

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 shaped 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 advan-

tage 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 thirtieth anniversary of 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*.