LNA commander in chief Khalifa Haftar declares that his military council is ready to take control of all Libya and announces the end of the Skhirat Agreement, a UN-mediated deal from 2015 which led to the formation of the GNA.

Tunisia

- On 4 April the Parliament grants the Prime Minister Elies Fajfaj special powers to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.
- On 19 April Tunisia extends its lockdown measures until 3 May.
- On 20 April hundreds of Tunisians trapped in Libya force their way across the border in Ras Jadir after waiting for a week to be evacuated.
- On 29 April the President Kais Saied extends the state of emergency until 28 May.
Algeria

- On 1 April General Abdelghani Hamel is sentenced to 15 years in prison for corruption.
- On 1 April a presidential pardon sees the release of 5,037 prisoners, none of whom are Hirak members, as a preventative measure against COVID-19.
- On 14 April Abdelmadjid Tebboune announces that a National Agency for Health Security is soon to be created in a bid to overhaul the healthcare system after the pandemic.
- On 22 April as part of the penal code reform, the Parliament approves a law that criminalizes the broadcast of fake news.
- On 24 April the government announces the end of lockdown in Baida, the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak in Algeria, and its replacement with a curfew. It also reduces the curfew in nine provinces.

Morocco

- On 5 April Mohamed VI pardons 5,654 prisoners to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- On 18 April the government extends the state of emergency for COVID-19 and the nationwide lockdown until 20 May. On 23 May, an overnight curfew is announced for Ramadan.

Mauritania

- On 21 April the parliamentary committee, which since 15 February has been investigating cases of corruption over the last decade, announces that it will call the former President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz to testify.

European Union

- On 2 April the EC boosts its response to COVID-19 proposing a solidarity instrument known as SURE, worth 100 billion euros in financial assistance for workers and companies.
- On 2 April the CJEU rules against Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic for their refusal to relocate asylum seekers in 2015.
- On 6 April the Commission recommends extending the closure of the Schengen Area until 15 May for the pandemic.
- On 7 April the Eurogroup approves 540 billion euros in loans to deal with the consequences of the pandemic, but which does not include the so-called coronabonds.
- On 29 April the Commission launches proceedings against Poland for ignoring warnings over its justice system reform, which goes against EU principles.
- On 30 April the EU and United Kingdom begin talks on the future management of the Northern Irish border.

May 2020

Most European countries start to ease restrictions following the first wave of COVID-19 and announce recovery plans. France and Germany present their initiative for the creation of a common European fund to help repair the damage caused by the pandemic. In Italy, the government survives two no-confidence votes. Malta withdraws from Operation Irini. In Croatia, the Defence Minister resigns and early elections are called. Bosnia and Herzegovina postpone local elections. Kosovo’s Constitutional Court rules that a new government can be formed without holding elections. In Syria, the escalation of Daesh and Israeli attacks continues. Lebanon calls on the IMF to rescue its economy. Jordan and Tunisia begin easing lockdown. In Libya, the Turkish intervention in support of the GNA pushes back LNA troops.

Portugal

- On 2 May Portugal lifts the state of emergency and on 4 May begins its gradual relaxation of restrictions in three phases declaring a less severe state of calamity.

Spain

- On 4 May Spain begins asymmetrically easing lockdown in four phases, based on each region’s situation.
- On 6 May the Parliament approves a new extension of the state of alarm until 24 May, coinciding with protests in several cities ongoing since the middle of the month against the government’s handling of the crisis.

France

- On 2 May the government extends its state of emergency until 24 July and submits its plan to ease lockdown to the Parliament, which is given the green light by the National Assembly.
- On 5 May senior figures in healthcare management believe the first cases of COVID-19 in France began in December 2019 in Seine-Saint-Denis.
- On 11 May France begins its first phase to ease restrictions, which will last until 2 June.
- On 18 May the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron present an initiative for the creation of a European rescue fund through a joint loan requested by all Member States.
- On 18 May clashes break out in Angenteuil between police and demonstrators following the death of a motorcyclist after colliding with a police car.
- On 19 May 17 LREM MPs present the statutes of the new Ecology, Democracy, Solidarity party (EDS), leaving the President Emmanuel Macron’s party without a parliamentary majority. On 27 May, a further seven MPs leave LREM to form a new independent group Act Together.

Italy

- On 4 May Italy begins resuming economic activity and its gradual easing of restrictions, and Bergamo prosecutors open an investigation into the government’s handling of the pandemic. On 17 May, the government gives into regional pressure and accelerates the reopening process. Only Campania announces it will not speed up its plans to relax restrictions.
- On 12 May the Financial Guard arrests 91 members of the Acquasanta and Arenella clans from Cosa Nostra.
- On 13 May the government approves the regularization of thousands of immigrants employed in agriculture and as domestic helpers.
- On 14 May Italy announces a new 55-billion-euro rescue plan to prop up the economy.
- On 20 May the government survives two no-confidence votes tabled against
the Justice Minister Alfonso Bonafede, over the release of some 8,000 prisoners during the pandemic, including around 500 members of the mafia.

Malta

• On 4 May Malta begins easing restrictions.
• On 8 May Malta withdraws from Operation Irini, which enforces the arms embargo to Libya, and announces it will veto decisions within the operation concerning spending procedures for migrant disembarkation.

Slovenia

• On 4 May Slovenia continues to ease its lockdown, which began on 30 April with the end of commercial and mobility restrictions. On 15 May, Slovenia reopens its borders to the rest of the Union.
• On 4 May a fourth Friday of protests denounces an authoritarian drift in the coalition government, which is undergoing a growing internal crisis.

Croatia

• On 7 May the Defence Minister Damir Krsticevic resigns after two soldiers are killed when their plane crashes near Zadar.
• On 10 May Croatia begins easing its lockdown.
• On 18 May the Parliament is dissolved to hold early parliamentary elections as a second wave of COVID-19 may make it impossible to hold elections later.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

• On 10 May border police thwart an attempt in Izicie by 87 immigrants to cross into Croatia.
• On 16 May thousands of people protest against the holding of a mass in memory of the victims of the Bleiburg massacre, committed by partisans against Nazi collaborators during the Second World War.

Montenegro

• On 4 May Montenegro begins easing restrictions.
• On 13 May clashes break out in different cities between police and demonstrators protesting against the arrest of an orthodox bishop and several priests for leading a religious procession in the middle of lockdown.

Serbia

• On 16 May Serbia deploys the army in Sid, on the Croatian border, to “protect the local population from harassment and robbery committed by migrants” from three camps, following the lifting of the state of emergency.
• On 26 May the European Council approves border management agreements between Frontex and Montenegro and Serbia.

Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244

• On 28 May the Constitutional Court rules in favour of the presidential decree for the formation of a new government without elections being held.

Albania

• On 17 May there is unrest between police and demonstrators protesting during the demolition of the National Theatre in Tirana, who accuse the government of destroying cultural heritage in the interests of private investors.
• On 31 May the government and opposition fail to comply with the deadline set for the modification of the electoral code, requested by the EU before accession talks can be opened.

Greece

• On 4 May Greece begins its gradual relaxation of lockdown.
• On 20 May the government unveils a 24-billion-euro rescue package to help get through the economic crisis caused by COVID-19.
• On 26 May Greece confirms it will complete the border fence with Turkey along the Evros river in three months.

Turkey

• On 4 May Turkey announces it will be easing the coronavirus restrictions imposed in several cities as of 11 May.
• On 4 May a new diplomatic incident takes place between Turkey and Greece after Athens condemn the fact that several Turkish fighter jets harassed a helicopter flying over the Aegean Sea in which the Greek Defence Minister Nikolas Panagiotopoulos was travelling.

Cyprus

• On 4 May Cyprus begins easing lockdown. On 21 May, travel restrictions are lifted for Cypriot citizens.

Syria

• On 17 May the magnate and former confidant of Bashar al-Asad, Rami Makhluf, asserts that the Syrian authorities have set a deadline for him to give up control of Syriatel or Syria’s biggest mobile operator would have its license revoked and assets seized for failing to pay back its debts to the State.
• On 17 May an airstrike on Deir ez-Zor by the US-led military coalition and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), as part of Operation Inherent Resolve, claims the lives of Daesh’s regional leaders Ahmad Isa Ismail azzawi and Ahmad Abd Muhammad Hasan al-Jughayfi. On 26 May, the death is also reported of Daesh’s leader in Iraq, Mutaz Numan Abd Nayif Najm al-Jaburi.
• On 18 May the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights (SOHR) reports three Daesh attacks in the last 24 hours, which have left at least nine people dead on the Homs-Deir ez-Zor road.
• On 25 May the deployment of Syrian, Russian and SDF troops reopens the Aleppo-Latakia highway, following an agreement with Turkey.
• On 26 May the government announces the end of the overnight curfew imposed in March, despite the rise in COVID-19 infections.
• On 28 May the EU extends sanctions against the Syrian regime for another year.

Lebanon

• On 1 May Lebanon asks the IMF to help bail out its economy.
• On 5 May the government extends lockdown measures until 24 May.
on 20 May, the LNA announces its withdrawal from the front lines in Tripoli.
• On 29 May Russia says that the ceasefire announced in January has failed, three days after the US, on 26 May, accuses Moscow of deploying mercenaries.

Tunisia

On 4 May Tunisia starts easing restrictions by economic sector, age range and governorate.
• On 24 May the Tunisian coast guard intercepts 223 migrants trying to reach Europe.
• On 25 May the police disperse workers protesting in Bizerte against the freeze on a number of building projects.

Algeria

On 12 May the Prime Minister Abdelaziz Yerad announces a new two-week extension on the lockdown. On 29 May, another two-week extension is declared.
• On 20 May the activists Larbi Tahar and Boussif Mohamed Boudiaf are sentenced to 18 years in prison for posting content critical of the government. A third activist, Soheib Debaghi, is sentenced to a year’s imprisonment.

Morocco

On 18 May the Prime Minister of Morocco Saadeddine Othmani extends the state of emergency for COVID-19 by three weeks.
• On 24 May Mohammed VI pardons or reduces jail terms for 483 prisoners for Ramadan.
• On 29 May the former Prime Minister Abderrahmane Youssoufi dies of cancer.

European Union

On 6 May the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Zagreb approves 3.3 billion euros in aid to the region and an increase in cooperation to strengthen its European perspective.
• On 9 May the Commission declares that the Union’s external borders will remain closed until mid-June.
• On 13 May the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) reports that due to the pandemic, between January and April 2020, applications for asylum in the EU, Switzerland and Norway have fallen by 25% with respect to the same period in 2019.
are arrested. Serbia holds parliamentary elections. In Kosovo, the Parliament approves Avdullah Hoti’s government and the prosecutor for the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC) accuses the President Hashim Thaci of war crimes. In North Macedonia, the former Special Anti-corruption Prosecutor is convicted for corruption. Greece and Italy agree on the demarcation of their maritime border. In Turkey, numerous arrest warrants are issued for figures allegedly linked to Fethullah Gulen and the opposition. In Syria, the State seize Siriatel and the Prime Minister is sacked, coinciding with the resurgence of social protests, which also increase in Lebanon and Tunisia. In Libya, the Tripoli forces continue their advance. Algeria reshuffles its cabinet and the former Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia is convicted of corruption. Morocco extends its state of emergency. Mauritania restructures its military leadership.

**Portugal**

- On 9 June Mario Centeno steps down as Finance Minister and is replaced by Joao Leao.
- On 22 June the government tightens measures against the pandemic in Lisbon with an overnight curfew and limiting gatherings to up to 10 people.

**Spain**

- On 3 June the Parliament extends the state of alarm to 21 June.
- On 8 June the Supreme Court launches an inquiry into Juan Carlos I over his alleged receipt of illegal payments in exchange for the contract for the Medina-La Meca high-speed railway line being awarded to Spanish companies.
- On 15 June the government unveils a 3.75-billion-euro package to support the car industry through increased competitiveness and decarbonization.
- On 21 June the state of alarm for the pandemic ends, restrictions are eased and borders are partially reopened.

**France**

- On 7-8 June demonstrations in numerous European cities condemn the murder by police of the African-American George Floyd in Minneapolis on 25 May, which sparks a serious sociopolitical crisis in the US. The mobilizations gain particular strength in France, where police are deployed in large numbers, the situation reigniting anger over Adama Traore, a young man who died in 2016 while in police custody in Persan.
- On 9 June the government unveils a 15-billion-euro support package for the aviation industry.
- On 10 June the submission of 63 complaints is cause for the public prosecutor to open an investigation into possible criminal offences committed in the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- On 11-12 June new protests are staged by the police force and gendarmerie against government policy and to denounce poor working conditions and low pay.
- On 12 June four days of score-setting violence erupts between Chechen and North African gangs.
- On 16 June the National Front, now renamed the National Rally, is ordered to pay 18,570 euros for “misuse of corporate assets,” and illegal financing.
- On 22 June compulsory face-to-face school attendance is resumed.
- On 28 June the second round of local elections, postponed due to COVID-19, delivers poor results for the President Macron’s LREM party and a recovery for The Republicans (LR, Gaullist), who gain votes in rural France. Worthy of note are the victory of the Prime Minister Edouard Philippe in El Havre and the re-election of Anne Hidalgo (PS) in Paris.
- On 29 June the former Prime Minister François Fillon is sentenced to five years’ imprisonment and a 10-year ban from holding office for embezzling public funds.

**Italy**

- On 1 June Italy reopens its borders.
- On 9 June a major police operation against the Camorra leads to the arrests of 59 members of the Puca, Verde and Ranucci clans, including three brothers of Luigi Cesaro, the former president of the province of Naples and FI senator.
- On 10 June the public prosecutor announces that he will call the government to testify over its handling of the pandemic in an investigation opened following the receipt of a number of complaints.
- On 23 June after nine days of government meetings with social representatives at the States General called in Rome, the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announces an ambitious plan to relaunch the economy. The centre-right opposition boycotts the meetings and demands the plan be debated in Parliament.

**Malta**

- On 17 June the deputy leader of the ruling PL, Chris Cardona, resigns after a witness says he paid to have the journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia murdered in 2017.
- On 23 June Angelo Gafa is appointed commissioner of the National Police to replace Lawrence Cutajar. The voting is boycotted by the opposition, which disagrees with the selection procedure.

**Slovenia**

- On 30 June the Interior Minister Ales Hojs and police chief Anton Travner resign in the context of an inquiry into the purchase of protective equipment for the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Croatia**

- On 1 June Croatia reopens its borders to 10 countries in the Union.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina**

- On 2 June the Security Minister Fahrudin Radonic resigns over political disagreements with coalition government partners concerning the deportation of 9,500 illegal immigrants, which he defends. Another reason for his resignation is the scandal related to the purchase of overpriced Chinese respirators, which also affects the caretaker Prime Minister Fadil Novacic.
- On 9 June Bozo Mihajlovic, the former head of the Special Department for Organized Crime, Economic Crime and Corruption at the state prosecution is sentenced to five years in prison for embezzlement.
• On 17 June Bosniak and Croat nationalists reach an historic agreement to hold local elections in Mostar, for the first time in 12 years.

*Montenegro*

• On 24 June the mayor of Budva Marko Carevic and local assembly chief Krsto Radovic are arrested after refusing to hand over power after one of its councillors defected to the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS). Incidents break out with hundreds of supporters of the arrested men, which spread to other cities.

• On 25 June public gatherings are banned in light of a spike in COVID-19 infections. The Serbian Orthodox Church accuses the government of exploiting the pandemic to put an end to the protests against the arrests made since May of various religious figures for defying the lockdown measures.

*Serbia*

• On 21 June Serbia holds parliamentary elections. President Aleksandar Vucic’s Serbian Progressive Party (SNS, conservative) wins (62.7%). The hitherto co-ruling Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) comes second (10.4%).

*Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244*

• On 3 June the Parliament approves Avdullah Hoti’s new government. The former Prime Minister Albin Kurti and his party, Vetëvendosje, demand new elections are held and stage a protest march on 12 June.

• On 6 June the new government announces the lifting of Serbian import tariffs.

• On 24 June the prosecutor for the KSC accuses the President Hashim Thaci and another nine former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), among them the leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK, conservative) and former parliament speaker Kadri Veseli, of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

• On 30 June trade unions condemn the Constitutional Court ruling that the 2019 Law on Salaries is unconstitutional because its provisions violate the separation of powers.

*North Macedonia*

• On 4 June a curfew enters into force in Skopje, Tetovo and Kumanovo, until 8 June, due to a spike in COVID-19 infections.

• On 13 June the state of emergency ends and is declared again on 16 June for eight days to prepare for the early elections in July.

• On 18 June the former chief special prosecutor Katica Janeva and businessman Bojan Jovanovski are sentenced to seven and nine years in prison respectively for their involvement in the "Extortion" corruption scandal.

• On 30 June North Macedonia steps up its military presence on its borders with Greece and Serbia, anticipating an increase in the number of migrants trying to cross over.

*Greece*

• On 9 June Greece and Italy sign an agreement in Athens on the demarcation of their maritime border and their EEZs, which complements the one signed in 1977.

• On 17 June the Parliament lifts the immunity of lawmakers Andreas Patsis (New Democracy, conservative) and Miltiadis Hatzigiannakis, (SYRIZA, left-wing) who are under investigation for possible criminal offences.

*Turkey*

• On 2 June the Istanbul prosecutor’s office issues arrest warrants for 118 people charged with having links to Fethullah Gulen.

• On 5 June the lawmakers Enis Berberoglu (CHP) and Leyla Guven and Musa Farsigoolar (HDP) are arrested on suspicion of spying and terrorism after being stripped of their status as parliamentarians.

• On 9 June arrest warrants are issued for 191 soldiers charged with having links to Fethullah Gulen.

• On 11 June the parliamentary majority of the AKP and the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) gives broader powers to the neighbour-hood guard that are almost on a par with those of the police force.

• On 17 June the UN General Assembly elects the diplomat and former Turkish European Affairs Minister Volkan Bozkir as its President.

• On 27 June at least 60 migrants die trying to cross Lake Van.

*Cyprus*

• On 5 June the Parliament approves the 220-million-euro package unveiled by the government to counter the effects of the pandemic.

• On 9 June Cyprus reopens airports, ports, hotels and recreational centres in its third phase of easing restrictions, which will last until 24 June.

• On 23 June the nurses’ union calls off the strike organized for the following day after reaching an agreement with the state health service Okypi to improve staffing in the sector.

*Syria*

• On 2 June the National Securities Commission announces it will indefinitely suspend trading shares in Syriatel, the country’s biggest telecommunications company, owned by Rami Makhlouf, after the deadline expires to pay back 450 million euros in debt to the treasury.

• On 4 June Daesh attacks the Azraq field, one of the main oil facilities in Deir ez-Zor, controlled by US-backed Kurdish forces.

• On 11 June Bashar al-Assad dismisses his Prime Minister Imad Khamis faced with the resurgence of protests against the crisis, corruption and the lack of democracy, this time with Sweida at the epicentre. The protests continue throughout June and are responded to with pro-regime counter-demonstrations.

• On 14 June at least two senior members of Huras al-Din, the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, are killed in bombing in Idlib attributed to the international coalition.

• On 15 June the pro-Turkish authorities in northeastern Syria formally announce the adoption, from the beginning of the month, of the Turkish lira in territories under Turkish control, faced with a 200% devaluation of the Syrian pound since the beginning of the war.
• On 17 June the US increases sanctions against the Syrian regime as part of the entry into force of the so-called Caesar Act.
• On 17 June a court in Paris sentences Rifaat al-Assad, the Syrian President’s uncle and nicknamed the “Butcher of Hama,” to four years in prison and seizes his hoard of illegal property assets.
• On 19 June Save the Children reports that thousands of families have started leaving the refugee camps in northeastern Syria for fear of COVID-19.
• On 26 June fighting intensifies between Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Hurras al-Din, the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, in areas surrounding Idlib.
• On 30 June the fourth EU and UN-sponsored donors’ conference raises a little over 4.9 billion euros, less than half what was asked for, to combat the humanitarian emergency in Syria.

Lebanon

• On 1 June shopping centres reopen as part of the measures for easing restrictions for the COVID-19 pandemic.
• On 6 June there is a large-scale protest against the government, accused of incompetence in failing to prevent the country’s crisis. On 12 June, the government holds an emergency meeting after the protests turn violent over a new drop in the Lebanese pound, which loses more than 60% of its value.
• On 29 June the director general of the Finance Ministry Alain Bifani resigns.

Jordan

• On 6 June Jordan further eases restrictions in view of its success in containing the pandemic.

Egypt

• On 9 June Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia resume talks on the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.
• On 12 June the government postpones the total reopening of its economy due to the continued increase in COVID-19 infections.
• On 14 June the LGTBQ activist and supporter of the Bread and Freedom party Sarah Hegazy commits suicide, as a result of the trauma she suffered during her time in prison in 2017. She was arrested for unfolding a rainbow flag at a concert for the Lebanese group Mashrou Leila, amid an Egyptian government campaign against the LGTBQ community, which included 57 arrests.
• On 30 June the government announces the death of two “extremely dangerous” terrorists amid constant fighting in North Sinai as part of the army’s counter-terrorism offensive.

Libya

• On 4 May GNA forces capture the Tripoli airport, which had been in LNA hands since April 2019.
• On 5 June the GNA announces that Tripoli and its periphery have been liberated from its siege by Khalifa Haftar’s troops, which withdraw to Tarhuna, where they are surrounded by GNA and Turkish soldiers. Tarhuna falls on the same day. Libya’s eastern forces, backed by Russia, Egypt and the UAE maintain control over Cyrenaica and its oil terminals.
• On 5 June Egypt announces an initiative to end hostilities in Libya as of 8 June, which is supported by the UAE and Khalifa Haftar. Meanwhile GNA and Turkish forces continue their advance to retake Sirte.
• On 22 June the United Nations Human Rights Council establishes a mission to investigate the violations and abuses committed by the warring parties in Libya.
• On 26 June the GNA extend the curfew for COVID-19 by 10 days due to the increase in infections.
• On 26 June the state-owned oil company NOC condemns the presence of Russian mercenaries at the Sharara oilfield, the country’s biggest, and rejects the foreign interference in the Libyan conflict.

Tunisia

• On 4 June hotels and cultural centres reopen and domestic movement is allowed.
• On 9 June the EU announces the removal of Tunisia and Bosnia and Herzegovina from the list of countries with insufficient measures against money laundering and terrorist financing.
• On 11 June at least 45 migrants die when the vessel they were travelling in sinks after leaving Sfax on 4 June headed for Italy.
• On 18 June thousands of health workers go on strike demanding improvements in the public system in the wake of COVID-19, after, on 15 June, the government announces the end of the pandemic.
• On 22 June a general strike is staged in Tataouine called by the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) in protest against the dismantling on 20 and 21 June of a camp in Kamour, which for two months had been demanding the government stand by its promises in 2017 for socio-economic improvements.
• On 27 June Tunisia reopens its borders.

Algeria

• On 7 June Algeria begins its first phase to ease lockdown.
• On 24 June the President Abdelmadjid Tebboune reshuffles the cabinet. Notable changes include: the former CEO of Sonatrach Abdelmadjid Attar who replaces Mohamed Arkab as the Energy Minister, who, in turn, takes over as Mining Minister; Aymen Abderrahmane, governor of the Bank of Algeria, who takes over as Finance Minister to replace Abderrahmane Raouia.
• On 24 June the former Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia is sentenced to 12 years in prison for corruption in the “Sovac” case trial against businessman Mourad Eulmi, sentenced to 10 years in prison. Also sentenced to three and 20 years in prison, respectively, are the former Energy Minister Youcef Yousfi and Industry and Mining Minister Abdeslam Bouchouareb.
• On 26 June the former director general of the national police Abdelghani Hamel and Algiers’ former regional police chief Noureddine Berrashdi are sentenced to four years in prison for abuse of power.

Morocco

• On 10 June Morocco extends its state of emergency until 10 July.

Mauritania

• On 8 June the President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani announces sweeping...
reforms in the army with the appointment of Mohamed Ould Meguett as army chief of staff to replace Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed Lemine, who becomes chief of the National Guard, in turn replacing Misgharou Ould Sidi, who takes over as director general of National Security, until now occupied by Ould Meguett.

European Union

• On 5 June France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands agree to form a European alliance to find a vaccination against Covid-19.
• On 11 June the Commission recommends reopening the Union’s external borders as of 30 June.
• On 22 June the EU and China hold their bilateral summit in which the Union calls on China to respect its commitments regarding market access for European companies, transparency on subsidies and technology transfer, warns Beijing against cyberattacks and disinformation and expresses concern for the situation in Hong Kong.
• On 24 June the Commission unveils its draft budget for 2021, the first of the next multiannual financial framework and the first without a British contribution. The draft budget totals at 388 billion euros, -166.7 billion corresponding to the annual budget and 211 billion for the “Next generation EU” recovery plan. It also foresees 133 billion euros in loans, which is also in the framework of the Recovery Plan.
• On 25 June the annual EASO report reveals that in 2019, 738,425 asylum applications were lodged, 11% more than in 2018 with a 40% recognition rate.

Arab League

• On 23 June the Arab League rejects the foreign interference in Libya.

July 2020

In most European countries, the states of emergency in place for the first wave of COVID-19 come to an end. Portugal declares a state of alert over wildfires. In Spain, Galicia and the Basque Country hold elections. France reshuffles the cabinet. In Italy and Malta the large-scale migrant arrivals continue. Croatia holds early parliamentary elections and advances the process for adopting the euro. In Serbia, there are protests against the handling of the pandemic and talks are resumed to normalize relations with Kosovo, whose President appears before the KSC. North Macedonia holds parliamentary elections. Albania modifies its electoral system. Greece approves a public safety bill and tensions rise with Turkey over territorial waters. Turkey orders the Hagia Sophia Museum be converted into a mosque and the Parliament approves a law that grants the authorities greater control over social media. In Syria, fighting continues for control of Idlib and parliamentary elections are held. In Lebanon, the Central Bank subsidises hundreds of basic goods. Jordan dissolves the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Egypt reinstates the Senate and the Court of Cassation ratifies the life sentence handed down to the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. In Tunisia, the Prime Minister resigns. In Algeria, two former Prime Ministers Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal are handed down new prison sentences.

Portugal

• On 27-28 July the government declares a national state of alert over the wildfires sweeping across the country.

Spain

• On 1 July lockdown is lifted and borders are gradually reopened.
• On 12 July Galicia and the Basque Country hold regional elections, postponed since March due to the pandemic. In Galicia, the People’s Party (PP; conservative) wins, Alberto Núñez Feijoo obtaining his fourth consecutive absolute majority. The Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG) is the second most voted party. In the Basque Country, Iñigo Urkullu’s Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) wins, although it needs to form a coalition to govern.

France

• On 3 July the Court of Justice of the Republic opens an investigation into the former Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, and the Minister and former Minister of Health, Olivier Veran and Agnes Buzyn, over their handling of the COVID-19 crisis.
• On 6 July the President Emmanuel Macron reshuffles the cabinet. Jean Castex replaces Edouard Philippe as Prime Minister. Gerald Darmanin replaces Christophe Castaner as Interior Minister and Eric Dupond-Moretti replaces Nicole Belloubet as Justice Minister.
• On 10 July the public health state of emergency is lifted.

Italy

• On 1 July Italian police in Naples seize 14 tons of amphetamines, produced by Daesh in Syria, in the world’s largest seizure of the drug.
• On 5 July the authorities allow the 180 migrants aboard the Ocean Viking to disembark at Sicily’s Porto Empedocle.
• On 6 July the government unveils its economic recovery plan, which includes 32 billion euros to spend on healthcare infrastructure, 7 billion euros on educational research and 3 billion euros on the renovation and digitalization of school infrastructures.
• On 9 July Italy bans entry to all travelers from 13 countries outside of the EU.
• On 14 July the government extends the measures for easing restrictions adopted on 11 June until the end of the month.
• On 21 July 75 people accused of having links with the Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta are arrested in a joint Italian-Swiss operation. Another 83 people are investigated over their ties with the mafia.
• On 27 July the Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese sends a large military contingent to Sicily and Lampedusa in view of the high levels of tension sparked by the overcrowding in migrant centres, three days after some 30 migrants escape from a centre in Brindisi.
• On 28 July the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announces an extension of the state of emergency and a partial border closure until October for the numerous new COVID-19 flare-ups.
• On 30 July the Senate strips the League’s leader Matteo Salvini of his immunity as a senator so he can be...
tried in the case of the Open Arms rescue ship, which was left stranded in Italian waters for 19 days after Salvini, the then Interior Minister, refused to allow the 160 migrants aboard to disembark.

Malta

- On 27 July Malta rescues 95 migrants adrift at sea, 65 of whom test positive for coronavirus.

Croatia

- On 5 July Croatia holds early parliamentary elections. The Prime Minister Andrej Plenković’s HDZ wins taking 66 of the 151 seats. The Restart Coalition, led by the social democrats, wins 41 seats. On 23 July, the Parliament approves Plenković’s new government.
- On 10 July the Eurogroup and ECB approve the incorporation of Croatia and Bulgaria into the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM-II) ahead of their adoption of the euro in 2023.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 7 July the Bosnian Serb police arrest 10 members of the Movement of Justice as they try to hold a press conference in Banja Luka. The group demands explanations be given for the 2018 death of the student David Dragicevic, for which they blame the police.
- On 11 July 25 years after the Srebrenica massacre, the remains of nine victims are buried in the Potocari cemetery, adding to the 6,610 identified bodies so far, from a massacre in which at least 8,372 Bosniaks were murdered at the hands of the Bosnian Serb army.
- On 29 July Salko Bukvarevic, Minister of Veterans for the Bosniak-Croat entity, dies from COVID-19.
- On 29 July the Parliament adopts the 2020 budget set at 1.8 billion marks, 42 million of which is to help alleviate the economic impact of the coronavirus.

Montenegro

- On 21 July after negotiations over the Freedom of Religion Law fail, the Serbian Orthodox Church accuses the government of using the dialogue for electoral gain ahead of the elections set for 30 August.

Serbia

- On 7-8 July thousands take to the streets of Belgrade to protest against the government’s handling of the pandemic, and clashes break out throughout the month with security forces over the curfew decreed from 10 to 13 July, which the government is finally forced to suspend.

Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 6 July Kosovo brings back the curfew in Pristina and other cities in light of an increase in COVID-19 infections.
- On 16 July the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Kosovo’s Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti resume talks in Brussels to normalize the two countries’ relations.
- On 21 July the temporary board of Kosovo Telecom resigns after the court rules to seize 26 million euros in assets to settle a debt with the operator DardaPhone, plunging the state-owned company into bankruptcy.
- On 20 and 22 July rival protests take place over the construction of the new Central Mosque of Pristina, funded by Turkey.
- On 30 July the EU appoints the Czech Tomas Szunyog as its new Special Representative for Kosovo from 1 September, to replace the Bulgarian Natalya Apostolova.

North Macedonia

- On 7 July the North Macedonian security forces find 211 migrants crammed into a lorry near Gevgelija.
- On 15 July in accordance with the agreement on 15 June, North Macedonia holds early parliamentary elections, postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. With 36.13% of the vote, victory is claimed by the ruling pro-European Social Democratic Union, although it will have to form a coalition to govern. The main opposition party, VMRO-DPMNE, obtains 34.65%.
- On 22 July VMRO-DPMNE scraps the post of honorary president, occupied until now by the former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, who has fled to Hungary after being implicated in a corruption scandal.

Albania

- On 28 July the Special Prosecution against Corruption announces the arrest of 20 election officials after identifying three cases of vote manipulation in the 2017 elections, won by PSS and whose results, among other reasons, have been the cause since 2019 of the parliamentary boycott of most DPS MPs.
- On 30 July the socialist majority in the Parliament approves a constitutional amendment that modifies the electoral system and removes the parties’ right to run as coalitions in an effort to generate less fragmented parliamentary compositions. Although this reform is a requirement set by Brussels to advance in the accession process, its approval comes following an agreement on principle reached on 5 June with the opposition, something which the EC also requires.

Greece

- On 1 July Greece resumes activity in the tourism sector after authorizing the reopening of the leisure sector.
- On 7 July Greece reports more than 50 violations of its airspace by Turkey in a single day.
- On 9 July the Parliament approves a controversial public safety law met with demonstrations in Athens which end in unrest.
- On 21 July the army goes on its highest alert after a Turkish ship begins exploration activities close to the Greek island of Kastellorizo, which continue until 2 August.

Turkey

- On 3 July Taner Kilic, the honorary chair of the Turkish branch of Amnesty International, is sentenced to six years in prison on terrorism-related charges.
- On 3 July the trial in absentia is held against the men accused of the assassination of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.
- On 7 July the Turkish coast guard intercepts a vessel in the Aegean Sea
with 276 migrants aboard attempting to reach Greece.

- On 9 July the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan orders the reclassification of the Church of Hagia Sophia as a mosque, after Turkey’s highest administrative court annuls the 1934 decree to secularize it. On 24 July, Hagia Sophia officially reopens for Muslim prayer, for the first time since 1931.
- On 11 July the Parliament passes a law that allows provincial bar associations with over 5,000 members to split. The measure is rejected by the opposition and bar associations accusing the AKP of looking to divide up bar associations along political lines and create groupings that give government politics their unconditional support.
- On 13 July the EU calls on Turkey to respect the arms embargo on Libya and put an end to the illegal drilling in Cypriot waters. It also condemns Turkey’s decision to reclassify the Church of Hagia Sophia as a mosque.
- On 22 July Turkey rescues 110 migrants in the Aegean Sea on their way to Lesbos.
- On 29 July the Parliament approves a law pushed forward by the AKP and MHP, which gives the authorities greater control over social media.
- On 30 July the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood for failing to resolve its legal status since it was originally shut down in 2016. All that remains is the more moderate offshoot, the Muslim Brotherhood Society.

Cyprus

- On 10 July the new Energy, Commerce and Industry Minister Natasa Pilides takes office, replacing Yiorkos Lakkotrypis.
- On 28 July the UN Security Council decides to extend the mandate of UNFICYP for another six months.

Syria

- On 7 July 10 Syrian soldiers and 13 jihadists die in clashes with Daesh at the border triangle between Aleppo, Hama and Raqqaa.
- On 7 July the United Nations releases a report once again denouncing war crimes committed in Syria against civilians in 52 attacks in Idlib between November 2019 and June 2020. The report places the blame on Syria, Russia and HTS.
- On 8 July Syria and Iran sign an agreement to expand their military cooperation.
- On 8-9 July the United Nations Security Council fails to approve the renewal of a resolution which, since 2014, has delivered food and healthcare to millions of Syrians in the north of the country.
- On 9 July the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) confirms the first five cases of Palestinian refugees in Syria, coinciding with the first case reported in the rebel stronghold of Idlib.
- On 13 July Russian warplanes bomb Daesh positions in Syria after a new attack by the jihadist group on the Syrian army in Homs.
- On 19 July the regime holds parliamentary elections in areas under its control.

Lebanon

- On 7 July the government announces an agreement with the Central Bank to subsidise around 300 basic goods, faced with the financial crisis and surge in protests.

Jordan

- On 15 July the Court of Cassation orders the definitive dissolution of the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood for failing to resolve its legal status since it was originally shut down in 2016. All that remains is the more moderate offshoot, the Muslim Brotherhood Society.
- On 16 July the government announces plans to reopen schools at the beginning of September.
- On 18 July the murder of a young woman at the hands of her father in the al-Basha province sparks a wave of protests calling for tougher penalties for domestic violence against women.
- On 26 July Jordan orders the two-year closure of the Teachers Syndicate after arresting its leading members for corruption and incitement against the government.

Egypt

- On 1 July Egypt reopens its airports to international traffic, suspended since 19 March.
- On 2 July the President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi ratifies the new laws for legislative elections and the recovery of the Senate.
- On 6 July the Parliament approves a law banning army officers from running for election without the approval of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.
- On 14 July the Court of Cassation upholds the life sentence handed down to the leader of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Badie, for the violent episodes that broke out after the coup that overthrew Mohamed Morsi.
- On 14 July Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan conclude another negotiation round without reaching an agreement on the water management of the Nile following the construction and imminent filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.
- On 20 July the Parliament gives the President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi authorization for a military intervention in Libya, risking a direct confrontation with Turkey.

Libya

- On 1 July France announces its temporary withdrawal from NATO’s Operation Sea Guardian for Libya amid tensions with Turkey, which it accuses of illegal interference in the Libyan conflict.
- On 2 July 172 migrants are intercepted in the Mediterranean and returned to Libya.
- On 5 July Russia announces the reopening of its embassy in Libya, which will be temporarily located in Tunisia.
- On 11 July the LNA commander in chief Khalifa Haftar shuts down oil facilities again, just a day after the state-owned oil company NOC announces that exports can be resumed.
- On 14 July the House of Representatives in Tobruk, which supports general Khalifa Haftar, calls on Egypt to intervene directly to counter Turkey’s open support for the GNA. On the same day, the US and Turkey agree to coordinate to stabilize the situation in Libya. For their part, Russia and the UAE continue
to insist on the need for the GNA to respond to the call to dialogue made by Egypt and Haftar.
• On 19 July Egypt threatens for the first time to intervene directly in Libya if the foreign interference in the conflict continues and especially if Turkish troops take Sirte.
• On 20 July Algeria announces a new Algerian-Tunisian initiative to find a negotiated solution to the Libyan crisis and criticizes Egypt for trying to involve Libyan tribes to justify a military intervention in Libya.

Tunisia
• On 3 July a general strike in Tataouine is staged against the economic crisis and unemployment.
• On 7 July HRW condemns the Tunisian judiciary for violating the rights laid out in the Constitution in its persecution of homosexuality, following the two-year prison sentence handed down to two men for sodomy.
• On 8-9 July tensions rise in Tataouine after residents from the town of Remada accuse the army of unlawfully killing a young local man who was driving in a restricted area.
• On 10 July the Parliament announces the creation of a committee to investigate allegations against the Prime Minister Elies Fajfaj regarding conflicts of interest in relation to companies in which he is a shareholder. On 13 July, Fajfaj announces a partial cabinet shuffle, and the Islamist party Ennahda calls for a new Prime Minister. On 15 July, Fajfaj announces his resignation after several parties call for a no-confidence vote.
• On 30 July the Parliament rejects a no-confidence vote tabled against the Parliament Speaker, Rachid Ghannouchi, leader of Ennahda, over corruption accusations.

Algeria
• On 1 July the former chairman of the business owners’ association Ali Haddad was sentenced to 18 years in prison for corruption, together with the former Prime Ministers Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal, both sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment.
• On 2 July Karim Tabbou, Amira Bouraoui, Samir Benlarbi and Sliman Hamitouche, four leaders of the popular movement that succeeding in ousting Abdelaziz Bouteflika, are released after spending between three and 10 months behind bars.
• On 15 July the former prime ministers Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal are sentenced to a further 10 years in prison for corruption in the case against the businessman Mahiedine Tahkout, sentenced to 16 years. In the same case, the former ministers Amar Ghoul and Youcef Yousfi are also sentenced to three and two years in prison respectively.

Morocco
• On 8 July Morocco announces the partial opening of its borders on 14 July to allow entry to Moroccans resident abroad for the summer holidays. Entry is allowed exclusively by plane or from the ports of Sete and Genoa.
• On 13 July Morocco enforces lockdown in Tangier following the rise in COVID-19 infections. On 27 July, movement is limited between Tangier, Tetouan, Fez, Marrakech and Casablanca due to the increasing spread of the coronavirus.
• On 29 July Mohammed VI orders a commission of inquiry into the dysfunctions of the Competition Council, following the confusion generated by the submission of two contradicting reports from its director, Driss Guerraoui.
• On 30 July the journalist Omar Radi, already under investigation for suspected espionage, is taken into custody on rape charges.

Mauritania
• On 9 July the former President Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz fails to appear before a parliamentary inquiry set up to shed light on his years in power.

European Union
• On 1 July Germany takes over the six-month Presidency of the Union at a crucial moment, prioritizing the economic recovery, fundamental rights, solidarity and cohesion, climate change, the digital transition and Europe’s role in the world.
• On 8 July the Parliament appoints Frenchman François-Louis Michaud as executive director of the European Banking Authority.
• On 9 July the Irish Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe is elected President of the Eurogroup, taking over from the Portuguese Mario Centeno.
• On 13 July the European Vice-President for Values and Transparency Vera Jourová calls on the 27 to join forces to fight against disinformation campaigns, which she describes as attacks on the EU.
• On 14 July the Council adopts measures to facilitate and accelerate the development of a vaccine against COVID-19.
• On 21 July a five-day European Heads of State and Government summit ends with an agreement between the southern countries plus the Franco-German axis and so-called “frugal countries” on the 750-billion-euro recovery plan, finally comprising 390 billion euros in grants and 360 billion euros in low-interest loans. They also agree on the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework, which amounts to 1.74 trillion euros.

August 2020

New measures are brought back in most countries faced with a second wave of COVID-19 infections. France steps up its military presence in the eastern Mediterranean because of the escalation between Turkey and Greece. Migration pressure increases in southern Italy. The appeal begins of the former Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladic, who was convicted of genocide for the Srebrenica massacre. Montenegro holds parliamentary elections. Greece and Egypt agree on their maritime border. Turkey announces new oil and gas exploration activities in the eastern Mediterranean. In Syria, the regime unveils a new government and talks resume in Geneva between the government and the opposition. In Lebanon, two explosions destroy the Port of Beirut and the government resigns. In Egypt, a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood is
overloaded. Unsal, on hunger strike since February 22, was arrested and the Senate elections are held. Libya signs memorandum of understanding with Turkey to boost trade and economic ties, and the Interior Minister is dismissed. Mauritania appoints a new Prime Minister.

**Portugal**

- On 13 August the government announces a 15-day extension on restrictions in Lisbon faced with the rising number of COVID-19 infections. On 27 August, it is announced that the containment measures will apply throughout the country from mid-September.

**Spain**

- On 21 August an outbreak of the West Nile virus is detected in the province of Seville, which, until November, spreads through to other areas, especially Andalusia and Extremadura, leaving at least 72 people in hospital and seven dead.

**France**

- On 7 August the Constitutional Court rules against the legislation approved in July for the monitoring and surveillance of people convicted of terrorism, stating that many of its clauses are unconstitutional.
- On 13 August France steps up its military presence in the eastern Mediterranean over the escalation between Turkey and Greece.

**Italy**

- On 24 August the president of Sicily Nello Musumeci threatens to take legal action against the government if it does not comply with his order to close the region’s migrant reception centres.
- On 30 August the mayor of Lampedusa announces a general strike from 31 August against the relentless migrant arrivals.
- On 30 August the Louise Michel rescue ship transfers some of the 200 migrants it is carrying to the Sea-Watch 4, after previously requesting coast guard assistance to evacuate some of its passengers due to the vessel being overloaded.

**Malta**

- On 19 August the government announces the mandatory use of face masks in public spaces and a new closure of hotels and recreational centres, faced with the second wave of COVID-19.

**Slovenia**

- On 23 August hundred of tourists are held up at the border with Austria after Vienna tightens border controls to halt the pandemic.

**Croatia**

- On 14 August the government upholds its plans to reopen to avoid economic collapse, despite the onslaught of a second wave of COVID-19. On 26 August, after reporting the highest number of confirmed new cases to date in the Pandemic, restrictions and closures are reintroduced in the worst affected counties.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina**

- On 24 August the appeal hearing begins of the former Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladic, for the Srebrenica massacre.

**Montenegro**

- On 30 August Montenegro holds parliamentary elections in which the alliance between For the Future of Montenegro, Peace is Our Nation and United Reform Action wins taking 43 of the 81 seats. The ruling DPS wins 30 seats, thereby becoming the opposition after being in power for 30 years.

**Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244**

- On 27 August the EU reactivates the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue with a meeting between the Special Envoy for Dialogue, Miroslav Lajcak, and the coordinators from Belgrade and Pristina.

**Greece**

- On 6 August Egypt and Greece sign an agreement on maritime boundaries and the creation of an EEZ.
- On 7 August seven people are reported to have died from torrential rains in Eubea.
- On 7 August Poros goes into lockdown after 13 test positive for COVID-19.
- On 15 August Greece announces the closure of hotels in Athens, Thessaloniki and several islands and limits gatherings to a maximum of 50 people, in view of the second wave of COVID-19.
- On 21 August UNHCR expresses its deep concern over the increase in migrant pushbacks from Greece to Turkey.
- On 26 August Greece announces the extension of its territorial waters in the Ionian Sea after the agreements reached with Italy and Egypt.
- On 26 August Greece, France, Italy and Cyprus begin joint aeronautical manoeuvres amid the escalation with Turkey.

**Turkey**

- On 7 August the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announces the resumption of oil and gas prospecting activities in the eastern Mediterranean. On 12 August, the CHP shows its support for the President’s policy in the area.
- On 12 August 33 women are arrested in Ankara at a demonstration in favour of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating domestic violence.
- On 13 August Turkey states that it will continue its operations against the PKK terrorist organization in Iraq as long as its presence is tolerated there, after Baghdad issues a complaint to Ankara over the death of two Border Guard commanders during a Turkish airstrike.
- On 21 August Recep Tayyip Erdogan announces the discovery of a 320 billion m³ gas reserve in the Black Sea.
- On 21 August Recep Tayyip Erdogan orders the conversion of the Byzantine Church of San Salvador de Chora, in Istanbul, into a mosque.
- On 22 August human rights groups and bar associations call for the release of the lawyers Ebru Timtik and Aytaç Unsal, on hunger strike since February against being sentenced to jail for their links with the terrorist organization the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front (DHKP-C).
On 31 August Turkey calls on Greece to withdraw its troops from the island of Kastellorizo.

Syria

- On 2 August Syria and Iran condemn the agreement between the SDF and the US-based oil company Delta Crescent on the development of oil fields controlled by the Kurdish authorities.
- On 23 August an explosion that strikes a gas pipeline close to Damascus, branded by regime as an act of terrorism, causes power cuts all over Syria.
- On 27 August after a nine-month break, talks resume in Geneva between the Syrian government, the opposition and civil society to negotiate the drafting of the new Constitution.
- On 30 August Bashar al-Assad confirms the formation of a new government led by Hussein Arnous in which the main ministerial posts remain unchanged.

Lebanon

- On 4 August around 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, seized from a ship in 2014 following a court order, explode triggering two massive blasts measuring between 3.3 and 4.5 on the Richter scale at the Port of Beirut and leaving 202 people dead and at least 6,500 injured. On 8 August, 175 members of the security forces are wounded during protests in Beirut against negligence and corruption, which are stoked by the blasts and come to an end on 10 August with the resignation of Hassan Diab’s government. On 12 August, the Parliament extends the state of emergency in Beirut and the President Michel Aoun says the blasts are estimated to have caused at least 12.72 billion euros in damages.
- On 18 August the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) convicts Hezbollah-linked Salim Ayyash for the bomb attack on 14 February 2005, which claimed the life of the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 21 others.
- On 27 August at least two people are killed and a further eight injured in armed clashes in Khaldeh between members of Hezbollah and supporters of the Sunni cleric Omar Ghosn.
- On 31 August the diplomat Mustapha Adib is appointed Prime Minister.

On the same day, the Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri expresses his support for the President Michel Aoun’s proposal to modify the current political system of confessionalism and replace it with a secular one.

Jordan

- On 12 August Jordan orders the one-week closure of the border with Syria due to the spike in coronavirus infections in the area.

Egypt

- On 13 August Essam el-Erian, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood who was arrested in 2013 following a coup against the President Mohamed Morsi, dies in prison from a heart attack.
- On 24 August the Parliament postpones until after the October elections a draft law that would give the government authority over Dar al-Ifta, the country’s main body responsible for issuing religious guidelines, which answers to al-Azhar, the leading Sunni institution of Islamic learning.
- On 25 August the human rights activist Bahey el-Din Hassan is sentenced in absentia to 15 years in prison, charged with spreading fake news.
- On 26 August the National Elections Authority says it will fine the almost 54 million voters who failed to turn out for the elections on 11 August to elect 200 of the Senate’s 300 members, an institution that has been revived after its abolishment six years ago amid corruption allegations.
- On 28 August Mahmoud Ezzat, one of the Muslim Brotherhood leaders sentenced to death in absentia, is arrested.

Libya

- On 6 August the US announces financial sanctions against members of a human-trafficking network operating in Libya, including a company based in Malta.
- On 7 August the GNA announces a new ten-day extension on the overnight curfew.
- On 14 August Turkey and the GNA sign a memorandum of understanding to boost trade and economic ties.
- On 19 August the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet designates a mission of experts to document human rights violations in Libya.
- On 21 August the GNA declares a ceasefire, confirmed hours later by Libya’s eastern forces.
- On 26 August the GNA declares a 24-hour curfew for the next four days in Tripoli to halt the spread of COVID-19 infections.
- On 27 August the GNA accuses Khalifa Haftar’s forces of violating the ceasefire announced on 21 August.
- On 28 August the Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj suspends the Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha, following the protests in Tripoli against corruption, replacing him temporarily with Khaled Ahmed al-Tijani. On 29 August, he appoints Salah al-Namroush as Defence Minister, until now the Deputy Minister of the same ministry, and Mohamed al-Haddad as chief of staff of the army.
- On 30 August operations resume at Brega Port thanks to the ceasefire agreement.

Tunisia

- On 11 August Tunisia announces the mandatory use of face masks in public spaces.

Algeria

- On 4 August Algeria approves the gradual reopening of cultural and recreational centres.
- On 10 August the journalist Khaled Drareni is sentenced to three years in prison for his coverage of the protests that ousted Abdelaziz Bouteflika.
- On 18 August the government unveils an ambitious economic plan to reduce dependence on oil and gas, based on cutting back on imports, stimulating small and medium-size enterprises and promoting the African market and Islamic finance.

Morocco

- On 6 August the government extends the health state of emergency until 10 September.

Mauritania

- On 6 August the government of Ismail Ould Bede Ould Chej Sidaya resigns,
amid investigations by the parliamentary committee set up in January over the allegations of corruption made against the former President Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz and which could involve several members of Sidaya's cabinet. Hours later, the President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani, appoints Mohamed Ould Bilal as the new Prime Minister. On 10 August, Ould Ghazouani names the new cabinet.

- On 24 August the police release the former President Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz on conditional bail, after his arrest on corruption charges on 18 August.

September 2020

In Spain, the regional President of Catalonia is banned from office by the Supreme Court. In France, elections for the senate are held, clashes break out during a yellow vest demonstration and al-Qaeda threatens the magazine Charlie Hebdo over the republication of the Muhammad caricatures. In Italy, elections are held in six regions, the reduction of parliamentary seats is approved in a referendum and, like in Croatia, there are demonstrations against the government’s handling of the pandemic. In Malta, the former cabinet chief of the former Prime Minister is arrested for money laundering. Serbia and Kosovo sign an agreement on economic normalization and Israel recognizes Kosovo’s independence. There is a rise in incidents in migrant reception centres on the Greek islands. In Turkey, several HDP members are arrested. The Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot armed forces begin joint manoeuvres amid the escalation in the eastern Mediterranean. The US ends the arms embargo on Cyprus. In Syria, Russia steps up its bombing campaign against Daesh and the US announces new sanctions against the regime. In Lebanon, Mustapha Adib gives up efforts to form a government. Jordan announces the reinstatement of mandatory military service. Anti-government demonstrations are staged in Egypt and six members of the Muslim Brotherhood are sentenced to death. In Libya, the GNA reappoints the Interior Minister while the demonstrations against corruption continue. In Tunisia, the Parliament approves the new government and Daesh carries out an attack in Sousse. In Algeria, the Parliament approves the new draft Constitution and four businessmen close to Abdelaziz Bouteflika are convicted for corruption. Morocco imposes a lockdown in Casablanca.

Portugal

- On 10 September Portugal limits gatherings to 10 people and regulates opening hours for shops to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

Spain

- On 1 September students begin their gradual return to face-to-face classes.
- On 28 September the regional President of Catalonia Quim Torra is banned from office by the Supreme Court for disobedience. Catalonia’s Vice-President Pere Aragonès takes over as caretaker President until the 2021 regional elections.

France

- On 1 September teaching centres resume their activities after months of closure due to COVID-19.
- On 3 September the government unveils its 100-billion-euro economic recovery plan, 40 billion of which will be financed by the European Recovery Plan.
- On 10 September the Summit of southern EU countries in Corsoica agrees on a fresh drive for European politics in the Mediterranean and calls on Turkey to halt its unilateral activities in Greek waters.
- On 11 September al-Qaeda threatens the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo again for republishing the Muhammad caricatures.
- On 12 September at least 256 demonstrators are arrested during a new day of Yellow Vest protests, calling for changes in the political system.
- On 24 September judges and prosecutors demonstrate against the new Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti, after he launches an inquiry into three prosecutors and former prosecutors.
- On 24 September the court rejects the appeal lodged by the former President Nicolas Sarkozy against an investigation into the alleged financing of his 2007 presidential campaign by Muammar Gaddafi.
- On 27 September France holds indirect elections to renew 172 of the 348 seats in the Senate. LR and the environmentalists from Europe Ecology-The Greens (EELV) are the parties with the best results.

Italy

- On 5 September thousands of people demonstrate in Rome over the government’s handling of the pandemic in protests backed by far-right and denialist groups.
- On 13 September the 27 migrants rescued on 4 August by the cargo ship Etienne in Tunisian waters disembark in Pozzallo, days after being transferred to the ship Mare Jonio from the NGO Mediterranea Saving Humans.
- On 14 September teaching centres resume activity after months of closure due to COVID-19.
- On 18 September around 50 migrants rescued by Open Arms throw themselves into the sea in response to the delay in authorization to disembark, a day after more than 70 others did the same and were rescued by the Italian Coast Guard. Finally, on 24 September, Italy allows them to disembark in Arbatax, Sardinia.
- On 20 and 21 September, in a public referendum, 69.55% of Italian voters agree to reduce the members of the Chamber of Deputies from 630 to 400 and the Senate from 315 to 200, one of M5E’s central election promises. On the same day, regional elections are held in Marches, Veneto and Liguria, where the centre-right wins, and in Apulia, Campania and Toscana, where the centre-left takes most votes.

Malta

- On 22 September Keith Schembri, former chief of staff of the former Prime Minister Joseph Muscat, is arrested under suspicion of money laundering.
- On 23 September the Alan Kurdi rescue ship sets a course for Marseille after Malta and Italy both refuse to allow the migrants onboard to disembark.
**Croatia**

- On 6 September some 3,000 persons demonstrate in Zagreb against the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, in an act supported by far-right and denialist groups.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina**

- On 15 September Momcilo Krajsnik, the former Bosnian Serb leader convicted in 2006 for war crimes, dies from COVID-19.

**Montenegro**

- On 30 September more than 300 people file lawsuits against the State for publishing their names on lists of people ordered to self-isolate, saying it violated their privacy and constitutional rights.

**Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244**

- On 4 September Serbia and Kosovo sign a bilateral agreement on economic normalization.
- On 4 September Israel recognizes Kosovo’s independence.
- On 26 September officers from the EU’s Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) arrest several UÇK war veterans, including the party’s president Hysni Gucati, on charges of war crimes.

**Albania**

- On 7 September the President Ilir Meta sets 25 April 2021 as the date for the next parliamentary elections.

**Greece**

- On 15 September the authorities confirm that a fire has broken out at a refugee camp in Samos, days after, on 11 September, another fire, started deliberately, devastates the Moria camp in Lesbos, and migrants protest against their detention. On 19 September the police announce the transfer of 9,000 of the 12,000 migrants in Moria to the Kara Tepe camp.

**Turkey**

- On 1 September the Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu announces the arrest in Adana of Mahmut Ozden, the leader of Daesh in Turkey.
- On 5 September a Turkish frigate takes part in a joint military exercise with the Northern Cypriot coast guard after escorting the Barbaros Hayrettin Pasa oil and gas exploration vessel in August and before the beginning of a new exploration mission by the Yavuz in the eastern Mediterranean.
- On 11 September the MP Remziye Tosun (HDP) is sentenced to 10 years in prison accused of being a member of a terrorist organization.
- On 14 September the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) condemns Turkey for the arbitrary arrest in 2012 of the author Ragip Zarakolu charged with membership of a terrorist organization.
- On 17 September the Constitutional Court orders the retrial of the MP Enis Berberoglu (CHP) sentenced in 2018 to more than five years in prison for leaking state secrets.
- On 21 September education centres reopen after months of closure for the pandemic.
- On 25 September the authorities arrest a dozen senior members of the HDP as part of the investigations into the clashes in 2014, which left at least 40 people dead in southeastern Turkey.

**Cyprus**

- On 1 September the US announces it will allow the sale of non-lethal military goods to Cyprus, thereby ending the embargo imposed in 1987, amid the escalation with Turkey.

**Syria**

- On 24 September Russia steps up its bombing campaign against Daesh in Hama, Raqqa and Homs, in response to the increase in jihadist attacks on Syrian government forces.
- On 26 September at least seven civilians are killed in an attack in Ras al-Ayn. The Syrian National Army (SNA), which controls the area, accuses the SDF.

**Lebanon**

- On 2 September Mustapha Adib, the Prime Minister-designate, begins talks with the parliamentary groups to form a government, a day after the second visit since the August explosions in Beirut of the French President Emmanuel Macron, during which the Lebanese parties give their commitment to forming a government within the next two weeks. Macron’s visit is met with clashes between police and demonstrators protesting against France and the republication of the Muhammad caricatures in the Charlie Hebdo magazine.
- On 8 September the US announces sanctions against the former ministers Ali Hassan Khalil and Yusuf Finianus, which it accuses of supporting Hezbollah.
- On 10 September the army says it has shot down an Israeli drone which entered its airspace near Aytash-Shab. The incident comes three weeks after Hezbollah shot down and captured another Israeli drone in the same area.
- On 17 September the US imposes sanctions on the companies Arch Consulting and Meamar Construction and an individual, Sultan Khalifa Asad, for alleged links to Hezbollah.
- On 26 September Mustapha Adib abandons efforts to form a government, faced with the difficulties in forming a cabinet of independent ministers, especially in Finance.

**Jordan**

- On 9 September Jordan announces the reinstatement of mandatory military service to deal with rising unemployment and the effects of COVID-19.
• On 14 September the government announces that it will close mosques, markets and restaurants for two weeks because of a spike in infections.
• On 22 September the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, announces it will participate in November’s parliamentary elections, despite July’s court order for its dissolution.

**Egypt**
• On 19 September demonstrations break out against the government’s failure to implement democratic and socio-economic reforms, which continue throughout the month.
• On 23 September at least four police officers and four prisoners and members of Ansar al-Sharia and Daesh are killed during an escape attempt at Tora prison.
• On 25 September several demonstrators are arrested on charges of vandalism during an anti-government protest in several locations in Egypt, including Cairo, Damietta and Luxor.
• On 30 September six members of the Muslim Brotherhood are sentenced to death for the murder of a police officer in Sharqiya in 2016.

**Libya**
• On 4 September the GNA restores Fathi Bashagha to his post as Interior Minister, after his suspension in August over the anti-corruption demonstrations, which continue throughout September.
• On 13 September at least five people are injured by shots fired by members of the LNA against demonstrators in al-Marj, a day after protests and unrest in Benghazi over the situation of violence in Libya.
• On 16 September the LNA announces it has killed the Daesh leader in Libya, Abu Abdullah al-Libi, during fighting in Sabha.
• On 18 September Khalifa Haftar announces an agreement to resume production in the country’s oil fields, which have been shut down by his milicias since January.
• On 21 September the Defence Minister Salah al-Namrush rejects any political deal that involves Khalifa Haftar.
• On 21 September Turkey reiterates its support for the GNA reacting to the Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj’s announcement of his resignation at the end of October to facilitate the formation of a new government based on the talks being held in Morocco and Switzerland.
• On 22 September the EU announces sanctions against Kazakhstan’s airline Sigma Airlines and the shipping companies Avarsya (Turkish) and Med Wave (Jordanian) for violating the military embargo on Libya. Mahmoud al-Werfalli, leader of a military brigade in Benghazi, accused of murders and executions, is also sanctioned.
• On 30 September the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) reports the readiness of the warring parties in Libya, meeting in Hurghada, to resume military contact and exchange prisoners.

**Tunisia**
• On 1 September the Parliament approves the government of the Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi, thereby avoiding new elections.
• On 6 September a member of the National Guard is killed in a Daesh attack in Sousse.

**Algeria**
• On 10 September the Parliament approves the government-backed draft Constitution.
• On 23 September four businessmen and members of the Kouninef family, close to the former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, are handed down jail sentences for corruption.

**Morocco**
• On 7 September Morocco imposes lockdown in Casablanca for COVID-19. On 9 September, the health state of emergency is extended until 10 October.
• On 10 September Morocco announces the arrest of five suspected members of a cell linked to Daesh, in an operation in Tangier, Temara, Tiflet and Sijra.

**Mauritania**
• On 25 September the Mauritanian public prosecution issues an order banning the former President Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz from leaving Nouakchott, while he is under a court investigation.

**European Union**
• On 23 September the EC unveils a draft proposal for a new pact on migration and asylum whose central elements are the pre-entry examination of asylum applications at the Union’s external borders and a new division of the work between the Member States, which in the future will be able to choose between accepting asylum applications and returning those that have been rejected.
• On 28 September the European Public Prosecutor’s Office begins operations, which will be entrusted with investigating, prosecuting and taking to trial perpetrators of crimes that affect the financial interests of the Union.

**Arab League**
• On 9 September the Arab League votes down a draft resolution proposed by the Palestinian National Authority condemning the agreement between Israel and UAE.

**October 2020**

In Spain and Italy there is unrest in response to the measures to contain the pandemic. New Caledonia votes in favour of remaining part of France. After the murder of the teacher Samuel Paty and a jihadist attack in Nice, France announces measures to combat radical Islamism. The EC launches infringement procedures against Malta and Cyprus. In Serbia, the new government takes office. The North Macedonian Parliament approves the anti-discrimination law and the EC recommends the opening of accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania. Greece outlaws the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party. The EC advises upholding its suspension on Turkey’s accession process and tensions rise with Greece and Cyprus over the waters of...
the eastern Mediterranean and Northern Cyprus’ announcement of a unilateral plan to reopen Varosha, where elections are also held. An earthquake measuring 6.7 on the Richter scale affects Turkey and Greece. In Lebanon, massive protests reject the Central Bank’s announcement to lift its subsidies on basic products and Saad Hariri is appointed as Prime Minister. Jordan appoints a new Prime Minister. Egypt holds the first phase of its legislative elections. In Libya, the state-owned oil company resumes operations at the Sharara and al-Fil oil fields, the rival powers of Tripoli and Tobruk sign a ceasefire agreement and talks begin for the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum. Tunisia deploys troops in Sbeitla. In Algeria, new prison sentences are handed down to people linked to Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s entourage.

**Portugal**
- On 24 October the Parliament approves the mandatory use of face masks in public spaces.

**Spain**
- On 29 October, coinciding with the parliamentary approval of the extension of the state of alarm until May 2021, the autonomous regions order the closure of their borders and overnight curfews.
- On 31 October there is unrest in Barcelona over the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, which over the ensuing days spreads to other Spanish cities.

**France**
- On 4 October New Caledonia votes in favour of remaining part of France in a new referendum that backs up the results from the 2018 referendum.
- On 10 October the Champs-Élysées police station is attacked with mortar shots, after which there are fierce clashes. Over the last six months, 60 other police stations have been attacked in towns across France.
- On 14 October France imposes the state of emergency again.
- On 21 October the teacher Samuel Paty is beheaded near Paris after a fatwa was issued against him for showing caricatures of Muhammad to his pupils.

- On 29 October the National Assembly approves the new national lockdown as of 30 October and until 1 December, which adds to the lockdown in place since the middle of the month in areas with high infection levels.
- On 29 October three people have their throats slit in a jihadist attack at the Notre-Dame de l’Assomption Basilica, in Nice. On the same day, the police kill a man armed with a knife in Avignon and arrest another in Lyon. Emmanuel Macron announces Opération Sentinelle, doubling the country’s military deployment to protect churches and schools.

**Italy**
- On 6 October the government approves a decree-law that modifies the anti-migration laws established by the previous government and which puts an end to the fines for NGOs carrying out rescues in accordance with the Law of the Sea and in coordination with the national authorities.
- On 19 October the government introduces stricter measures against COVID-19. On 23 October Lombardy and Campania impose overnight curfews. On 26 October, new restrictions are approved, faced with the sharp rise in infections. On 27 October, there are protests and unrest in the big cities against the adopted measures.

**Malta**
- On 4 October Bernard Grech is voted leader of the PN after beating Adrian Delia in the party’s leadership election.
- On 20 October the EC announces it is launching infringement procedures against Cyprus and Malta, in the belief that their systems of issuing passports to citizens from outside the Union in exchange for investments is incompatible with EU principles.
- On 26 October the closure of hotels and restrictions on gatherings are announced to halt the spread of the pandemic.

**Slovenia**
- On 26 October the government imposes a ban on movement between municipalities. The measure is adopted three days after the government orders the closure of all non-essential establishments, as part of the new state of epidemic decreed on 19 October.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina**
- On 2 October the forcible removal of 350 people from a reception centre on the border with Croatia brings the number of migrants sleeping rough to 2,800 according to the IOM.

**Serbia**
- On 20 October the Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic is appointed Parliament Speaker.
- On 28 October the Parliament approves the new coalition government, led by the outgoing Prime Minister Ana Brnabic (SNS).

**Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244**
- On 8 October the EC urges Kosovo to speed up the reforms needed for visa liberalization.

**North Macedonia**
- On 27 October the Parliament approves the anti-discrimination law again, which includes sexual orientation and identity as grounds for discrimination, after it was repealed in May by the Constitutional Court for failing to attain a constitutional majority.

**Albania**
- On 6 October the EC recommends the opening of accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia.
- On 27 October the EC expresses its satisfaction with the Prime Minister Edi Rama’s decision to refer the electoral code reform, needed for the accession process to move forward, to the Venice Commission.

**Greece**
- On 1 October Greece and Turkey agree to set up a military hotline through NATO to ease tensions in the eastern
Turkey

- On 1 October universities reopen after their six-month closure.
- On 6 October the EC advises upholding the suspension of Turkey’s accession process, issuing a warning over the country’s backsliding in the area of democracy. Added to this ruling is Brussels’ warning against Ankara’s decision to boycott French products, over France’s “hostile stance to Islam.”
- On 8 October the Parliament ratifies a motion for a one-year extension on its authorization to conduct cross-border counter-terrorism operations in Iraq and Syria against the PKK and the People’s Protection Units (YPG).
- On 9 October a court approves a new indictment against the philanthropist Osman Kavala for his involvement in the 2016 failed coup attempt.
- On 17 October the US and NATO warn Turkey of serious consequences if it uses the S-400 air defence system it purchased from Russia, despite Turkey’s membership of the Atlantic Alliance.
- On 25 October the government announces a new extension of its natural gas exploration mission in the eastern Mediterranean, close to the Greek island of Rhodes.
- On 27 October the ECtHR rules that Turkey has violated article 10 of the European Human Rights Convention, which guarantees freedom of expression, following a number of Turkish court rulings against Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the opposition CHP party.
- On 29 October 27 people are sentenced to prison in connection with an arms shipment to Syrian rebels by the Intelligence Agency (MIT), which came to light after the lorries were intercepted and inspected in 2014 on the border with Syria. Among those convicted are 11 people accused of having ties with the Islamist preacher Fethullah Gulen.
- On 30 October an earthquake measuring 6.7 on the Richter scale in the Aegean Sea leaves at least 115 dead in Turkey and two dead in Greece. Izmir and Samos are the worst affected areas.

Cyprus

- On 13 October Cyprus announces the suspension of the measure that grants citizenship to foreign investors injecting at least two million euros into the country’s economy.
- On 13 October the EU calls on the leaders of Northern Cyprus to suspend their unilateral plan to reopen Varosha, a district of Famagusta that has been closed to the public since the conflict in 1974.
- On 19 October Ersin Tatar, from the National Unity Party (UBP, Turkish nationalist), is elected the new Turkish Cypriot leader in the second round of the presidential elections. Tatar announces his willingness to resume reunification talks based on “sovereign equality.”

Syria

- On 5 October Oman becomes the first country in the Persian Gulf to reopen its embassy in Syria after the closure of diplomatic delegations in 2012, in protest against the repression of demonstrations against the regime.
- On 15 October the SDF releases 631 prisoners held in the al-Hola camp and accused of having links with Daesh, in an amnesty that includes people convicted of terrorism, but who were deceived and have not shed blood.
- On 20 October Turkish forces begin their withdrawal from the strategic observation post in Murek, Hama, in an area under Syrian government control.
- On 22 October the Mufti of Damascus Mohammad Adnan Afiouni is killed in a bomb attack in Qudaysa.
- On 30 October the US-led international coalition declares that more than 1,400 civilians have been killed in airstrikes against Daesh in Syria and Iraq since 2014.

Lebanon

- On 11 October Lebanon closes its bars and nightclubs and orders a lockdown in 169 towns and villages due to COVID-19.
- On 14 October massive protests are staged against the Central Bank’s announcement to remove its subsidies on basic products at the end of 2020 to stem the rising public debt, amid the country’s worst economic crisis in decades and an 80% devaluation of the Lebanese pound against the dollar.
- On 22 October Saad Hariri is appointed Prime Minister tasked with forming a government, nearly a year after his resignation amid a wave of protests against corruption and the economic crisis.
- On 30 October clashes break out in Beirut between the police and demonstrators protesting against France and the republication of caricatures of Muhammad by the Charlie Hebdo magazine.

Jordan

- On 8 October Abdullah II appoints the diplomat and palace aide Bisher al-Khasawneh as the Prime Minister-designate tasked with forming a government, following the resignation of Omar Razzaz’s cabinet. On 12 October, al-Khasawneh and his cabinet take office.

Egypt

- On 6 October the journalist Basma Mostafa, arrested in Luxor where he was covering the protests against police brutality, is released pending trial.
- On 18 October the blogger Shadi Abu Zeid is released after spending two years in jail on charges of spreading false news and terrorism.
- On 24 October Egypt holds the first phase of its legislative elections in 14 of its 27 governorates. Around 65 million Egyptians are called to the urns to elect 568 seats in the two electoral phases, with more than 4,500 candidates running for election. A further 28...
On 26 October the President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi approves a three-month extension of the state of emergency decreed in 2017, following the bombings at two Coptic churches in Alexandria and Tanta.

On 31 October Abdel Fattah el-Sisi announces a plan to inaugurate the world’s biggest agricultural wastewater treatment plant in Bahr el-Baqar in June 2021.

Libya

On 7 October Libya’s rival governments reach an agreement on the criteria for appointing key posts in the country’s future institutions.

On 15 October the GNA announces the arrest of the people smuggler Abd al-Rahman al-Milad, sanctioned by the UN Security Council in 2018.

On 16 October UNHCR resumes humanitarian flights to evacuate migrants and asylum seekers from Libya after a seven-month suspension due to COVID-19.

On 21 October the warring parties in Libya agree to reopen land and air border crossings.

On 23 October the warring parties in Libya sign a ceasefire agreement in Geneva.

On 26 October the EU’s Operation Irini reports the inspection of a Turkish merchant ship heading for Misrata which may have violated the arms embargo on Libya.

On 26 October, following the ceasefire agreement, the state-owned oil company announces the reopening of the al-Fl oil field, the last to remain closed due to the armed conflict.

On 30 October the GNA Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj takes back his decision to resign at the end of October to avoid a power vacuum.

On 13 October the government deploys troops in Sbeitla after fierce clashes between police and demonstrators protesting against the Kasserine provincial authorities’ previous day’s demolition of a tobacco kiosk, killing its owner who was sleeping inside. The incident prompts the Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi to dismiss the governor of Kasserine province and his local delegate, as well as the security chief of the district and the police chief in Sbeitla.

On 22 October Tunisia announces the extension of the overnight curfew imposed in the capital and several adjacent provinces on 19 October until 6 November due to the spike in COVID-19 infections. On 29 October, Tunisia extends the curfew to the rest of the country.

Algeria

On 14 October the businesswoman Nachinchichi Zoulikha-Chafika is sentenced to 12 years in prison in the corruption investigations into the entourage of the former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The former National Security director-general Abdelghani Hamel and former governors of Chief Mohamed el Ghazi, and Oran, Abdelghani Zaalane, are sentenced to 10 years in prison.

On 29 October the overnight curfew for COVID-19 is extended to another nine provinces, bringing the number of provinces affected by this measure to 20 out of a total of 58.

Morocco

On 5 October Morocco announces the dismantling of a Daesh cell in Tangier.

Mauritania

On 18 October the opposition figure Mustapha Ould Limam Chaﬁ returns to Mauritania.

European Union

On 1 October the EC sanctions the United Kingdom for violating the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement after London’s refusal to withdraw its internal market bill from 15 September, which contradicts the current agreement with regard to the situation in Northern Ireland.

November 2020

In Spain, the Canary Islands face mass migrant arrivals, the education law reform is approved and the Constitutional Court upholds the Public Safety Law.

France announces a sharp increase in the measures against radical Islamism and approves the Global Security Law.

Slovenia announces its support for Poland and Hungary’s initiative to veto the
European budget. In Croatia, the former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader is sentenced to prison. Bosnia and Herzegovina holds local elections. Montenegro unveils its new government. Serbia and Albania agree on the free movement of citizens between its territories. Kosovo’s Parliament Speaker takes over the Presidency following Hashim Thaci’s resignation. Bulgaria vetoes the beginning of accession talks with North Macedonia. The Berlin Process agrees to establish a common market in the Western Balkans. Greece announces the construction of a new naval base in Crete. In Turkey, the Finance Minister resigns and 337 people are convicted in a mass trial for the 2016 failed coup attempt. The EU and US announce new sanctions against the Syrian regime. Lebanon continues without a government amid the ongoing protests and the US imposes sanctions on the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement. Jordan and Egypt hold parliamentary elections. In Libya, the Political Dialogue ends without an agreement. In Tunisia, there are demonstrations in Gafsa. Algeria holds a referendum on the new Constitution.

Portugal
- On 4 November a partial lockdown comes into effect in 121 municipalities, including Lisbon and Porto, thereby affecting 70% of the population, to deal with the spike in COVID-19 infections. On 14 November, the weekend curfew is expanded. On 21 November, the government announces a ban on national travel and the closure of schools between 27 November and 9 December.

Spain
- On 7 November around 900 people arrive in the Canary Islands aboard 17 vessels, amid an increase in migrant arrivals to the archipelago in recent weeks. On 10 November, the government resumes the return of migrants arriving in the Canary Islands. The migrant landings on the archipelago has increased by 1,019% so far this year compared with 2019, becoming the most unsustainable situation since the Cayuco crisis in 2006. By the end of the month, more than 8,000 migrants have reached the islands and are temporarily sheltered in the port of Arguineguin.
- On 19 November the Constitutional Court upholds the Public Safety Law approved by the PP in 2015.
- On 19 November the Parliament approves the Education Law that bolsters public education, places restrictions on the semi-private model, allows failing students to go on to their next year, gives the autonomous regions practically exclusive authority and removes Spanish as the vehicular language in regions where it has co-official status.

France
- On 3 November the Internal Security Service arrests a retired nurse and member of a far-right group for plotting an attack to assassinate Emmanuel Macron.
- On 4 November France outlaws a Turkish ultra-nationalist group called the Grey Wolves, following incidents during an anti-Armenia protest near Isere.
- On 5 November the President Emmanuel Macron announces increased measures to control irregular immigration and jihadist terrorism.
- On 21 November the images of three police officers brutally beating the music producer Michel Zecler scandalizes French society, amid the crisis over the identity debate and the Global Security Law.
- On 23 November the trial begins against Nicolas Sarkozy, France’s first former President to appear in the dock, who faces a possible 10-year prison sentence for corruption and influence peddling.
- On 24 November Emmanuel Macron announces a gradual easing of lockdown across three phases, after the peak of the second wave of COVID-19 infections is believed to have passed.
- On 24 November the National Assembly approves the controversial Global Security Law, whose article 24 makes it a criminal offence to share images that identify police officers in operation, which could carry up to a year’s prison sentence. The text sparks citizen and left-wing protests that condemn the article’s authoritarian nature and the danger it poses for the freedom of information. On 28 November, the first day of the new easing of restrictions for the health crisis, there are a number of demonstrations in different towns and cities against the new law, which end in violent clashes and force the government to announce the reformulation of article 24.

Italy
- On 5 November the government imposes restrictions throughout Italy until 4 December, including an overnight curfew, the closure of most of the hospitality sector and recreational centres and the closure of Lombardy, Piamonte, the Aosta Valley and Calabria to curb the second wave of COVID-19. On 30 November, the government announces the restrictions will remain in place throughout the Christmas holiday.
- On 17 November Eugenio Gaudio, the recently appointed health chief for the COVID-19 pandemic for Calabria, steps down from the post citing personal reasons. He is the third person to have resigned from the post in just 10 days, following Saverio Cotticelli and Giuseppe Zuccatelli.
- On 19 November the police arrest 19 people linked to the ‘Ndrangheta’s Grande Aracri clan, including the president of the regional council of Calabria, Domenico Tallini (FI), accused of allowing money-laundering activities through a chain of 23 pharmacies in exchange for votes in the 2014 regional elections.

Malta
- On 12 November Roberta Metsola (PN) is appointed the First Vice-President of the European Parliament.
- On 21 November Justyne Caruana replaces Owen Bonnici as Education Minister, who replaced Evarist Bartolo in January.

Slovenia
- On 6 November clashes break out in Ljubljana during an anti-government protest called by the Slovenian branch of the Anonymous activist group.
- On 18 November Slovenia announces its support of Poland and Hungary’s initiative to veto the 1.82-trillion-euro
COVID-19 economic stimulus package, as well as the EU budget, both of which were approved on 10 November by the Council and the Parliament, in opposition to the inclusion of a mechanism that allows the Union to cut funding to countries that violate the rule of law.

Croatia

• On 13 November the County Court of Zagreb sentences the former Prime Minister and former leader of the ruling HDZ Ivo Sanader to eight years in prison for corruption.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

• On 15 November Bosnia and Herzegovina holds local elections, postponed since 4 October over the delay in approving the state budget. In the Sarajevo Canton, the conservative SDA loses the power to the coalition of moderate parties. In Banja Luka, the opposition Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) wins the mayoralty from the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). Similar situations arise in another 16 towns, where moderate options oust the traditional nationalist parties.

Montenegro

• On 13 November the deputy ombudsman Snezana Armenko urges the authorities to clarify the quarantine or self-isolation measures, believing the current apparently arbitrary rules pose a threat to people’s human rights.
• On 17 November the parties of the Albanian and Bosniak minorities refuse to join the government coalition, in a situation that has not arisen since 1998 and which owes to the concern of said parties over the nationalist drift of the pro-Serbian parties in the incoming coalition.
• On 28 November Montenegro declares the Serbian ambassador Vladimir Bozovic persona non grata for his declarations about the country’s history and statehood, which Podgorica views as unacceptable. In response, Belgrade expels Montenegro’s ambassador Tarzan Milosevic, although on 29 November the measure is revoked by the Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic.

Serbia

• On 9 November Serbia and Albania sign an agreement that allows the free movement of their citizens between their respective territories.

Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244

• On 4 November the KSC reports the arrest of the former Parliament Speaker and Kosovo’s former President Jakup Krasniqi for war crimes.
• On 5 November the Parliament Speaker Vjosa Osmani takes over Kosovo’s Presidency following the resignation of Hashim Thaci after the KSC confirms his indictment for war crimes.
• On 29 November extraordinary local elections are held in two municipalities, after their mayors assume posts in the central government. In Podujeva, Shpetrim Bulliqi (Vetevendosje) wins, taking over from Agim Veliu (LDK), appointed Interior Minister. In North Mitrovica, Milan Radojevic, (Srpska List) wins, taking over from his colleague Goran Rakic, the new Deputy Prime Minister.

North Macedonia

• On 10 November at the seventh Summit of the Berlin Process, an agreement is reached to set up a common market in the Western Balkans aligned with the European Single Market and a green agenda to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, with the support of a European investment plan of 9 billion euros.
• On 17 November, at the EU Council of Ministers, Bulgaria vetoes the start of accession talks with North Macedonia, while the differences regarding their shared history and the Macedonian language remain unresolved.
• On 20 November North Macedonia declares a month-long state of emergency faced with the rise in COVID-19 infections.

Greece

• On 1 November a fire is reported to have broken out at the Vathy migrant camp on Samos.
• On 5 November Greece announces the creation of a naval base in Crete as a cornerstone of its security policy in the eastern Mediterranean, amid tensions with Turkey.
• On 7 November stricter social distancing measures for COVID-19 come into force until 30 November, in addition to the total lockdown in Thessalonica, partial lockdown in Athens and the overnight curfew throughout Greece.
• On 17 November as part of the government ban on gatherings to curb the spread of COVID-19 infections, riot police disperse a demonstration outside the University of Athens to commemorate the 1973 student uprising against the Regime of the Colonels.
• On 26 November the Greek civil servants trade union, Adedy, leads a 24-hour national strike across the country to demand greater protection against the pandemic for workers in the sector.

Turkey

• On 10 November Lutfi Elvan is appointed Treasury and Finance Minister after the sudden resignation on 9 November of the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s son-in-law, Berat Albayrak, and the firing of the governor of the Central Bank Murat Uysal, replaced by Naci Agbal.
• On 10 November the ECHR condemns Turkey for violating the freedom of expression of the newspaper Cumhuriyet.
• On 11 November the Constitutional Court rejects a request by CHP to annul the decree that grants immunity to civil servants trade union, Adedy, leads a 24-hour national strike across the country to demand greater protection against the pandemic for workers in the sector.
• On 18 November the opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu presses charges before Istanbul’s chief prosecutor’s office against a notorious Turkish mafia boss, Alaattin Cakici, after receiving a letter in which Cakicithreatens the CHP leader for suggesting that he was recently released from prison thanks to pressure on the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan from his far-right, nationalist partner, Devlet Bahceli.
• On 21 November Turkey extends the exploration activities of the ship Oruc Reis until 29 November in an area of the
eastern Mediterranean under dispute with Greece, coinciding with Egypt, Greece and Cyprus’ preparations for the Medusa 10 joint military exercises at the start of December.
• On 26 November 333 army officers and four civilians are handed down life sentences in a mass trial which began in August in Ankara against 475 people accused of taking part in the 2016 failed coup attempt. A further 60 people are given lighter sentences and 75 are acquitted.

Cyprus

• On 5 November the overnight curfew for COVID-19 comes into effect, which in Paphos and Limassol, where infection levels are highest, is more strictly enforced. On 17 November, shopkeepers in Limassol demonstrate to call for more help from the government.

Syria

• On 6 November the EU adds eight Syrian government ministers to its sanctions blacklist against the regime and its supporters.
• On 9 November the US announces sanctions against 19 Syrian individuals and entities, among them the National Defence Forces, which it accuses of abuses and obstructing a peaceful end to the Syrian conflict.
• On 16 November the Syrian Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Walid al-Moallem dies.
• On 18 November Syria condemns the killing of three of its soldiers in Israeli airstrikes, after an Israeli military spokesperson reports that during the night, warplanes attacked military targets of the Iranian al-Quds Force and Syrian armed forces.
• On 23 November the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces backtracked on its decision, announced three days ago, to form a national elections commission entrusted with preparing for parliamentary elections during the transition phase and a constitutional referendum. The decision comes following a wave of criticisms from large parts of the opposition that believe such a commission would perpetuate Bashar al-Assad’s regime.

Lebanon

• On 5 November a man burns himself to death in Bir Hassan in protest against the effects of the economic crisis. Since the beginning of the year, there have been a number of acts of suicide. On the same day, a Syrian refugee sets himself alight outside the UNHCR reception centre in Beirut faced with being unable to afford his daughter’s medical treatment.
• On 6 November the US imposes sanctions against the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement Gebran Bassil, for corruption, embezzlement and links to Hezbollah activities. The Former Minister of Telecommunications, Energy and Foreign Affairs, a Maronite Christian and son-in-law of the President Michel Aoun, Bassil is one of the country’s most influential politicians.
• On 13 November Lebanon repeals the nationwide lockdown until 30 November, faced with the increase in COVID-19 cases. On 16 November, the protests are resumed, particularly in Tripoli and Sidon, calling for support to survive the damages caused by the lockdown.

Jordan

• On 10 November Jordan holds parliamentary elections with a turnout of below 30%. The independent and pro-government candidates retain their majority in the Lower Chamber, just 16% of which comprises members of political parties. After the closure of the voting stations, a four-night overnight curfew is introduced against COVID-19.
• On 12 November the Interior Minister Tawfiq al-Halalmeh resigns over his violations of the curfew imposed on 10 November.

Egypt

• On 2 November Germany approves a agreement on selling naval arms to Egypt amid escalating tensions in the eastern Mediterranean.
• On 5 November more than 60 people are sentenced to prison for their involvement in a sit-in protest in 2013 in support of the overthrown President Mohamed Morsi.

Libya

• On 7 November Egypt holds the second phase of the legislative elections in 13 governorates, including Cairo, to elect the remaining 284 seats, most of which are won by supporters of the President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.
• On 14 November Egypt and Sudan begin joint military drills that last until 26 November.

Jordan

• On 4 November paramilitary groups loyal to the GNA ask for entry into a future National Guard.
• On 2 November the military delegations of the warring parties in Libya, hold their first meeting in Ghadames, as part of the first round of the UN-sponsored Libyan Political Dialogue to discuss, from 7 November in Tunis, the application of the 23 October permanent ceasefire agreement, the creation of a new unity government and holding parliamentary elections within the next 18 months.
• On 10 November the lawyer and activist Hanan al-Barassi is murdered in Benghazi having spoken out over the years against cases of corruption and sexual assault against women by members of Khalifa Haftar’s forces.
• On 11 November OPEC reports an increase in crude oil production of 322,000 barrels a day, as a consequence of Libya’s ceasefire agreement.
• On 12 November more than 70 migrants lose their lives when the vessel they were using to attempt the crossing to Europe sinks off the Libyan coast.
• On 21 November Qatar signs a military training deal with the GNA, which Egypt condemns for undermining the negotiations in progress to reach a political solution in Libya.

Tunisia

• On 9 November Lofti Zitoun, the former Minister of Local Affairs and the Environment resigns from the Shura Council, Ennahda’s legislative body, confirming the rifts within the party.
• On 25 November security forces in Om Laarayes, Gafsa, disperse a group of demonstrators who had entered the local offices of the Revenue Agency.
after a day of protest against the government’s inadequate socio-economic measures.

Algeria

- On 1 November Algeria holds a referendum in which the Constitution is approved by 67% of voters, although turnout stood at just 23.7%. In Bouira, Tizi Ouzou and Bougie, the voting stations cannot open due to reported unrest. On 11 November, the Constitutional Court ratifies the referendum and the victory for the yes vote.
- On 9 November an overnight curfew for COVID-19 is imposed in another nine Algerian provinces, the measure now being enforced in half of Algeria’s provinces.

Morocco

- On 5 November Morocco extends the state of emergency again until 10 December, faced with the increase in COVID-19 infections.

Mauritania

- On 22 November the death is announced of Sidi Ould Cheik Abdallah, Mauritania’s first democratically elected president, who came to power in 2007.

European Union

- On 10 November the EC rules that Amazon is abusing its dominant position and distorting the competition in online retail markets.
- On 11 November the EC signs a contract with the German and US pharmaceutical companies BioNTech and Pfizer for the purchase of 300 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. This is the fourth contract signed by the Commission after those of AstraZeneca, Sanofi-GSK and Janssen Pharmaceuticals. On 17 November, the Commission signs a fifth deal with the European pharmaceutical company CureVac for the purchase of 405 million doses and on 24 November closes a deal with the US company Moderna for the purchase of a further 160 million doses.
- On 12 November, at the Paris Peace Forum, the EC announces an increase in the Union’s contribution to the WHO’s COVAX mechanism from 400 to 500 million euros to ensure that countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific have access to the COVID-19 vaccination.
- On 12 November the EC proposes that European Law cover hate crimes against LGTBIQ citizens and that funding be withdrawn from administrations that discriminate against them, faced with the rise in homophobia in countries like Poland and Hungary.
- On 16 November the European Interior Ministers approve a common declaration to strengthen external border protection and the fight against jihadist terrorism, following France’s call for a “coordinated and rapid response against terrorism” following the attacks in France and Austria and the “development of common databases” and “stronger criminal policies.”
- On 18 November Frontex announces that the illegal border crossings into the European Union have dropped by 21% in the first 10 months of 2020, compared with the first 10 months of 2019.

December 2020

Spain legalizes euthanasia. In France, Valery Giscard d’Estaing dies, there are protests against the Global Security Law and new measures are announced against radical Islamism. Slovenia declares Hezbollah a terrorist organization and DeSUS abandons the coalition government. Croatia is hit by more earthquakes. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mostar holds local elections. In Montenegro, the parliament approves the new government, the country’s main airline closes down, and the president of the Supreme Court resigns. A Constitutional Court ruling leads to new elections. The Albanian Interior Minister resigns. In Turkey, there are new arrests in connection with the 2016 failed coup attempt, and tensions mount with the US over the purchase of the S-400 air defence system from Russia, and with the EU over the situation in the eastern Mediterranean. The US announces fresh sanctions on the Syrian regime. In Lebanon, the protests continue and the STL sentences a member of Hezbollah to life imprisonment for the assassination of Rafik Hariri. In Egypt, arrests are made of prominent businessmen accused of having links with the Muslim Brotherhood. In Libya, Turkey approves extending its military deployment. A Tunisian court issues a new arrest warrant for the former presidential candidate Nabil Karoui. Morocco normalizes its relations with Israel in the same month that the US recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Portugal

- On 17 December the Parliament extends the state of emergency until 7 January 2021.

Spain

- On 4 December the EC calls on the Spanish government to consult with the opposition, judicial associations and the European Council’s Venice Commission regarding the judicial reform it is preparing.
- On 17 December the Parliament approves the legalization of euthanasia.
- On 17 December the High Court of Justice of Catalonia rules that all teaching centres must teach 25% of its classes in Spanish.
- On 22 December Spain summons the Moroccan ambassador in Madrid to ask him for clarification of the Moroccan Prime Minister Saadedine Othmani’s statement regarding alleged Moroccan sovereignty over the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.
- On 22 December the Senate approves the country’s 2021 general budget.

France

- On 2 December Valery Giscard d’Estaing, the 20th President of the French Republic and one of the main architects of European integration, dies from COVID-19.
- On 5 December thousands demonstrate against the Global Security Law and police violence, joining the workers’ demonstrations against precarious working conditions, sparking violent unrest in Paris.
• On 7 December the Agricultural Social Mutual Organization reveals that suicides among French farmers will have exceeded 375 in 2020 due to the crisis caused by COVID-19.
• On 9 December the Prime Minister Jean Castex presents a draft law he says will strengthen the State against any attempt of cultural or religious, particularly Islamist, “separatism.” The bill comes after on 2 December, the Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin announces the monitoring of 76 mosques suspected of radicalization.
• On 14 December Emmanuel Macron announces the upcoming national referendum to approve or reject the inclusion of environmental protection in the Constitution.
• On 17 December the National Assembly approves the finance bill for 2021, which includes the 100-billion-euro economic recovery plan presented in September.

Italy
• On 18 December the Senate approves a decree that paves the way towards the removal of the migration reforms introduced by the former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini.
• On 18 December the government announces a nationwide lockdown for the Christmas and New Year period.
• On 24 December Italy detects the first case of the UK variant of COVID-19 in Venice, which is more contagious than the original virus and quickly spreads to other EU countries during the month.
• On 30 December the Senate endorses the 2021 state budget, approved two days before by the Parliament’s lower house.

Malta
• On 30 December the former Labour Finance Minister Edward Scicluna gives up his parliamentary seat to take over as governor of the Central Bank on 1 January 2021.

Slovenia
• On 7 December Slovenia declares Hezbollah a terrorist organization.

Croatia
• On 28-29 December earthquakes measuring 5.2 and 6.3 on the Richter scale, with its epicentre in Petrinja, leaves at least seven dead and causes widespread damage.

Bosnia and Herzegovina
• On 4 December the public prosecutor files an indictment against the Prime Minister of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Federation Fadil Novalic, in a corruption scandal over the purchase of ventilators.
• On 8 December seven people are arrested near Banja Luka for the unlawful detention, torture and abuse of some 150 Bosniak and Croat civilians in Donji Vakuf in 1992.
• On 10 December Milan Tegeltija, the head of the Bosnian High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, resigns after being investigated for influence peddling.
• On 18 December the IOM closes down the Lipa migrant camp, after the Bosnian-Herzegovinian authorities ignore the organization’s repeated calls to supply basic services and road access.
• On 20 December Mostar holds municipal elections for the first time in 12 years. The Croat and Bosniak nationalist parties, HDZ-BiH and SDA, win the majority of the votes.
• On 23 December migrants from the Lipa camp, close to Bihac, set the centre alight in protest against their detention and the living conditions there.

Montenegro
• On 4 December after three decades of socialist rule, the Parliament approves the government of the Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic, who enjoys the support of the pro-Serb, centre-right and green parties.
• On 17 December DeSUS abandons the right-wing coalition led by Janez Janša (SDS) to back its new leader Karl Erjavec as candidate for Prime Minister designate.
• On 29 December Slovenia temporarily closes its nuclear power plant as a precaution, as the country feels the effects of an earthquake in neighbouring Croatia.

Serbia
• On 8 December the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals calls on Serbia to arrest the members of the Serbian Radical Party, Petar Jojic and Vjerica Radeta, to be tried at the Hague Tribunal with contempt of court during the trial against the party leader Vojislav Seselj.
• On 24 December Serbia begins its mass vaccination campaign against COVID-19.

Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244
• On 3 December families of the victims of the massacre at Krusha e Madhe and Krusha e Vogel at the hands of Serb forces in 1999 protest outside the Appeals Court in Pristina after the only person convicted for the massacre, Darko Tasic, has his prison sentence reduced from 22 to 11 years.
• On 21 December the Constitutional Court rules that the parliamentary vote to appoint the government of Avdullah Hoti in June was unconstitutional as lawmaker Etem Arifi, who voted in favour of the new government, had served time in jail. As a result, Kosovo has to call new elections.

North Macedonia
• On 1 December a demonstration in Skopje calls for the resignation of
the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev over his stance on Bulgaria, which has recently blocked the country’s accession talks.

**Albania**

- On 3 December the Venice Commission criticizes the PSS-led government for rushing through approval for constitutional changes and the electoral system reform without waiting for the ruling from the advisory body to the Council of Europe, and considering that the approved reforms are designed to benefit the ruling party in the parliamentary elections set for April 2021.
- On 10 December the Interior Minister Sander Lleshaj resigns, over the demonstrations for the death on 8 December of a young man at the hands of the police, after violating the curfew. Despite the resignation, the protests continue over the following days.

**Greece**

- On 15 December the Parliament approves the 2021 state budget, which earmarks 2.5 billion euros to spend on defence, five times more than in 2020.

**Turkey**

- On 1 December the Turkish authorities order the arrest of 82 military personnel in a new operation against supporters of Fethullah Gulen and the 2016 failed coup attempt.
- On 4 December, after two years of construction works, Turkey completes an 81-kilometre security wall along the Iranian border in its fight against the PKK terrorist organization, adding to the wall built along a large part of the Syrian border.
- On 8 December 304 army officers and ex-army officers are arrested charged with having ties to the movement of Fethullah Gulen and the 2016 failed coup attempt.
- On 11 December the European Heads of State and Government agree to respond to Turkey’s actions in the eastern Mediterranean extending the sanctions list over the country’s gas exploration activities.
- On 14 December the US imposes sanctions on Turkey over the purchase from Russia of the S-400 anti-aircraft system in 2019.
- On 18 December the leader of AKP’s coalition partner MHP, Devlet Bahceli, defends a constitutional amendment that outlawed the HDP.
- On 18 December the philanthropist and businessman Osman Kavala is acquitted for his involvement in the anti-government protests in 2013, though he remains in prison on charges of espionage and in relation to the 2016 failed coup attempt. On 29 December, the Constitutional Court rejects an appeal for his release.
- On 21 December former HDP lawmaker Leyla Guven, whose parliamentary seat and immunity were stripped in June, is sentenced to 22 years in prison for terrorism.
- On 27 December the Parliament approves AKP’s draft law that increases the monitoring of foundations and associations.
- On 29 December Turkey and the United Kingdom sign a free trade deal that ensures the flow of goods between the two countries will continue after the UK’s formal withdrawal from the EU.

**Cyprus**

- On 9 December the government approves a new closure, from 11 December, of all non-essential shops to contain the spread of COVID-19.
- On 11 December the EU calls on Turkey to resume Cypriot reunification negotiations and respect United Nations resolutions in response to Turkish plans to reopen the Varosha district.

**Syria**

- On 12 December the director-general of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fernando Arias tells the UN Security Council there are unresolved “gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies” regarding Syria’s declaration of its chemical weapons arsenal.
- On 18 December several days of fighting erupt leaving 30 people dead, due to a Turkish-backed rebel offensive on SDF positions in Raqqa.
- On 22 December the US announces fresh sanctions on senior Syrian officials, which affect the First Lady Asma al-Asad, the Central Bank and the Syrian intelligence service.
- On 30 December the UN calls on the US to lift sanctions on Syria to enable the country’s reconstruction.
- On 31 December the SOHR reports that at least 6,817 people have died in the Syrian conflict in 2020, the lowest recorded figure since the country’s civil war broke out in March 2011.

**Lebanon**

- On 7 December protests are staged in different towns against the government plans to remove subsidies on certain essential goods.
- On 10 December the judge investigating the explosions at the Port of Beirut charges the caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab and the former Finance Minister Ali Hassane Khail and Public Works Ministers Youseff Finyanos and Ghazi Zaiter.
- On 11 December the STL sentences the Hezbollah member Salim Jamil Ayash in absentia to life imprisonment for the assassination of the Prime Minister Rafik Hariri en 2005.
- On 20 December clashes break out in Beirut between the police and demonstrators protesting against the hike in university fees.
- On 21 December the Parliament endorses a landmark law that penalizes sexual harassment with up to four years in prison.
- On 21 December the Parliament approves a bill suspending the banking secrecy law to enable an audit of the Central Bank, one of the central demands of international donors for delivering aid to the country following the blasts in the Port of Beirut.
- On 25 December Lebanon confirms its first case of the new coronavirus variant, on a flight from the United Kingdom.

**Egypt**

- On 3 December Gasser Abdel-Razek, director of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, Kareem Ennarah, the organization’s director of criminal justice and Mohammed Basheer, its office manager, are freed weeks after their arrest and following intense pres-
sure from the international community for their release.

Libya
- On 3 December the UN acting Special Envoy to Libya Stephanie Williams reports that some 20,000 mercenaries and foreign soldiers remain in Libya, despite October’s ceasefire agreement.
- On 16 December the UN Security Council appoints Bulgarian Nikolai Mladenov Special Envoy to Libya, 10 months after the resignation of his predecessor, Ghassan Salameh. The Norwegian Tor Wennesland will replace Mladenov as the United Nations Middle East Envoy.
- On 22 December the Turkish Parliament votes in favour of extending its military deployment in Libya.
- On 31 December the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres proposes deploying international observers to monitor the ceasefire in Libya.

Tunisia
- On 15 December Tunisia intercept around 100 migrants trying to reach European shores.
- On 20 December Fadhil Abdelkefi is elected leader of the Afek Tounes party, to succeed Yassine Brahmi.
- On 24 December a new arrest warrant is issued for the media mogul and former presidential candidate Nabil Karoui for corruption.

Algeria
- On 12 December Algeria rejects the US’ recognition of Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara.
- On 16 December the authorities declare a two-week extension on the curfew in place in 34 provinces due to COVID-19.
- On 30 December the President Abdelmajid Tebboune returns to Algeria after spending two months in hospital in Germany after COVID-19 complications.

Morocco
- On 12 December the US moves forward with a deal to sell arms to Morocco to the value of around 825 million euros following the US’ recognition of Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara and after ties are normalized between Israel and Morocco. On 22 December, the first commercial flight arrives in Rabat from Tel Aviv carrying an Israeli-US delegation led by Jared Kushner, son-in-law and advisor of the outgoing US President Donald Trump.

Mauritania
- On 31 December a migrant trafficking network in Rosso is dismantled.

European Union
- On 9 December the Council and the Parliament agree on the details for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), which will amount to 9.6 billion euros in the next financial framework, three times more than in 2014-2020.
- On 10 December after weeks of negotiation, the German EU Presidency reaches an agreement to unblock Poland and Hungary’s veto on the Union’s budget for the next seven years and the 750-billion-euro recovery fund to alleviate the effects of the pandemic. In exchange, Budapest and Warsaw’s demands are met for the Rule-of-Law Mechanism to only be used as a last resort and subject to a CJEU ruling as a condition for a Member State to receive funding.
- On 14 December the Council and Parliament agree on the details of the European Defence Fund (EDF) which amounts to 7.9 billion euros.
- On 17 December the CJEU condemns Hungary for violating the right to asylum by keeping asylum seekers detained while their cases are under examination and for failing to offer special protection to vulnerable refugees.
- On 17 December the Council formally adopts the 2021-2027 Multianual Financial Framework, approved by the Parliament the previous day, standing at a total of 1.8 trillion euros, including 672.5 billion euros for the recovery mechanism and 47.5 billion euros for the React-EU instrument.
- On 18 December the Parliament approves the budgets for the Union for 2021 -164.3 billion euros in commitment appropriations and 166.1 billion euros in payment appropriations, based on an agreement reached with the Council.
- On 21 December the European Medicines Agency and the EC authorize the vaccination against COVID-19 developed by Pfizer and BioNTech between 26-29 December, all the Member States start the mass vaccination of their populations.
- On 24 December the EU and the United Kingdom reach an agreement to define their relationship after 1 January 2021, when Brexit comes into effect. On 30 December, the EC President Ursula von der Leyen and Council leader Charles Michel sign an agreement, which, on 31 December, is also ratified by Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom.

Gibraltar
- On 30 January Spain gives Europe’s chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier its red lines with respect to Gibraltar, which include Spain maintaining its right to veto any agreement with the British colony, fishing rights and migrant rights. On 12 February, the European Parliament explicitly includes this Spanish prerogative in a resolution that outlines the EU’s negotiating objectives on its new relationship with the United Kingdom.
- On 12 February Moneyval, the European Council’s body against money-laundering and the financing of terrorism, says that Gibraltar needs to step up its efforts in the investigation and prosecution of money-laundering offences.
- On 4 March Gibraltar confirms the territory’s first case of COVID-19. Mid-month, the government on the Rock acts ahead of the British government and decrees an overnight curfew, advises against gatherings of over 50 people and bans the arrival of cruise ships.
- On 21 December the United Kingdom confirms the detection on Gibraltar of at least one case of the new COVID-19 variant, coming from England, and which prompts the Rock to enforce stricter lockdown measures, as well as the closure of EU borders with the United Kingdom.
- On 31 December Spain and the United Kingdom reach an agreement to avoid an imminent hard border in Gi-
bretar, allowing Gibraltarians to remain in the Schengen Area during the four-year transition.

Western Sahara

- On 1 April Morocco reports the detection of the first two COVID-19 cases in Western Sahara.
- On 13 August the UN Human Rights Committee condemns the forced disappearance of the Polisario leader Ahmed El Khalil, arrested in 2009 allegedly by Algerian security forces and seen for the last time in 2011 in an Algerian prison.
- On 30 October the UN Security Council renews the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for another year and underlines the need to appoint a special envoy to replace Horst Koehler, who resigned in May 2019.
- On 9 November the Polisario condemns the deployment of Moroccan forces in Guerguerat and says it will respond to any “aggression” and warns that this would mean “the end of the ceasefire” agreed in 1991. Rabat justifies the deployment citing the need to ensure free movement after a week-long blockade by Sahrawi activists in the area, which is under the control of UN peacekeeping forces. On 13 November, the Polisario announces the end of the ceasefire with Morocco and declares a “state of war.” On the same day, the Polisario claims to have fired on four Moroccan military bases and two of its surveillance posts along the separation wall in response to a Moroccan attack in Guerguerat.
- On 25 November the Court of Cassation upholds the convictions against the separatist Sahrawis sentenced to between 20 years and life in prison in the 2017 trial for the clashes in Gdeim Izik.
- On 11 December the US recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara in exchange for full diplomatic ties being established between Morocco and Israel.
- On 15 December Bahrain announces its intention to open a consulate in Laayoune, joining Jordan and UAE, countries that also have peace deals with Israel and which made the same announcement in November.

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War on the Rocks
Chronology of Events in Israel and Palestine

With the peace talks between the Palestinians and Israel frozen since 2014, the US President Donald Trump announces in January, together with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a Middle East peace plan dubbed by Trump himself as "the deal of the century." The plan proposes a Palestinian state comprising a myriad of enclaves without territorial continuity and Israel’s annexation of the Jordan Valley, which borders Jordan. The agreement is rejected outright by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), whose President Mahmoud Abbas calls on the UN Security Council to condemn the US proposal and suspends security cooperation with Israel and the US. This is not resumed until mid-November, thanks to the postponement of the plans to annex the West Bank as a condition for the signing in August of the so-called Abraham Accords, a joint peace deal signed by Israel and the UAE. Similar agreements follow with Bahrain and Sudan and then in the last days of the year with Morocco, in one of the Trump Administration’s last moves. In return, Washington recognizes Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara. This series of agreements demonstrate a realignment of many of the Arab states in their relations with Israel, as well as regarding their stance on the Palestinian question. Despite the freezing of the annexations outlined in the deal of the century, the situation prompts the PNA, as a sign of protest, to refuse the rotating Presidency of the Arab League in September. Notable alongside these advances in Israel’s bilateral relations, is also the beginning of indirect talks with Lebanon to reach an agreement on the maritime border between both states, amid a crisis over territorial waters and gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean.

At the end of February, the death of a member of the al-Quds Brigades sparks the year’s first major clash between Islamic Jihad and the Tzahal (Israeli army), which endangers the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, agreed between Israel and Hamas in December 2019. Three deaths and 48 hours later, on 25 February, the al-Quds Brigades announces the end of its retaliation. Hostilities between Israel and Gaza escalate once again from August onwards, following the signing of the Abraham Accords. Incendiary balloons are launched from the Strip towards southern Israel, which are met with the Israeli army’s systematic response throughout the second half of the year, despite a brief ceasefire agreed in September.

In Israel’s internal politics, the announcement of the deal of the century comes at the same time that Benjamin Netanyahu is stripped of his parliamentary immunity so he can face trial on three charges of corruption. This all happens a month ahead of Israeli elections, after Netanyahu’s Likud party’s narrow victory over Benny Gantz’s Blue and White alliance in the September 2019 elections made it impossible to form a government coalition. In addition to all of the above, the rapid spread around the world of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, the cause of the COVID-19 pandemic, as declared by the WHO in March, becomes a crucial factor in all major actions taken throughout the world. In Israel, the health emergency, combined with the close results of the elections on 2 March, won by Likud, obliged once again to reach a deal to form a government, leads to talks with White and Blue to form a national unity government that can prioritize containing the virus. Meanwhile, on 16 March, the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declares a state of emergency. These talks, accelerated by the Supreme Court’s ruling to require the outgoing Parliament Speaker of the Knesset (Parliament) Yuli Edelstein to call a plenary session to elect his successor despite the state of emergency, end with a dramatic turnaround. In the voting on 26 March, following Edelstein’s decision to resign rather than comply with the Supreme Court ruling, Benny Gantz is elected Parliament Speaker with Likud’s support, in exchange for taking over from Netanyahu as the head of the government in the second half of the government’s term, in 18 months. The agreement leads to a break-up of the Blue and White alliance and ensures that Netanyahu continues as Prime Minister and maintains control of the Parliament, in exchange for keeping the unity government agreement alive, which is so crucial in the fight against the spread of the pandemic. So, Netanyahu and Gantz, on 20 April, sign a deal for a rotating unity government which will move forward, in July, with one of Netanyahu’s central election promises: the annexation of large parts of the West Bank, effectively putting an end to any prospects of a two-state solution. The agreement will see Gantz serve as the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister until he takes over from Netanyahu at the head of the government in October 2021. The agreement also foresees the appointment of the Supreme Court judges by consensus, thereby guaranteeing Netanyahu vetoing rights ahead of his trial for three
Consequently, in September, Fatah and Hamas reach a Turkish-brokered agreement to hold joint elections within six months, in a move regarded with suspicion by Egypt in view of Turkey’s growing presence in the region.

January 2020

Israel

• On 1 January the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, under investigation in three cases of corruption, requests the Knesset grant him parliamentary immunity.
• On 3 January the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu submits his resignation from the three ministerial portfolios he still held – as Minister of Agriculture, Welfare and Diaspora Affairs – under pressure over his corruption indictment.
• On 7 January Israeli police raid the home of Adnan Ghaith, the Palestinians’ appointed governor of Jerusalem.
• On 7 January Israeli authorities announce the approval of plans to build 1,936 new homes in occupied territory of the West Bank.
• On 12 January schools throughout Israel protest against statements made by the Education Minister Rafi Peretz in which he implied that homosexuality is unnatural.
• On 26 January the Interior Minister Aryeh Deri issues a statement saying Israeli citizens can now travel to Saudi Arabia for religious, business or financial reasons.
• On 28 January the US President Donald Trump presents, along with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his peace plan known as “the deal of the century,” developed by his son-in-law, the magnate and presidential adviser Jared Kushner, to reactivate the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. The plan includes Jerusalem as the indivisible Israeli capital and East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian State, which Washington would be ready to recognize, as well as a 50-billion-dollar investment to double the Palestinian GDP and create a million jobs, in exchange for the Palestinian factions abandoning their armed struggle. It also supports Israel’s annexation of the Jordan Valley, which constitutes 30% of the West Bank – despite the UN’s warnings that such a move would violate international law, in addition to other land concessions in favour of Israel and its settlements in occupied territory. All in all Trump’s self-proclaimed “unbeatable” plan would turn a future Palestinian State into a territorial archipelago, the viability of which is dubious to say the least. Consequently, two hours later the PNA President Mahmoud Abbas reiterates Palestine’s outright rejection of the proposal.

• On 29 January Benjamin Netanyahu withdraws his request for parliamentary immunity shortly before the Parliament approves the committee set up to study said request. The Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit immediately files charges against Netanyahu for corruption in cases 1000 – fraud and breach of trust for receiving gifts from billionaire businessmen, in exchange for favours, 2000 – fraud and breach of trust for conspiring with the owner of the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper in exchange for favourable media coverage – and 4000 – bribery, fraud and breach of trust for exerting pressure on the news website Walla!, owned by Shaul Elovitch, the controlling shareholder of Bezeq, the Israeli telecommunications giant.

Palestine

• On 27 January the Egyptian security forces and army begin the first phase – from Karm Abu Salem to Rafah – of the construction works of a second separation wall along the border with the Gaza Strip, due to be completed by the summer of 2020. The project, aimed at shutting down the smuggling tunnels, has received approval from the Hamas government, which has ruled over the narrow Palestinian coastal strip since 2006.

Conflicts between the Parties

• On 29 January a missile fired from the Gaza Strip lands in southern Israel without causing any damages, hours after Israel steps up its military presence in the West Bank and along
the border with Gaza in response to demonstrations condemning Donald Trump’s peace plan, dubbed “the deal of the century.”

February 2020

Israel

• On 12 February the United Nations publishes a black list of 112 companies that do business in Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory. The decision is fiercely criticized by the US and comes a day after the Security Council’s examination of Donald Trump’s peace plan proposal and before it is put to the vote.

• On 16 February Israeli commercial planes begin overflying Sudan, following a meeting on 3 February with the Sovereignty Council of Sudan to normalize bilateral relations.

• On 20 February a little over 10 days ahead of legislative elections, the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu unveils a plan to build two new neighbourhoods with 5,200 homes in Israeli settlements south of Jerusalem, located in an area occupied in 1967. In parallel, Netanyahu also announces the construction of 1,000 homes for inhabitants of the Palestinian neighbourhood of Beit Safafa.

• On 21 February Israel confirms its first case of COVID-19.

Palestine

• On 22 February Saleh al-Arouri, deputy chairman of Hamas’s politburo, announces Egypt’s invitation to discuss issues in Cairo such as Palestinian reconciliation, the general elections and the economic crisis affecting Gaza. Relations between Egypt and Hamas are at a delicate moment following the Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh’s visit to Iran to attend the funeral of Qasem Soleimani as part of his overseas tour.

Peace Negotiations

• On 2 February the PNA President Mahmoud Abbas responds to “the deal of the century,” unveiled by Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu, with the announcement of the “rupture of relations and agreements” with the US and Israel, including in the area of security. On 11 February, Abbas asks the UN Security council for its “complete rejection” of Trump’s Middle East peace plan and for talks to be set up mediated by the Quartet – the US, the EU, Russia and the United Nations.

Conflicts between the Parties

• On 4 February at least 15 soldiers are injured after a vehicle, whose driver flees the scene, rams into a crowd close to the First Station entertainment centre in Jerusalem.

• On 7 February the atmosphere of violence, incited by the announcement of “the deal of the century,” intensifies with clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli security forces in Azzun, Jericho, Hebron, Bilin, Tulkarm and other places in the West Bank.

• On 10 February the Israeli army reports attacks on various Hamas targets in Gaza in response to a rocket launch during the night into southern Israel.

• On 16 February the Israeli army reveals it has recently thwarted a Hamas cyber attack against Israeli soldiers, who it contacted through social media, seduced using fake profiles of women and made them download an application through which it could control their mobile phones.

• On 24 February the death of the al-Quds Brigades member Mohamed an-Naem, who was shot by Israeli soldiers on 23 February while planting an explosive device on the border between Gaza and Israel, sparks the year’s first major fighting between Islamic Jihad and the Israeli army, endangered the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip agreed between Hamas and Israel in December. Missiles are fired shortly after Qatar’s monthly delivery of financial aid to the Gaza Strip and Israel’s decision to increase the number of permits for Gazans to work in its territory to 7,000. On 25 February, the al-Quda Brigades, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad, announces the end of its “military response” to Israel, after the death of three of its members in 48 hours of fighting.

• On 25 February the Israeli police reports the arrests of 58 Palestinians suspected of belonging to a network that transforms airsoft guns into assault rifles.

• On 27 February dozens of Israeli settlers attack Palestinian homes and businesses in Huwara, the West Bank.

March 2020

Israel

• On 2 March Israel holds legislative elections again with a turnout of 71%, the highest since 1999. Likud, the party of the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wins with 36 of the 120 seats in the Knesset (four more than in the last elections). Benny Gantz’s Blue and White party come second, repeating their result from September 2019 and winning 33 seats. The Joint List, an alliance of Israel’s four main Arab parties, increases its seats from 13 to 15. The elections are a blow for Netanyahu’s potential allies (Shas, United Torah Judaism, the Yamina Coalition and Israel Our Home), who all lose seats.

• On 10 March the Jerusalem District Court rejects a request by the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to delay the start of his corruption trial, scheduled for 17 March, amid talks between Likud and its far-right allies to try to form a government.

• On 12 March Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz discuss the possibility of forming a national emergency government to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The talks take place days after the announcement of an opposition initiative, led by the Blue and White party and the Joint List, to propose two laws that would prevent Netanyahu from forming a government if he is indicted.

• On 15 March the hearings against Benjamin Netanyahu for corruption cases 1000, 2000 and 4000 are delayed until May due to the containment measures against the pandemic.

• On 16 March the President Reuven Rivlin tasks the leader of the Blue and White alliance Benny Gantz with forming a government, after holding consultations the previous day with the different parliamentary parties.

• On 16 March the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declares a
state of emergency and authorizes the police and Shin Bet, the internal security service, to track suspected COVID-19 carriers.

- On 16 March the Israeli authorities disband an Israeli army cell selling arms and ammunition to Palestinian militias.
- On 18 March Israel closes the border crossings with Gaza and the West Bank to stop the spread of COVID-19 to Palestinian territories.
- On 18 March the Peace Now NGO reports a 25% increase in settlement construction in the West Bank under the Trump Administration, with respect to construction during Obama’s Presidency.
- On 18 March the Parliament Speaker Yuli Edelstein announces the closure of the plenary for at least a week due to the COVID-19 emergency measures, according to which gatherings are not allowed of more than 10 people, and Likud’s and the Blue and White party’s failure to reach an agreement on the formation of the parliamentary committees. Blue and White calls on the Supreme Court to stop the suspension of parliamentary activity, with one of the scheduled sessions being to elect a new parliament speaker, for which Gantz is running.
- On 21 March the director of the Religious Affairs Council of Jerusalem Abdul Azim Salhab is fined 1,400 euros for allowing Friday prayers to go ahead at the Temple Mount, despite the containment measures ordered by Israel.
- On 24 March the Israeli Supreme Court orders the Israeli Parliament Speaker Yuli Edelstein, an ally of Benjamin Netanyahu, to call the parliamentary session for electing his replacement, before 25 March. Edelstein had opposed holding the plenary, in which he may likely lose to his central rival the Blue and White party. On 25 March, Edelstein resigns to avoid complying with the Supreme Court’s ruling, thereby, in practice, giving Netanyahu’s government another week without parliamentary control.
- On 26 March the Blue and White leader Benny Gantz becomes the new Parliament Speaker, with the support of his chief rival, Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud. The surprising election of Gantz, instead of the Yesh Atid candidate Meir Cohen, leads to a break-up of the Blue and White coalition, formed in 2018 to put an end to a decade of Netanyahu’s government, and paves the way to the formation of a national unity government between Likud and Gantz’s supporters to try to halt the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country and faced with the polarization of the Israeli electorate, which has led to three elections being held without a government being formed. The agreement between Netanyahu and Gantz means the latter takes over as Speaker of the Knesset during the first 18 months of the government’s term, after which he will replace Netanyahu as Prime Minister. This means that, in exchange for ensuring the urgent formation of a cabinet that can tackle the COVID-19 health emergency, Netanyahu extends his post for 18 months, and at the same time retains control over the Parliament, enabling him to prevent the approval of the law that bars anyone indicted for corruption from holding office. For his part, Gantz obtains for his supporters the same number of ministerial portfolios as Likud, including those of the Foreign, Defence and Justice Ministries.

**Palestine**

- On 5 March Palestine confirms its first two cases of COVID-19 in the West Bank. On 13 March, the PNA declares a state of emergency and the temporary closure of Qarawat Bani Hassan, in the West Bank. On 22 March, the PNA orders a lockdown in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as amnesty for prisoners who have served half of their sentence, as a measure for reducing the spread of infection. On 22 March, Hamas confirms the first two cases in the Gaza Strip.
- On 16 March the PNA sends a report to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in which it restates Palestine’s sole sovereignty over the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. On 18 March Philippe Lazzarini is appointed commissioner-general of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).
- On 28 March the Hamas authorities call off the Great March of Return protests in Gaza against the Israeli occupation due to the high risk of COVID-19 infection. A large-scale demonstration was scheduled for 30 March to commemorate the second anniversary of the protests.

**Conflicts between the Parties**

- On 6 March a missile fired at Israel from Gaza lands inside the Palestinian enclave.
- On 7 March Palestinian fishermen report being attacked by Israeli navy ships within Gaza’s fishing zone.
- On 11 March a Palestinian man is shot dead by Israeli soldiers during clashes south of Nablus.
- On 27 March the Israeli army bombs Hamas targets in Gaza in response to a missile fired from Palestinian territory.

**April 2020**

**Israel**

- On 1 April talks stall between Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz to form a national emergency government due to Likud’s insistence on implementing Israeli sovereignty over large parts of the occupied West Bank, following the proposal of the US President Donald Trump. At first, the measure is rejected by the Blue and White party, which also demands veto rights in all diplomatic decision-making.
- On 16 April the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin tasks the Parliament with forming a new government to avoid the year’s fourth election, after Benny Gantz fails to form a coalition before the deadline.
- On 19 April around 2,000 people called by the Black Flag movement protest in Tel Aviv against Benjamin Netanyahu’s government, accusing him of corruption and anti-democratic measures adopted to contain the pandemic.
- On 20 April Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz sign a rotation agreement for a unity government, which will avoid four elections being held in little over a year and will set in motion in July one of Netanyahu’s central elections promises: Israel’s annexation of the West Bank settlements, the third
following that of East Jerusalem in 1980 and the Golan Heights in 1981. The annexation, sponsored by the US, includes the Jordan Valley, which accounts for 30% of the West Bank’s surface area. Gantz will be the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister until taking over from Netanyahu as the head of the government in October 2021. Besides Likud and the part of Blue and White supporting Gantz, the new cabinet will include the two ultra-orthodox parties and the Labor party. Blue and White’s Gabi Ashkenazi will take over as Foreign Minister and the Labor leader Amir Peretz will take the helm of the Economy Ministry. As part of the agreement, there will be no appointment of judges to the Supreme Court in the next six months, and after that time they must be chosen by consensus, thereby giving veto rights to Netanyahu, who is facing three trials for corruption that have been delayed until May due to the state of pandemic.

- On 22 April in an unprecedented act, rabbis, sheikhs, imams and patriarchs pray in Jerusalem for the end of the COVID-19 crisis and warn of the rise in racism and xenophobia caused by the pandemic.

- On 24 April Israel announces the reopening of shops on 26 April to boost the economy, which has been damaged by the effects of the pandemic.

- On 25 April thousands gather in Tel Aviv to protest against Benjamin Netanyahu remaining at the head of the government while under indictment in corruption cases 1000, 2000 and 4000.

- On 27 April the Supreme Court rules against the powers the Parliament granted at the beginning of the month to Shin Bet, Israel’s internal security agency, to track Israeli citizens’ telephones as part of the campaign against the spread of COVID-19.

- On 27 April at least three civilians and four pro-Iran militiamen are killed in a missile attack in Rif Dimashq, launched from Lebanese airspace by the Israel Defense Forces.

- On 30 April the US Treasury Department announces that Hapoalim Bank, Israel’s biggest bank, would agree to paying a 900-million-dollar fine after it admits to conspiring to evade taxes by hiding more than 7.6 billion dollars in over 5,500 secret Swiss and Israeli bank accounts. The Treasury Department also announces that the same bank and its Swiss subsidiary will pay another fine of 9.3 million dollars for another case in which they have been found guilty for conspiring to launder more than 20 million dollars in bribes to officials from FIFA and other football federations, in the so-called Fifagate scandal.

Palestine

- On 13 April Egypt opens the Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip to allow hundreds of people to return to their homes in the Palestinian territory. They will have to undergo quarantine as decreed by the Hamas authorities within its measures to contain COVID-19.

- On 24 April the PNA warns it will bring a case against Israel before the International Court of Justice if it continues with its plans to annex part of the West Bank.

- On 27 April the media reports the construction works undertaken by Egypt to build a wall equipped with electronic sensors on the border with the Gaza Strip, designed to prevent militants from Palestinian factions from crossing over to join the jihadists the Egyptian army is fighting against in North Sinai.

- On 30 April the Arab League holds an emergency virtual meeting at the request of the PNA to discuss Israel’s plans to annex large parts of the West Bank and declares the annexation as a “war crime.”

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 21 April there is a ramming attack on an Israeli soldier in Abu Dis, which is subsequently praised by Hamas as an act against the plans to annex parts of the West Bank. The attacker is shot dead by security forces.

- On 22 April Shin Bet reports it has dismantled a cell made up of three Hamas members who were planning attacks against civilians and soldiers, one of them in the Teddy football stadium in Jerusalem.

- On 28 April an Israeli woman is injured in Kfar Sava after being stabbed by a Palestinian man, who is then shot dead by Israeli security forces.

May 2020

Israel

- On 1 May the Israeli Defense Forces launch their second attack on southern Syria from the Golan Heights in less than 24 hours.

- On 3 May Likud presents its draft law for annexing large parts of the West Bank, which include the Jewish settlements in these territories, the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea.

- On 3 May the gradual reopening of education centres begins as part of the strategy for easing restrictions for the COVID-19 pandemic.

- On 5 May the Parliament’s Subcommittee for Intelligence authorizes Shin Bet to extend its tracking of mobile phones of citizens who have contracted or are susceptible to contracting COVID-19 until 26 May. In parallel to this, the government prepares amendments to the law on this practice, as requested by the Supreme Court, which banned it in April.

- On 6 May the Supreme Court gives its unanimous approval, although with reservations, for the unity government between Likud and Blue and White, with Netanyahu at the helm of the government for the first half of the term.

- On 7 May the Defence Minister Naftali Bennett announces the approval of the construction of 7,000 homes for the Efrat settlement, near Bethlehem.

- On 12 May the Israeli Defence Minister Naftali Bennett orders the expropriation of part of the Ibrahim mosque –Cave of the Patriarchs – in Hebron, as part of a project to install an elevator to facilitate access to the site and which is framed within the project approved on 3 May to build a Jewish settlement. The head of the PNA’s General Authority for Civil Affairs Hussein al-Sheikh says the decision abolishes the Hebron protocol, puts an end to the Oslo Accords and constitutes a continuation of the annexation project in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

- On 13 May the US State Secretary Mike Pompeo travels to Israel to meet with Benjamin Netanyahu on the eve of the formation of the national unity government, which signals the start of the annexation of parts of the West Bank.
Bank. Besides this issue, the meeting also looks at coordinating their common stance against Iran.

- On 17 May after days of delay because of internal disputes in Likud over the allocation of ministries, the new Israeli government takes office, backed by 73 of the 120 members of the Knesset and with Benjamin Netanyahu as the Prime Minister. Benny Gantz resigns as Parliament Speaker, replaced by Yair Levin. Gantz then takes over as Defence Minister until 17 November 2021, when he will relieve Netanyahu as the head of the government. With 35 ministers and 16 deputy ministers, this is the largest cabinet in the country’s history, in order to make room for the seven political parties it is formed by – Likud, Blue and White, Shas, United Torah Judaism, the Labor Party, Derech Eretz and Gesher. Naftali Bennett’s far-right Yamina does not make it into the government. Among the new ministers, the former army chief Gabi Ashkenazi takes over as Foreign Minister, Yair Levin as the Parliament Speaker and Tzipi Hotovely will be the Settlements Minister. Pinna Tamano, the Immigration and Absorption Minister, will be the first Ethiopian-born woman in the Knesset, while Omer Yankelevich, at the head of the Diaspora Affairs Ministry, will be the first ultra-orthodox minister.

- On 20 May the trial begins against Benjamin Netanyahu for corruption cases 1000, 2000 and 4000, marking the first time a serving Israeli Prime Minister has sat in the dock.

- On 28 May Benjamin Netanyahu announces that Palestinians residing in the Jordan Valley will not be granted Israeli citizenship once the region is annexed to Israel.

Palestine

- On 5 May the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas orders a 30-day extension on the COVID-19 lockdown measures, which came in force on 5 March in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

- On 7 May Amnesty International condemns the “arbitrary” arrests in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of people who have criticized the authorities.

- On 19 May a young man dies after setting himself alight in the Shati refugee camp in protest over the effects of the economic crisis affecting the Gaza Strip.

- On 20 May Mahmoud Abbas warns Israel again that the PNA will stop abiding by the Oslo Accords if the government of Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz goes ahead with its plans to annex territories in the West Bank.

- On 21 May the PNA suspends its security cooperation with Israel and the US.

- On 21 May the Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh calls on the EU to recognize Palestinian statehood and put pressure on Israel to drop its plans to annex parts of the West Bank.

- On 23 May the first COVID-19 death in the Gaza Strip is reported in Rafah, two days after the Hamas authorities announce the closure of all borders.

- On 25 May the PNA announces the end of lockdown measures in place since March in the Palestinian territories.

- On 27 May the ICC asks the PNA to clarify, before 10 June, whether its decision to end cooperation agreements with Israel and the US because of Israel’s decision to annex parts of the West Bank includes the annulment of the Oslo Accords.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 4 May the Israeli army announces it has attacked three Hamas military posts in the Gaza Strip in response to a rocket launched at Israel.

- On 12 May an Israeli soldier is killed by a rock that was thrown at him during a raid in Yabad, the West Bank, marking the year’s first death of an Israeli soldier.

- On 13 May Israeli soldiers kill a Palestinian teenager in the al-Fawar refugee camp, near Hebron, during protests against the plans to annex part of the West Bank.

- On 14 May an Israeli soldier is injured after being the target of a ramming attack in the West Bank settlement of Negohot. The Palestinian attacker is shot dead by Israeli soldiers.

- On 16 May three Palestinians are injured as their attack on an Israeli army base in Abu Dis is thwarted.

- On 18 May the Israeli settler Amiram Ben Uliel is found guilty of racially motivated murder in an arson attack in 2015 that killed a Palestinian couple and their baby in the West Bank.

- On 30 May Israeli police kill a Palestinian man in Jerusalem’s Old City they believe was carrying a weapon. He was later identified as an unarmed young man with special needs.

June 2020

Israel

- On 4 June the Parliament sessions are suspended after Sami Abu Shehadeh from the Balad party, a member of the Joint Arab List, tests positive for coronavirus.

- On 7 June thousands demonstrate in Tel Aviv against the annexation of part of the West Bank.

- On 12 June the UAE warns Israel that normalizing relations with the Arab countries will not happen if it goes ahead with its plans to annex part of the West Bank.

- On 22 June the government holds an urgent meeting to approve stricter measures to counter a new wave of COVID-19, after fresh outbreaks are detected that also affect the Palestinian territories.

Palestine

- On 3 June the PNA refuses tax revenues collected on its behalf by Israel as part of its measures to reject the West Bank annexation plans.

- On 3 June the PNA extends the state of emergency for the coronavirus by another month.

- On 6 June Qatar’s special envoy to the Gaza Strip Mohammed al-Emadi travels to the Palestinian territory for the first time in four months, after a break imposed by the pandemic, to resume the distribution of Qatari economic aid, agreed in the framework of the 2014 ceasefire with Israel, Egypt and the United Nations.

- On 8 and 22 June thousands of Palestinians protest in Ramallah and Jericho, respectively, against the plans to annex part of the West Bank territory.

- On 9 June the Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh warns that the PNA will declare an independent Palestinian state if Israel annexes parts of the West Bank.

- On 24 June 115 million euros is pledged at the UNRWA Donors Conference, organized by Sweden and Jordan.
• On 28 June the Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip call for a “day of rage” for the 1 July against Israel’s plans to annex West Bank territories.
• On 30 June the EU Council agrees to extend the mandate for its missions in Libya and Palestine until 30 June 2021.

Conflicts between the Parties

• On 24 June the Organization for the Liberation of Palestine (PLO) calls on the ICC to investigate the death of a Palestinian man shot by Israeli soldiers the previous day, who claim he had tried to ram them at a checkpoint near Ramallah.
• On 16 and 27 June Israel attacks Hamas targets in Gaza in response to missiles launched into Israeli territory.

July 2020

Israel

• On 5 July Israel launches the Ofek-16 spy satellite.
• On 6 July the government introduces tougher restrictions for the pandemic and orders the closure of recreational centres and bars and restaurants.
• On 7 July the head of public health services Siegal Sadetzki resigns over her disagreement with the government’s delay to tighten restrictions in response to the rise in COVID-19 cases.
• On 8 July the Parliament rejects a proposal supported by Likud to create a committee for investigating possible conflicts of interest in the country’s judiciary.
• On 10 July a law passed by Parliament goes into effect to combat prostitution, which includes fines for clients.
• On 12 July a large demonstration takes place in Tel Aviv to protest against Benjamin Netanyahu’s government’s handling of the pandemic.
• On 17 July with the arrival of the second wave of COVID-19 in Israel, the government declares a nationwide weekend lockdown and a new closure of all non-essential establishments. The protests intensify against the handling of the pandemic by the government, which is facing mounting internal divisions.
• On 19 July Israeli security forces arrest the Palestinian governor of Jerusalem Adnan Gheit. Since his appointment in 2018 by the PNA, Gheit has been arrested by the Israeli police on 17 occasions.
• On 22 July Israel reduces its quarantine period for people diagnosed with coronavirus and records its highest daily number of cases, with almost 2,000 infections.
• On 26 July thousands of protesters gather outside the home of the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu calling for his and the government’s resignation.
• On 27 July the Israeli army opens fire at the border between Israel and Lebanon to thwart what it claims to be an attempt by a Hezbollah commando unit to cross the Blue Line and infiltrate Israel.

Palestine

• On 6 July the Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh asks Israel to close its border crossings with Palestine and attributes the rise in infections to the lack of controls by the Israeli authorities.
• On 12 July the PNA announces new restrictions to contain the latest rise in COVID-19 infections. The announcement sparks protests from business owners, especially in Ramallah and Hebron, one of the West Bank’s epicentres of the outbreak and where a curfew is in place. The effects of lockdown and the suspension of cooperation with Israel following the announcement of the annexation of part of the West Bank keeps the local economy in decline. In response to social pressure, on 13 July the government allows small shops to stay open.

Conflicts between the Parties

• On 9 July a Palestinian man is killed near Kifl Haris, in the West Bank, shot down by Israeli security forces, who claim he had thrown a Molotov cocktail at them.

August 2020

Israel

• On 1-2 August there are new protests against the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The protests go on throughout the month, amid a new crisis in the coalition government, which suspends the day’s scheduled cabinet meeting after failing to reach an agreement on a new recovery package within the state budget to alleviate the effects of the pandemic.
• On 10 August the Supreme Court rules against the demolition of the home of a Palestinian man charged with killing an Israeli soldier during a raid in May in Yabed, the West Bank.
• On 13 August Israel freezes plans to annex and declare sovereignty over parts of the West Bank, as part of an agreement to normalize ties with the UAE.
• On 20 August thousands of Israelis protest in the country’s main cities over the rape of a minor by 30 men in a hotel in Eilat.
• On 23 August the cabinet adjourns its weekly meeting for a second time since the formation of the new government, following disagreements over the budget between the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his party Likud, and the Blue and White alliance of Defence Minister Benny Gantz. Israeli law stipulates that the state budget must be approved within 100 days of the government taking office, making 23 August the deadline. On the night of 23 August an agreement is reached concerning the budget that avoids early elections being called, which would have been the fourth in the last year and a half.
• On 26 August the armed forces bomb Hezbollah targets in Lebanon in retaliation for an attack on an Israeli military checkpoint.
• On 30 August around 2,000 public laboratory workers go on strike over the low salaries the government pays them.
• On 30 August the UAE President Khalifa Bin Zayed al-Nahyan issues a decree that abolishes the Israeli boycott law.

Palestine

• On 10 August Egypt opens the Rafah border crossing with Gaza until 13 August, in the crossing’s first opening since May.
• On 18 August Gaza’s only operational power plant closes down due to a lack of fuel as a result of Israel’s closure of the Kerem Shalom border crossing.
• On 24 August the Gaza authorities detect the first four cases of community-
spread COVID-19 infections, impose a full lockdown and issue a warning about the precarious situation of the Strip’s health system.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 3 August Israel attacks Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip in response to a rocket launched at Sderot.
- On 7 August a Palestinian woman is shot dead by Israeli security forces during a raid in Jenin, the West Bank.
- On 9 August the Israel Defense Forces confirm it has bombed a Hamas observation post in northern Gaza in retaliation for the launch of incendiary balloons by the group Waad al-Tahrir (Promise of Liberation) towards southern Israel. Throughout August the Israeli army carries out attacks on targets in the Gaza Strip in response to new launches.
- On 13 August the Israeli army confirms accidentally striking an UNRWA school during an airstrike on the Gaza Strip.
- On 26 August an Israeli man is stabbed to death in Petah Tikva, in an attack police say was carried out by a Palestinian citizen.
- On 30 August the Israeli army launches a new operation in response to the fire balloons launched from Gaza.
- On 25 September Israel introduces tougher measures against COVID-19, a week after on 18 September the country’s second lockdown goes into effect.
- On 30 September the Parliament approves restrictions on demonstrations in the country in the context of the current lockdown.

Palestine

- On 22 September the PNA security forces arrest dozens of protesters from the faction, Fatah – Democratic Reform Current, led by Mohammed Dahlan, after an Israeli newspaper reports that the US was considering using him to replace the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas.
- On 22 September the PNA announces it is relinquishing its right to hold the Arab League’s rotating presidency in protest over the UAE and Bahrain’s decision to normalize ties with Israel.
- On 24 September Fatah and Hamas agree to organize a general election in the Palestinian territories in no more than six months, in the context of the reconciliation talks held in Istanbul.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 1 September Israel authorizes the reopening of the only goods crossing with the Gaza Strip, hours after reaching a ceasefire agreement with Hamas.
- On 4 October the police arrest around 17 members of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in the neighbourhood of Bnei Brak, in Tel Aviv, due to their refusal to follow the containment measures set by the government in response to the pandemic. There are also dozens of arrests in the ongoing protests against Netanyahu’s government.
- On 6 September Malawi, Serbia and Kosovo announce the transfer of their embassies in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.
- On 7 September Israel announces curfews in 40 towns and neighbourhoods described as hotspots, in response to the increase in COVID-19 infections.
- On 11 September the US President Donald Trump announces that Israel and Bahrain have reached an agreement to normalize their diplomatic relations.
- On 13 September the Housing Minister Yaakov Litzman resigns, in protest against the government’s plans to impose a new lockdown due to the spike in COVID-19 cases.
- On 14 October Twitter announces it is updating its policy against hateful content, with the removal of posts that deny or diminish the Holocaust, days after Facebook announces a similar measure.
- On 15 October the Israeli Parliament votes overwhelmingly in favour of the agreement reached with the UAE to normalize bilateral relations.
- On 16 October the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov calls on Israel to immediately cease all settlement activities, following the approval of around 5,000 new homes in settlements in the West Bank.
- On 16 October Israel extends lockdown in coronavirus hotspots.
- On 18 October Israel begins relaxing restrictions introduced two weeks ago following the protests against measures designed to curb anti-government demonstrations.
- On 21 October, citing a technicality, the Parliament Speaker nullifies a motion approved shortly before to investigate Case 3000 for an alleged corrupt plan to purchase submarines from the German company Thyssenkrupp, in which the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is implicated.
- On 22 October Israel and Bahrain sign a deal to begin direct flights between the countries.
- On 23 October the peace agreement between Israel and Sudan is sealed in a phone call between the prime ministers of both countries and the US President Donald Trump.
- On 24 October thousands demonstrate in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in the 18th consecutive week of protests against the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
- On 28 October the US and Israel sign an agreement that extends their scientific cooperation to the West Bank settlements.
- On 30 October the US announces that US citizens born in Jerusalem can, from now on, opt to specify Israel as their country of birth on their passports.

Palestine

- On 2 October Fatah’s Central Committee approves the agreements reached on 24 September in Istanbul with Hamas, which include holding parliamentary and presidential elections in 2021. Egypt, the traditional mediator between...
the Palestinian factions, is suspicious of the agreement, which it considers an instrument in Turkey’s ambition to increase its influence in the region.

**Peace Negotiations**

- On 29 October Mahmoud Abbas asks the United Nations to hold urgent consultations to organize an international conference in 2021 to restart peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians.

**Conflicts between the Parties**

- On 5 October at least one Palestinian is shot dead by Israeli soldiers following a Molotov cocktail attack on a checkpoint in Jenin.
- On 6 October Israel launches an offensive against southern Gaza in response to rocket fire launched towards Kerem Shalom.
- On 11 October according to Israel’s Channel 12, Israel and Hamas have reached a Qatar-mediated six-month ceasefire agreement, which includes Qatar’s promise to deliver economic aid to the value of 100 million dollars to Gaza.
- On 14 October at least two Israeli soldiers are injured when an explosive device is thrown at them during an operation in a refugee camp in Nablus.
- On 20 October the Israeli army attacks Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip in response to a missile launched shortly after Israel announces it has uncovered a tunnel that penetrates into Israeli territory.
- On 25 October Islamic Jihad militants in Gaza begin several days of incendiary balloon launches towards southern Israel to demand the release of the prisoner Maher al-Akhras, who has been on hunger strike for the last three months.
- On 30 October at least three Palestinians are injured by Israeli security forces after they allegedly threw a Molotov cocktail from their vehicle at a military checkpoint.

**November 2020**

**Israel**

- On 1 November teaching centres in Israel reopen after government restrictions are relaxed following a slight drop in coronavirus infections.
- On 10 November the Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee meets to discuss the US sale of F-35 jets to the UAE. Opposition members slam the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for approving the sale, suspecting it was a condition set by Abu Dhabi for the normalization of relations, a circumstance they say Netanyahu has deliberately kept in the dark.
- On 11 November the Parliament votes in favour of the peace agreement with Bahrain.
- On 13 November Benjamin Netanyahu announces the signing of a deal with the US pharmaceutical company Pfizer for the purchase of eight million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.
- On 17 November the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov urges Israel to reverse its plans to build homes in Givat Hamatos, East Jerusalem.
- On 18 November the US State Secretary Mike Pompeo meets with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Bahrain’s Foreign Minister Abdulatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, as part of his tour of Europe and the Middle East, likely the last before the upcoming administration change in Washington. The PLO condemns Pompeo for being the first US State Secretary to visit an Israeli settlement in the Golan Heights and Washington’s plans to recognize products from illegal West Bank settlements as being made in Israel.
- On 22 November the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and director of Mossad Yossi Cohen travel to Saudi Arabia to meet with the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Neom. The meeting is indicative of a possible future peace agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel that emulates those reached with the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan, with the primary aim of isolating Iran.
- On 23 November the Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz invites the Lebanese President Michel Aoun to begin direct talks on the maritime border between both countries, days after criticizing Beirut for changing its stance on several occasions in the indirect talks. On 30 November, the US-mediated talks are postponed indefinitely.
- On 26 November the Settlement Affairs Minister Tzachi Hanegbi announces that he will go ahead with plans to legalize dozens of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, most built on privately owned Palestinian land, before the Trump Administration is replaced by the Biden Administration.

**Palestine**

- On 9 November UNRWA announces that it cannot pay the salaries of thousands of staff members during November and December due to its budget deficit.
- On 10 November Saeb Erekat, the most prominent Palestinian negotiator since the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991 and Secretary-General of the PLO since 2015, falls victim to COVID-19.
- On 17 November the PNA announces it will resume civil and security cooperation with Israel, which it had stopped in May due to Israel’s plans to annex parts of the West Bank, which have been put on hold in accordance with Israel’s agreement to normalize relations with the UAE.
- On 23 November the PNA announces an overnight curfew during the coming weekends due to the increase in COVID-19 cases.

**Peace Negotiations**

- On 10 November the Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz calls on the Palestinian leaders to come back to the negotiating table, saying the Abraham Accords signed with the UAE and Bahrain have changed the paradigms of the past, when the Palestinian question blocked any prospect of normalizing ties with Arab countries.

**Conflicts between the Parties**

- On 4 November the Israeli armed forces intercept an attack in south Nablus, fatally shooting the alleged assailant, identified as a member of the Palestinian security forces.
- On 15 and 22 November the Israeli army bombs Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip in response to rockets fired at southern Israel.
December 2020

Israel

- On 2 December a no-confidence vote is passed by the Parliament in its first reading, tabled against Benjamin Netanyahu’s government by the opposition leader and leader of the centrist party Yesh Atid, Yair Lapid, and backed by lawmakers from the Blue and White alliance and Labor Party, who accuse Netanyahu and Likud of failing to comply with agreements established by the current coalition government.
- On 4 December around a hundred Ethiopian Jews arrive in Israel, as part of Israel’s Operation Rock to repatriate 2,000 members of this community.
- On 5 December dozens of arrests are made during the 24th week of protests against Benjamin Netanyahu’s government.
- On 7 December the US President-elect Joe Biden asserts that he intends to continue with the Abraham Accords to normalize relations between Israel and the Arab countries.
- On 11 December Mohammed VI announces that diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel will be reestablished as soon as possible following Washington’s recognition of Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara.
- On 19 December Israel begins its COVID-19 vaccination campaign, with the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Health Minister and former Parliament Speaker Yuli Edelstein being the first to receive the Pfizer vaccine in an act broadcast live on television.
- On 22 December the Parliament rejects a bill to delay the deadline for passing the 2020 state budget by almost a week, thereby setting the country on course for new early elections, the fourth in two years.
- On 25 December Israel approves a third nationwide lockdown to try to halt the spread of the pandemic, starting on 27 December and for an initial period of two weeks.
- On 27 December thousands take to the streets again to protest against the government, leading to unrest and arrests.
- On 27 December right-wing demonstrators protest in Jerusalem over the death on 21 December of a settler in the West Bank who was fleeing police after throwing stones at a group of Palestinians. The protesters are dispersed by police after throwing stones at a vehicle in which several Arab citizens are traveling and injuring 11 officers.
- On 30 December the Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard arrives in Israel after serving a 35-year prison sentence for spying when he was an intelligence analyst in the US military’s Center for Counter Terrorism.

Palestine

- On 2 December Israel transfers more than 1 billion dollars to the PNA in tax revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian authorities, six months after the PNA decided not to accept the transfers, which account for 60% of the annual Palestinian budget, in protest against the West Bank annexation plans, currently on hold.
- On 7 December the Palestinian government imposes a full week-long lockdown as of 10 December in the governorates of Bethlehem, Nablus, Hebron and Tulkarm, after registering a spike in COVID-19 infections. The lockdown adds to the curfew in force throughout Palestine, which is extended for another two weeks.
- On 11 December the Gaza Strip goes into a full 48-hour lockdown in response to the rising number of COVID-19 infections.
- On 29 December armed Palestinian groups carry out what is described as an unprecedented military drill in the Gaza Strip.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 31 December the Israel Defense Forces annual report for 2020 registers attacks on 50 targets in Syrian territory, two thwarted attempts by Hezbollah to attack across the Lebanese border and at least 176 rockets fired from Gaza into Israel, with some 300 targets in the Gaza Strip hit by the Israeli army in response. The report also counts 60 terrorist attacks in the West Bank, 1,500 stone-throwing incidents and 229 involving Molotov cocktails, 2,277 arrests, 50 closures of suspected arms production facilities, 38 attempts to cross from Gaza into Israeli territory and the discovery of a Hamas-built secret border tunnel.

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Chronologies

Euromed Chronology

January

EU-Palestine
13-Al-Issawiya: The heads of EU missions to Jerusalem and Ramallah meet residents and civil society organizations in East Jerusalem, a neighbourhood which has been the scene of clashes and incursions since May 2019. The diplomats also discuss the educational situations of the Palestinian students from this area. "Israel has an obligation to protect, respect and fulfil the rights of the child, by ensuring that schools are inviolable safe spaces for children." In addition, the diplomats address the Jerusalem issue and reaffirm that the EU favours a solution which fulfils the legitimate aspirations of both parties and that the status of Jerusalem as future capital of both Israel and Palestine must be resolved.


Police
16-Brussels: Around 80 representatives and experts from partner countries across the Mediterranean join the closing conference of the Euromed Police project in the Academy Palace. The project team presents the lessons learned during its implementation, which comprises a total of 35 activities, 11 of which take place in the southern Mediterranean and which mobilize 859 police officers.


Youth employment
16/17-Paris: Around 30 participants of the Youth Employment in the Mediterranean (YEM) project meet at the UNESCO headquarters for a capacity-building and planning session on skills anticipation to share their knowledge and experience within this field. The aim is to fine tune the skills anticipation methodology for the beneficiary countries of the YEM project: Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia.

https://en.unesco.org/themes/skills-work-and-life/yem

Environment
17-La Marsa: The municipality of La Marsa, in Tunisia, and the MEGARA Network launch the local kick-off of the "Mediterranean Integrated Alliance on Waste for Cities and Citizens" (MED-InA) project, part of the ENI CBCMed programme. The city of La Marsa becomes the pilot site for the testing and implementation of Zero Waste strategies and methodologies. The project involves start-ups of the circular economy sector that develop innovative solutions to local waste management while the project also encourages citizens to act more responsibility with regards to waste.


EU-Libya
19-Berlin: President of the European Commission (EC) Ursula von der Leyen and High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP) Josep Borrell attend the Berlin conference on Libya alongside influential international partners to discuss the critical state of the Libyan crisis. The participants agree on 55 points for a swift follow up, and the EU reaffirms its support to the UN-led mediation efforts, which it considers as the only sustainable solution to the Libyan conflict. The EU also reveals that it has launched talks with international and regional powers to broker a ceasefire while it commits to supporting Libya’s territorial integrity and unity.


Humanitarian aid
20-Brussels: The EC adopts its annual humanitarian budget for 2020. The EU deploys €900 million to more than 80 countries, of which €345 million goes to countries of the Middle East, with a special focus on addressing the conflict in Syria and the refugees flow into Syria’s neighbourhood, as well as the critical humanitarian situation in Yemen. In this regard, Janez Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management stresses that “Europe has a responsibility to show solidarity and support for those in need. Our assistance depends on full humanitarian access so aid organizations can do their lifesaving job”.


EU-Jordan
20-Brussels: During his visit to the European institutions, King Abdullah II meets with the main EU leaders. President von der Leyen discusses at length security and stability issues in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as well as EU-Jordan bilateral relations. She stresses the Hashemite Kingdom’s role in promoting stability in MENA and offers a €500 million package to support the economic process in Jordan.

EU-Morocco
21-Rabat: The Moroccan Minister of Energy and the European, French and Austrian Ambassadors to Morocco chair the launch seminar of the European Union-Morocco institutional twinning. This initiative is expected to support the implementation of the National Charter for the Environment and Sustainable Development, aimed at strengthening the sustainable management of natural resources and promoting economic activities in line with environmental protection standards.


Renewable energy
22-Brussels: The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the EU agree on a new €50 million programme of financial guarantees aimed at scaling up investment in renewable energy in the EU’s southern neighbourhood, particularly in Jordan, Tunisia and Lebanon under the EU’s External Investment Plan (EIP). The programme is expected to generate investment of up to €500 million in the field of renewables and to provide some additional 340 MW of renewable energy capacity as well as lead to a cut in annual greenhouse gas emissions to 530 kilotons of CO2.


ARLEM
22/23-Barcelona: Hosted by the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the 11th plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) adopts the Plan of Action for its next term of office, during which it will focus on sustainable economic development, climate action in the Mediterranean and women’s empowerment. The ARLEM adopts two draft reports titled “Euro-Mediterranean integration: The role of regional and local authorities” and “Blue Economy for local and regional authorities in the Mediterranean.”

https://cor.europa.eu/es/events/Pages/11th_ARLEM_Plenary_session.aspx

Economic integration
27/28-Geneva: Nasser Kamel, Secretary General of the UfM, meets bilaterally with heads of international organizations. He provides an overview of the UfM’s trade-related action to the World Trade Organization (WTO), notably the deepening of South-South economic integration and the strengthening of the Euro-Mediterranean trade partnerships. With the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), he discusses the implementation of the 2030 Agenda across the Mediterranean, especially focusing on women’s entrepreneurship and technical and vocational training. Finally, with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), he talks about the collaboration of the UfM in line with the Water Convention.

https://ufmsecreatariat.org/promoting-trade-wto-unctad-unitar-unece/

Migration
29-Rabat: The European Union in Morocco and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) launch two guides developed in the framework of the Regional Programme for Development and Protection in North Africa (RDPP). Entitled “Media coverage of migration based on international law and factual data,” the two guides are directed at journalists and facilitators in order to strengthen the resilience and protection of migrant communities and their families. They are developed in collaboration with the Minister Delegate to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Residing Abroad, responsible for Moroccans Residing Abroad (MDCMRE) and the Higher Institute of Information and Communication (ISIC).


Environment challenges
29-Tunis: The EU-funded Med Dialogue for Rights and Equality holds a public debate on the environmental challenges in the Mediterranean, gathering 30 participants from 10 Mediterranean countries to raise their awareness on the environmental challenges that the Mediterranean is facing.


Youth Entrepreneurship
31-Cagliari: MEDS@rts project is officially presented by project partners from Italy, Greece, Tunisia, Lebanon and Palestine. The project aims to help unemployed youth and businesses in the shadow economy through the creation of a common transnational programme as an alternative system of access to credit inspired by ethical finance and solidarity principles involving public and private actors. It intends to enable access to microfinance for entrepreneurial developments in sectors such as digitalization, sustainable tourism, agriculture, eco-design and craftsmanship.

www.enicbcmed.eu/medstrrts-project-promote-credit-mediterranean-basin-kicking-january-31-930-cagliari-presence-italy/

February

Middle East Peace Process
4-Brussels: Following the US proposals for peace between Israel and Palestine, advanced on 28 January, EU HR/VP Josep Borrell Fontelles recalls the EU’s commitment to a lasting resolution to the conflict between both parties. He reiterates the EU’s preference for a two-state solution and calls for direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine on the unresolved Jerusalem status issue, borders, security and the refugee question.


Social and solidarity economy
4-Beirut: The MoreThanAJob project, funded by the EU under the ENI CBC Med programme, holds a stakeholders meeting and is attended by a number of Lebanese organizations from the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) sector. The event aims to present success stories with regards to inclusion and the challenges identified in this area by Lebanese SSE organizations.

www.enicbcmed.eu/projects/more-than-a-job

Youth radicalization prevention
10-Barcelona: The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) hosts the launch event of the project CONNEKT,
an EU-funded project part of the Horizon 2020 programme. The discussion focuses on the gaps in research into violent extremism in the MENA, the Balkans and Europe. It exposes the aim of the project: mapping the factors that lead to radicalization among youth to improve prevention.

https://launching.h2020connekt.eu/

Entrepreneurship empowerment
10-Luxembourg:
The SANAD Fund for MSME (SANAD) announces that its investments have facilitated the 200,000th such sub-loan, which was disbursed by Microfund for Women (MFW). The loan, which stands at $1,000, is provided to a Jordanian entrepreneur to finance the sewing business she runs in Jordan. www.sanad.lu/index.php

Business development
13/14/15-Rabat: Moroccan diaspora members and entrepreneurs, mentors, industry experts, investors and leaders of innovation ecosystems in Europe and MENA meet at the StartUp Africa Summit, an event organized by StartUp Maroc and co-funded by the EU, to discuss the internationalization of African business and industry. It also explores several pathways of investment to strengthen African start-up firms.


Health
17-London: The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) announces its support for the development of high-quality hospitals in Egypt and Morocco. The EBRD supports the Islamic finance structure backed by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) put in place with a provision of $20 million, deepening further its action in Europe's southern neighbourhood.


EU-Libya
17-Brussels: EU Foreign Affairs Ministers, gathered at the Foreign Affairs Council, agree to launch a new operation in the Mediterranean Sea to support the implementation of the arms embargo imposed on Libya by the UNSC. Following Operation Sophia, ending in March 2020, the new operation will uphold some of its tasks, namely that of fighting organized crime and training the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy. With regards to its scope, as opposed to Operation Sophia which covered the whole of Libya's coast, HR/VP Josep Borrell urges surveillance be concentrated on the eastern part of the shore.


Fight against cybercrime
17/18-Algeria: The working group in charge of developing a manual on cybercrime and electronic evidence for Algerian magistrates holds its second meeting in the framework of the EU-funded project Cybersouth. The aim of the meeting is to assess current work in view of the facilitation of the integration of a basic and advanced module on cybercrime and electronic evidence into the initial course for student magistrates.


Fight against corruption
18/19-Barcelona: A regional seminar on “Enhancing integrity for sustainable investment” is held in the framework of the EU-OECD Programme on Promoting Investment in the Mediterranean. The seminar provides a multistakeholder platform to discuss the importance of fighting corruption in investment transactions, to advance international instruments on anti-corruption to favour policymakers’ action for integrity and include cooperation mechanisms with the private sector.


Intercultural integration
18/19-Marrakech: In the framework of the programme “Ensuring sustainable democratic governance and human rights in the Southern Mediterranean (South Programme III),” jointly funded by the Council of Europe and the EU, an Intercultural Integration Academy takes place in Marrakech. It gathers a variety of stakeholders from Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and Palestine, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), cities and ministries.


Maritime safety
25/26-Haifa: In the framework of the EU-funded SAFEMED IV project, 15 members of the Israeli Maritime Administration attend a training course on THETIS-Med, delivered by the European Maritime Safety Agency’s (EMSA) staff. The aim is to familiarize the participants with the new system’s functionalities and features in order to ensure a smooth transition.


Cultural heritage
26-Amman: The EBRD, the Jordanian Ministry for Tourism and Antiquities and the Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority (PDTRA) sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on their intention to jointly work on a development plan to boost the cultural heritage resources of the Petra and South Shuna regions. The MoU also foresees collaboration on the development of a Christian pilgrimage trail across Jordan.


Civil protection
25/27-Tunis: Two sub-regional workshops are held by PPRD South 3 (with Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia). The first provides information on how to activate the European Mechanism for civil protection and use the aid received. The second workshop deals with disaster risk reduction, especially related to river floods caused by heavy rains.

Transports
27-Algers: In the framework of the EU-funded project EUMedRail, the European Union Agency for Railways (ERA), together with the Algerian authorities, holds a regional seminar on how to manage risks through the development of a Safety Management System (SMS). The SMS manages the various elements – the mechanisms in place to comply with international and national regulations and standards, sector and business level requirements, the outcomes of risk assessment and good practice – needed to be able to run a safe and successful organization. 

EU-African Union
27/29-Addis Ababa: The European Union – African Union (AU) 10th Commission-to-Commission meeting gathers EC President Ursula von der Leyen, HR/VP Josep Borrell and 19 European Commissioners to kick-start the consultation process ahead of the EU-AU meeting planned for October 2020. On this occasion, President von der Leyen consults EU’s African partner about the Africa Strategy which will be presented in March 2020 and takes the opportunity to discuss common challenges facing the EU and Africa. 

Education and sustainable development
29-Rabat: Erasmus Global Partnerships organizes the MENA Forum 2020 on “Fostering Global Citizenship Education to move beyond the Sustainable Development Goals,” gathering 60 young entrepreneurs and leaders from the MENA region and Europe. It comprises capacity-building training sessions on Global Citizenship Education and Entrepreneurships and an opportunity to exchange knowledge, build inter-disciplinary and cross-border partnerships and prepare policy recommendations in various areas. 
www.erasmuspartnerships.org/erasmus-global-partnerships-mena-forum-2020/

March
5+5 Dialogue
1/2-Marrakech: For the first time since 2010, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Secretaries of State from the member countries of the 5+5 Dialogue meet to discuss exclusively the issue of migration in the western Mediterranean. The Ministers agree to adopt a positive approach linking migration to development. Representatives from the EU, the AU, the UfM, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the IOM and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) attend as observers. 

Gender equality
3-Barcelona: Ahead of the celebrations of International Women’s Day, the UfM launches the regional intergovernmental follow-up mechanism on gender balance. In line with the 2017 UfM Ministerial Declaration on strengthening the role of women in society, this mechanism will set up concrete indicators to evaluate the progress made towards women’s full participation in the region. 

Women’s access to health
5-Barcelona: The UfM and the World Health Organization (WHO) sign a MoU to improve women’s access to health in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It seeks to establish a cooperation framework to promote and facilitate the engagement of UfM Member States in health-related activities, also addressing violence against women. 
https://ufmsecretariat.org/ufm-who-join-forces-improve-womens-access-to-health/

Gender equality
5-Tanger: The EU-funded programme Moucharaka Mouwatina organizes a capitalization workshop on the EU’s support for Moroccan civil society into promoting gender equality, on the occasion of International Women’s Day. 

Police
5-Nablus: From the 29 February to the 5 March, the European Union Police and Rule of Law Mission (EUPOL COPPS) delivers a training course to Palestinian Civilian Police (PCP) officers on handling complex operations, while keeping people safe and protecting human rights in the event of riots, demonstrations and sporting fixtures. It adopts a multidisciplinary approach integrating different areas of police operations. 

Equal opportunities:
9-Ouargla: The Support Programme to training-job and qualification adequacy (AFEQ), co-funded by the EU and the Algerian government, organizes a conference at the University of Ouargla on the issue of equal opportunity. The aim is to address issues of gender analysis and the inclusion of the gender dimension in processes of occupational integration of young graduate women. 
www.programme-afeq.org/afeq/

EU-Africa
9-Brussels: The EC and the EU’s HR/VP release a Joint Communication for a comprehensive strategy with Africa, ahead of the 2020 EU-AU Summit. It seeks to intensify cooperation through partnerships in key areas: green transition, digital transformation, sustainable growth and jobs, peace and governance and migration and mobility. 

Women, gender and the media
10-Tunis: The Council of Europe, in partnership with the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists (SNJT), organizes a study visit for media professionals from Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia in the framework of the EU-funded South Programme II. The main aim is to strengthen journalists’ capacities to produce ethical journalistic content and media treatment against stereotypes and
existing discourses in the media and to best respond to challenges related to their respective contexts.


Economic and social development

13-Tunis: The EU-funded project Innov’l – EU4Innovation and Elife project, implemented by the “Fondation Tunisie pour le Développement” sign a grant agreement to contribute to economic and social development by associating innovation and entrepreneurship to enhance the employability and supervision of young entrepreneurs in the region.


Palestine refugees

24-Jerusalem: The EU provides €82 million to UNRWA to continue providing access to education for 532,000 Palestine refugee children and primary health care for more than 3.5 million patients. With this new financial input, UNRWA also plans to provide assistance to over 250,000 vulnerable Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan in the particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic.


EU-Morocco

27-Brussels: The EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi talks to the Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Living Abroad Nasser Bounia to announce the EU’s immediate reallocation of €150 million to support the Special Fund for the Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic, initiated by the King of Morocco Mohammed VI. The EU also foresees a possible additional redirection of the €300 million allocated to Morocco towards the response to the pandemic.


EU-Tunisia

28-Brussels: The EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi informs the Tunisian Foreign Minister Noureddine Erry regarding the EU’s decision to grant €250 million to help fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic consequences. In addition, the EU foresees reinforcing the “Essahra Aziza” programme by tripling the allocated grants from €20 million for 13 governorates to €60 million for the whole of the Tunisian territory.


Protection of vulnerable populations

30-Gaziantep: The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) grantee Bousla for Training and Innovation trains Syrian refugees and displaced people in Turkey and north-west Syria in the framework of the awareness campaign launched to combat the spread of COVID-19 amongst these vulnerable populations.


Libyan conflict

31-Brussels: The Council of the EU adopts the decision to launch the Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI to help enforce the UN arms embargo on Libya. With a mandate lasting until 31 March 2021, the operation will use aerial, satellite and maritime assets. Its secondary aim is to monitor and gather information on illicit exports of hydrocarbons from Libya, participate in the training of the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy and to contribute to the fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking.


Access to water:

31-Sabha: The EU and the IOM supply the Libyan General Water and Waste Water Company (GWWC) with waste water pumps under the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The initiative responds to the very critical water situation in Libya where health and environmental conditions have been affected by an incomplete wastewater system.


Syrian refugees

31-Brussels: The EU provides further support for refugees from Syria and vulnerable persons in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon through a new package of almost €240 million, raising the total assistance via the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis to more than €2 billion. It assists host countries in facing public health challenges and other challenges in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.


April

Women’s entrepreneurship

1-Luxemburg: The SANAD entrepreneur Academy and the Womenpreneur-Initiative release a documentary about their joint trip to Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia between November and December 2019 to meet and interview female tech entrepreneurs and digital talents in the framework of the Womenpreneur Tour. This initiative aims to promote female entrepreneurship in the fields of technology, digitalization and innovation in MENA.


Civil protection

7-Cairo: The EU allocates €100,000 to enable volunteers and teams of the Egyptian Red Crescent to provide assistance to 12,000 people affected by the floods caused by the severe weather conditions that have hit Egypt since March 2020. The assistance package includes meals, first aid, mattresses, blankets, kitchen sets and hygiene kits.
in addition to cash assistance to over 880 families who have lost livestock and sources of income.


Research and innovation

8-Barcelona: The UfM member states meet to discuss actions to tackle the crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic through research and innovation and to foster cooperation for evidence-based healthcare decision-making. Countries from both shores of the Mediterranean present their ongoing research on ways to address the global pandemic through calls for proposals, clinical trials and training sessions. https://ufmsecretariat.org/cooperation-research-innovation-covid-19/

Global response to COVID-19

8-Brussels: The EC and the EU HR/VP design plans to support the EU’s partner countries in facing the global COVID-19 pandemic. €2.1 billion are secured for the EU’s SN to address the immediate health issues and, related humanitarian issues with strong focus on partner countries’ health, water and sanitation systems as well as their research capacities. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_604

Microplastics observation

8-Rome: The EU-funded “COastal Management and MOntoring Network for tackling marine litter in Mediterranean Sea” (COMMON) project operating in Italy, Lebanon and Tunisia, observes 116 marine species to identify to observe the presence of plastics and microplastics in their gastrointestinal tract and evaluate the related ecological effects of the ingestion of such substances. www.enicbcmed.eu/common-fishing-under-observation

EU-Morocco

8-Luxembourg: The European Investment Bank (EIB) decides, as an exceptional measure, to speed up the disbursement of loans in support of small and medium-sized enterprises in Morocco. It also aims to help the country improve its health facilities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic through the purchase of medical equipment.


Water and sanitation

8-Barcelona: The UfM and the Institut Méditerranéen de l’Eau (IME) organize the first online brainstorming meeting on water and sanitation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some 25 partners and experts from Algeria, France, Lebanon, Morocco, Spain and Tunisia exchange their points of view on possible recommendations on how to move forward with the water emergency situation.

https://ufmssecretariat.org/ufm-ime-meeing-water-sanitation-covid/

Energy efficiency

9-Tripoli: The EU-funded BEEP (BIM for Energy Efficiency in the Public Sector) project holds its first meeting in the Lebanese city of Tripoli, which will serve as the project case study. The project team meets with engineers and administrative officials to present the main lines of the project, which aims to enhance energy efficiency in Mediterranean public buildings.


Education

10-Piran: The Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) Management Board meets online, with the participation of the UfM Secretariat, to discuss the educational challenges and opportunities in the context of the global pandemic, putting forward some proposals on the digital transformation of teaching and training. The Presidents of EMUNI and the Eumed Romed University of Fes (UEMF), both UfM supported-projects, agree in this occasion to strengthen the collaboration between the two institutions.

https://ufmssecretariat.org/emuni-innovative-actions-covid/

Education

15-Alexandria: The Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) organizes the first virtual exchange on Intercultural Citizenship Education, bringing together educators from the formal and non-formal education sectors. This virtual platform aims to encourage discussion amongst educators from various Euro-Mediterranean countries on how the COVID-19 pandemic affects their work and intercultural exchanges.


Online businesses

16/18-Amman: The EU Delegation to Jordan organizes, in partnership with Google for Startups, the Startups Weekend Jordan, an online event aimed at gathering local developers, designers, marketers, nurses, doctors, students, scientists, teachers and anyone with innovative ideas on how to tackle the business challenges posed by the global pandemic.


Response to COVID-19

22-London: In response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy of Morocco, the EBRD loans €145 million to the Bank of Africa-BMCE Group. €100 million are dedicated to lending to corporations and to small and medium-sized enterprises whose activity has been negatively impacted by the pandemic. The remaining €45 million is appointed for a multi-currency trade finance aimed to stimulate import and export transactions.


Intercultural dialogue

23-Online: The ALF and the EU delegation to the UN host their first Virtual Dialogue. It focuses on Youth, Peace and Security and is organized in cooperation with the European Parliament’s Young Political Leaders (YPL). Young leaders from seven countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region express their will to participate in conflict resolution and to be involved in the bottom-up decision-

Violence prevention
24-Strasbourg: Tunisia is formally invited by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) to accede to the CoE Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention. To help Tunisia in its efforts to implement reforms to fight violence against women, the CoE reinforces the capacities of Tunisians involved in the prevention of such violence through the Programme on Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP). https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/south-programme/-/tunisia-invited-to-accede-to-the-istanbul-convention

Sustainable investments
28-Online: The ANIMA Investment Network, in collaboration with the UIM and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) hosts the opening session of a series of workshops dedicated to developing investments that contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Mediterranean. Through the initiative “Impact Invest,” it aims to involve private investors in achieving sustainable development. https://ufmsecretariat.org/tapping-sustainable-development-potential-investment/?bclid=IwARZ2rcPhEkmWwMMLibysbHCDVBSig_bryeYSGGyZW8-ZoZHOEb9-1mEbWwM0

MSMEs

Migration management

Water management
30-Online: The MENAWARA (Non-Conventional Water Re-use in Agriculture in Mediterranean countries) project funded by the EU organizes the online meeting of its Steering Committee to plan the project’s new activities under the COVID-19 constraints. The project aims to enhance access to water and the treatment of wastewater to be reused in irrigation systems in Italy, Jordan, Palestine, Spain and Tunisia. http://www.enicbcmed.eu/menawara-steering-committee-met-online

May

Security
4-Rome: European Union Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI starts its activities at sea with a French naval vessel and a maritime patrol aircraft provided by Luxembourg. The operation operates under the mandate in compliance with the Berlin Conference on Libya, implementing the arms embargo in an impartial and conflict-sensitive way. www.operationirini.eu/operation-eunavformed-irini-operation-sets-sail/

Financial assistance
5-Brussels: EU ambassadors endorse an EC proposal for the provision of €3 billion in assistance to ten countries of the EU’s neighbourhood to help cope with the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The package allocates €200 million to Jordan and €600 million to Tunisia.


Migration
5-Brussels: The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) initiates a new three-year phase of the Migration EU eXpertise (MIEUX), funded by the EU. It is a facility aimed at providing partners – including southern neighbourhood countries – with capacity building and technical assistance through projects. https://euneighbours.eu/en/east-south/stay-informed/news/fourth-phase-migration-eu-expertise-initiative-launched

Resilience
5-Tripoli: In the framework of the “North of Africa Window” of the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), the EU provides €18 million for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project in Libya. The project aims to foster resilience and to improve the living conditions of residents of municipalities affected by conflict and by the COVID-19 pandemic-related challenges. https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/libya/78581/european-union-increases-ues-funds-eur-18-million-undp-resilience-programme-libya-targeting-20-new_en

Innovation and employability
5/19-Barcelona: With the support of the GIZ, the UIM launches its new initiative for universities, research centres and policymakers. It aims to help them share best practices and boost career opportunities in the Mediterranean region, thereby promoting the nexus between research, innovation and employability in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. https://ufmssecretariat.org/closing-gap-between-universities-business/

Water emergency
6-Online: The UIM and the Mediterranean Water Institute (IME) hold a series of virtual meeting addressing the effects of COVID-19 on water and sanitation. Experts from Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestine, Spain, Tunisia and Tur-
key share best practices, lessons learned, and the emergency plans that water and utility operators elaborate in their countries in order to face the crisis. https://ufmsecretariat.org/mediterranean-countries-share-water-emergency-and-recovery-plans-to-tackle-the-aftermath-of-covid-19/

Public debate
6-Tunis: The EU Delegation to Tunisia partners with the association Jamaity and the radio channel Shems FM for the launch of a new radio programme, “Point Jamaity” focused on Tunisian civil society. The programme aims to reflect on and give visibility to collective, individual and social movements’ dynamics by giving the floor to civil society actors. https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/eu-tunisia-gives-floor-civil-society

Innovation
7-Online: The NEXT SOCIETY, an EU-funded project, launches the first regional Innovation Scoreboard, elaborated in collaboration with FEMISE. With 78 indicators, it gives information on the innovation performance of countries of the MENA region and aims to mobilize and promote their innovation ecosystems. https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/next-society-launches-first-innovation-scoreboard-suitable-southern

Green business
8-Region: The Green Entrepreneurship Programme, part of the SwitchMed initiative, starts in six countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region, namely Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia. Through the commitment of six local partners in each of these countries, the programme aims to implement activities and provide tools to support entrepreneurs involved in the green and circular economy. https://switchmed.eu/news/switchmed-green-entrepreneurship-programme-kicks-off-in-6-countries/

Intercultural dialogue
9-Online: The EU launches the “Meet the Neighbours of the Neighbours during COVID-19 time” initiative, on the occasion of Europe Day. In the context of lockdown, it aims to provide youth from Europe, Africa and the Mediterranean region free access to films from Europe, the Western Balkans, Africa and the Mediterranean neighbourhood. It thus promotes and encourages intercultural dialogue amongst youth. https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/meet-neighbours-neighbours-during-covid-19-time-eu-online-film-festival

Entrepreneurship
11/12-Online: The Green Impact MED (GIMED) project, which supports entrepreneurs in their efforts to access financing and markets in Egypt, Italy, Lebanon, Palestine, Spain and Tunisia, holds its second coordination meeting to discuss the implementation and planning of activities. Particular attention is drawn to mitigation strategies in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/eu-funded-gimed-partners-meet-online-share-experiences-and-plan-future

Humanitarian aid
12-Brussels: The European Commission publishes guidance on how to provide COVID-19-related aid to Syria. It seeks to provide technical advice about how to comply with EU sanctions while sending humanitarian aid to Syria to facilitate the work of humanitarian workers, whether from Member States or non-state actors such as NGOs or banks, among others. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_831

Business financing
12-Cairo: The EIB and Banque du Caire (BDC) decide to provide $100 million to help finance SMEs from the manufacturing and services sectors in Egypt. Targeting 100 companies, it aims to improve their competitiveness and thus to sustain 4,000 jobs. It brings total EIB support for the Egyptian private sector to €2.7 billion since 2015. www.eib.org/en/press/all/2020-114-eib-and-bdc-provide-usd100-million-to-finance-smes-in-egypt?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=Social&utm_campaign=na&utm_content=na&cid=Social_twitter_na_2020-05-12-01_en_na_Egypt_SMFes

Training

Sustainable development
13/14-Online: The UfM participants in the UN Environment Programme’s (UNEP) 21st Meeting of the Members of the Steering Committee of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development to tackle the issue of pollution in the Mediterranean. Among the topics covered, the Water and Environment Support (WES), funded by the EU and part of the UfM Water Agenda, was put at the forefront as a success story of UN and UfM joint efforts towards waste reduction solutions. https://ufmsecretariat.org/strengthening-collaboration-tackle-pollution-mediterranean/

Pandemic response

Private sector development
18-Tunis: The Delegation of the EU to Libya announces €3 million for the EU for the Private Sector in Libya (EU4PSL) project. This complements the €7 million already allocated to the project. The project, implemented by Expertise France
in collaboration with the Libyan authorities, aims to boost economic opportunities in Libya.


**Protection at work**

19-Tunis: The EU delivers personal protective equipment to the Tunisian internal security forces thanks to the funding of the Counter Terrorism in the MENA (CT-MENA) project, which aims to build the capacities of government security agencies across the MENA region. The delivery occurs in the framework of the Team Europe initiative in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.


**Water and sanitation**

19-Online: The UfM, jointly with the IME meets with experts on the occasion of the 3rd Brainstorming Meeting to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on drinking water and sanitation. The meeting stressed the essential character of the work of water and wastewater workers, manufacturers and suppliers as well as the need to protect them and infrastructure in the context of the pandemic.


**EU-Morocco**

20-Rabat: The EU and Morocco sign a new financing convention to the value of €100 million to support Morocco’s health system in its efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19. It also aims to ensure the system’s resilience to future health crises that may occur.


Economic assistance

20-Brussels: The Council of the EU adopts a €3 billion macro-financial assistance package to be allocated to neighbouring countries. It allocates €200 million to Jordan and €600 million to Tunisia, in order to help these countries cover their immediate needs in the face of the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.


**Online training**

27-Online: EUNAVFOR MED launches an online training platform providing a COVID-19 information course. It aims to train the Libyan Coast Guard, as a priority, and possibly other Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions to establish and implement behavioural changes to help combat the spread of COVID-19.


Social and Solidarity Economy

27-Online: Partners from MedTOWN and MoreThanAJob projects and experts in social inclusion from the Joint Technical Secretariat of the ENI CBC Med Programme meet to lay the foundations for future collaboration. They explore the potential for common fieldwork in Palestine and Jordan and other possible synergies for dialogue and policy dialogue to promote the social economy and fight poverty.


**EU-Syria**

28-Brussels: The Council of the EU extends the EU’s restrictive measures introduced in 2011 against the Syrian regime for an additional year, until 1 June 2021, as the repression against civilians continues in Syria. 273 persons are thus targeted by an assets freeze and a travel ban, while 70 entities are targeted by an assets freeze.


June

Climate awareness

1-Guelmim Oued Noun: In the framework of the “10 days for the Mediterranean,” supported by the EU-funded regional programme Med Dialogue For Rights and Equality, an advocacy campaign is launched and takes place until 30 June simultaneously in 10 countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean. It comprises 29 local awareness-raising, training and advocacy actions to encourage sustainable practices and environmental protection measures.


Recovery assistance

2-Brussels: The European Commission proposes a budget of €118.2 billion for external action and an additional €15.5 billion to support its partners in recovery efforts in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) is allocated €96.4 billion of which, €10.8 billion comes from the new European Recovery Instrument (“Next Generation EU”).

Refugees

3-Brussels: The European Commission proposes to increase its support to refugees and host communities in relation to the crisis in Syria. Out of a top-up of €585 million in total, it decides to provide €100 million to Jordan and Lebanon, which host the largest numbers of refugees per capita in the world, and €485 million to support refugees in Turkey.

Entrepreneurship

8-Istanbul: The new EU-funded project “Enhancement of Entrepreneurship Capacities for Sustainable Socio-Economic Integration” (ENHANCER) is launched in 11 provinces of Turkey. The project, implemented by the ICMPD, aims to create opportunities for Syrian entrepreneurs living in Turkey. It targets participants aged 18-44, with a 30% women quota.

Research and innovation
8-Online: The UfM Regional Platform on Research and Innovation holds its 25th meeting, co-chaired by the European Commission and Jordan. It kick-starts the creation of the Experts’ Technical Working Group entrusted with the task of making proposals for the implementation of regional strategic priorities.

Intercultural dialogue
9-Online: The ALF launches an Intercultural Dialogue Resource Centre accessible online. This platform aims to foster accessibility to undertaking research, good practices, learning activities, expertise and events on intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean, with information on more than 100 curated academic publications and the biographies and contact information for 100 experts. www.annalindhfoundation.org/news/launch-intercultural-dialogue-resource-centre

Water
9/10-Online: The UfM holds a consultation meeting to address the impact of the pandemic on the water sector, with 100 participants from 21 different countries and representing more than 30 regional expert organizations. It highlights the fact that, although relief is needed, a focus on meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should remain a priority. https://ufmsecretariat.org/ufm-water-agenda-responses-covid-19/

Refugees and vulnerable groups
10-Brussels: The EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis mobilizes an additional €55 million for refugees from Syria and vulnerable persons in Jordan and Lebanon with the aim to fight the pandemic and to provide effective support in areas of health, water and sanitation. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1013

Energy
10-Online: MEDREG holds its 29th General Assembly, providing participants with the regulators’ methodology in the context of the pandemic. It informs participants regarding the rescheduling of MEDREG’s deliverables foreseen in the 2020 Action Plan. www.medreg-regulators.org/

Migration governance
15/18-Online: The “Mediterranean City-to-City Migration” (MC2CM) project, funded by the EU, holds a peer-learning event with over 50 participants in attendance from over 22 local administrations of the Euro-Mediterranean region. It gives way to a reflection on ways to rebalance migration-related narratives at local level through communication practices. https://youngmedvoices.org/media/events/eu-high-level-virtual-discussion-youth-eu-high-representativevice-president-josep

Youth
16-Online: Young Mediterranean Voices and the European Parliament’s Young Political Leaders discuss with the EU HR/VP, the Vice-President of the European Parliament, the Director-General of the external policies of the Union, providing an important platform for constructive dialogue in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. https://youngmedvoices.org/media/events/ue-high-level-virtual-discussion-youth-eu-high-representativevice-president-josep

Health
16-Tripoli: The EU provides, through the EUTF, €1 million to the International Medical Corps (IMC) for a new programme to be implemented in Libya. Its aim is to equip and train staff in two primary healthcare centres and one hospital in Tripoli to enable the provision normal healthcare continue in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/syria/81300/syria-crisis-brussels-iv-conference-supporting-future-syria-and-region-kicks-today_en

Private business

EU-Libya
24-Janzour: Through the EU-funded programme “Recovery, Stability and socio-economic development in Libya” (Baladiyat), UNICEF Libya is set to deliver essential medicines to 24 Libyan municipalities, thus helping 600,000 people to have access to basic health services. https://eu-neighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/eu-provides-essential-medicines-three-municipalities-libya

Refugees
24-Brussels: Budget Committee Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) approve increasing the financial support
an international pledge of €6.9 billion in financial assistance to Syria and countries hosting Syrian refugees. 71% of the total amount is pledged by the EU through the European Commission and the Member States.


Security and Defence
30-Brussels: The Council of the EU extends the mandates of the following missions: EUBAM Libya, EUBAM Rafah and EUPOL COPPS. The mandates are extended until 30 June 2021 to enable the mission to implement the activities put on hold due to the COVID-19-related context.

Green finance
30-London: The EU provides €61.3 million to support the EBRD programmes aimed at helping businesses to develop in a more sustainable way by cutting their carbon emissions, investing in energy efficiency and, introducing green technologies. The EBRD is set to finance two of Green Energy Financing Facility (GEFF) programmes in Egypt and Morocco, with in this framework.


July
Marine litter
1-Monastir: The EU-funded COMMON project launches the “BEach CLEAN” campaign to address the pressing issue of marine litter on Mediterranean beaches. In the framework of this initiative, the ten golden rules will be posted on Italian, Lebanese and Tunisian beaches to promote sustainable and clean bathing establishments. The campaign is set to last until 30 September.

www.enicbcmed.eu/eu-funded-common-project-launches-beach-clean-campaign-reduce-marine-litter-mediteranean-beaches

Sustainable development
2-Online: The ALF holds a high-level policy debate, co-organized with Friends of Europe. It discusses the role of EU-MENA multilateral action and intercultural dialogue with regards to aligning post-COVID-19 recovery with the 2030 Agenda in the Euro-Mediterranean region.


Training
6-Online: The EBRD sponsors the launch of a training platform to support the Tunisian finance sector institutions in their MSME financing activities. The platform also aims to share best practices in this field and provide training for technical certifications.


EU-Libya
6-Online: In the framework of the Berlin process, the Economic Working Group of the International Follow-up Committee on Libya meets to reiterate its support to the National Oil Corporation (NOC) as it resumes its work on behalf of the Libyan people after lifting “force majeure” nationwide. By allowing the NOC to resume work, it aims to establish the basis of understanding among all Libyans on equitable distribution of oil and gas revenues.


Youth
7-Online: Delegates of the ALF’s “Young Mediterranean Voices” and the European Parliament’s “Young Political Leaders” participate in a discussion with the European Commission’s Director-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations and the Vice-Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee. The discussion focuses on youth perspectives on building trust in the media and the role of intercultural dialogue in this.

Dialogue and media
8-Online: The ALF organizes the online platform entitled “Beyond painting pictures and cultivating stereotypes: Media narratives and foreign reporting for dialogue in the Euromed region.” It provides a platform for facilitated debate between journalists, academics and civil society to reflect on how media reporting and mutual perceptions have changed as a result of the current pandemic.

Barcelona Process
8-Online: The Generalitat de Catalunya, in collaboration with the IEMed, launches a series of conferences covering central issues related to the Euro-Mediterranean partnership on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process. The first webinar focuses on how digitization and innovation can help MSMEs grow.

Tourism
9-London: The EBRD launches, together with Jordan’s Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Sector Skills Council for Hospitality and Tourism, a programme aimed at providing extra training to 20,000 employees of the hospitality and tourism sector in Jordan, a sector which accounts for 13% of the country’s GDP and has been hit hard by the pandemic.

EU-North Africa
10-Online: The European Commission for Home Affairs and the European Commission for Neighbourhood and Enlargement meet the Interior Ministers of France, Italy, Malta, Spain, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania and Morocco at a conference hosted by Italy. The EU aims to engage actively with its partner countries in the fight against migrant smuggling on this occasion.
https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/news/commissioner-v%C3%A1rhelyi-participates-

ministerial-conference-eu-member-states-and_en

Multilateral finance
14-London: The EBRD shareholders approve Algeria’s request for membership, thus allowing the country to be a recipient of EBRD finance and advisory services. Algeria thus moves to the next stage in the membership process and has to meet pre-membership requirements prior to becoming a full member.

Climate
14-Online: On the occasion of the UfM Mediterranean Climate Week, UfM member states meet with scientific experts and other relevant climate actors, such as civil society representatives, to discuss the UfM Climate Action Plan for 2021-2025 which insists on the reinforcement of the Sciences – Society – Policy nexus and climate finance as priorities.
https://ufmsecretariat.org/ufm-mediterranean-climate-week-2020/

EU-funded: The aim is to build a collaboration network between Italy, Tunisia and Lebanon to support the correct management of marine litter, a major concern in the Mediterranean region with regards to the preservation of coastal areas.
www.enicbcmed.eu/common-project-presented-lebanon?fclid=1wAR21OwysLl1-Ito4i5DZNqo624J4XLvh56cO0DAPo8qmRjKA4XXE_YrD8

Women and youth
20-Tunis: The project EBSOMED organizes a working session on “Gender Mainstreaming and Women and Youth Empowerment” in the framework of the Employers’ Thematic Committees developed by BUSINESSMED. It highlights the need to include a gender perspective across different sectors in the target countries.
http://ebsomed.eu/en/content/actualit_s/working-meeting-committee-gender-mainstreaming-and-women-and-youth-empowerment

Risk management
15-Online: PPRD 3 South holds a webinar on “the roles and tasks of the national civil protection authority and the disaster risk management authority in the wider framework of the national responses to the COVID19 crisis”. France, Italy and Spain share experiences and outline the role of their respective civil protection systems in the context of the COVID19 crisis.

Agrifood sector
16-Online: The UfM and the foundation “Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area” (PRIMA) organize a debate on the agrifood sector and means to promote the rebond of the Mediterranean region in the face of exacerbated challenges related to the pandemic.

Women and youth
17-Tunis: 120 young developers participate in the Hackathon Fin’n’Hack, organized by the start-up company Hack-up with the support of the EU-funded Innov’1 – EU4Innovation. They work for one day on proposing solutions to problems related to finance technologies such as artificial intelligence to the service of insurers companies and the banks and automation of bank processes among others.
hhttps://innovi.tn/

Sea waste management
18-Tyre: The COMMON project launches its activities in Lebanon. Through this EU-funded project, the aim is to build a collaboration network between Italy, Tunisia and Lebanon to support the correct management of marine litter, a major concern in the Mediterranean region with regards to the preservation of coastal areas.
www.enicbcmed.eu/common-project-presented-lebanon?fclid=1wAR21OwysLl1-Ito4i5DZNqo624J4XLvh56cO0DAPo8qmRjKA4XXE_YrD8

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Water
23-Online: The UfM Task Forces on Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems (WEFE) Nexus and Water-Employment-Migration (WEM) meet to jointly identify priorities and investigate potential synergies to find solutions to water-related socioeconomic challenges in the region.
https://ufmsecretariat.org/ufm-water-agenda-solutions-water-challenges/

Cyber security
25/26-Tunis: 120 young developers participate in the Hackathon Fin’n’Hack, organized by the start-up company Hack-up with the support of the EU-funded Innov’1 – EU4Innovation. They work for one day on proposing solutions to problems related to finance technologies such as artificial intelligence to the service of insurers companies and the banks and automation of bank processes among others.
https://innovi.tn/

Cultural sector
27-Online: The EMEA organizes a meeting in the framework of the “CREative Entrepreneurs ACTing FOR the future MEDiterranean” (CREACT4MED) project aiming to map and analyse the eco-
systems of culture and creative sectors in the south of the Mediterranean as the project seeks to enhance the role of culture as a vector for employment and resilience in the region.
https://euromed-economists.org

Cyber resilience
29-Online: CyberSouth organizes a regional workshop addressing the topic of legislation and international cooperation in cybercrime and electronic evidence. The aim is to present international standards and assess whether regional legislations are in line with them. It also gives way to the presentation of two studies on cybercrime legislation and international cooperation capacities.

Marine litter management
29-Sousse: The University of Sousse, in partnership with the COMMON project, inaugurates a new molecular biochemistry laboratory. The laboratory aims to study plastics and microplastics and to study the effect of plastic on marine biodiversity.
www.enicbcmed.eu/common-project-new-lab-analyse-marine-litter-impact

Renewable energy
30-Oujda: Morocco creates Training Institutes for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (IFMEREE), with the financial support of the EU. The three institutes located in Oujda, Ouarzazate and Tangiers offer training courses related to eco-friendly jobs, as the renewable energy market is growing steadily in Morocco.

Gender equality
30-Barcelona: The UfM Member States endorse an intergovernmental set of 20 indicators to set up a region wide mechanism to monitor progress on gender equality on four priority areas: “women’s access to leadership and decision-making”; “women’s economic participation”; “combating gender-based stereotypes” and “combating gender-based stereotypes”.
https://umqsecretariat.org/indicators-gender-equality/

August

Gender mainstreaming
3-Ramallah: EUPOL COPPS managers receive training on institutionalizing gender mainstreaming. The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) provides this training in order to give EUPOL COPPS staff tools to identify and address gender inequalities in everyday work. It fuels initiative such as the setting up of a hotline for reporting gender-based violence and domestic violence with the Palestinian police force.

Economic resilience
4-Barcelona: The UfM launches the Grant Scheme for employment promotion – a regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its aim is to support projects which enable people to find jobs and improve their working and living conditions and is targeted an non-profit organizations of the Mediterranean that works actively to provide people with employment opportunities.
https://umqsecretariat.org/grant-scheme-2020/

EU-Libya
4-Tunis: The EU mobilises an additional €20 million in financial assistance to help Libyan authorities face the surge of COVID-19. The EU aims to step up assistance and establish better national coordination mechanisms for the detection and surveillance of infection clusters and improve public awareness of the virus and effective preventive measures.

EU-Lebanon
5-Lebanon: The port of Beirut suffers a powerful explosion leaving a number of casualties. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism is immediately activated to support the Lebanese authorities in facing the immediate challenges related to the explosion. The EU also provides support through its Copernicus Satellite mapping system.

Tourism
8-Aqaba: In the framework of the project “Cultural Routes for Sustainable Social and Economic Development in the Mediterranean” (CROSSDEV), journalists and members of the press visit the tourist site of Aqaba, one of the sites where the project is implemented. The aim is to give visibility to less known destinations.
www.enicbcmed.eu/crossdev-educational-tour-press-aqaba-jordan?fbclid=IwAR1f5MjFqjz4JNxeSuCenRP5FFzGP_8xUUPgOWbEwmHDb8iMZjhcWolg4

Higher education
11-Brussels: The European Commission announces a list of capacity-building projects selected in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme for higher education. Jordan wins eight projects in this field, with a total funding of approximately €4 million and involving cooperation with 12 European countries and Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine.

Emergency assistance
12-Beirut: To provide much needed emergency assistance after the Beirut port explosion, INTERPOL deploys a specialized team. The international team includes Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) experts deployed on-site, as many people remain missing.

Tourism
18-Umm Qais: The Jordanian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities participates in the opening of the Umm Qais Archaeology Museum. On this occasion, she meets local partners of the CROSSDEV project which aims to promote tourism
in Jordan and link the various tourism products in the region. www.enicbcmed.eu/minister-tourism-visited-umm-qais-and-was-briefed-about-crossdev-project

Counter terrorism

Water infrastructure
27-Tunis: The Acting Head of the EBRD, the officer in charge of water infrastructures for the EBRD and the Tunisian Secretary of State for water resources meet to discuss the project aimed at rehabilitating deep drilling in Tunisian oases, for which the EBRD funds technical assistance. https://euineighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/tunisia-european-bank-reconstruction-and-development-montors-projects

Trade and investment
31-Brussels: An EU air bridge flight delivers 12 tonnes of essential humanitarian supplies and medical equipment to Lebanon. It aims to enable Lebanon to provide access for medical services to the most vulnerable, and includes a mobile hospital and face masks. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1537

Trade

Digital education

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Trade and investment
31-Online: The EU-funded initiative Majalat organizes a capacity-building webinar focused on EU policies and mechanisms related to trade and investment. It draws particular attention to the role held by civil society in these sectors of action. https://euineighbours.eu/en/south/remainformed/news/ru-founded-majalat-webinar-focus-eu-policies-and-mechanisms-regarding-trade

Emergency assistance
31-Luxembourg: In order to help Morocco in its fight against COVID-19, the EIB releases a €100 million in emergency funding as the first part of a €200 million package. The funding directly helps the country increase its health facilities and hospital capacity in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak. https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2020-231-la-bei-debloque-en-urgence-100-millions-d-euros-pour-soutenir-lermaroc-face-au-covid-19

September

Infrastructure

EU-Palestine
2-Jerusalem: The EU provides an additional €9 million to pay the July pensions and salaries of 37,500 Palestinian civil servants in the West Bank, as well as those of health and education workers and the pensions of civil servants in the West Bank. This contribution is in the framework of the Team Europe approach. https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/palestine-occupied-palestinian-territory-west-bank-and-gaza-strip/84660/new-eu-contribution-%e2%82%ac9-million-payment-july-salaries-and-pensions-palestinian-civil-servants_en

Women and employment
3-Baata: The PADSEL-NOA programme closes a series of training sessions on handmade pottery, leatherwork and baketry. These training sessions involve women and unemployed youth from the regions of Baata, Saida and Ain Defla and aim to foster more income-generating activities for these vulnerable communities of Algeria. https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/algeria/84893/cl%C3%A9%2B4ture-des-trois-sessions-de-formations-%C3%A0-Aïn-Defla

Euromed Mediterranean policy
9-Online: In the framework of the “Mediterranean +25 Dialogues”, the IEMed and the Generalitat de Catalunya organize a conference on the impact of COVID-19 in southern Mediterranean countries. The aim is to look at how far the EU has gone to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.
in its southern neighbourhood and how it aims to channel this in the future. https://malchi.mp/emed/euromed-dias Legs_mediterrania_25anys_en

**Water management**

9-Online: The project “Mediterranean Integrated System for Water Supply” (MEDISS) holds its Partners Steering Committee, under the coordination of the Palestinian Wastewater Engineers Group (P Wenger). It follows output delivery and the state of play of the activities of the projects. http://www.enicbcmed.eu/water-management-mediss-partners-steering-committee-web-meeting

**Civil protection**

10-Online: PPRD South 3 organizes a technical webinar on contingency planning in the field of civil protection for the national focal points and other stakeholders involved in the project. The Italian Civil Protection Directorate gives presentation on Italian disasters to provide examples of the good practices and share lessons learned concerning civil protection. https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/eu-funded-pprd-south-organises-meeting-contingency-planning

**Socioeconomic recovery**


**Tourism**

11-Online: The project “GAMification for Memorable tourist experienceS” (MED GAIMS) organizes a webinar on “Gamification in Tourism: Opportunities in Lebanon”. The webinar discusses opportunities in Lebanon for five funded grants and potential Hackathon and Creative Labs to be created in the framework of the project. http://www.enicbcmed.eu/med-gaims-grant-opportunities-gamify-tourism-lebanon-september-11

**Security and defence**

14-Rome: The Acting Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Libya visits the headquarters of the EU operation EUNAVFORMED. She exchanges views with the operation commander on the current situation in Libya and highlights that the staff are implementing the mission with the objective of complying with the UN arms embargo on Libya. https://www.operationirini.eu/un-acting-envoy-libya-stephanie-williams-visited-irini-headquarters/

**Foresight**

15-Online: In the framework of the EU-funded project el-Hiwar II, the College of Europe Development Office organizes a foresight exercise on the anticipation of future crises and opportunities in Euro-Arab relations. It analyses the impact of COVID-19 but also that of other game changers and trends. https://www.coleurope.eu/news/eu-funded-project-el-hiwar-ii-2020-fore sight-exercise

**Civil protection**

16-Online: PPRD South 3 organizes a meeting with 30 participants including representatives of the project’s partner countries, Norway, Italian regions and Romania. Italy gives a presentation on the aid received and the international assistance provided in the context of COVID-19 to countries of Euro-Mediterranean region. https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/eu-funded-pprd-south-looks-back-international-assistance-countries

**Green innovation**

17-Beirut: Berytech launches a ten-month programme called the “Green Applied Research & Innovations Support Programme” in the framework of the GIMEd project. It aims to provide selected projects with the funding and networking opportunities to help their green economy-oriented innovations access markets and create jobs. http://www.enicbcmed.eu/berytech-through-gimed-launches-green-applied-research-and-innovations-support-program

**Cyber security**

17-Online: Lebanese magistrates attend a meeting organised by the CyberSouth project with the aim of further developing the training manual for the training module on cybercrime and e-evidence targeting in-service magistrates and student magistrates in Lebanon. https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/eu-funded-cybersouth-working-group-meeting-build-manual-cybercrime-and

**Police**

17-Berlin: The Acting Head of EUPOL COPPS participates in the launch of the European Centre of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management and makes the case, among other women leaders, for greater women’s participation in the EU’s civilian missions. Out of the EU’s 11 civilian missions, EUPOL COPPS has the highest proportion of female staff (around 40%). https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/eupol-copps-acting-head-mission-katja-dominik-advocates-more-women-eu

**Democracy**

19-Amman: Ahead of the 19th Jordanian parliamentary elections, the Independent Election Commission holds a mock election, in cooperation with the Hayat Centre-RASED, the EU and the Spanish Agency for International Development (AECID). While 600 young men and women participate in this exercise, it is the occasion to raise awareness about the importance of political participation. https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/jordan/85447/iec-and-partners-hold-mock-elections-2020-parliamentary-elections_en

**Women entrepreneurship**

21-Vienna: The UNIDO, the Principality of Monaco and the UfM agree on a tripartite declaration focusing on empowering women in Tunisia through inclusive and sustainable industrial development,
thus providing more opportunities for women in the country, both as entrepreneurs or as employees.

https://ufmsecretariat.org/unido-em power-women-in-tunisia/

Human rights
21-Online: In the framework of the el-Hiwar II project, the College of Europe Development Office holds a two-day training session on the “Wider Human Rights Agenda,” organized with the Human Rights Department of the League of Arab States (LAS) Secretariat. The aim is to explore the historical trajectory of human rights and how to monitor them efficiently.


Women’s rights
21-Online: The project “Combating Violence against Women in the Southern Mediterranean Region,” funded by the EU and implemented by the EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI), holds a policy dialogue in partnership with the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development. It tackles the issue of combatting violence against women and strengthening women’s rights in the COVID-19 context.


Gender and development
22/24-Algiers: The PADSEL-NOA programme facilitates a workshop on ways to foster greater integration and inclusion for women in the actions carried out throughout Algeria. The workshop focuses on the gender and development approach to foster sustainable and fair development involving both men and women.


Cyber resilience
22/24-Online: The CyberSouth project organizes two online training workshops on SOPs for Moroccan and Tunisian stakeholders. Through these, they improve their understanding of international standards and the importance of having their domestic standards aligned with them. It deepens their knowledge on cybercrime investigations and evidence.


Industrial resources
24-Online: In the framework of the training on “Resource Efficiency in Industry” organized by the Royal Scientific Society (RSS) as part of the SwitchMed and MED TEST III projects, 20 academics from Jordanian universities receive an introduction to the tools for a Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production (RECP). In addition, they receive a certification on UNIDO’s TEST methodology.

https://switchmed.eu/

Ecosystem preservation
25/27-Various places: The COMMON project promotes the Clean Up the Med campaign, involving participants and institutions from all around the Mediterranean. The campaign aims not only to physically remove waste from natural ecosystems but also to raise awareness concerning ecosystem preservation.

http://www.enicbcmed.eu/clean-med-back-promoted-common-project

Tourism
28-Online: The ENI CBC Med Programme organizes the webinar “Building a resilient tourism sector in the COVID-19 era: challenges and opportunities in the Mediterranean” to celebrate World Tourism Day. It gathers representatives of four of the programme’s tourism-related projects to shed light on how they address the new reality imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.


Urban resilience


Youth
30-Online: The ALF’s Young Mediterranean Voices “Virtual” Euro-Med Debate and Policy Forum starts, with the participation of young leaders from both shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It provides a programme of intercultural dialogues, policy roundtables and provides a great networking platform for Mediterranean youths.

https://youngmedvoices.org/media/events/%E2%80%98young-med-voices%E2%80%99-regional-virtual-forum-harnessing-youth-led-efforts-eur op%3fclid%3dlwa1R1yN7ua9pCOOaczuIL XbOGKvbm-0Hz9RsFHttlJ7Etvhe CLxr5Ktkefw

Dialogue
30-Online: The ALF organizes the Virtual Marathon for Dialogue in the Euro-Med Region. It aims to offer a platform for dialogue about the future, in the framework of the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process, and give visibility vis-à-vis the broad public.

https://www.annalindhfoundation.org

October

Coastal tourism
1-Tyr: The project “Co-evolution of coastal human activities & Med natural systems for sustainable tourism & Blue Growth in the Mediterranean” (Co-Evolve4BG) is presented in Lebanon. The project’s team insists on the need for cooperation with local communities to develop sustainable tourism in the pilot areas of Tyr and Batroun.

www.enicbcmed.eu/co-evolve4bg-infoday-meeting-lebanon

Microfinance
1-Tunis: The MedSt@rts project launches a series of local microfinance forums in Tunisia, which will then be followed up by forums in Greece, Italy, Lebanon and Palestine. They aim to establish a
cross-border strategy to facilitate access to microfinance and provide a networking platform for microfinance players and entrepreneurs.

www.enicbcmed.eu/medstrts-and-local-microfinance-forums

Cyber resilience

1-Online: In the framework of CyberSouth’s online workshop on SOPs for Lebanon, the assessment of the Lebanese legal framework for handling e-evidence is presented. The workshop also highlights the benefits of aligning domestic proceedings with international SOPs.


Social and solidarity economy

5-Online: The project “Co-producing social policies with SSE actors to fight poverty, inequality and social exclusion” (MedTOWN) is launched with 500 participants attending from 16 countries, including representative of the UfM Secretariat.


Electricity

7-Online: MEDREG and Mediterranean Transmission System Operators (MedTSO) organize a webinar on “Cross-border cost allocation for electricity projects in the Mediterranean.” The webinar aims to identify the needs and interests of countries of the Mediterranean.

www.medreg-regulators.org/

Justice

7-Brussels: Eurojust hosts the new phase of the EuroMed Justice Programme. Serving as a base for the partners, it intends to enhance cross-border strategic collaboration in criminal matters and improve capacity building in the framework of justice cooperation between the EU and the southern Mediterranean countries.


Social dialogue

8-Online: The UfM holds its 4th Social Dialogue Forum with the participation of the UfM, the European Commission and the ILO and 117 participants. They address the issues related to the Euro-Mediterranean labour markets in the context of COVID-19.

https://ufmsecretariat.org/4th-ufm-social-dialogue-forum/

Culture and heritage

8-Online: The UfM Economic Development and Employment Division holds its fourth webinar on socioeconomic developments in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It looks at how cultural and creative industries can be a source of employment creation in the current crisis.

https://ufmsecretariat.org/creativity-heritage-youth/

Private sector

9-Online: In the framework of EBSOMED, BUSINESSMED organizes a webinar on “Connecting business initiatives response to COVID-19: transforming the private sector engagement through SDGs”. It focuses on the responses of the private sector with regards to COVID-19 and in line with the SDGs.


Marine litter

9-Monastir: The COMMON project holds the first local working group, providing a training session for local stakeholders. It promotes the relationship between marine litter reduction and Integral Coastal Zone Management (ICZM). Tourist establishments, representatives of associations, fishermen and companies committed to promoting environmental sustainability are among the attendees.

www.enicbcmed.eu/common-project-local-working-group-monastir-tunisia-reduce-marine-litter

Migration

13-Online: EU and IOM officials meet for the seventh joint strategic meeting. They discuss ways to advance their strategic partnership in light of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, recalling the importance of comprehensive and tailor-made partnerships to address challenges related to migration.


Digitalization

13-Online: More than 60 cultural actors from the Euro-Mediterranean regions gather to discuss the topic of digitalization in culture as part of the networking event Creative Europe Matchmaking.


Social entrepreneurship

14-Medea: The PADSEL-NOA programme organizes training sessions on social and rural entrepreneurship for young project leaders. The sessions are held in the provinces of Medea and Tiaret in Algeria and, aim to encourage entrepreneurship in rural areas.


Cyber resilience

14-Medea: The CyberSouth project pursues its programme of online workshops with two workshops for Tunisian and Algerian stakeholders responsible for drafting cybercrime procedural law, on the topic of procedural law provisions, cybercrime and e-evidence treatment.


Entrepreneurship

14/18-Online: The project Med Dialogue for Rights and Equality launches a capacity development bootcamp with the participation of 32 leaders from ten Arab countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region. The central theme is “entrepreneurship for the social and solidarity economy.”

Civil protection
15-Online: The PPRD South 3 project holds an online meeting on the different experiences of using civil protection medical teams on a national level and during the outbreak of COVID-19. It helps participants understand the remaining challenges and the upgrades needed in this field.
https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/eu-funded-pprd-south-3-online-meeting-shares-experiences-use-national

Energy
19-Rome: The Med-TSO association launches its new project “Towards an Efficient, Adequate, Sustainable and Interconnected MEDiterranean power system” (TEASIMED) with the backing of the European Commission. It aims to achieve the successful integration of Med-TSO members’ power systems throughout the region.

Migration
19-Cairo: The EU, Germany and the Egyptian government launch the project “Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa” (THAMM) in Egypt, coordinated with the ILO, the IOM and the GIZ. The project will be implemented over a period of 36 months, establishing regional dialogue and cooperation for migration and mobility.

Maritime security
20/21-Online: The team of the project SAFEMED IV participates in the 22nd Committee meeting of the Mediterranean Memorandum of Understanding (Med MoU) on Port State Control (PSC) monitoring the development of the information system THETIS-MED, eight months after its launch.

Children trafficking and smuggling
21-Online: The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and the IOM hold a webinar on countering the trafficking and smuggling of children in the European Union and the MENA. The event is attended by UNICEF, UNODC and UNHCR among others.

Small businesses
22-Online: In the framework of the MED MSMEs programme, the Working Group on the Internationalization of SMEs meets and gathers 30 participants from Moroccan government agencies and private and finance sectors. A particular attention is given to the contribution of MSMEs to the post-COVID-19 recovery.

Blue economy
22-Online: The HELIOS project organizes a webinar regarding the job opportunities linked to the sustainable economy. Titled “the role of the Blue and Circular Economy in promoting employment and social inclusion in the Mediterranean Region,” its aim is to explore the sustainable economy as a way to foster the inclusion of young people and women in Mediterranean countries.

Dialogue
22-Online: The 16th Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the 5+5 Dialogue is held under the co-presidency of Malta and Tunisia, with a strong focus on the issue of regional security, inclusive and sustainable development, youth and employment and migration.
https://ufmssecretariat.org/foreign-affairs-ministers-55-2020/

Sustainable development
27-Tunis: A cooperation agreement is signed between the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technologies (INSTM) and the Mediterranean Renewable Energies Centre (MEDREC). It aims to foster synergies between both institutions and to unify their expertise.
Industry
28-Online: The UfM holds its Regional Platform on Industrial Cooperation with the participation of representatives of the European Commission, public authorities, business associations and international organizations. They discuss a number of EU policies, namely the green and digital transitions and the strategy for SMEs among others, in light of the COVID-19 context. https://ufmsecretariat.org/regional-industrial-cooperation-covid-19/

Employment
29-Online: The UfM organizes the second edition of the Mediterranean Initiative for Jobs (Med4Jobs) Stakeholders Dialogue to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the region’s employment landscape and the actions to be taken to ensure labour market resilience. https://ufmsecretariat.org/med4jobs-stakeholders-dialogue-and-advisory-board/?fbclid=IwAR2nYn9Dnja4Jorko2W1T8mW9HXMgn2suYB_SqzpVc-vTwksKMPF_Qbvo0

November
Migration
4-Online: The EUROMED Migration IV (EMM4) project holds a webinar titled “Migrant Vulnerabilities along the Mediterranean Migration Routes: A Perspective on Structural Challenges and Current Developments”. It addresses the issue of irregular migration and the vulnerabilities of migrants in the Mediterranean. It also discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migratory flows. https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/euromed-migration-project-holds-webinar-migrant-vulnerabilities

Innovation
4-Online: The EBRD in Tunisia launches a series of workshops to provide training for SME managers and executives on “innovation as a tool for economic development: identifying opportunities”. The aim is to share good practices and behaviour that lead to innovation as a development tool. https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/eu-tunisia-promotes-innovation-tool-economic-development

Circular economy

Cyber resilience
5-Online: CyberSouth holds the Tunisian and Lebanese national meetings dedicated to the preparation of the annual cybercrime situation report, an opportunity for experts to share their views on their countries’ situation by emphasizing the cyberthreats, statistics and reporting, policies and strategies. https://euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/news/cybersouth-national-workshops-preparation-cybercrime-evidence

Intercultural dialogue

Trade
10-Online: The UfM holds its 11th Trade Ministerial Conference with the participation of representatives of the 42 member countries. The aim is to launch three new trade initiatives aimed at stimulating employment and fostering inclusive economic development. https://ufmsecretariat.org/ufm-ministers-highlight-regional-trade/

Energy
11-Online: Med-TSO holds the webinar titled “Mediterranean Grid Code and its application to the Maghreb Pilot Project.” It presents the work done through Mediterranean Project 1 and 2, which serves as a basis for the elaboration of the Mediterranean Grid Codes Guidelines. https://www.med-tso.com/notizia.aspx?id=171&l=1&f

Sustainable growth

Trade and Investment

Gender equality
16/20-Online: The UfM holds a high-level conference on “Accelerating gender equality in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.” It takes stock of what has been achieved in this area in the last 25 years since the adoption of the Barcelona Process and the Beijing Declaration.
It stresses the impact of the pandemic on women and aims to highlight the role of women in addressing the pandemic. [Link]

**Migration management**

17/19-Tripoli: The ICMPD, under the project “Strategic and Institutional Management of Migration in Libya,” provides two training sessions on consular crisis management and migration governance for Libyan authorities’ representatives. The aim is to enhance authorities’ preparedness when facing these issues. [Link]

**Civil protection**

18-Beirut: Following the wildfires which affected the lives of 200,000 people of Syria’s coastal regions, the EU provides €80,000 to support the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in the delivery of relief in the form of cash assistance and disaster preparedness, targeting 12,500 of the most vulnerable people. [Link]

**Energy**

18-Online: The Med-TSO launches the Mediterranean Power Statistics web platform which gathers essential data about the performances of the Mediterranean power systems and the interconnections of the 19 countries members and presents it publicly. [Link]

**Dialogue**

19-Online: The Med Dialogue for Rights and Equality holds an event on “Civil society engagement in policy dialogue” with Mediterranean civil society representatives, offering them an understanding of the opportunities offered by the adoption of policy dialogue as the main programming tool for international cooperation. [Link]

**Digital transformation**

19-Online: The UfM Secretariat organizes an event addressing the challenges posed by the acceleration of the digital transformation in higher education, underlined by the COVID-19 pandemic. It demonstrates how these challenges can be turned into opportunities for the improvement of inclusive education. [Link]

**Green cities**

19-London: The EBRD doubles its funding for its urban sustainability programme EBRD Green Cities by €950 million. The programme aims to reach 100 cities by 2024 and to significantly reduce their gas emissions to make them more sustainable. [Link]

**Rural development**

20-Online: The Mediterranean Week of Economic Leaders (MedaWeek Barcelona) celebrates its 14th edition, on the occasion of which FASTER holds its first brokerage event titled “Rural Development Boost Through Transfer Of Research Excellence.” [Link]

**Regional dialogue**

23-Online: The South Programme IV, co-funded by the EU and the Council of Europe, is launched with a focus on the following area of cooperation: “Regional Support to Reinforce Human Rights, Rule of Law and Democracy in the Southern Mediterranean.” It takes stock of past cooperation with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Palestine. [Link]

**Gender equality**

25-Online: The European Commission, the EEAS and the German Presidency of the EU host the high-level event “Towards a Gender-Equal World” for the launch of the EU Gender Action Plan – an ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external action (GAP III), which deals with key themes for addressing the gender gap in several areas. [Link]

**Women protection**

25-Online: DG NEAR and the EU Delegations in the Southern Neighbourhood organize an event to take a stand against all forms of gender-based violence and particularly Violence Against Women and Girls, to mark the Interna-
tional Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Tourism
25-Tunis: The EBRD and the World Tourism Organization launch a technical assistance mission to support the Tunisian tourism sector. It foresees the development of a roadmap for the revival of Tunisian tourism and a focus on digitalization, sustainable development and inclusion.

EU-Southern Neighbourhood
26-Online: The EU HR/VP chairs the EU-Southern Neighbourhood partner countries Foreign Ministers’ meeting. Spain is hosting the meeting and the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement participates. They discuss the different challenges facing the partnership and how to renew the priorities.

Human trafficking
26 - Online: In the framework of the South Programme IV, a webinar on regional action against trafficking in human beings in the southern Mediterranean is organised. It is attended by authorities’ representatives of various southern Mediterranean countries as well as members of the civil society and it identifies the common priorities and challenges facing the countries of the region in this matter.
https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/south-programme/

EU-Southern Neighbourhood
27-Online: EU Neighbours and Kantar Public release the results of their joint survey on the perceptions of Mediterranean countries about the EU and the values it is associated with. 59% of respondents in the Maghreb region say that relations between their country and the EU are good, compared to 67% in the Mashrek countries. Both regions see EU financial support as being effective.

Barcelona process
27-Online: The UfM holds its fifth Regional Forum to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona process. They also choose 28 November as the International Day of the Mediterranean to be celebrated each year.
https://ufmsecretariat.org/5th-regional-forum-news/

Innovation
30-Online: The UfM Secretary General takes part in Slovenia’s Innovation Day titled “Symptoms of Creativity”. SG highlights the commitment to supporting the creative sector in the Euro-Mediterranean region, especially through its partnership with the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
https://ufmsecretariat.org/slovenia-innovation-day-2020/

Intercultural dialogue
30-Online: The heads of networks of the ALF meet and take part in discussions and reflections on the next strategic orientations of the programming phase. It is attended by 33 network coordinators and chaired by the President of the ALF.

December

Energy regulation
1-Online: The MEDREG organizes a training event on the role and scope of energy regulation. It details the objectives addressed by regulatory authorities, as well as their core powers and competences through a course on fundamental energy economics.
http://www.medreg-regulators.org/

EU-Palestine
1-Jerusalem: The EU-Palestine Investment Platform is launched to support the roll-out of the EU External Investment Plan in Palestine. Its aim is to help identify, prioritize and coordinate the investment opportunities that the EU offers through its Investment Plan and to ensure the alignment of Palestine’s publicly sponsored investments with political, policy and reform priorities.

Border management
1-Online: The Executive Director of Frontex opens the first Euro-Arab Technical Roundtable on Border Management and Security with the participation of representatives of 18 EU states and 14 Arab states. It addresses challenges such as health at the borders, cross-border crime and other multi-dimensional threats facing the security of the region.

Labour migration
2-Tunis: The THAMM programme is officially launched in Tunisia. Tunisia is one of the three countries of implementation, alongside Morocco and Egypt. The programme fosters safe, regular migration for North African countries and aims to build mutually beneficial partnerships.

EU-Lebanon
2-Brussels: The EU HR/VP and the President of the European Council participate in the “Conference in support of the Lebanese people,” hosted by the French President and the UN Secretary General. The EU mobilizes an additional €100 million of financial support to Lebanon in order to face the devastating impact following the explosion in the Beirut port.

EU-Algeria
7-Brussels: The EU HR/VP and the Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs chair
the 12th session of the Association Council between Algeria and the EU. It is an occasion for both parties to review the state of their cooperation and to identify common challenges and interests in the current context.

https://eueas.eu/delegations/algeria/90038/communiqu%C3%A9-de-presse-%C3%A0-l%27occasion-de-la-v%C3%A9id%C3%A0conf%C3%A9rence-des-membres-du-conseil-dassociation-ue_%fr

**Sustainable cities**

- **Various places**: The Clima-Med project and the UNDP Country Entrepreneurship for Distributed Renewables Opportunities (CEDRO) project in Lebanon team up to develop pilot projects in Lebanese municipalities to serve as a basis and model to replicate for future actions. One of the aims is to make municipalities more sustainable from the point of view of energy production and consumption.


**Youth**

- **Online**: The ALF and the Centre for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) organise the Communications Lab of the Young Mediterranean Voices. It focuses on fostering youth-led dialogue and youth-led creative communication initiatives to challenge extremist narratives in the digital world.


**Radicalization and extremism**

- **Online**: The project CONNEKT holds a seminar on “Researching on radicalization and violent extremism in times of COVID-19”. It explores the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism in the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also explores with the participation of policy-makers how the CONNEKT project can better serve the European Union’s challenges concerning Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism.

https://h2020connekt.eu/the-project/

**Water jobs**

- **Online**: The UfM organizes a webinar on “The Future of Water Jobs: Post Covid-19 Opportunities for Youth in the Mediterranean.” It aims to highlight opportunities for youth in the water sector and stresses the role youth can play in the adaptation of the economy in the face of the challenges raised by the COVID-19 pandemic.


**Urban development**

- **Online**: The UfM holds its Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Urban Development. It recommends the adoption of the UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040 for sustainable, resilient and inclusive cities and communities in the Mediterranean and of the UfM Action Plan for Sustainable and Affordable Housing.

https://ufmsecretariat.org/urban-agenda-meeting/

**Criminal justice**

- **Online**: CyberSouth holds its fifth steering committee meeting with the participation of the main stakeholders from Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. Its aim is to review the progress made within the project and validate the next project implementation plans.


**Education**

- **Online**: Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange holds its closing event. Experts, educators, youth workers and university staff involved celebrate the lessons learned and the achievements of the process. The participants also share their experience as part of the Virtual Exchange.


**Sustainable tourism**

- **Online**: The WestMED Assistance Mechanism promotes a webinar organized by BlueMed and focusing on strengthening ties and opportunities with Southern Partners with regard to sustainable tourism. It also seeks to reflect on possible synergies between related problems.


**Police**

- **Jericho**: EUPOL COPPS provides training to the Palestinian police, in cooperation with the PCP. It aims to modernize the mechanism and process for evaluating Palestinian police officers’ performance.


**EU-Southern Neighbourhood**

- **Online**: In the framework of Euro-MeScO: Connecting the Dots, the IEMed launched the 11th Euromed Survey titled “Towards a Renewed Partnership between the EU and its Southern Neighbours” in the context of the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration and against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.


**Media**

- **Online**: The ALF and EMUNI hold the fourth virtual Intercultural Trends and Media platform about “Cross-cultural reporting and EuroMed mobility.” It provides journalists, academics and civil society representatives with a platform to share initial ideas on the topic.

**Science**

15/16 - Online: The UfM and the project Using Science Diplomacy for Addressing Global Challenges (S4D4C) organize a workshop on “Science and Innovation Diplomacy in the Mediterranean.” It takes stock of existing regional public policies on research and innovation, and reflects on the way in which scientists, political-makers and diplomats can jointly respond to global and regional challenges.

[https://ufmsecretariat.org/science-diplomacy-mediterranean/](https://ufmsecretariat.org/science-diplomacy-mediterranean/)

**Socioeconomic resilience**

17/18 - Online: The EMNES holds its annual conference titled “What Pillars for Resilience of the Socio-Economic Models Post COVID-19 Pandemic in the Mediterranean?”. It presents the work and research of the EMNES on the various pillars which could be conducive to resilience, namely digitalization, financial inclusion, social protection and safety net, and regional integration via regional value chains.


**Women’s empowerment**

18-Online: In the framework of EB-SOMED, BUSINESSMED organizes a webinar on gender equality policies. It aims to foster a debate on women’s participation in public life and decision-making and on ways to foster increased women’s representation across all industries.


**Financial instrument**

18-Brussels: The European Parliament and EU Member States in the Council reach an agreement on a €79.5-billion Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) for the period 2021-2027. It aims to step up the funding for the EU’s external action.


**Dialogue**

21-Online: The Dialogue of the Two Shores launches its new online platform. It aims to promote the projects which are part of the initiative and to offer a secure intranet for project coordinators to share information among themselves and with the investors, international organizations and partners involved.


**EU-Lebanon**

23-Brussels: The EU steps up its support for Lebanon with an additional financial support package of €100 million. It seeks to help the country recover from the damages caused by the Beirut port blast, both economically and socially.


**Sustainable development**

23-Brussels: The EU adopts the Guarantee Agreements under the European Fund for Sustainable Development Guarantee. In this framework, it agrees to provide €500 million to the EU Neighbourhood to help the private sector to better face the impact of the socio-economic crisis and build more resilient economies.


**Culture**

26-Karama: The Karama Human Rights Film Festival launches its 11th edition and presents 40 films. The theme is “Memory of being” and the EU Delegation to Jordan offers its support.


**Urban transport**

29-Luxembourg: The European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Arab Republic of Egypt sign a €1.128 billion agreement. The aim of this financing agreement is to support investments in the rehabilitation and expansion of metro and tram systems in Alexandria and Cairo.


**Private businesses**

31-Luxembourg: The EIB provides a €425-million credit line to Banque Misr so it can help Egyptian MSMEs recover from the damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and to offer them an opportunity to participate in the country’s economic recovery.

Cheronomies

Other Cooperation Initiatives in the Mediterranean

1. NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

Instability in the Mediterranean region is important to NATO Allies and partners both for humanitarian and geopolitical reasons as security in the Middle East and North Africa is organically related to security in Europe. NATO has developed a network of partnership with seven southern Mediterranean countries under the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), as well as with four countries of the Gulf region through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). Within these frameworks, these countries: share insights on areas of common interest or concern through political consultation and intelligence sharing; participate in exercises and training for future missions; contribute to current operations; support research on new capability development; integrate gender perspective into security and defence; fight against corruption in the defence sector; and enhance efforts to destroy or control arms. The MD started in 1994 with five participating countries, which included Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, followed a few years later by Algeria and Jordan. The Dialogue has the following features: it is progressive in terms of participation and content; it is generally bilateral in the NATO+1 format but also admits multilateral meetings in the NATO+7 format; the same basis is offered to all the partners according to a non-discrimination principle; however each country can decide to intensify its own participation in the spirit of self-differentiation through an Individual Cooperation Programme (ICP) and NATO will not impose the extent of the cooperation; it is complementary to other regional or international initiatives; and it has both a political and practical dimension. Until 2011, the overall responsibility for the MD fell to the Mediterranean Cooperation Group (MCG), established at the Madrid Summit in 1997. It was then replaced by the Political and Partnerships Committee, which is responsible for all partnerships. The Committee meets at the level of Political Counsellors on a regular basis to discuss all matters related to the Dialogue including its further development. At the 2004 Istanbul Summit, NATO’s Heads of State and Government elevated the MD to a genuine partnership through the establishment of a more ambitious and expanded framework, which considerably enhanced both the MD’s political and practical cooperation dimensions. Consultations of the 29 Allies (Montenegro became NATO’s 29th member on 5 June), and seven MD countries take place on a regular basis on a bilateral and multilateral level, at ministerial, ambassadorial and working level formats. The political dimension also includes visits by NATO Senior Officials, including the Secretary General (SG) and the Deputy SG, to MD countries. The main purpose of these visits is to conduct high-level political consultations with the relevant host authorities on the way forward in NATO’s political and practical cooperation under the Dialogue. The new Strategic Concept, adopted at the Lisbon Summit in 2011, identifies cooperative security as one of three key priorities for the Alliance. Practical cooperation in the MD includes seminars, workshops and other practical activities in the fields of modernization of the armed forces, civil emergency planning, crisis management, border security, small arms & light weapons, public diplomacy, scientific and environmental cooperation, as well as consultations on terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The military dimension of the practical cooperation includes invitations to Dialogue countries to observe – and in some cases participate – in NATO/PfP military exercises, attend courses and other academic activities at the NATO School (SHAPE) in Oberammergau (Germany) and the NATO Defense College in Rome (Italy), and visit NATO military bodies. The Individual and Partnership Cooperation Programme (IPCP), which replaces the previous Individual Cooperation Programme (ICP) framework document, is aimed at enhancing bilateral political dialogue as well as tailoring cooperation with NATO according to key national security needs. Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia have all agreed tailored ICPs with NATO. At the 2014 Wales Summit two important initiatives were endorsed: the Partnership Interoperability Initiative and the Defence and Related Security Capacity Building (DCB) Initiative. The first provides measures to ensure that the connections built up over years of operations and exercises are deepened so that partners contribute to future NATO-led operations (currently only Jordan has access to enhanced cooperation). The DCB Initiative is demand-driven and aimed at NATO’s commitment with partners. This package includes: seven areas of cooperation (cyber defence, military exercises, Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices cooperation, border security…); the invitation to participate in the 2015 NATO Cyber Coalition exercise (the first MD countries to do so); and a Science for
Peace and Security (SPS) project on Counter-IED. The Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme is a policy tool that enhances cooperation and dialogue with all partners, based on scientific research, innovation, and knowledge exchange. It provides funding, expert advice, and support to security-relevant activities. More than 30 SPS activities are held with MD countries covering areas such as cyber-defence training for Morocco, the implementation of a cyber-defence strategy in Jordan, the development of advanced security technologies in Israel and the creation of a regional crisis management centre in Mauritania. Unlike the MD, the ICI only focuses on practical cooperation and it was launched in 2004. It is addressed to the Gulf Countries and, as it stands, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have all joined the Initiative. Based on the principle of inclusiveness, the Initiative is, however, open to all interested countries of the broader Middle East region who subscribe to its aims and content, including the fight against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The Initiative offers bilateral activities that countries can choose from, which comprise a range of cooperation areas: tailored advice on defence transformation; military-to-military cooperation to contribute to interoperability through participation in selected military exercises and through participation in selected NATO and PIP exercises and in NATO-led operations on a case-by-case basis; cooperation in the fight against terrorism, including through intelligence sharing; cooperation regarding border security in connection with terrorism, small arms and light weapons and the fight against illegal trafficking; and civil emergency planning. With the approval of the new partnership policy at the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Berlin in April 2011, all NATO partners will have access in principle to the same range and number of activities. This will dramatically expand the number of activities accessible to ICI countries. ICI partners have also increasingly demonstrated their readiness to participate in NATO-led operations, acting as security providers. Today, several ICI partners actively contribute to the NATO ISAF operation in Afghanistan. Following the launch of Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in Libya, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates promptly provided air assets to the operation and were recognized as contributing nations, playing a key role in the success of the operation. Finally, within the Parliamentary dimension of NATO a Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group (GSM) was created in 1996 as a forum for parliamentarians of NATO and the MENA region to discuss security issues. The GSM conducts seminars, bringing together parliamentarians from NATO countries with their counterparts in the region, to explore specific topics and to consider the annual GSM Report. The Group also undertakes an annual visit to a country in the region.

Main Events in 2020

- 6 January, Brussels, Belgium: The North Atlantic Council addresses tensions in the Middle East and implications for NATO’s training mission in Iraq. As a measure to protect NATO’s personnel, the Alliance temporarily suspends training activities for Iraqi forces on the ground, ready to resume it when the situation permits. Following the briefing of the US on attacks on coalition forces in Iraq and the strike against General Soleimani, the Allies also express their concern about Iran’s destabilizing activities in the Middle East.

www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_172344.htm

- 10 January, Brussels, Belgium: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg attends the extraordinary meeting of the EU Foreign Ministry Affairs Council (FAC) in the situation in the Middle East. Speaking to reporters, the Secretary General stresses the need for NATO and the EU to keep supporting Iraq and fighting ISIS.

www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_172429.htm

- 14 January, Brussels, Belgium: King Abdullah II of Jordan visits NATO headquarters to discuss regional security with Allied ambassadors during a meeting of the North Atlantic Council. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stresses that Jordan is one of the Alliance’s closest global partners, particularly with regard to countering international terrorism.

www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_172529.htm

- 28 February, Brussels, Belgium: A special meeting of the North Atlantic Council takes place following a request by Turkey to hold consultations under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty on the situation in Syria. Allies offer their condolences to Turkey for the death of a soldier near Idlib, condemn air strikes by the Syrian regime and Russia in the province and call for them to end their offensive.

www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_173927.htm

- 9 March, Brussels, Belgium: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg meets the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to discuss the security situation in Syria. The Secretary General confirms NATO’s support to Turkey against threats from Syria and address the impact of migration movements on the border between Greece and Turkey.

www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_174281.htm

- 14 May, Brussels, Belgium: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg talks with the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on the phone to discuss NATO’s support to Allies in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and the situation in Libya. The Secretary General commends Turkey for its medical support to other Allies and partners, in response to requests made through NATO’s Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre. Regarding Libya, he stresses that NATO is prepared to help the country in the area of defence and security institution building, in response to the request made in this direction by the Prime Minister of the Government of National Accord and in close coordination with other international efforts, including those of the UN and the EU. The Secretary General also reminds all parties to respect the UN arms embargo and that NATO fully supports UN efforts to find a political solution.

www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_175793.htm

- 16 May, Brussels, Belgium: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg talks with the Prime Minister of Libya, Fayez al-Sarraj on the phone to discuss
the latest developments in the country and express his concern over the latest escalation of violence, highlighting that there is no military solution to the conflict. He also calls for the UN arms embargo to be respected and confirms that NATO remains prepared to assist Libya with building up its defence and security institutions, as restated by NATO Heads of State and Government in 2018 and in response to the request by the Government of National Accord.

www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_175873.htm

- 22 June, Bizerte, Tunisia: The Standing NATO Maritime Group Two (SNMG2) exercises with two Tunisian Navy units in the waters north of Bizerte, Tunisia. According to Rear Admiral Paolo Fantoni, Commander of SNMG2, this training opens a new chapter of further cooperation at sea between Tunisia and NATO, already in partnership under NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue. The objectives are, for both sides, to enhance interoperability, improving maritime security and deterring potential terrorist threats at sea.


- 10 December, Mediterranean Sea: NATO Operation Sea Guardian has completed its last focused security patrol for the year. As part of this activity which began on 24 November, NATO maritime assets have been helping provide an accurate maritime picture to NATO commanders, enforcing counter-terrorism measures, and working with partners. Focused operations are carried out by Sea Guardian six times a year and take place in a designated geographic area of the Mediterranean. During such operations, NATO vessels interact with non-NATO maritime actors, including commercial ships, to assess current trends and share maritime situational awareness.

www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_180025.htm

2. OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation

The relationship between the OSCE and its MPCs dates back to the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, which recognized that security in Europe is closely linked with security in the Mediterranean as a whole. Immediately after Helsinki, Mediterranean non-participating states were invited to a specific meeting on Mediterranean issues related to economic, social, environmental, scientific and cultural topics. It was at the 1993 Rome Ministerial Council meeting when Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Morocco and Tunisia requested a closer cooperation and finally became partners for cooperation in 1995 (Jordan joined in 1998).
In 1994 an informal contact group of experts met to conduct a dialogue with MPCs to facilitate the exchange of information of mutual interest and generate ideas: the Mediterranean Contact Group (MCG). Within the political framework of this relationship, besides the MCG, the main elements are: the annual OSCE Mediterranean Conference, certain annual OSCE events, the OSCE PA Mediterranean Forum and the visit by the Secretary General (SG). The OSCE Mediterranean Conference is generally attended by international organizations, parliamentarians, academics and NGOs, and it provides a place for the exchange of ideas and exploring new ways to enhance cooperation. At the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting, partners engage in high-level meetings with the OSCE Troika (incoming, current and past Chairmen-in-Office) and the OSCE SG. In 2003, OSCE participating states decided to extend the fields for cooperation with partners (counterterrorism, border issues, economic and environmental activities, trafficking in human beings, election observation, media freedom) besides encouraging them to voluntarily implement OSCE commitments. Since 2007, a special fund has been created to attend to Partners’ needs to participate in specific activities. The wave of upheavals that swept across the southern Mediterranean as of 2011 confirmed the need to reinforce and adapt the Partnership to assist Partners on their way to democracy and stability. The Contact Group serves at the main venue for regular dialogue with the Partners. It generally meets seven times a year at ambassadorial level and its chairman is generally the incoming chair of the OSCE. It discusses topics relevant to OSCE Partners or members in the three OSCE dimensions: politico-military, economic and environmental and human. Since 2011, Partners have displayed a readiness to share relevant information and developments within the group while OSCE participating states have reaffirmed their support to share their expertise, experience and OSCE toolbox for democratic transition. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) enhances relations between participating states and MPCs from a parliamentary perspective. MPCs are invited to participate in OSCE PA conferences, and also to country observation missions offering them the opportunity to study best practices and democratic processes.

2020 OSCE Mediterranean Conference

- 3 November, Vienna, Austria: The conference is held under the topic of “Promoting security in the OSCE Mediterranean region through sustainable development and economic growth” and is hosted by Sweden, as the Chair of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia). During 2020, Sweden as the Chair has promoted political dialogue with the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation on a range of crucial topics with a view to intensifying the exchange of best practices and identifying areas for long-term co-operation. The issues covered by the conference are information technology and the fight against human trafficking; women, peace, and security; youth engagement and participation to counter violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.

www.osce.org/event/2020-osce-mediterranean-conference

2020 Annual Security Review Conference

- 23-25 June, Vienna, Austria: The Annual Security Review Conference (ASRC) is the OSCE’s main event for enhancing dialogue on regional security challenges. Under the 2020 Albanian OSCE Chair, participants focus on “Building stability through dialogue” and exchange views on the security situation in the OSCE region as well as on the impacts of COVID-19 on security and stability in the OSCE area to identify joint responses to some of the unprecedented challenges caused by the pandemic. In particular, participants discuss security and stability in the OSCE region in light of developments with respect to Ukraine, and the Structured Dialogue, a process that explores new ways of addressing politico-military challenges and reversing the negative trends in the European security architecture. Other topics covered are: transnational threats – current and future trends in the OSCE area and beyond; conflict and crisis situations in the OSCE area – building security and confidence; conventional arms control and confidence- and security-building measures – challenges and opportunities; the OSCE’s role in early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, conflict resolution, and post-conflict rehabilitation – lessons learned and the way ahead.

www.osce.org/event/2020-annual-security-review-conference

Annual Ministerial Council – 27th OSCE Ministerial Council

- 3-4 December, Tirana, Albania: The Ministerial Council is the central decision-making and governing body of the OSCE and provides an opportunity to review and assess the Organization’s activities and strengthen dialogue on security issues in the OSCE area. Due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time, the Ministerial Council is held via video teleconferencing (VTC). At the end of the Council, the parties decide to appoint Ms. Helga Schmid as the Secretary General of the OSCE, Mr. Matteo Mecacci as Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and Ms. Teresa Ribeiro as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media for a period of three years with effect from 4 December 2020. They also decide that North Macedonia will take over the chairmanship for 2023 and that the 28th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council will be held in Stockholm on 2 and 3 December 2021. Moreover, the parties express their commitment to strengthening cooperation in countering transnational organized crime and co-operation with the OSCE Asian Partners. They also discuss the prevention and combat of corruption through digitalization and increased transparency, as well as the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the Ne-
negotiations on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process in the “5+2” format.
www.osce.org/event/mc_2020

OSCE Informal Ministerial Gathering (did not take place in 2020)
19th Autumn Meeting of OSCE PA (expected to take place in October 2021)

Mediterranean partners for Co-operation
• 11 May, Vienna, Austria: The Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, under the Swedish Chair, held their first virtual meeting. It focuses on the rapid development of information technology and its tremendous impact globally on trafficking in human beings (THB), including in the OSCE region and across the Mediterranean. It is announced that the 2020 programme will focus on topics such as countering trafficking in human beings, women, peace and security, youth and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (VERLT).
www.osce.org/partners-for-cooperation/mediterranean/452098

3. 5+5 Dialogue

The 5+5 Dialogue comes from a French proposal and was set up on 10 October 1990 during a ministerial meeting in Rome. It gathers the ten countries of the western Mediterranean Basin: five countries from the Arab Maghreb Union (Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Libya and Tunisia) and five members of the European Union (France, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Malta who joined in 1991). The 5+5 Dialogue has a flexible and informal nature. Over the years, it has been transformed from a merely political forum to one for strengthened regional and multidisciplinary cooperation in the western Mediterranean. Its flexibility and informality have enabled a gradual opening up, and the participating ministers and senior officials now meet to discuss an increasing number of issues. Originally just a political compromise between Foreign Ministers dealing with security and stability, as well as economic integration, it later expanded to include other spheres, such as Education, the Environment and Renewable Energies, Home Affairs (since 1995), Migration (since 2002), Inter-parliamentary Relations (since 2003), Defence (since 2004), Tourism (since 2006) and Transport (since 2007). Due to its practical and operational nature, it is a forum for the exchange of ideas and the launch of new initiatives. It can also capitalize on its restricted geographical scope, which is limited to the western Mediterranean. This initiative has encouraged the insertion of Libya and Mauritania in the regional context.

Main events in 2020
• 1-2 March, Marrakech, Morocco: the 8th Ministerial Conference of the 5+5 Dialogue on Migration and Development gather in Marrakech to discuss the migration and development issue in the western Mediterranean, with representatives from the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in attendance as observers. Ministers reaffirm the relevance of the 5+5 Dialogue to address migration issues and highlight the need to cooperate and coordinate for a better management of migrations. The meeting ends with the adoption of a declaration listing the actions to be undertaken in five broad lines: coordination of national migration policies; facilitation of legal migration and mobility; the strengthening of the links between migration and development; migrant integration policies; policies to fight irregular migration, smuggling of migrants and human trafficking. The Declaration calls for the implementation of a “Roadmap towards the operationalization of the conclusions” of the Ministerial Conference in order to translate the Ministers’ commitments into concrete projects and practical programmes.
• 20 May: The “Building Resilience to Health Crisis through Enhanced Cooperation in the Western Mediterranean: The Role of the 5+5 Dialogue in a Post COVID-19 Era” webinar brings together experts from different countries of the 5+5 Dialogue to discuss the impacts of the health crisis on the western Mediterranean. The participants highlight the need to further engage in a long-term cooperation on health issues in the western Mediterranean. The webinar will lead to a publication of a report gathering the recommendations that experts put forward during discussions.
https://medthink5plus5.org/en/2020/05/22/medthink-55-webinar-towards-a-strengthened-health-cooperation/
• 20 October, online: On the occasion of the 16th Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting of the 5+5 Dialogue, which celebrates its 30th anniversary (1990-2020), the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the 10 countries of the 5+5 Dialogue of the Western Mediterranean gather in a virtual meeting. The videoconference, organized under the title “Together for Collective Security and Partnership in the Western Basin of the Mediterranean” provides the opportunity for Foreign Affairs Ministers to advocate for the strengthening and deepening of the 5+5 political framework. The main topic of the meeting is security cooperation between countries of the western Mediterranean. In this regard, countries face a number of challenges, including those related to the fight against terrorism and radicalization, the conflicts in Libya and Sahel, and the Middle East Peace Process. The post-COVID-19 economic recovery is also at the centre of the ministers’ discussion. They acknowledge the need to foster synergies between the socio-economic recovery plans of the countries of the region, especially through the development of partnership in areas with potential such as digitalization, sustainable development and the integration of industrial supply chains. Finally, they discuss topics related to youth, education, mobility, sustainable development, and migration and development. Their conclusions are outlined in the Tunis Declaration. In 2021, Spain will succeed Malta as the Northern co-chair of the Dialogue.
• 11 November: The MedThink 5+5 webinar is held under the title “From Crisis to Recovery in the Western Mediterranean: Challenges and Opportunities on the road to a Post-COVID-19 Sustainable Growth.” The webinar is organized by the European Institute of the Mediterranean in collaboration with the Policy Centre for the New South. The participants discuss the prospects of the severe economic contraction as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, 5+5 Dialogue countries present their strategies to firstly mitigate the impact of the economic recession on the productive tissue and employment, and secondly to help re-activate the economy. Finally, they also discuss the opportunities that the post-COVID-19 era can offer to the region’s countries, as well as the role of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in financing the recovery. The webinar will lead to the publication of a report gathering the recommendations put forward by experts during the discussions.

4. Adriatic Ionian Initiative (AII)

After the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia and the growing tensions among ethnic, cultural and religious groups in the Balkan area, the EU, in its attempts to cope with these crises, promoted the “Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe” for south-eastern European countries hoping to join the Union in the future. Within this treaty, at the Finnish EU Summit in 1999, the Italian Government presented the “Adriatic Ionian Initiative.” The Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) was established at the Summit on the Development and Security of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, held in Ancona (Italy) in May 2000. At the end of the Conference, the Foreign Ministers of the participating countries, Italy, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece and Slovenia signed the “Ancona Declaration” in order to strengthen regional cooperation to promote political and economic stability, thus creating a solid base for the process of European integration. Today, the AII has eight members: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. The initiative’s Chairmanship rotates every May/June according to alphabetical criteria. The Chairmanship of Greece started in June 2016 and ended in May 2017, with Italy taking over from June 2017 until May 2018. Following the recent EU approach to support multilateral sub-regional cooperation, the AII started working, in 2010, on the idea of a Macro-Region for the Adriatic Ionian Region. Since then the All Participating states, started raising awareness regarding the need to establish a Macro-Region for the Adriatic Ionian basin. The European Council has given a mandate to the EU Commission to present a new “Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region” (EUSAIR) by the end of 2014. The EUSAIR has been endorsed by the Council on 24 October 2014 and is now in its implementation phase. Many years after the establishment of the AII, the geopolitical environment has deeply changed. Slovenia in 2004 and Croatia in 2013 entered the EU and the other Adriatic-Ionian Eastside coastal Countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia), albeit with different time-frames and conditions, are gradually approaching the EU within the Stabilisation and Association Process framework, as a prelude to future EU membership. After the overhaul of the All Round Tables approved in 2015, the highest political body of the AII is also reformed. For the first time in Dubrovnik (12-5-2016) a double hat “Adriatic and Ionian Council / EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting” is held within the EUSAIR Forum. This now makes the two exercises (All and EU-SAIR) inseparable from each other and mutually beneficial. The All focus for 2017 is on stakeholders and civil society with the ultimate goal of bringing them into the picture and making the subsidiarity principle work. The All is going to foster this process in two ways: firstly, by strengthening All Round Tables and connecting them strictly with the EUSAIR Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs). In order to make them effective, the All-PS finances the participation of selected experts coming from Adriatic and Ionian Civil Society (universities, NGOs, associations, chambers of commerce) and from local administrations; and, secondly, by connecting the All Round Tables with the EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform, as soon as it is fully operational.

Main Events during the Serbian Chairmanship

• The Republic of Serbia formally assumes the year-long presidency of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) and the chairmanship of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) from Montenegro on 1 June 2019 and remains in this position until May 2020. In order to ensure full coordination within the country for the duration of the presidency, as well as to provide a continuous exchange of views and assure cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, the government of the Republic of Serbia renews the Working Group for the Cooperation with the European Union in the Adriatic and Ionian Region (established in 2014) which comprises 22 members from different line ministries of the Serbian government. The Republic of Serbia will continue its activities aimed at developing regional cooperation and, in particular, at strengthening All as a regional structure, relying, certainly, on the already agreed and commenced activities. It is, therefore, necessary to focus future joint activities on several key priorities, such as: infrastructure connectivity, promotion of cooperation in the areas of culture and creative industries, sustainable tourism and youth exchange (like, for example, the establishment of the All Youth Chamber Orchestra, etc.). For the purpose of implementing the above-mentioned priorities, the inclusion of economic and financial segments in the presidency/chairmanship priorities are deemed a practical necessity, and sustained efforts will be invested to implement them in practice. In that context, special focus will be placed on the cooperation between chambers of commerce and industry aimed, primarily, at improving economic connectivity, increasing employment and reducing labour emigration.

• 18-19 February, Brussels, Belgium: 2nd All Committee of Senior Officials back-to-back with the first session of
the 11th EUSAIR Governing Board, chaired by Mr. Jankovic Pavle, takes place to discuss the calendar of upcoming events, the organization of the 20th All Anniversary Celebrations and updating rules of procedures due to the inclusion of the Republic of San Marino in the All. According to the Serbian Chairmanship, the upcoming activities include: four EUSAIR Thematic Steering Group meetings and the 5th EUSAIR annual meeting; a Round Table on Youth Connectivity; the Round Table on Transnational tourist products as a way of connecting the coastline with the hinterland; the 20th anniversary of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative on 22-24 of March; the 9th Energy and Investment International Day; the International Fair of Technics and Technical Achievements and the International Agricultural Fair. Regarding the core EUSAIR GB, the discussion on the activities and the expected outcomes of the Serbian Chairmanship Programme and the upcoming 5th EUSAIR Annual Forum needs to be highlighted.


- 20-21 February, Athens, Greece: over 240 delegates from 53 countries and international organizations gather in Athens, at the 14th Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), to discuss counterterrorism, MENA region challenges, climate change and economy. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean region is the principal forum where the Parliament of the Euro-Mediterranean region deliberate to support the creation of the best political, social, economic and cultural environment for the fellow citizens of the Member States. During the 14th Plenary Session, PAM parliamentarians review reports and vote on resolutions concerning the critical issues, such as the threat from ISIS terrorists, the peace process in the Middle East region, the economic integration in the region, the challenges related to climate change following COP25, mass migration and the promotion of Human rights.


- 2 April: North Macedonia officially becomes the ninth participating country of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), joining Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. The country participates in All Strategy governance structures and, together with Italy and Serbia, coordinates the Pillar 2: Connecting the Region, whose aim is to develop interlinked sustainable transport and energy networks in the macro-region. Macedonia’s participation in the EUSAIR reinforces the macro-regional Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region and will help the region progress on key areas: blue growth, the environment, tourism and transport. The two official documents that testify the accession of North Macedonia to EUSAIR are the Addendum to the EUSAIR communication and the New EUSAIR Action Plan.


- 27 May: The meeting of the Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative and European Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR), hold via videoconference from Belgrade at the end of one year of successful Serbian Chairmanship, aims to deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting stresses the need to start border reopening, economic recovery and continue fighting against COVID-19. Participants underline the fact that fostering regional cooperation is key to mitigate the post COVID-19 challenges. Also, the Adriatic and Ionian Council/EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting formalizes the decision of confirming Ambassador Giovanni Castellaneta’s second mandate, as Secretary General of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative. The Ambassador has covered the position of All Secretary General from June 2017, and will stay in charge until May 2023. Lastly, The Belgrade Declaration, the annual strategic document which acknowledged the results achieved by the Chairmanship and set strategic guidelines for the future, will follow in the coming weeks.


Main Events during the Slovenian Chairmanship

- Slovenia takes over the Chairmanship in June 2020 and remains in this position until May 2021. During its presidency, it seeks to implement high-profile activities to develop regional cooperation and strengthen All as a regional structure, relying on the already agreed and initiated activities. It also places particular attention on the promotion of EU standards and values and continues to support the European Integration aspirations of Western Balkan countries. The activities planned during the one-year presidency focus on four keys priorities: 1. infrastructure connectivity; 2. the promotion of cooperation in the areas of culture and creative industries; 3. youth issues; and 4. digitalization. Furthermore, in light of the ongoing challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chairmanship must deal with the current health and humanitarian situation. Thus the organization of events during its Chairmanship will depend on the region’s sanitary condition. Slovenia will also promote the active participation of the Fora of civil society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities, and Universities) that have proven to be key actors in addressing systemic challenges of common interest. Besides this, during its Chairmanship, the country will emphasize All’s parliamentary aspect, which helps provide broad discussions and, as a consequence, will lead to further political support from governments.

- 18 June, online: On this date, the high-level political representatives of the All/EUSAIR participating countries following the Adriatic Ionian Council/ EUSAIR Ministerial meeting hold a meeting in Belgrade via videoconference and adopt the Belgrade Declaration. The Declaration welcomes both North Macedonia as a new participating country, and the decision of the European Council of 27 March to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. Furthermore, participants commit to jointly respond to the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis by facilitating the use of the unprecedented amount of funds mobilized to support the most severely affected sectors. The govern-
ment representatives also recognize the important contribution provided by the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and the EUSAIR to the progressive strengthening of the regional cooperation dimension in sectors of pivotal importance for the region’s future.

• 24 August, online: On this date, the Office of the Marche region, as Italian Project Partner of the EUSAIR Facility Point, in cooperation with the Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative organizes the Web-meeting on the protection and promotion of the rights of children in the Adriatic Ionian area. The meeting stresses the importance of raising the level of attention and awareness on the protection of children with a special focus on the most vulnerable, so that safeguarding their interest becomes a pivotal point of every political decision taken at every institutional level. In more concrete terms, participants share the best practices on the protection of children’s rights and related European Projects, strengthening the inter-institutional network and the role of National Authorities/Institutions for Children and Adolescents.

• 26-29 August, Ancona, Italy: the 2020 edition of the Adriatic Mediterranean Festival takes place in Ancona, Italy and focuses on the 20th anniversary of the Ancona Charter. The Mediterranean festival constitutes a four-day cultural event that brings together numerous musicians, writers and artists from all over the Adriatic-Ionian region. For the entire duration of the event the rhythms of Mediterranean music, the sounds and scents of the cultures of the Mediterranean sea are interwoven with the central themes of European politics looking south: from human rights, to the role of the Balkans and the Adriatic-Ionian.

www.adriaticomediterraneo.eu/
• 15 September, online: The First All Committee of Senior Officials under Slovenian Chairmanship takes place in Izola, via videoconference, at the beginning of September. Together with the All Permanent Secretariat Programme of Activities the Priorities and indicative calendar of events of the Slovenian Chairmanship is presented.

• 24 September, online: the Montenegro CEI Presidency in cooperation with the CEI-Executive Secretariat, holds the videoconference of the annual meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Central European Initiative (CEI), chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, Mr. Srdjan Darmanovic. Minister of Foreign Affairs, deputy ministers of Foreign Affairs, state secretaries, and high representatives in the CEI Member States participate in the meeting to reiterate CEI’s valuable role in fostering constructive political dialogue and project-oriented cooperation among 17 Member States. They also stress the importance of European integration and sustainable development in the region, but also the fundamental role of strong multilateral cooperation in the post-COVID-19 recovery phase.

• 27 October, online: the EUSAIR Stakeholder Platform, in collaboration with the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship of the Universita Politecnica Delle Marche in collaboration with REDETE (Researching Economic Development and Entrepreneurship in Transition Economies), hosts a workshop on the implementation of the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) in the Adriatic-Ionian Macro-regional Strategy (EUSAIR). The webinar aims to exchange opinions on how to build synergies and embed cooperation in the overlap between the EUSAIR pillars and the areas of specialization defined within S3. Also, it invites participants to discuss the correct methodology for the design and implementation of S3 in EUSAIR regions and countries and the problems that might arise from its implementation.

• 7 November, online: the All Slovenian Chairmanship, together with UNI-ADRION and the All Permanent Secretariat, organizes the All Round Table on Inter-University Cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian Region. The objective of the round-table is to discuss the present situation and future perspective of Higher Education challenges and responses in COVID-19 time within the Adriatic Ionian Region (AR). In addition, participants will discuss challenges and best practices of Inter-University Cooperation.

www.aii-ps.org/news/347-save-the-date-aii-round-table-on-inter-university-cooperation-november-17-online
• 9 December, online: the All Slovenian Chairmanship, the All Permanent Secretariat and the three Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities, and Universities) organize a joint-meeting, in videoconference, to exchange views and experiences on topics and issues of common interest related to the future of regional cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian Region. The meeting also constitutes an opportunity to deepen the cooperation between the Fora of Civil Society and the current Slovenian Chairmanship of the All. The organization of this meeting demonstrates the growing awareness of the important contribution the civil society is giving to the EUSAIR Strategy process. Indeed the role of the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce, Cities, and Universities have been repeatedly recognized in the Belgrade Declaration and previous ones, contributing to the connection of citizens and civil society to the intergovernmental level.


5. The Arab League

The League of Arab States (LAS) is an association of 22 countries established in 1945 with the aim of improving coordination among its members on matters of common interest. The founding members of the League (Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Yemen) agreed to seek closer co-
operation on issues regarding economics, communication, culture, nationality, social welfare and health. The LAS traditionally embodies both the idea of Pan-Arabism (the principle of an Arab homeland) and Arab nationalism (respect of each member state's sovereignty). Among the LAS main achievements, the 1950 Joint Defence and Economic Cooperation Treaty; 1995 Draft Agreement on turning the Middle East into a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction; and the 1999 Arab Agreement on Combating Terrorism, should be mentioned. The highest body of the League is the Council, composed of representatives of member states, generally foreign ministers. Each member state has one vote, regardless of the size of the country. The Council meets twice a year, in March and September but it may also convene a special session at the request of two members. The General Secretariat runs the daily activities of the League. It is the executive body of the Council and administrative body of the League. The current SG is the Egyptian Ahmed Aboul Gheit since July 2016, who succeeded Nabil Elaraby. The Arab league struggles with dysfunction and disunity among its members. In 2002 it achieved remarkable consensus on the Arab Peace Initiative. The 2011 Arab revolts in the Middle East and North Africa offered an occasion to propose actions and initiatives: it backed the UN action against Gaddafi's forces in Libya and sent, for the first time in history, a mission of observers to Syria (after suspending its membership in the League). Further information:
http://www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/Pages/default.aspx

Main events of 2020

• 2 January, Cairo, Egypt: The Executive Office of the Council of Arab Youth and Sports Ministers organizes the 64th session of the International Conference entitled "Youth Initiatives and their Relationship to Defeating Terrorism." Participants discuss many important topics that affect Arab Youth, including the modernization of the Arab Youth Policy and the launch of the "Youth Empowerment" campaign. The meeting also aims to enhance the role of youth in making initiatives and linking them to information technology to confront intellectual extremism and harness creativity.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2315

• 18 January, Berlin, Germany: Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, the Secretary-General of the Arab League (LAS), heads to the German capital to participate in the summit called by German Chancellor Ms. Angela Merkel on the Libyan crisis. The meeting represents the conclusion of a series of conferences and preparatory stages and aims at reaching a comprehensive political settlement of the Libyan situation and calls on the Libyan parties to agree on the necessary arrangements to achieve the permanent cessation of military operations. Within the meeting framework, the Secretary-General also renews the League's rejection of all forms of foreign military interference in Libyan affairs.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2385

• 15 February, Cairo, Egypt: Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, meets with Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), to discuss several regional and international issues with a particular focus on the Middle East and Mediterranean region. The meeting comes on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, held annually in the German city, and enjoys the participation of many politicians, security officials, and international experts. Also, the Secretary-General of NATO extends an invitation to the Secretary-General of the League to visit the Alliance headquarters in Brussels to discuss supporting channels of consultation and dialogue regarding regional challenges and crises facing the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2400

• 5 March, Cairo, Egypt: Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, receives Mr. Christian Saunders, the Acting Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRAWA). The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States expresses concerns over the financial situation of UNRAWA. Participants then exchange ideas on how to bridge the budget deficit UNRAWA faces, which negatively affects the organization's operations in education, health
and other sectors, and reflects directly on the Palestinian refugee communities. Finally, Mr. Aboul Gheit emphasizes the important role of UNRWA in supporting stability in the Middle East region, thanking the donor countries – Arab and non-Arab – for their generous contribution.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2401

- **15 April, Cairo, Egypt:** Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the LAS, listens to the assessments of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria on security situation in Syria, stressing the importance of consolidating the current armistice that was reached between the Turkish and Russian sides, maintaining the ceasefire and calming the military situation. Within the meeting, the parties also discuss the ongoing health situation and the dangerous social and economic consequences of the possible spread of the COVID-19 pandemic across the most vulnerable areas and among refugees and displaced persons.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2424

- **5 May, Cairo, Egypt:** The General-Secretariat of the League of Arab States (Social Sector) issues a report titled “The current situation and post-Coronavirus vision and health and social repercussions of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).” Mr. Haifa Abu-Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Social Affairs Sector, states that the report includes, in addition to analysing health, social and development implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in Arab countries, a brief presentation of the efforts of Arab countries to contain the pandemic. Furthermore, the report provides a series of short and long-term recommendations in support of the decision-maker to develop the necessary policies to deal with the consequences of the sanitary crisis and mitigate its economic and social repercussions.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2441

- **14 May, online:** The General Secretariat of the League of Arab States participates, via videoconference, in the International Follow-up Committee on Libya, at the Berlin International Conference. The meeting, chaired by Italy and jointly organized with the United Nations support missions to Libya, sees the participation of 18 delegations from countries and regional and international organizations. Within the meeting, emphasis is placed on the revision and evaluation of the latest political and military developments in Libya and proposing possible ways to solve the conflict. In his intervention, Ambassador Hossam Zaki presents the Arab position concerning the situation in Libya. He stresses that the priority from the Arab League’s point of view, in light of the current situation, should be reaching a ceasefire and cooperating to support the initiation of a high-level political dialogue with the actors involved in the Libyan transition process.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2449

- **17 June, online:** The Department of Women, Family, and Childhood (Social Affairs Sector) organizes the 39th session of the Ministerial Meeting Arab’s Women’s Committee, headed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and hosted online, on “Examining the effects of the Covid-19 virus on women and girls.” The events constitute an opportunity to exchange the best experiences among member states on several issues affecting women’s lives.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2467

- **22 June, online:** The 3rd meeting of the International Follow-up Committee on Libya (IFCL) at the Senior Officials level is co-chaired by the League of Arab States, represented by Assistant Secretary-General Hosam Zaki, and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), represented by Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General Stephanie Williams. The meeting follows from the last meeting of the IFCL, which was held on 13 May 2020 and co-hosted by Italy and UNSMIL. Within this framework, participants recall the importance of addressing, within the 5 + 5 JMC negotiations, comprehensive provisions regarding the repatriation of all foreign mercenaries; the multiple violations of the UN arms embargo; the various attempts to resume an inclusive political process and completing Libya’s transition. Participants also welcome the progress achieved so far by the four thematic technical working groups of the IFCL, addressing security, political, economic and international humanitarian law and human rights issues, in following up and operationalizing the conclusions of the Berlin Conference. They also stress the IFCL’s efforts to support a durable and peaceful Libyan-led resolution of the conflict, under UN auspices.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2476

- **27 July, online:** The United Nations Development Programme UNDP, the Government of Japan, and the League of Arab States hold a round table on the impacts of COVID-19 in the Arab region. The main participants meet with other relevant United Nations agencies to assess the repercussions of the pandemic and discuss the need for coordination and cooperation to prevent further crises. The meeting also contributes to strengthening joint efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on development and identify potential opportunities to move towards more inclusive and sustainable development, supporting the most vulnerable.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2520

- **30 August, Cairo, Egypt:** The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States meets with Stephanie Williams, acting Head of the United Nations Support Mission, to discuss the overall developments in the Libyan arena and possible ways to push the efforts to settle the Libyan crisis on its military, political and economic tracks. Participants reaffirm the significance of previous declarations and stress the importance of installing the ceasefire, resuming the production and export of oil and re-establishing political dialogue to establish a political dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations. The Secretary-General emphasizes that all these efforts cannot succeed unless all foreign military intervention in the Libyan territory stop, including mercenaries and foreign forces.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2550

- **3 September, Cairo:** The Aboul Gheit, the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, receives the High Representative for European Foreign Policy, Joseph Borrell, at the headquarters of the General Secretariat.
of the League. The two sides exchange views on the current developments in the MENA region and prospects for cooperation between the two parties at various levels. Participants discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts and highlight the importance of joint Arab-European work to consolidate consensus on the determinants of a peaceful settlement within the two-state solution framework. They also discuss Libya’s situation and stresses the importance of maintaining the current calm and establishing a ceasefire on the ground between the forces of the Government of National Accord and the Libyan National Army, and encourage the Libyan parties resume inclusive political dialogue.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2557

• 30 September, online: The General Secretariat of the Arab League (Human Rights Administration), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa), together with the participation of representatives of stakeholders in 17 Arab countries, as well as the Arab Human Rights Commissions, take part in a specialized digital communication technology symposium on the “Impact of COVID-19 on human trafficking.” The event is part of the Arab League-level efforts to identify the economic and social repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants emphasize the need to strengthen capacity-building programmes that tackle the crime of human sale and trafficking in women and children, as they were strongly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Member state representatives share views, concerns, and proposals on how to pre-empt the activities of organized crime networks dealing with human trafficking.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2593

• 8 October, Juba, Sudan: The Arab League signs as a witness, the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan. The ceremony occurs in Juba, in the presence of General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the first vice president of the Sudanese Transitional Sovereignty Council, leaders of Sudanese armed movements, and senior officials of the Government of South Sudan. The agreement is highly complex and covers various areas, including governance, security and transitional justice. Nevertheless, it constitutes a milestone in the country’s history as it is intended to inform the future constitutional negotiation process.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2601

• 14 October, Cairo, Egypt: The Arab League Secretary General receives the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Mr. Nikolai Udinov to discuss the latest developments of the Palestinian situation, from a political, security and economic point of view. The Arab League Secretary-general expresses Arab points of view on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and reiterates the idea that the stability of the region is directly related to reaching a political settlement based on the two-state solution, which, from an Arab perspective, remains the only internationally acceptable solution. Furthermore, the UN Special Coordination for the Middle East Peace Process presents the economic and social challenges faced by the Palestinian region, especially with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2608

• 17 October, Cairo, Egypt: Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the Arab League, receives the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, Arancha González Laya, at the Headquarters of the General Secretariat of the Arab League. Participants discuss several topics of common interest, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and ways to improve the relationship between the Arab League and Spain in several areas, such as the politics, economics and cultural ones.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2610

• 23 November, online: Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, the Secretary-General of the Arab League (LAS), participates in a meeting organized by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres with more than 20 regional organizations from the Arab, African, Asian, European and American region. The conference aims to discuss the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on international peace and security and find new ways to maximize cooperation between the United Nations and the regional organizations to address global cross-border challenges.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2660

• 2 December, online: The Secretary-General of the Arab League takes part in the international meeting, held under the joint auspices of the United Nations and France, in support of the Lebanese people. The Secretary-General of the Arab League makes a speech where he stresses the contributions made so far by the Joint Arab Action System to support the Lebanese people in the wake of the Beirut port bombing in August, including, for example, the contribution of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. Also, Mr. Aboul Gheit indicates the importance of giving Lebanon global support in these difficult circumstances, stressing the need for Lebanon to form, as soon as possible, a new government to carry out the necessary reforms to deal with the severe crisis the country faces.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2679

• 10 December, online: The League of Arab States (LAS), the Government of Japan, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) convene a senior-policy roundtable under the theme of “Towards Recovery from COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities for the Arab Region.” The roundtable brings together experts and stakeholders from across the region to discuss recovery policies and explore pathways to work towards a sustainable future. Experts from the UNDP and the Arab region assess and present policy responses to address the impact on vulnerable businesses and groups in the discussion, confirming the importance of turning the crisis into an opportunity to strengthening regional and international cooperation as a fundamental step to moving forward and accelerating efforts towards achieving the SDGs.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2706

• 28 December: The General Secretariat of the Arab League welcomes the appointment of Norwegian diplomat Mr. Tor Wennesland as the UN Special
Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. Mr. Wennesland succeeds Nickolay Mladenov of Bulgaria and, according to his new role, Mr. Wennesland will be the Envoy of the Secretary-General to the Quartet. The Secretary-General congratulates the new envoy and expresses his readiness to collaborate in order to restore peace in the region.

www.leagueofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2706

6. Summit of the Southern European Union Countries

The 1st Mediterranean EU Countries’ Summit took place in September 2016 in Malta to enhance their cooperation and contribute to the dialogue on the future of the EU. The recovery from the crisis, high migration flows, instability in the southern Mediterranean, Brexit, and Euro-scepticism need a united response from south European countries. With the Athens Declaration, the Heads of State and Government (HoSG) of the Republic of Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain underline their strong commitment to European unity. They are convinced that the EU needs fresh energy to address the common challenges the Member States are facing and uphold its values of freedom, democracy and rule of law, and tolerance and solidarity. The countries, therefore, propose the following priorities and measures: ensuring the internal and external security of Europe, reinforcing cooperation in the Mediterranean and with African countries, fostering growth and investment in Europe, strengthening programmes for youth, and addressing the challenge of migration. Athens Declaration 2016.

https://southeusummit.com/about/athens-declaration/

• 4 June, online: The ministers in charge of European Affairs of Greece, Cyprus, France, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain, meet by videoconference to join efforts in ensuring Europe can withstand the sanitary and economic crisis and come out of it united and stronger. They discuss several topics, including the plan for Europe’s economic recovery, based on solidarity; the Future of Europe and the strategic importance of the Southern Neighbourhood; the lessons to be learned from the severe sanitary crisis; the management of migratory flows; the Commission’s proposal of a new European pact on migration and asylum; the latest developments in the eastern Mediterranean and the reiteration of the European Council Conclusions of December 2019 and, finally, the Statement of EU Foreign Ministers of 15 May 2020. The videoconference also prepares the MED 7 Summit Meeting, which is to be held in Ajaccio, France, in the near future.

www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/es/SalaDePrensa/NotasDePrensa/Documents/MED%20meeting_joint%20statement.pdf

• 10 September, Ajaccio, France: The declaration issued after the 7th Summit of the Southern EU Countries highlights the strategic importance of the Southern Neighbourhood for Europe. The participants to the Med 7 propose giving new strength to a holistic European policy in the Mediterranean, intending to enhance the European Union capacity and its Member States to face collectively and efficiently the regions’ challenges. Overall, the declaration issued after the 7th summit tackles several issues: peace and stability in the Mediterranean, with particular attention given to the relationship of the EU with Turkey and security issues in Greece and Cyprus; the volatile situation in Libya, on which the stability of the country itself but also the entire region depends; ongoing Syrian instability and the Syrian refugees crisis; Beirut’s explosion on 4 August and Lebanon’s economic adjustment; Middle-East Peace Process; the European agenda: the Next Generation EU and its implementation; and the new European Pact on Migration and Asylum to be presented by the Commission.

This chapter provides details of the results of presidential and legislative elections that took place in 2020 in independent states, presented in circum-Mediterranean order. The list also includes referenda and those elections held in autonomous entities or in any other relevant territory that are of particular political significance.

Croatia

Presidential elections

22 December 2019 (first round), and 5 January 2020 (second round)

Previous elections: 28 December 2014 (first round), and 11 January 2015 (second round)

Croatia is a parliamentary republic. The President is elected by absolute major-
North Macedonia

Legislative elections

15 July 2020

Previous elections: 11 December 2016

The Republic of North Macedonia has a unicameral parliament (Sobranie) with 123 seats to serve four-year term. Deputies are elected through a closed-list proportional representation system, and three of them represent the diaspora. There is no threshold.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We Can Coalition (Social Democratic Alliance Coalition, SDSM and allies (Social democracy, Third way))</td>
<td>35.89</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewal (Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity, VMRO-DPMNE and allies) (Conservatism)</td>
<td>34.57</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Union for Integration (DU/BDI) (Albanian minority interests)</td>
<td>14.18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance for Albanians-Alternative</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Left (socialist)</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA/PDSH) (Albanian minority interests)</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Turnout: 52.02%

Jordan

Legislative elections (House of Deputies)

20 September 2016

Previous elections: 23 January 2013

The Arab Kingdom of Jordan has a bicameral National Assembly (Majlis al-Umma) consisting of the Senate (Majlis al-Ayan) with 65 seats and the Chamber of Deputies (Majlis al-Nuwaab) of 130 members, elected as follows: 15 members elected by open list proportional representation from 23 constituencies of between three and nine seats in size. 15 women members are elected from 15 of the constituencies, in which the female candidate with the most votes is elected. Nine members are elected by the Christian minority from nine of the constituencies, in which the Christian candidate with the most votes is elected. Finally, three members are elected by the Chechen-Circassian minority from three of the constituencies. Each constituency was contested by multiple lists, some of them allied to lists in other constituencies, but most of them purely local.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Majlis al-Ayan (Social Democrats (Neoliberalism))</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majlis al-Nuwaab (Social Democrats)</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanian List (Albanian minority interests)</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanian Coalition (Albanian minority interests)</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Turnout: 76.84%

Israel

Legislative elections

2 March 2019

Previous elections: 9 April 2019

Israel is a parliamentary republic with a unicameral legislature (Knesset). Elections are called to elect the 120 members through a closed-list proportional representation system to serve four-year terms. There is a 2% threshold.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Action Front (Islamist, Muslim Brotherhood)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Centrist Party (ICP, Islamist)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Jordanian United Front Party</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Al-Wafa Party</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Turnout: 29.9%

Egypt

Legislative elections

From 21 October to 8 December 2020

Previous elections: 17 October and 2 December 2015

Egypt has a unicameral parliament, the House of Representatives (Majlis al-Nuwaab) with 596 seats. The representatives are elected with the following proportion: 566 directly elected and the other 28 can be appointed by the President, all for a five-year term. A total of 568 seats will be elected through a system of parallel voting; 284 of them will be elected using a two-round system in 142 constituencies and the other 284 will be elected using party lists in four constituencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Seats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nation’s Future Party</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican People’s Party</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Wafd Party</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeland Defenders Party</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Egypt Party</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform and Development Party</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian Social Democratic Party</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian Freedom Party</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Egyptian Conference Party</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Al Nour Party</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagammu</td>
<td>6</td>
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## TABLE A1

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## CHART A1

![Chart showing Official Aid to Mediterranean Countries Financed under the European Commission Budget and the European Development Fund (EDF) in 2019](chart.png)

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### TABLE A3  European External Assistance in the Mediterranean Countries by Country and Instrument** – Disbursements

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<th>2020</th>
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### Table A7: European Investment Bank Loans toward Mediterranean Countries in 2020

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<tr>
<td>Corridor VC Medakovo - Poprikuse</td>
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<td>RLBH loan for SMEs Mid-Caps &amp; Priority Projects II</td>
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<td>Corridor VC Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
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<td>Main Roads Rehabilitation Program</td>
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<td>PDB Covid19 response for SMEs &amp; Mid-Caps</td>
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<td>IDFB Covid19 response for SMEs &amp; Mid-Caps</td>
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<td>EBM Loan for SMEs &amp; Other Priorities</td>
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<td>Montenegro Water and Sanitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Procredit WB Covid19 response for SMEs &amp; Mid-Caps</td>
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<td>Serbia</td>
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<td>Connected Schools in Serbia</td>
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<td>EBS Covid19 Crisis Response for SMEs &amp; Mid-Caps</td>
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<td>UCBS Impact Incentive Loan for SMEs &amp; Mid-Caps</td>
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<td>Kosovo*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOREK II Desalination Plant</td>
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<td>Jordan</td>
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<td>Palestine</td>
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<td>Vitas Palestine Microloans</td>
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<td>Palestine Private Sector Covid-19 Response</td>
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<td>Egypt</td>
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<td>Banque du Caire Loan for SMEs</td>
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<td>Banque Misr Covid19 Loan for SMEs and Mid-Caps</td>
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<td>Automotive Glass Manufacturing Morocco</td>
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<td>CAM- Smes &amp; Mid-Caps Agri and Rural Development</td>
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<td>AL Amana Microcredit</td>
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<td>Tunisia</td>
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<td>Support to the Drinking Water Sector</td>
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### Table A8: Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO)

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<th>Funding Allocations in Mediterranean Areas</th>
<th>Millions of euros</th>
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<td>Area</td>
<td>2020</td>
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<td>19.1</td>
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<td>Syrian Crisis (Syria, Lebanon and Jordan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Africa (Algeria, Libya and Egypt)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balkans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>348.6</td>
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Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/financing-decisions-hips-2020_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/financing-decisions-hips-2020_en)
Cooperation in the Mediterranean

Spanish Cooperation in the Mediterranean

**TABLE B1**

Breakdown of Net Spanish Development Assistance in the Mediterranean Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2018-2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>€</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maghreb and Middle East</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>5,184,042</td>
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<td>Jordan</td>
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<td>121,846</td>
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<td>Lebanon</td>
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<td>11,534,991</td>
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<td>45.64</td>
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<td>Palestine</td>
<td>38,110,595</td>
<td>29,707,293</td>
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<td>Western Saharan Refugees</td>
<td>10,787,032</td>
<td>11,632,800</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>30,474,487</td>
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<td>Tunisia</td>
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<td>-</td>
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**CHART B1**

Breakdown of Spanish Gross Development Aid in the Maghreb and the Middle East by Sector (2019)


![chart showing breakdown of Spanish aid sectors](chart.png)


## Table B2: Breakdown of Spanish Cooperation in the Mediterranean Region by Sustainable Development Goals (2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Albania</th>
<th>North Macedonia</th>
<th>Bosnia and Herzegovina</th>
<th>Kosovo*</th>
<th>Montenegro</th>
<th>Serbia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Algeria</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Libya</th>
<th>Western Sahara</th>
<th>Tunisia</th>
<th>Morocco</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Palestine</th>
<th>Syria</th>
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### TABLE C2  Number of Foreigners from Southern Mediterranean Countries in MENA Countries, mid year 2020

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<th>Tunisia</th>
<th>Libya</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Palestine</th>
<th>Syria</th>
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### CHART C1  Migration Flows in the Mediterranean Sea, 2015-2020

![Migration Flows in the Mediterranean Sea, 2015-2020](chart.png)


Central route: [Migration flows in the Mediterranean Sea from the Western, Central and Eastern routes - 2015-2019](chart.png).

Eastern route: [Migration flows in the Mediterranean Sea from the Western, Central and Eastern routes - 2015-2019](chart.png).

Total: [Migration flows in the Mediterranean Sea from the Western, Central and Eastern routes - 2015-2019](chart.png).

% missing: [Migration flows in the Mediterranean Sea from the Western, Central and Eastern routes - 2015-2019](chart.png).
### TABLE C3

**Total Asylum Applications from MPCs in the European Union, 2020**

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<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
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### TABLE C4

**International Protection Status Given by the EU**

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CHART C2  Asylum Stock Pending Cases in EU, 2020

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More than 6 months  
Less than 6 months


CHART C3  Syrian Refugees in 2020 (countries gathering 98% of total Syrian refugees)

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### TABLE D1

**Merchandise Trade between Mediterranean Countries**

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EU28, Mediterranean Yearbook 2021
### Commercial Relations of the Mediterranean Countries

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#### Chart 2

**Import Ratio from EU and from the Mediterranean, 2019**

- EU/total imports
- Med/total imports
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<th>Minerals fuels, lubricants and related materials</th>
<th>Animals and Vegetables</th>
<th>Chemicals and related products</th>
<th>Manufactured goods</th>
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### Chart D3: Trade Openness (Trade as % of GDP), 2019

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### Chart D4: Percentage of Services in Total Export and Total Import, 2019

The Herfindahl-Hirschmann Index (HHI) is calculated as $H^* = H - 1/N$, where $H = \sum_i s_i^2$ and $s_i$ is the share of each import (export) flows of country $i$ in total imports (exports) of country $i$. The HHI is an index of concentration and ranges from 0 to 1. Values closer to 1 indicate highly concentrated flows. Here it is calculated with Mediterranean trading partners only. Own production. Source: UNCTAD.

### Chart D5: Herfindahl Hirschmann Index (HHI) of Geographical Concentration in the Mediterranean, 2019
Intra-regional Trade Intensity Index (IRTII) and Intra-regional Trade Shares (IRTS, 2018)

Intra-Med trade: $580 billion in 2019:
- 24% inter-subregions
- 66% intra-West
- 10% intra-East

IRTII: 1.85
IRTS: 6%

Intra-Med trade: $580 billion in 2019:
- 3.5% inter-subregions
- 4.0% intra-Middle East
- 1.4% intra-North Africa

IRTII: 0.97
IRTS: 2%

Intra-Med trade: $580 billion in 2019:
- 25% inter-subregions
- 72% intra-North
- 3% intra-South

IRTII: 1.67
IRTS: 11%

Intra-Mediterranean Total Trade and Intra-regional Trade Intensity Index (IRTII), 2005-2018

The IRTS (intra-regional trade share) \( \frac{T_{ii}}{T_{i}} \) is the share of intra-regional trade to total trade of the region. \( T_{i} \) is the sum of exports and imports of region \( i \) with region \( j \). \( T_{i} \) is the sum of imports and exports of region \( i \) vis-à-vis the rest of the world. A higher share indicates a higher degree of dependency on regional trade. The IRTII (intra-regional trade intensity index) is calculated as \( \frac{\frac{T_{ii}}{T_{i}}}{\frac{T_{i}}{T_w}} \), where \( T_w \) is the sum of world exports and imports. If it is greater than 1, flows are greater than expected. An IRTII larger than 1 indicates shares that are greater than expected. Own calculations using UNCTAD data.
### Signature of Multilateral Treaties and Conventions

#### TABLE E1

<table>
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<th>Accession or succession to Human Rights Treaties</th>
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Source: ILO

### TABLE E2

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Source: ILO
Appendices
Signature of Multilateral Treaties and Conventions

TABLE E3

Persistent
organic
pollutantsg

Kyoto
Protocolb

Biological
diversityc

Biosafety
Protocold

CITES e

Date of adoption

1992

1997

1992

2000

1973

1994

2001

1985

1989

Portugal
Spain
France
Italy
Malta

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Slovenia
Croatia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Serbia
Montenegro

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North Macedonia
Albania
Greece
Cyprus
Turkey

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Syria
Lebanon
Jordan
Israel
Palestine

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2019

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1994
1989
1994
2015

Egypt
Libya
Tunisia
Algeria
Morocco

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1998
1995

UN

UN

UN

UN

CITES

UN

UN

UN

UN

Source:

Desertificationf

2015

Ozone
layerh

Control of
hazardous wastes
and their disposali

Climate
changea


TABLE E4

Multilateral Disarmament Treatiesa
Geneva
Protocolc

Nuclear
weaponsd

Date of adoption

1925

1968

1972

1980

1992

1996

1997

Portugal
Spain
France
Italy
Malta

1930
1929
1926
1928
1970

1977
1987
1992
1975
1970

1972
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1984
1975
1975

1997
1993
1988
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1995

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1998
1998
1999
2001

1999
1999
1998
1999
2001

Slovenia
Croatia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Serbia
Montenegro

2008
2006

1992
1992
1994
1970
2006

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1993
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1973
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1998
2000
2003
2003
2003

2017
1995
1995
2015

2013
2008
1997
1993b
2018

2008
1998
1996b

1998

446
IEMed. Mediterranean Yearbook 2021

Multilateral Environmental Treatiesj

2006

Bacteriological
weaponse

Conventional
weapons f

Chemical
weaponsg

Nuclear
testingh

North Macedonia
Albania
Greece
Cyprus
Turkey

2015
1989
1931
1966
1929

1995
1990
1970
1970
1980

1997
1992
1975
1973
1974

Syria
Lebanon
Jordan
Israel
Palestine

1968
1969
1977
1969
2018

1968
1970
1970

1972b
1975
1975

2015

2018

Egypt
Libya
Tunisia
Algeria
Morocco

1928
1971
1967
1992
1970

1981
1975
1970
1995
1970

1972b
1982
1973
2001
2002

1987
2015
2002

2004
1997
1995
1995

1996b
2004
2004
2003
2000

UN

UN

UN

UN

UN

UN

Source:

1981b

Antipersonnel
minesi

2017

1999
2001
UN

a. Ratification, acceptance, approval, accession or succession. b. Signature. c. Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of
Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction.


### TABLE F1 Human Development Index (HDI)

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Own production. Source: UNDP.

* Data refer to 2019 or the most recent year available.

### CHART F1 Gross National Income (GNI) per Capita (constant 2017 PPP$)

GNI per Capita (constant 2017 PPP$) Rank

Own production. Source: UNDP.
### TABLE F2  Population: Demography

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Source: WB UNPOP WB WB WB WB UNPOP WB WB WB UNPOP UNPOP UNPOP UNPOP

### CHART F2  International Migrant Stock by Country of Origin, 2020

- **International migrant stock by region of origin, 2020**

- **International migrant stock by country of origin, 2020**

Own production. Source: UNPOP.
### TABLE F3 Population: Structure and Distribution

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<th>Rural population</th>
<th>Population in urban agglomerations of more than 1 million</th>
<th>Population located in the Mediterranean coastal regions</th>
<th>Urban population using at least basic sanitation services</th>
<th>Population density</th>
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<td>(thousands)</td>
<td>(thousands)</td>
<td>(people per km²)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>2019</td>
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Source: UNPOP. Own production. a. Latest data available from this period. b. Own production according to National Statistical Offices data. c. Data from 2017. d. Data from 2018. e. Data from 2008. (..) Data unavailable.

### CHART F3 Evolution of Urban Population (1950-2020)

![Evolution of Urban Population Chart](chart.png)

### TABLE F4: Education and Training of Human Capital

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<th>Country</th>
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<th>Duration of compulsory education</th>
<th>R&amp;D personnel headcount</th>
<th>R&amp;D expenditures</th>
<th>Public expenditure on education</th>
<th>Pre-primary and primary</th>
<th>Secondary and post-secondary</th>
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### CHART F4: Repetition Rate by Level and Gender (%) (2017-2018)

![Chart F4: Repetition Rate by Level and Gender (%) (2017-2018)](chart_data.png)

- **Primary female**
- **Primary male**
- **Lower secondary female**
- **Lower secondary male**

Own production. Source: UNESCO.
### TABLE F5  Health and Survival

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<th>People living with HIV/AIDS</th>
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*own production. Source: IGME, CME, WB, WHO, UNAIDS, WHO.*


### CHART F5  Evolution of Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 100,000 live births) in Selected Mediterranean Countries

Source: WHO.
### TABLE F6 Nutrition and Food Security

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Food supply kcal/person/day</th>
<th>Food supply mt</th>
<th>Food supply thousands $</th>
<th>Cereal trade mt</th>
<th>Cereal trade thousands $</th>
<th>Children underweight % of children aged &lt; 5</th>
<th>Children overweight % of children aged &lt; 5</th>
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Own production. Source: FAO. Latest data available for this period. Data unavailable.

### CHART F6 Food Supply by Source (2018)

[Food Supply by Source (2018)](chart)
### TABLE F7 Access to Health Resources

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<th>Population using safely managed drinking-water service</th>
<th>Population using safely managed sanitation services</th>
<th>Births attended by skilled health personnel</th>
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<th>Current health expenditure</th>
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Own production. Source: WHO. Latest data available for this period. b. Data from 2016. c. Data from 2015. d. Data from 2014. e. Data from 2013. f. Data from 2012. g. Data from 2011. (..) Data unavailable.

### CHART F7 Health Workforce

Countries with the highest value of health workforce

- Nursing and midwifery personnel (per 10,000)
- Medical doctors (per 10,000)

Own production. Source: WHO.
TABLE F8 Gender: Social Development

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<th>Life expectancy at birth</th>
<th>Adult literacy rate</th>
<th>Combined gross enrolment ratio, primary to tertiary</th>
<th>Year women received right to vote</th>
<th>Year women received right to stand for election</th>
<th>Year first woman elected or appointed to parliament</th>
<th>Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments</th>
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<td>men years</td>
<td>% of females 15+</td>
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Own production. Source: IPU. *The values shown refer to lower or single chamber.

| CHART F8 Women in Politics (2021) |

Own production. Source: IPU. *The values shown refer to lower or single chamber.

Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments

Proportion of women in ministerial positions
### TABLE F9  Technology and Communications

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<th>Mobile-cellular telephone subscriptions</th>
<th>Fixed-broadband subscriptions</th>
<th>Active mobile-broadband subscriptions</th>
<th>Proportion of households with computer</th>
<th>Proportion of households with internet access</th>
<th>Internet users</th>
<th>Share of ICT goods as percentage of total trade</th>
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<td>%</td>
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*Own production. Source: ITU.*

a. Latest data available for this period.

b. 2016.

c. 2015.

(…) Data unavailable.

---

### CHART F9  ICT Price Basket: Fixed Broadband 5GB* (2020)

[Chart showing ICT Price Basket: Fixed Broadband 5GB* by Region (PPT$)]

Purchasing Power Parity Dollars

Own production. Source: ITU.

*Data refer to revised fixed-broadband basket with a monthly data usage of (a minimum of) 5 GB.
TABLE F10  Security and Military Expenditure

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<th>Conventional arms transfer</th>
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Source: IDMC, UNHCR, UNHCR, WB, SIPRI, SIPRI, SIPRI, SIPRI, SIPRI

Appendices

IE Med. Mediterranean Yearbook 2021

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IE Med. Mediterranean Yearbook 2021

Military Expenditure, 2020

Top Five Countries by Military Expenditure

Top Five Countries by Military Expenditure

Military Expenditure

Top Five Countries by Military Expenditure

Military Expenditure

Military Expenditure

Military Expenditure

Military Expenditure

Military Expenditure

Military Expenditure

Military Expenditure

Military Expenditure

Military Expenditure

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Military Expenditure

Military Expenditure
### TABLE F11
#### Economic Structure and Production

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<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP, current prices millions $</th>
<th>GDP per capita, current prices $</th>
<th>GDP growth annual %</th>
<th>Share in GDP by sector</th>
<th>Consumer price index</th>
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Own production. Source: IMF IMF WB UNCTAD UNCTAD UNCTAD IMF

<sup>a</sup> Data from 2018. <sup>..</sup> Data unavailable.

### CHART F11
#### Share in GDP by Sector

[Chart showing share in GDP by sector for different countries, including Agriculture, Industry, and Services.]
### TABLE F12: Agriculture

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<th>Land area</th>
<th>Agricultural areaa</th>
<th>Arable and permanent crops</th>
<th>Permanent pasture</th>
<th>Total area for irrigation</th>
<th>Land under cereal production</th>
<th>Cereal production</th>
<th>Cereal yield</th>
<th>Fertilizer consumption</th>
<th>Economically active population in agriculture</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>thousands ha</td>
<td>thousands ha</td>
<td>thousands ha</td>
<td>thousands ha</td>
<td>thousands ha</td>
<td>thousands tm</td>
<td>kg/ha</td>
<td>kg/ha</td>
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</table>

*Own production. Source: FAO*

* a. Agricultural area is divided into “arable land and permanent crops” and “permanent meadows and pastures.” (..) Data unavailable.

### CHART F12: Crops Production, 2019

**Total production (in tonnes)**

- Cereals
- Fruit Primary
- Oil crops
- Roots and Tuber
- Vegetables
- Other

- **Total production (in tonnes)**
  - 693,053,695
  - 137,375,780
  - 115,097,625
  - 89,588,493
  - 65,072,600
  - 50,701,760
  - 26,132,257
  - 24,475,712
  - 17,556,324
  - 12,992,115
  - 11,293,340
  - 9,281,174
  - 6,904,180
  - 5,311,210
  - 3,674,597
  - 3,265,097
  - 2,852,929
  - 2,664,358
  - 2,262,575
  - 2,150,828
  - 2,038,576
  - 1,003,870
  - 800,241
  - 354,286
  - 139,068
  - 64,700

*Own production. Source: FAO.*
TABLE F13  Livestock

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<th>Live animals</th>
<th>Live live animals trade</th>
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<td>pigs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>thousands</td>
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</table>

Own production. Source: FAO FAO FAO FAO FAO UNCTAD UNCTAD
<sup>a</sup> Included bovine, caprine, ovine and buffalo livestock. <sup>b</sup> Includes chickens, hens, ducks, turkeys and geese. <sup>c</sup> Includes horses, asses, mules and camels. <sup>d</sup> Data from 2018. <sup>e</sup> Data from 2017. (...) Data unavailable.

CHART F13  Cheese Production by Country, in Tonnes (2018)

Own production. Source: FAO.
### TABLE F14: Fisheries

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<th>Total fisheries</th>
<th>Mediterranean and Black Sea catches</th>
<th>Aquaculture production</th>
<th>Trade in fish and derivative products</th>
<th>Fish and seafood supply quantity</th>
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<td></td>
<td>mt</td>
<td>mt</td>
<td>quantity</td>
<td>value</td>
<td>export value</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2018</td>
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Own production. Source: FAO.

(\) Data unavailable.

### CHART F14: Fish and Seafood Supply Quantity per Capita (2014-2018)

[Graph showing fish and seafood supply quantity per capita for various countries with data for 2014 to 2018]
### TABLE F15: Employment and Unemployment

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<th>Employment by economic sector</th>
<th>Unemployment rate</th>
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<td>% of labour force</td>
<td>% of labour force</td>
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</table>

Own production. Source: ILO.

### CHART F15: Employment by Sex and Status in Employment (2019)

**Female**:
- Employees
- Employers
- Own-account workers
- Contributing family workers

**Male**:
- Employees
- Employers
- Own-account workers
- Contributing family workers

Own production. Source: ILO.
### TABLE F16  
**Income Distribution**

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>lowest 20%</th>
<th>second 20%</th>
<th>third 20%</th>
<th>fourth 20%</th>
<th>highest 20%</th>
<th>Richest 10% to poorest 10%</th>
<th>Gini index</th>
</tr>
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<td>12.6</td>
<td>16.5</td>
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<td>41.4</td>
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<td>17.1</td>
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**Own production. Source:** ILO.

---

### CHART F17 Time-related Underemployment Rate by Sex (2019)

[Chart showing time-related underemployment rate by sex for various countries, with data for select countries and regions highlighted.]
### TABLE F18  Production and Energy Consumption

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<th>Energy production</th>
<th>Energy use</th>
<th>Energy use per capita</th>
<th>Energy use by GDP (PPP)</th>
<th>Net energy import</th>
<th>Share of total primary energy supply</th>
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<td>millions mt oil eq</td>
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<sup>a</sup> Value calculated using IEA data.  
<sup>b</sup> Negative values indicate that the country is a net exporter.  
<sup>c</sup> Includes hydroelectric, biofuels, and waste and geothermal, solar and wind.  
<sup>…</sup> Data unavailable.

---

### CHART F18  Energy Production by Renewables and Waste Sources (2012-2018)

**Countries with more than 5,000 ktoe Produced by Renewables and Waste Sources**

**Countries with less than 5,000 ktoe Produced by Renewables and Waste Sources**

**Evolution of Energy Production by Renewables and Waste Sources in all Mediterranean Countries**

*Own production. Source: IEA.*
### TABLE F19  Production, Consumption and Access to Electricity

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<th>Sources of electricity</th>
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<td>% 2018</td>
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Own production. Source: WB IEA IEA IEA IEA IEA IEA IEA IEA IEA

- Excluding hydroelectric.
- Data unavailable.

### CHART F19  Imports and Exports of Electricity (GWh), (2018)

![Import and Export Chart](chart.png)

Own production. Source: IEA.
## Table F20: CO₂ Emissions

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<td>kg CO₂ / PPP $ (2015)</td>
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*Own production. Source: IEA, IEA, IEA, IEA, IEA, IEA, IEA, IEA, IEA, IEA.*

a. This does not include motorcycles.
b. Own production according to IEA data.
c. Own production according to OICA data.

---

### Chart F20: CO₂ Emissions (2018)

- **CO₂ emissions / TES (tonnes CO₂ / terajoule)**
- **CO₂ emissions / capita (tonnes)**
- **CO₂ emissions (millions tonnes)**
- **CO₂ emissions (2018)**

![Chart showing CO₂ emissions](image-url)
TABLE F21 Water

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Water resources (national)</th>
<th>Water resources (coming from other countries)</th>
<th>Water consumption</th>
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Own production. Source: FAO. ( .. ) Data unavailable.

CHART F21 Dam Capacity (2017)

Countries with highest Dam Capacity

- Total dam capacity
- Dam capacity per capita

Own production. Source: FAO.
### TABLE F22 Environment

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<th>Country</th>
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| a. For these groups there are still many species that have not been assessed. The figures presented should be interpreted as the number of species known to be threatened within those species that have been assessed to date. (..) Data unavailable.

### CHART F22 Threatened Species in Each Major Group by Country

**Mammals**

- **Birds**

- **Reptiles**

- **Amphibians**

- **Fishes**

- **Molluscs**

- **Other Inverts**

Own production. Source: UICN.

* For these groups there are still many species that have not been assessed. The figures presented should be interpreted as the number of species known to be threatened within those species that have been assessed to date.
### TABLE F23 International Trade

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Exports&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Imports&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Coverage Ratio</th>
<th>Trade Balance</th>
<th>Current Account Balance</th>
<th>Workers' Remittances&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Foreign Direct Investment Inflows</th>
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Own production. Source: UNCTAD.

<sup>a</sup> Percentage of exports and imports of goods and services.
<sup>b</sup> Personal transfers and compensation of employees.
<sup>c</sup> Own production using UNCTAD data.
<sup>d</sup> Only refers to goods.

### CHART F23 Trade of Services (2019)

![Chart showing trade of services as percentage of total exports and imports across Mediterranean countries](chart.png)

Own production. Source: UNCTAD.
### TABLE F24

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Own production. Source: UNCTAD.

### CHART F24

Exports by Geographical Destination (2019)

[Bar chart showing exports by geographical destination with percentages for each destination.]

Own production. Source: UNCTAD.
TABLE F25  Imports

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Own production. Source: UNCTAD.

CHART F25  Imports by Geographical Origin (2019)
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<td>5.5</td>
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*Own production. Source: UNWTO UNWTO UNWTO UNWTO WB UNWTO UNWTO WB WB.

### Chart F26: Tourism Seasonability, International Tourist Arrivals by Month (in %) (2019)

- Tunisia
- Egypt
- Israel
- Jordan
- Croatia
- Italy
- Turkey
- Greece
- Cyprus
- France
- Spain
- Slovenia

*Own production. Source: UNWTO.*
### Official Development Assistance (ODA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official development assistance by donor countries</th>
<th>Official development assistance by recipient countries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>millions $</td>
<td>% of GNI</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2020</td>
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<tr>
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<th>Own production. Source: OECD.</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. Value calculated using OECD data.</td>
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### Chart F27

#### Evolution of Official Development Assistance in Recipient Mediterranean Countries

**Evolution of ODA per capita**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2013</th>
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<th>2019</th>
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<tbody>
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<table>
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<th>2010</th>
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<th>2016</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

**Evolution of Total Net ODA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Own production. Source: OECD.
### TABLE F28: External Debt

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>External debt</th>
<th>Debt service</th>
<th>% of exports</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>millions $</td>
<td>% of GNI</td>
<td>$ per capita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2019</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Malta</td>
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<td>Slovenia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
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<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>16,596</td>
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<td>Serbia</td>
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<td>9,626</td>
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<td>Greece</td>
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Own production. Source: WB.

*Value calculated using WB data.

Data unavailable.

### CHART F28: Total External Debt Stocks by Debtor Type (2019)

- **Use of IMF Credit**
- **Public sector**
- **Private sector guaranteed by public sector**
- **Private sector not guaranteed**
- **Short-term external debt**

Own production. Source: WB.
Adolescent fertility rate
Number of births per thousand women aged between 15 and 19.

Agricultural land area
Land surface area made up of arable and permanently cultivated lands and by permanent meadows and pastures.

Annual population growth rate
Exponential change in the growth of the population during the period indicated.

Aquaculture production
Includes marine, freshwater and diadromous fish, molluscs and crustaceans cultivated in marine, inland or brackish environments.

Arable lands and permanent crops
Agricultural surface area that groups the data on arable or farm land and land used for permanent crops. Arable and farm land is land given over to temporary crops (those giving two yields are only counted once) temporal meadows for cutting or grazing, land dedicated to commercial vegetable gardens or orchards and land temporarily fallow for a period of less than five years. The term does not include land that has been abandoned as a result of migratory cultivation. Land destined for permanent crops refers to land dedicated to crops that occupy the terrain during long periods and that do not need to be replanted after each harvest, such as cacao, coffee and rubber. It includes land occupied by bushes destined to flower production, fruit trees, walnut trees and vineyards, but excludes land planted with trees destined for the production of firewood or wood.

Armed forces
Strategic, land, naval, aerial, command and support forces. It also includes paramilitary forces, such as the gendarmerie, the customs services and the border guard if they are trained in military strategy.

Births attended by skilled health personnel
Percentage of births attended by health personnel (physicians, nurses and midwives) that are trained in the care, supervision and counselling of women during pregnancy, birthgiving and periperrium, and who can also deliver babies and assist them on their own.

Broadband subscriptions (fixed and mobile)
Number of active (fixed or mobile) subscriptions to high speed access to the public Internet.

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions
The emissions of carbon dioxide produced in the burning of all fossil fuels used by a country.

Cereal production
The figures for cereal production only refer to harvests of dry grain. Crops harvested for hay, unripe foodstuffs, forage and silage, or used for grazing, are therefore excluded.

Cereal production yield
The outputs per hectare have been calculated using the data on surface area and production.

Cereal trade
The figures obtained by the FAO, have been supplied by the respective governments in the questionnaires sent out by the FAO.

Children overweight
Percentage of overweight (weight-age above + two standard deviations of the WHO Child Growth Standards median) among children aged 0-5 years.

Children underweight
Percentage of underweight (weight-age less than two standard deviations of the WHO Child Growth Standards median) among children aged 0-5 years.

CO₂ emissions intensity by GDP
Average quantity of CO₂ emitted per unit of income generated by a particular economy.

Consumer price index
Reflects changes in the cost, for an average consumer, in the acquisition of a basket of goods and services that can be fixed or can change at specific intervals; for example annually. The Laspeyres formula is normally used.
**Contraceptive prevalence rate**  
Percentage of women who are married or in a relationship who report using at least one method of contraception.

**Crude birth rate**  
Number of births per year per thousand inhabitants. An estimate is made in the middle of the current year.

**Crude death rate**  
Number of deaths per year per thousand inhabitants. An estimate is made in the middle of the current year.

**Current account balance**  
The sum of the net exports – exports minus imports – of goods and services, incomes and net transfers.

**Debt service**  
The sum of the main payments and interest payments made for long-term debts, interest paid on short-term debts and repayments (redemption and charges) to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

**Desalinated water production**  
Amount of water produced by elimination of salt from salt water using a variety of techniques, including inverse osmosis. Most of this water is used for domestic purposes.

**Duration of compulsory education**  
Number of years, within a determined age group, that children and young people are legally obliged to attend school.

**Ecological footprint**  
Measurement of the use of renewable natural resources by humanity. For a given population it is defined as the total area of biologically productive land and water required to produce the resources consumed, to maintain energy consumption, to make way for infrastructures and to absorb the waste generated by the population. The unit used to measure the ecological footprint is the global hectare and is defined as a hectare of biologically productive space, equal to the world average.

**Economically active population in agriculture**  
Part of the economically active population engaged in or seeking work in agriculture, hunting, fishing or forestry.

**Electricity consumption per capita**  
Refers to the gross production per inhabitant and includes the consumption of auxiliary stations and the losses in the transformers considered an integral part of the central station. It also includes the total electricity produced by pumping stations, without deducting the electricity absorbed by the pumps.

**Electricity production**  
Measured in the alternating equipment terminals of electric power stations. Also includes hydroelectric, coal, oil, gas and nuclear energy sources and generation by geothermal, solar, wind, tidal and marine energy, as well as renewable residues and fuels.

**Electricity sources**  
Refers to the energy sources used to generate electricity: hydroelectric, coal, oil, gas and nuclear.

**Employed population**  
Proportion of the economically active population that is employed. When adding the employed population to the unemployed the result is the whole economically active population or labour force.

**Employment by sector**  
According to the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC), the Agriculture category also includes hunting, fishing and forest exploitation; the Industry category includes mining, extraction activities (including oil production), manufacturing, construction and public services (electricity, water and gas); the Services category includes the wholesale and retail trades, restaurants and hotels, transport, storage services, communications, financial services, insurance, real estate, business services, as well as community, social and personal services.

**Employment rate**  
Percentage of population in work relative to the total population of working age.

**Energy production**  
Primary energy forms – oil, natural gas, coal and its derivatives and renewable fuels and residues – and primary electricity, all converted into equivalents of oil. The renewable fuels and residues refer to solid and liquid biomass, biogas and industrial and municipal residues.

**Energy use**  
Energy use refers to use of primary energy before transformation to other end-use fuels, which is equal to indigenous production plus imports and stock changes, minus exports and fuels supplied to ships and aircraft engaged in international transport.

**Export/Import concentration index**  
The Herfindahl–Hirschman Index is used, in a normalized version, to obtain values between zero and one (maximum concentration). It measures the degree of market concentration and the calculation takes into account the different product groups exported, according to the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC).

**Exports**  
The value of all goods supplied by an economy to the rest of the world. It excludes labour and income in concept of property, as well as transfer payments.

**External debt**  
The sum of the national debt, with public guarantee, private unsecured long-term debt, credit from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and short-term debt.

**Fertility rate**  
Number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her childbearing years and bear children in accordance with current age specific fertility rates.
In the context of economics, various indicators and definitions are used to measure economic performance and inequality. Here are some key concepts:

**Domestic Product per capita**
Amount of output produced in an economy from the rest of the world. It excludes labour and income in concept of property, as well as transfer payments.

**GDP growth rate**
Annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency.

**GDP per unit of energy use**
Indicator of energy efficiency. The temporary differences and entire countries partly reflect, structural economic changes, changes in the efficiency of particular sectors and differences in the use of fuels. The GDP has been converted into 2005 international dollars.

**Gender Inequality Index**
The Gender Inequality Index (GII) reflects women’s disadvantage in three dimensions — reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market — for as many countries as data of reasonable quality allow. The index shows the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in these dimensions. It ranges from 0, which indicates that women and men fare equally, to 1, which indicates that women fare as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions.

**Gini index**
Measure of greater or lesser inequality in the distribution of income and consumption, considering a state of perfectly equal distribution. A value of zero represents perfect equality and a value of one hundred total inequality.

**GNI (see Gross National Income)**
The sum of value added by all resident producers plus any product taxes (less subsidies) not included in the valuation of output plus net receipts of primary income (compensation of employees and property income) from abroad. The added value of the net profit of an industry after having summed up all profits and deducted international contributions.

**HDI (see Human Development Index)**
Index elaborated by the United Nations Development Project (UNPD) relating three indicators: income level (per capita GNI), health (life expectancy at birth) and level of education (mean years of education and expected years of schooling).

**Immigrants**
Refers to the people born outside of a given country at the mid point of the year. The data is given in absolute figures and as a percentage in respect to the population of the receiving country.

**Imports**
Value of all goods received by an economy from the rest of the world. It excludes labour and income in concept of property, as well as transfer payments.

**Inbound tourists by destination country**
Number of tourists who travel to a country other than that in which they have their usual residence, for a period not exceeding 12 months and whose...
main purpose in visiting is other than an activity remunerated from within the country visited.

**Infant mortality rate**
Shows the number of deaths of infants under one year of age per thousand live births.

**Internally displaced people**
As a result of armed conflicts or human rights abuses, some 25 million people live as internally displaced population. These people were forced to flee from their homes for fear of losing their lives, but unlike refugees, they were displaced within their country’s borders. Even though internally displaced people are twice as many as refugees, their situation receives less international attention.

**International tourism receipts**
Income received in a given country from visitors, including payments made to national freight companies for international freight. It also includes the prepayment of goods and services received in the destination country. It can include the income from single day visitors. The percentage it represents with respect to exports is calculated as a ratio of the exports of goods and services.

**Internet users**
The estimated number of internet users out of total population. This includes those using the Internet from any device (including mobile phones) in the last 12 months.

**Labour force participation rate**
The labour force participation rate is defined as the ratio of the labour force to the working-age population, expressed as a percentage. The labour force is the sum of the number of persons employed and the number of persons unemployed.

**Land area**
Refers to the total surface area minus the surface covered by inland waters. Inland waters are defined in general as rivers and principal lakes.

**Land under cereal production**
The figures related to cultivated crop surface areas generally refer to the area harvested, although those corresponding to permanent crops can refer to the total planted area. The figures for the cultivated cereal area only refer to harvests of dry grain. Crops harvested for hay, unripe foodstuffs, forage and silage, or used for grazing, are therefore excluded.

**Life expectancy at birth**
The number of years that a new-born infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout its life.

**Literacy rate**
The percentage of the population aged 15 and above who can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life. Generally, “literacy” also encompasses “numeracy,” the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations.

**Live animal stock**
The data on stock covers all domestic animals regardless of age, location or final purpose. Estimates have been made for countries that have not supplied data, as well as for countries supplying partial statistics.

**Live animal trade**
Enormous quantities of unregistered animals cross the borders of some countries. In order to obtain more representative international trade figures of live animals, the FAO has incorporated estimates of the unregistered trade.

**Long term external debt**
Debt that has an original or extended maturity of more than one year. It has three components: public, publicly guaranteed and private non guaranteed debt.

**Maternal mortality ratio**
Annual number of deaths of women owing to causes related to pregnancy, for every 100,000 live births.

**Mean years of schooling**
Average number of years of education received by people aged 25 and older in their lifetime based on education attainment levels of the population converted into years of schooling based on theoretical durations of each level of education attended.

**Mediterranean and Black Sea catches**
Fishing catches for commerce, industry or subsistence (including recreational catches where the data is available). The data refers to the catch by the fleet of a country in the Mediterranean and/or in the Black Sea.

**Military expenditure**
Total expenses effected by the Ministry of Defence and other ministries on the recruitment and training of military personnel, as well as the manufacture and acquisition of military supplies and equipment. Military assistance is included in the expenses of the donor country.

**Mobile cellular telephone subscriptions**
Refers to the subscriptions to a public mobile telephone service and provides access to a Public Switched Telephone Network using cellular technology.

**Net energy import**
Shows the amount of energy use by an economy and to what extent it exceeds its domestic production.

**Net enrolment ratio**
Number of students enrolled in a level of education who are of the official school age for that level, as a percentage of the total of the population of official school age for that level. The figures are shown for primary and secondary education.

**Net migration rate**
Net number of migrants divided by the average population of the receiving country within the period considered.

**Net number of migrants**
The entry of immigrants into a given country minus the outgoing emigrants of the same country.

**Official Development Assistance (ODA)**
The net payment of donations and loans granted under advantageous financial terms by official boards of partner countries of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-opera-
tion and Development (OECD), as well as international organizations, with a view to promoting economic development and wellbeing, including co-operation and technical assistance.

**Oil equivalent**
All the values of energy production and consumption presented in this classification are calculated and published by the International Energy Agency (IEA) which uses the equivalent metric tonne of oil based on the calorific content of the energy products as the unit of measurement. An equivalent metric tonne of oil is defined as 107 kilocalories or 11,628 gigawatts per hour (GWh). This amount of energy is practically equal to the amount of energy contained in a tonne of crude oil.

**Outbound tourists by country of origin**
Number of trips that travellers make to a given country from their normal country of residence, for a period of less than one year, for any other reason than to undertake a paid activity in the country visited.

**Passenger cars**
Road motor vehicles, other than two-wheelers, intended for the carriage of passengers and designed to seat no more than nine people (including the driver).

**Permanent pasture**
Refers to land used permanently (five years or more) for herbaceous fodder, whether cultivated or uncultivated (meadows or uncultivated land for grazing).

**Physicians**
Number of medical doctors (physicians), including generalist and specialist medical practitioners, per 10,000 members of the population.

**Population density**
The result of dividing the average annual population of a country by its land surface area expressed in square kilometres.

**Population in urban agglomerations of more than 750,000 inhabitants**
Percentage of the population of a country living in metropolitan areas that, in 2005 had a population of more than 750,000 people.

**Population located on the Mediterranean coastal regions**
Population living in the Mediterranean coastal regions of the Mediterranean countries.

**Population living with HIV/AIDS**
Estimated number of people of any age infected with HIV or AIDS. Includes the whole living infected population at the end of 2003, regardless of whether or not they have developed the disease. It shows the actual figure and the percentage with respect to the population of the country.

**Population using safely managed drinking-water services**
The percentage of population using safely managed drinking water services, which is defined as the population using an improved drinking water source which is located on premises, and available when needed, and free of faecal and priority chemical contamination.

**Population using safely managed sanitation services**
Percentage of population using safely managed sanitation services. To have a safely managed sanitation service, people should use improved sanitation facilities which are not shared with other households, and the excreta produced should either be treated and disposed in situ, stored temporarily and then emptied and transported to treatment off-site, or transported through a sewer with wastewater and then treated off-site.

**Population with access to electricity**
Refers to the number of people with access to electricity as a percentage of the total population.

**Prevalence of smoking**
The percentage of men and women who smoke cigarettes. The age range varies between countries, but in general it is 15 years of age or above.

**Primary pupil-teacher ratio**
Number of pupils registered in primary schools divided by the number of teachers in primary schools.

**Proportion of households with a computer**
Number of households which declare to have access to a computer at home. A computer includes: a desktop, portable or handheld computer (e.g. a personal digital assistant). It does not include equipment with some embedded computing abilities such as mobile phones or TV sets.

**Proportion of households with internet access**
Number of households which declare to have access to the Internet at home. Access is not assumed to be only via a computer – it may also be by mobile phone, digital TV etc.

**Protected areas**
Areas of land or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biodiversity, natural and associated cultural resources and managed through legal and other instruments. According to The World Conservation Union (IUCN) it includes the total area of all natural reserves, virgin areas, national parks, natural monuments, management areas of habitats and species, as well as protected land and sea areas in each country.

**Public expenditure on education**
Composed of capital expenses (construction, renovation, major repairs and purchase of heavy equipment or vehicles) and running costs (goods and services consumed during the current year and that need to be renewed the following year). It covers expenses such as salaries and rendering of services, contracted or acquired services, books and didactic material, social welfare services, furniture and equipment, minor repairs, fuel, insurance, rent, telecommunications and travel.

**Public health expenditure**
Refers to the recurring and capital expenses in government budgets (central and local), loans and external concessions (including donations from international agencies and non-governmental organizations) and social or compulsory medical insurance funds.
R & D expenditures
The current and capital expenses of creative and systematic activities that increase the stock of knowledge. It includes basic and applied research and experimental development work that leads to new devices, products or processes.

R & D personnel
All persons employed directly on R&D, as well as those providing direct services such as managers, administrators, etc., expressed as a proportion of a population of one million.

Refugees
People who have been forced to flee their country for fear of persecution owing to reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinions or membership of determined social groups and who are unable or unwilling to return. The asylum country is the country in which the refugee has requested asylum, but has not yet received a response, or where he or she has been registered as an asylum seeker. The country of origin refers to the nationality of the seeker or to the country in which he or she is a citizen.

Rural population
The estimated population at the mid point of the year in areas defined as rural, as a percentage of the total population of the country.

Sectorial distribution of the active population
Shown by the percentages of the workforce employed in the different economic sectors: agriculture, industry and services.

Share of income or consumption
In the questionnaires carried out in homes in diverse countries to determine the distribution of income, they make five divisions (or quintiles) from the lowest to the greatest incomes. The two lower quintiles (40%) are considered the poorest. A relation is also established between the richest 10% and the poorest 10%, in order to establish the degree of inequality in incomes.

Share of ICT goods as percentage of total trade
Share of ICT goods imports and exports as a percentage of total imports and exports for every economy for which this information is available. The list of ICT goods is defined by the OECD, and was revised in 2010. This new list consists of 95 goods defined at the six-digit level of the 2007 version of the Harmonized System.

Short-term external debt
Debt owed to non-residents having an original maturity of one year or less and interest arrears on long-term debt.

Surface area
Refers to the extension of the country in its totality, including the surface area occupied by inland waters.

Threatened species
Includes all the species classified by The World Conservation Union (IUCN), as “vulnerable, in danger, or in critical danger,” but excludes all introduced species, species whose status is not sufficiently known, extinguished species and those still without an assigned status.

Total area equipped for irrigation
Area equipped to provide water (via irrigation) to crops. It includes areas equipped for full and partial control irrigation, equipped lowland areas, pastures and areas equipped for spate irrigation.

Total catches
Fishing catches for commerce, industry or subsistence (including recreational catches where the data is available). The data refers to the catch by the fleet of a country in any part of the world. Marine fishing is practiced in seas or oceans, while freshwater fishing takes place in rivers, wetlands and inland lakes.

Total health expenditure
Funds mobilized by the system. Sum of general government and private expenditure on health.

Total population
Includes all of the residents of a country or territory with the legal status of citizen, except refugees settled in a country of asylum, who are generally considered as part of the population of their country of origin. Values for 2005 and projections for 2050 are shown.

Tourism expenditure in other countries
The expenditure in other countries of travellers from a given country, including the payments to national freight companies for international freight. It can include the expenses of single day travellers. The percentage it represents with respect to the exports, is calculated as a ratio of the exports of goods and services.

Trade balance
Account that holds the imports and exports of an economy during a certain period of time with the purpose of reflecting the corresponding balance. The negative values indicate a deficit in the trade balance.

Trade in fish and derivative products
Expresses the value associated to the exports and imports of live, fresh, frozen, chilled, dried, salted, smoked and tinned fish and derivative products. Includes fresh and salt water and aquaculture fish, molluscs and crustaceans.

Under-five mortality rate
Probability of death between birth and reaching five years of age, expressed per thousand live births.

Unemployment rate
Percentage of the active population without work, but available for and seeking employment.

Urban population using at least basic sanitation services
The percentage of urban population using at least basic sanitation services, that is, improved sanitation facilities that
are not shared with other households. This indicator encompasses both people using basic sanitation services as well as those using safely managed sanitation services.

**Water consumption**
Total water used by humans in a year, without taking into account the losses due to evaporation in reservoirs. Includes water from non-renewable underground sources, from rivers coming from other countries and from desalinated plants.

**Water dependency**
Percentage of water available in one country, coming from another.

**Water resources**
Refers to the total renewable resources, covering the watercourses of the country (rivers and underground rainwater reserves) and the watercourses originating in other countries.

**Women in parliamentary seats**
Refers to the percentage of seats occupied by women in a lower or single chamber, or in a higher chamber or senate, according to each case. In the case where there are two chambers, the data refers to the weighted average of the participation of women in both chambers.

**Wood fuel production**
Includes wood from trunks and branches, used as fuel for cooking, heating or producing energy.

**Workers’ remittances**
According to the definition of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Balance of Payments Manual, workers’ remittances are goods and financial assets transferred by immigrants living and working in an economy (where they are considered residents) in favour of the residents of their former country of residence. An immigrant must live and work in the new economy for more than one year to be considered a resident there. The transfers made to the immigrant’s own accounts abroad are not considered transfers. Moreover, all those derived from the possession of a business by an immigrant are only considered to be normal transfers to the country of origin.

**Year when women obtained the right to stand for election**
The dates refer to the year when the universal and equal right to stand for election was recognized. In the cases when two years appear, the first refers to the first partial recognition of the right to stand for election.

**Year when women obtained the right to vote**
The dates refer to the year when the universal and equal right to vote was recognized. In the cases when two years appear, the first refers to the first partial recognition of the right to vote.
List of the Organisms Consulted for Drawing up Tables, Graphics and Maps

CITES, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
www.cites.org

EIB, European Investment Bank
www.eib.org

Europeaid, Development and Cooperation
europa.eu/europaid

EUROSTAT, Statistical Office of the European Commission
europa.eu/eurostat

FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
www.fao.org

GFN, Global Footprint Network
www.footprintnetwork.org/

IDMC, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
www.internal-displacement.org

IEA, International Energy Agency
www.iea.org

IGME, UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, Child Mortality Estimates
www.childmortality.org

ILO, International Labour Organization
www.ilo.org

IOM, International Organization for Migration
www.iom.int

IMF, International Monetary Fund
www.imf.org

IPU, Inter-Parliamentary Union
www.ipu.org
ITU, International Telecommunication Union
www.itu.int

IUCN, World Conservation Union
www.iucn.org

OECD, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
www.oecd.org

OICA, International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers
www.oica.net

Psephos Adam Carr’s Election Archive
psephos.adam-carr.net

SIPRI, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
www.sipri.org

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
https://sdgs.un.org/

UNAIDS, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
www.unaids.org

UNCTAD, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
www.unctad.org

UNDP, United Nations Development Programme
www.undp.org

UNEP, United Nations Environment Programme
www.unep.org

UNESCO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
www.unesco.org

UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund
www.unfpa.org

UN-Habitat - United Nations Human Settlements Programme
unhabitat.org/

UNHCR, United Nations Refugee Agency
www.unhcr.ch

UNHCR The Refugees Operational Portal - Mediterranean

UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response
http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php
UNICEF, United Nations Children’s Fund
www.unicef.org

United Nations Treaty Collection
untreaty.un.org

United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN)
esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm

UNPOP, United Nations Population Division
www.unpopulation.org

UNRWA United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
www.unrwa.org

UNSTAT, United Nations Statistics Division
unstats.un.org

UNWTO, World Tourism Organization
www.unwto.org

WB, World Bank
www.worldbank.org

WEF, World Economic Forum
www.weforum.org

WHO, World Health Organization
www.who.int

WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard
https://covid19.who.int/
## Country Abbreviations in Graphics and Maps

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<th>Code</th>
<th>Country Name</th>
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<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
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<td>North Macedonia</td>
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<td>Malta</td>
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<td>Palestinian Territory, Occupied</td>
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<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>Serbia</td>
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<td>Tunisia</td>
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<td>Turkey</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>US</td>
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<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Association Agreement</td>
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<td>AA-DCFTA</td>
<td>AA including DCFTA</td>
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<td>ACAA</td>
<td>Agreements on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance</td>
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<td>AEDIB</td>
<td>African-European Digital Innovation Bridge</td>
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<td>AICFTA</td>
<td>African Continental Free Trade Area</td>
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<td>AFD</td>
<td>Agence Française de Développement</td>
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<td>AFSJ</td>
<td>Area of Freedom, Security and Justice</td>
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<td>AI</td>
<td>Artificial Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>AII</td>
<td>Adriatic-Ionic Initiative</td>
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<td>AIPAC</td>
<td>American Israël Public Affairs Committee</td>
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<td>AKP</td>
<td>Justice and Development Party (TR)</td>
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<td>AMCs</td>
<td>Arab Mediterranean Countries</td>
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<td>AMU</td>
<td>Arab Maghreb Union</td>
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<td>ARP</td>
<td>Assembly of People’s Representatives (TN)</td>
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<td>AWS</td>
<td>Artificial Weaponized System</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCM</td>
<td>Billion Cubic Metres</td>
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<td>BdL</td>
<td>Banque du Liban</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRI</td>
<td>Belt and Road Initiative</td>
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<td>C6ISR</td>
<td>Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Cyber-defence and Combat Systems, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Common Agricultural Policy</td>
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<td>CBAM</td>
<td>Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBC</td>
<td>Cross-Border Cooperation</td>
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<td>CERT</td>
<td>Computer Emergency Response Team</td>
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<td>CETMO</td>
<td>Centre for Transportation Studies for the Western Mediterranean</td>
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<td>CFR</td>
<td>Case Fatality Rate</td>
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<td>CFSP</td>
<td>Common Foreign and Security Policy</td>
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<td>CHP</td>
<td>Republican People’s Party (TR)</td>
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<td>CJEU</td>
<td>Court of Justice of the European Union</td>
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<td>CMI</td>
<td>Center for Mediterranean Integration</td>
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<tr>
<td>COAs</td>
<td>Courses of action</td>
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<td>CoE</td>
<td>Council of Europe</td>
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<td>CONNEKT</td>
<td>CONtexts of Extremism iN mEna and BalKan SocieTies</td>
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<td>CPEC</td>
<td>China-Pakistan Economic Corridor</td>
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<td>CSOs</td>
<td>Civil Society Organizations</td>
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<td>Counterterrorism</td>
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<td>CTO</td>
<td>Caribbean Tourism Organization</td>
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<td>D4D</td>
<td>Digital for Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCFTA</td>
<td>Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<td>Denial of Service</td>
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<td>DIH</td>
<td>Digital Innovation Hubs</td>
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<td>DVA</td>
<td>Domestic Value Added</td>
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<td>EAG</td>
<td>External Action Guarantee</td>
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<td>European Asylum Support Office</td>
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<td>EastMed</td>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum</td>
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<td>EBRD</td>
<td>European Bank for Reconstruction and Development</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<td>European Central Bank</td>
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<td>ECHO</td>
<td>EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department</td>
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<td>European Convention on Human Rights</td>
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<td>ECHR</td>
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<td>Economic and Investment Plan</td>
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<td>EQF</td>
<td>European Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>European Stability Mechanism</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</td>
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<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
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<td>FPA</td>
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<td>FTA</td>
<td>Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<td>FVA</td>
<td>Foreign Value Added</td>
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<td>GAM</td>
<td>Global Approach for Migration</td>
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<td>GAMM</td>
<td>Global Approach for Migration and Mobility</td>
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<td>GATT</td>
<td>General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade</td>
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<tr>
<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-based Violence</td>
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<td>GCC</td>
<td>Cooperation Council for Arab States of the Gulf/Gulf Cooperation Council</td>
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<td>GCM</td>
<td>Global Compact for Migration</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>GERD</td>
<td>Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam</td>
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<td>GHG</td>
<td>Greenhouse Gases</td>
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<td>Gender Inequality Index</td>
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<td>Government of National Accord (LY)</td>
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<td>GNI</td>
<td>Gross National Income</td>
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<td>Gross Value Added</td>
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<td>GVC</td>
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<td>High Commission for Planning (MA)</td>
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<td>Human Development Index</td>
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<td>HEIs</td>
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<td>High Representative/Vice-President</td>
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<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
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<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>IMTA</td>
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<td>Middle East &amp; North Africa</td>
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<td>SMEB</td>
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