

# The Emergence of a New (Multilateral?) Global Order: How Does the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Fit in?

**Senén Florensa**

President

European Institute of the Mediterranean (Barcelona)

Russia's war against Ukraine has given renewed impetus to a reflection that has been gestating for years on the transition to a new international order. The unipolar world that has prevailed since the end of the Cold War, with the United States as the dominant power, is changing in favour of an increasingly multipolar world. The growing rivalry with China as an emerging power, Russia's revisionist attitude to the international order of the past two decades, and the increasing assertiveness of what has come to be called the Global South, have made it clear that we are in a period of change. The war in Ukraine has exacerbated tensions and, as in any period of crisis, the pre-existing vectors of real, fundamental change are accelerating. What is clear is that, after the war, the international order of the future will be different from the unipolar world under US hegemony that emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The world of the future, however, is not the consequence of historical fate. It depends on what we do, what kind of understandings we reach, what policies we manage to put into action and how we manage to build the agreements and consensus necessary for their effectiveness. Today these questions are relevant not only for the construction of a security system in Europe that guarantees and restores peace and stability on the continent after the war in Ukraine. They are also relevant for the construction of a new international order. But it can be a multipolar world with serious tensions and confrontations, or a new international order based on rules that have legitimacy and are respected by all parties, as a ba-

sis for building peace and shared prosperity. This is the ultimate goal of *Multilateralism*.

The issue is of particular interest for the Mediterranean world, as it has been the epicentre of serious tensions, instability and wars in recent decades. It is also clear that the EU has an important role to play in partnership with the countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean in ensuring that this region of the world finds a place in the new international order that guarantees its stability and progress.

## The Construction and Rise of the Liberal International Order: The "End of History"

*From Vienna to Helsinki via San Francisco*

After the Congress of Vienna of 1814, the international system devised there gave Europe a century of peace and stability, with no general war on the continent despite the bloody Crimean and Franco-Prussian episodes. The system created by Metternich, Castlereagh and the other leaders was based on the balance of power in Europe (the *European Concert*), which resulted in the dominance of the British Empire. This was the period of Britain's global hegemony: the *Pax Britannica* from 1814 to 1914. World War I was Europe's suicide. The continent was shattered and its population decimated. Britain emerged from the conflict as a victor, along with the United States and the other allies, but extraordinarily weakened. Further afflicted by the 1920s currency crises and the Great Depression of the 1930s, as J.M. Keynes had predicted at Versailles in 1919, Britain was no longer able to guarantee the stability of the international system. Meanwhile, the United States, returning to isolationism under the new Republican President Warren G. Harding, did not want

to take on responsibilities, even refusing to join the League of Nations, which President Wilson had promoted at Versailles. The United States was not as strong in 1919 as it would become in 1945, and it is clear in any case that it could hardly have been the guarantor of international security then as it was after the Second World War. The inter-war period was characterised by instability, revanchism against the international order designed at Versailles, which did not come to fruition, and the march towards the new and even more serious conflagration of the Second World War, which the League of Nations could not even hope to prevent. Unlike that of Vienna, the international order that had emerged from Versailles had been a failure. But it must be acknowledged that, despite its failure, the creation of the League of Nations was the first attempt to build a multilateral order with an ambition of universality, though truncated. This is the origin of multilateralism.

The catastrophe was of such magnitude that the Allied powers, led by the United States together with Russia and England, prepared the future peace by achieving what had not been attained through the 1919 Treaty of Versailles: the establishment and effective functioning of a multilateral international system guaranteeing stability and progress, based on the Charter of the United Nations (San Francisco, 1945) and the UN itself, together with its Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The establishment of a new international economic system that would definitively overcome the chaotic world of conflicting protectionism of the inter-war years and the Great Depression was obviously essential to preparing for the future peace. These were the fundamental economic institutions of the new Liberal International Order (LIO): the Bretton Woods system, consisting mainly of the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which was to evolve into the World Trade Organisation (WTO). This is the international system based on *Multilateralism* which, despite the bipolar confrontation and the balance of atomic terror, is at the basis of what is probably the most important cycle of economic progress in the history of humanity, and which continues to this day despite crises such as those of 1973 and 2008. It is therefore an order based on liberalism in the politi-

cal sphere, market and free trade economic principles, and multilateralism in the international diplomatic system.

The Soviet Union, which participated in the creation and subsequent implementation of the United Nations system and all its specialised agencies, did not wish to join the Bretton Woods economic institutions. It created an alternative economic and political order, centred on the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) and on the total hegemony of the Soviet Union within its sphere of influence. We could therefore say that in this bipolar form of *Multilateralism* there was a single multilateral international system based on the United Nations and two parallel, antithetical and conflicting international orders: the capitalist and liberal one, led by the United States in alliance with Europe and other like-minded countries, and the communist one, led by the Soviet Union. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dismantling of the communist system, together with the collapse and dismemberment of the Soviet Union, left the world with a single leading hyperpower and a single international system, i.e. that of the LIO led by the United States and the Bretton Woods economic institutions. Everyone, including the countries of the so-called post-Soviet space and the developing countries, would be integrated into it. The Russian Federation joined the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 1992, followed shortly by the rest of the post-Soviet states.

**In the process of transforming the international order towards a much more multipolar system, the Arab-Mediterranean world's place in this new international order will have decisive consequences for both the Arab World and Europe**

Under the LIO led by the United States, Europe and other like-minded countries, confidence in liberalism, the capitalist market economy and the virtues of the democratic system spread throughout the

world; it became a certainty that it would be the common future to which all the countries of the world would gradually converge. As early as 1991, Samuel Huntington hailed this perspective in his famous study *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. This was the era of democratic transitions that had begun in southern Europe in the 1970s, continued in Latin America, Southeast Asia and other regions of the world in the 1980s, and from the 1990s onwards expanded to include Eastern Europe and the former Soviet world. *The fundamental hypothesis was that the triumph of the market and the liberal system would lead to progress and a common economic and social model for all: the capitalist free market economy and liberal and representative democracy.* The different areas of the world would be incorporated into this model as their growth and economic and social development led to the modernization of their economies, institutions and mindsets. As Francis Fukuyama symbolically underlined in the title of his famous book, it was *The End of History* (1992), understanding history as the uninterrupted sequence of confrontations and wars that relations among nations had always been.

The conviction of the inexorable march towards democratic transitions in the rest of the world under the LIO has a special relevance in Latin America, through the controversial application of the often ultra-liberal principles of the “*Washington Consensus*” in the 1990s and early 2000s. But one of the most notable examples of confidence in the transformative and liberalizing capacities of the market economy, also in political terms, was China’s admission to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001. Here, too, confidence prevailed that China’s adaptation to the liberal rules of international trade and the market economy, following the rules of GATT and the WTO, would progressively lead to political opening and democratization as the aspirations and demands of a rising middle class grew.

#### *From Helsinki to Barcelona*

For the Euro-Mediterranean world, the transformation of the international order and the optimistic hypothesis of the market and progress as an instrument of democratization were obviously of decisive importance. Within Europe, this hypothesis was

confirmed by the final triumph of the line of thought initiated by Willy Brandt with *Ostpolitik* and continued with the policy of *Wandel durch Handel* and the signing of the *Basic Treaty* between the two Germanys in 1972. Indeed, the opening to the East and the facilitation of trade and human exchanges were to lead not only to German reunification after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, but also to the transformation within a few years of the whole of Eastern Europe and even the Soviet Bloc, in a liberalizing and pro-democratic direction. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, with its momentous *Helsinki Final Act* (1975) and its successive meetings until the Paris Summit of 1990, led to the establishment of the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe* (OSCE), which were crucial steps on the road to détente and the constitution of a security system in Europe that we can call the *Helsinki System*. The 1975 Final Act ended up recognizing the borders that emerged from the Second World War (and thus the territorial gains of the USSR on that occasion) and the principles of the sovereign equality of states, respect for their territorial integrity, the prohibition of the threat or use of force and non-interference in internal affairs. But there was a second part to the Final Act, following the extension of *Ostpolitik*: the Accords included clauses devoted to the promotion of social and personal exchanges between East and West and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, together with the right to equality and self-determination of peoples. All of these were to prove fundamental for the transformation of Eastern Europe countries and the Soviet space itself and the onset of their democratic transition processes. This was a new fundamental step in *the conviction that democratic transition and socio-economic change were two sides of the same coin*. The example of the undeniable success of the European Union’s progressive construction was the best guarantee, after centuries of wars and confrontation in Europe, that cooperation between States and successful socio-economic growth and development were the basis for peace and the consolidation of the new democratic systems.

In the Euro-Mediterranean sphere, this same philosophy and the Helsinki methodology was at the root of the *Barcelona Process* or *Euro-Mediterranean Partnership* launched in 1995. The whole spirit of

the Helsinki Accords and their underlying philosophy are very much present in the 1995 *Barcelona Final Declaration*, including the three baskets into which its aims and areas of action were organized: Security, Economic Cooperation and Human Rights and Intercultural Dialogue.

The implementation of the Barcelona Process as of 1995 gave rise to a wave of optimism and hope as a set of policies were deployed, as agreed in the Final Declaration, aimed at building an area of peace and stability, shared economic progress and dialogue between the different peoples and cultures around the Mediterranean. This was clearly a grand political project endowed with innovative institutional and economic means that were to prove clearly insufficient. The EU's Association Treaties were concluded with each of the countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, with the exception of Syria and Libya, and an extensive programme of support for reforms was launched through the so-called *MEDA funds*. The constitution of a large *Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area* (FTA) by 2010 ended up being watered down to a set of bilateral industrial FTAs between the EU and each country, given the difficulty of reaching agreements or concessions between the southern countries and without progress towards agricultural products and the services sector due to resistance from the north. From 2004 onwards, the Barcelona Process was deepened, in terms of bilateral relations with the Mediterranean countries, through the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which sought to progressively involve them in the European internal market in accordance with the pace of their internal reforms. The ENP sought to spread the wave of European progress towards the Mediterranean Partner Countries, as had happened with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which then joined the EU in 2004. Meanwhile, the ENP's eastern dimension was set in motion with the new neighbours in that area: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, with Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements being concluded with Georgia and Moldova in 2016 and with Ukraine in 2017. From 2008 onwards, the regional dimension of the *Euro-Mediterranean Partnership* was also deepened through the creation of the *Union for the Mediterranean* (UfM), through a much more participatory exercise with the countries of the south. The UfM has become the

privileged forum for consultation between the EU and the Mediterranean Partner Countries, and its General Secretariat has become a key driver of the Euro-Mediterranean agenda.

### **Crisis and Proposals for Renewal of the Liberal International Order**

The third wave of democratization in the LIO has had many instances of success, such as those achieved in Southern Europe, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe and the countries of South-East Asia. However, there have also been areas of serious limitations. The most important of these have been China and the Arab-Mediterranean countries.

#### *China Deviates from LIO Forecasts*

In the case of China, it should be recalled at the outset that the first opening towards the great Asian country, promoted by Kissinger and President Nixon from 1972 onwards, was motivated by geostrategic realism, as befits the characters. It was an attempt to distance Mao Zedong's China from Russia, taking advantage of their border disputes and geostrategic dissensions in the communist camp. But that was water under the bridge by the 1990s, in view of the major economic reforms promoted by Deng Xiaoping and the spectacular growth rate of the great Asian power from the 1980s onwards. Finally, China not only joined the WTO in 2001, but also did so with the prerogative of enjoying the advantages of being classified as a developing country for a period of 15 years. This meant the enormous privilege of asymmetry in China's mutual concessions with other countries, and especially with its main economic partners, the United States and the European Union. Once again, the assumption was that China's opening up and economic growth would lead to its transformation, not only socio-economically, but also politically, initiating a process of democratic transition in due course.

The reality, however, has not borne out this expectation. China has introduced market economic principles, but has not changed its authoritarian political system controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. The latter has its internal governance mechanisms, but it certainly exercises a clear dictatorship over the

Chinese economy and society. Market mechanisms have led to the growing emergence of middle classes and even millionaires, but always under the power of the State, which controls all institutions, the financial system and big business, directly or indirectly but effectively. From the very beginning, Deng Xiaoping himself responded to the first timid demands for liberalization with the brutal repression of Tiananmen in 1989, which cut off any possibility of the regime's evolution towards a democratic transition. *The hypothesis of democratic transition as the fruit of economic growth and modernization has simply not been fulfilled.* In fact, the opposite is true on the international front. China's rise as an economic and technological power has clearly led to a much more assertive and even confrontational position, with a dramatic increase in its defence spending and its military and naval presence in its immediate areas, and also in remote areas that are strategic for its supply routes, such as Djibouti. Skirmishes have occurred on the border with India, as well as increased with assertiveness toward its neighbours in the China Sea. Beijing has assumed de facto direct rule over Hong Kong, breaking the agreements with Britain on its special administration, adopted large-scale repressive measures against the Uighurs in Xinjiang Province and practised a bullying approach on the Taiwan issue. Through its massive Belt and Road Initiative, China has been dramatically increasing its investments and presence along the trade routes that connect it to its main markets in Europe and the Middle East and to its raw materials supply areas, especially in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. With respect to its WTO commitments, China has been repeatedly accused of protectionist trade practices, not respecting intellectual and industrial property rights and attracting international investment in order to incorporate their technologies, thereby leading to the practical expulsion of the original investors, in addition to interventionist practices by the State through State-owned enterprises and banking.

President Trump took extraordinary populist measures, blaming China for job losses in American industry due to companies moving production to China and allegedly unfair Chinese competition. The Biden administration has continued that policy by increasing pressure to restrict China and its companies' access to technological know-how and

components as much as possible, whether or not they are suitable for military use, in order to contain the economic growth of its geopolitical rival.

**Most of the new Global South does not want to take sides between Russia and the West. They feel alienated from a European war in Ukraine that they believe does not concern them**

In short, China's project has consisted of not missing the train of the new industrial and technological revolution, which in the 19th century had already caused it to be sidelined from the first industrial revolution and dominated by the most advanced powers, especially the British Empire. That *Century of Humiliation* is a constant reminder for the rulers of contemporary China. However, China is not a revisionist of the international system. China has been one of the great beneficiaries of the LIO, to which it owes much of its impressive economic take-off over the past 30 years. What China seeks and advocates is a more balanced international system, tending towards the bipolar, in which, under the reformed United Nations, there would be a distribution and balance of power that recognises its new role and weight in the world as the next largest economy, according to its forecasts. China has been one of the major beneficiaries of the globalization process driven by the international system itself and the LIO, and would therefore be harmed by the process of fragmentation of the international economy looming on the horizon.

*Crisis and Regression of Democratic Transitions in the Arab-Mediterranean World*

Challenges to the hegemony of the United States, and by extension the West, spread to large parts of the area then known as the developing world as early as the 1960s. One of the hotspots of this opposition began with the Khomeinist revolution in Iran in 1979, which has not only led to both peaceful and violent Islamist movements against the West,

but has also fundamentally caused the upheaval and destabilization of the Muslim world itself, including the Arab-Mediterranean world. The constant tension between modernity and identity has been one of the vectors of conflict, further fuelled by the constant interference of foreign powers. The USSR and the US intervened successively in Afghanistan, and then the US in Iraq, before (1991) and after (2003) 9/11. The 2003 invasion in particular is probably the most disastrous decision of the US government in its history, the result of the sick arrogance of the *neocoon* teams, unfortunately based on ignorance and misplaced self-confidence. The chain of wars and conflicts spurred, if not directly launched, by the major foreign powers is impressive, including the wars in Iraq and then, after the failure of the Arab Spring, in Syria and Libya, as well as in Yemen, Lebanon, Somalia....

### The trend towards deglobalization now find in regional economic cooperation or integration schemes a desirable alternative to the fragmentation of the international economy by traditional economic nationalisms

In the Mediterranean world, this tension between modernization and identity regression evolved in favour of modernization, leading to the Arab Springs. Overall, then, the hypothesis that economic growth and modernization would be followed by democratic transition in the Mediterranean world has thus far only been partially and uncertainly fulfilled. It is clear that the democratic revolutions driven by the youth and the more modernizing groups in Arab societies have momentarily failed, with the general regression of the Arab Spring and a return to the traditional authoritarian regimes. The future is not set in stone, and it is clear that the will to democratize and modernize their governance, economy and institutions continues to grow in Arab-Mediterranean societies. Everything depends on how well they manage to steer their history. Partnership with Europe is a key

factor in this process. Euro-Mediterranean policy, the Union for the Mediterranean and EU support for its neighbours and partners must play a decisive role in overcoming the current regressive phase and bringing democratic transitions back on track in the South and East of the Mediterranean. In the process of transforming the international order towards a much more multipolar system, the Arab-Mediterranean world's place in this new international order will have decisive consequences for both the Arab World and Europe.

### The War in Ukraine as a Turning Point in the Emergence of a New International Order

Russia's attack and war against Ukraine is having a serious impact on an international system that was already evolving. The progressive configuration of a bipolar order with the United States and China as the two hegemonic major powers has been shaken by a multiple crisis. First, the European security system agreed in the Helsinki Accords was shattered when one OSCE member country attacked and invaded another sovereign and neighbouring member country, occupying part of its territory by force and unilaterally changing internationally recognized borders in its favour. Secondly, the international debate, graphically evidenced by votes in the UN General Assembly and its Commission on Human Rights, is redefining the global political map. As a defensive reaction, the attack has brought European countries and the West as a whole into extraordinary cohesion. NATO has been revitalized by the sudden reappearance of its need, with traditionally neutral countries such as Sweden and Finland even applying for membership. In the opposite camp, Russia appears, claiming great power status and its corresponding zone of influence in the tradition of imperial Russia and the USSR. To this end, it is seeking support from both China, in which it wishes to find its major ally, and the broad field of what were traditionally understood as developing countries. The latter are the emerging new Global South, which is to play a key role in the new multilateralism. Vladimir Putin already set out his Russian imperial design and his vision of a multipolar world with an exclusive directory of great powers, including Russia, in his famous speech at the Mu-

nich Conference in 2007, as he has on many other occasions, such as his 1914 and 2022 Valdai Conference speeches.

The countries of the South, largely heirs to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), nevertheless seem to be going their own way, showing a noticeable detachment and neutrality towards the war in Ukraine. The new Global South is more diverse and less ideologized than the old NAM created in Bandung in 1955. The latter was emotionally and ideologically against what it called US imperialism and European post-colonialism. Most of the new Global South does not want to take sides between Russia and the West. They are more concerned with their economic and social problems or their regional security and feel alienated from a European war in Ukraine that they believe does not concern them, to Europe's discomfort.

The war's impact on the economy and international trade flows has added to the shock already caused by the COVID-19 crisis. Both crises have led to a growing distrust in the security of supplies, namely of essential products for health and medical services, as well as of the supply of food, hydrocarbons and all kinds of goods, especially microchips and other technological components, regardless of their possible military use. The breakdown of value chains is leading to a breakdown of globalization and to the phenomenon of near-shoring and even friend-shoring. Concepts such as energy, technological and food sovereignty are gaining prominence.

It is difficult to foresee the future, but it is clear that the very development and growing welfare of Chinese society is leading to a change in the direction of industrial relocation. China, which had become the world's great factory, is now seeing its industries relocate, either within the vast territories of the People's Republic, or to developing countries with more convenient wages or other factors closer to the large, developed importing markets. One of the most interesting cases in this regard today is the return or establishment in North Africa of industries that had previously emigrated to China. This process of deglobalization and redistribution of industry and production is accelerating the constitution of large economic areas in the world, as a desirable alternative to national protectionism and the protectionist fragmentation of the international economy, as we shall see below.

## **Euro-Mediterranean Policy in the Emerging and Uncertain Multilateral World Order**

The invasion and war in Ukraine have brought to the fore the clear trend towards fragmentation of the LIO and de-globalization of the world economy, adding to the effects of the 2008 economic and financial crisis and the crisis associated with COVID-19.

This has been particularly evident, as indicated, in the votes of the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Committee. The emergence of the Global South underlines the progressive configuration of an order that is attempting to be multipolar in political terms and that also aims to bring closer together large regional areas of cooperation, and progressive trade and economic integration, at times under the influence of some of the old or new powers. In the sphere of political dialogue and coordination, the BRICS countries forum (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which Argentina, Egypt, Iran, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia will join in 2024) has emerged in recent years as the mouthpiece and expression of the Global South. Despite its heterogeneity, the informal group – which is not an international organization, with no treaty or association scheme – is nevertheless a fairly faithful representation of the international community sector aspiring to an evolution of the international order that would reflect the aspirations and growing weight of the emerging countries vis-à-vis the countries of the traditional IO establishment, the G-7 (United States, Europe) and like-minded (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Canada). The enlarged BRICS group represents 42% of the world's population and 23% of the world's GDP. The G-7 on the other hand represents 46% of world GDP, with 10% of world population still at current prices. But in terms of purchasing power parity, the BRICS are already catching up. From this informal but fundamental dialogue, progress toward a new multilateral international order should emerge in the United Nations and multilateral economic organizations.

In the political and security sphere, the demise of the Soviet Union and COMECON led Russia to set up the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) in 1992 to replace the Warsaw Pact, which had disappeared just a year earlier. The CSTO is thus Russia's NATO counterpart to preserve its privileged

relationship with the former Soviet republics of the USSR, with the exception of the three Baltic states, Ukraine and Moldova. In 2001 China and Russia established the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasia Political, Economic, International Security and Defence Organization, which the former Soviet countries of Central Asia joined, followed by India and Pakistan in 2017 and Iran in July 2023. The SCO's spheres of action cover a wide range, such as internal security, counter-terrorism, economic cooperation, cultural cooperation, military cooperation.... eventually including the Iranian proposal in 2022 to create a monetary payment system outside the dollar. Today the CSO is clearly an attempt to form an alternative global configuration to that led by the West, although with the war in Ukraine, most of its members have avoided openly supporting Russia.

It is in the field of economic and trade cooperation that most large regional initiatives have emerged, as simple economic cooperation projects or moving up the scale of economic integration to free trade areas, customs unions or economic unions. These are examples of the new multilateral *regionalism* that is *legitimized* by its respect for WTO rules. By applying the rules of the WTO, a tariff war between opposing nationalisms should be avoided by developing – through regional tariff dismantling– free trade areas or regional customs unions, admitted and sponsored by the WTO. The most successful case of customs unions is that of the European Union itself, which was initially established as the European Common Market by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. This area is now being extended through the Association Agreements and the corresponding incipient FTAs, both towards the Mediterranean countries in the Southern Neighbourhood and towards the countries associated in the Eastern European dimension of the Neighbourhood Policy.

Different areas of the world are also trying to integrate through agreements to varying degrees. In North America, through NAFTA (1992) and subsequent trade agreements between the United States, Canada and Mexico. In Latin America, through various formations with constantly uncertain progress: the Central American Common Market (CACM, 1960), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM, 1973), the Latin American Free Trade Association (ALADI, 1980), the Andean Community (1969), and

Mercosur (1991). In Africa, through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, 1975) and the rest of the African regional communities, and very recently the African Continental Free Trade Area (2018), promoted with incipient but notable success by the African Union. In Asia, the Gulf Cooperation Council is essentially political in scope but also aims to develop a Customs Union and a Monetary Union, but the most interesting case of economic cooperation in Asia is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, 1967), which groups together Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, with a total population of 661 million. It is one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing economic areas in the world.

For decades, therefore, we have been witnessing a process of regionalization of the world economy, which is now gaining enormous interest with the effects of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine. Regional agreements are positively envisaged in Chapter 8 (Regional Agreements) of the UN Charter as a positive element of multilateralism. According to the rules of the WTO and GATT, tariff reductions among its members are an important exception to the most-favoured-nation clause and therefore do not require extension to third countries. The trend towards de-globalization, the shortening of value chains in international trade and *near sharing* thus now find in regional economic cooperation or integration schemes a desirable alternative to the fragmentation of the international economy by traditional economic nationalisms, which impose higher tariffs or other trade barriers that are retarding, inefficient and disruptive of the international community.

Against this backdrop, it is understandable that the EU has set out not only to make further progress on its EU project internally, but also to build broader areas of economic cooperation and trade integration with neighbouring countries through association agreements with the Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs) and those in the Eastern Neighbourhood. However, given the limited results of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership on the one hand, and the uneven and worrying votes in the United Nations, with widespread reluctance of Southern partners to show solidarity with the EU's effort in support of Ukraine on the other, it is important that the EU, the MPCs and their citizens become clearly aware that



their best way forward lies in progressive integration in a Euro-Mediterranean area that guarantees their progress and stability in an increasingly complicated and competitive world.

What can and should the European Union do in this situation with regard to the countries of the Mediterranean area? There is already some good news. First of all, the EU has revamped its Euro-Mediterranean Policy, adapting it to the changes brought about by the Arab Spring and, more recently, introducing new strategic priorities through the 2021 proposal of a *New Agenda for the Mediterranean* and the 2022 *Global Compass for Security and Defence*. The new approaches consist essentially of addressing the major challenges facing Europe today, like the rest of the world, in order to turn them into opportunities and share them with the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Partner Countries. The new major environmental and climate change emergencies and the switch to renewable energies are particularly promising in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, given the wealth of renewable sources of solar and wind energy in the South, which can facilitate the export of electricity or, in the near future, green liquid hydrogen to European markets. In addition to the needs of the energy transition, there is the digital transition allowing economies to keep pace with global competitiveness and thus improving productive capacities and people's standard of living. The *New Agenda for the Mediterranean* sets out these major objectives as shared goals, which are endowed with budgetary provisions in the accompanying *Economic and Financial Plan*, but which are unfortunately not particularly higher than the traditional ENP envelope.

The other major innovation is the *EU Global Gateway Initiative* (2021), which takes advantage of the European experience from the Juncker Plan (2015) for financing investment in innovation, new technologies and infrastructures at the European level, and transfers it to the global level. The EU Global Gateway Initiative aims to provide up to 300 billion euros for mobility projects in infrastructure and innovation in the entire field of its external cooperation. It is the European counterpart of the *Chinese Belt and Road Initiative*, but with better financing conditions, more favourable because it includes a generous mix of grant funds as opposed to the almost exclusively loan-based offer of the Chinese Belt

and Road Initiative. Both the New European Agenda for the Mediterranean and the EU Global Gateway Initiative are excellent news today, the outcome of which remains to be seen. It is time for Europe to get serious about devoting resources to the development of its Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Partner Countries.

## It is time for Europe to get serious about devoting resources to the development of its Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Partner Countries

On the other hand, much more active EU participation in the reform of the UN system called for by the countries of the Global South is needed, especially in the enlargement of the Security Council to give much greater representation and capacity to the Global South. The world of 2023 is no longer the world of 1945. The EU should also participate more actively in the necessary reform of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. Otherwise, the Global South, led in this sphere by China and the BRICS as a whole, will create its own. It is a question of a global European policy that will help to bring the EU and the countries of the Global South –and especially the Mediterranean Partner Countries– closer together and improve their mutual appreciation and understanding. The first task is therefore to decisively help Ukraine to achieve a peace based on justice and the re-establishment of international law. The creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Economic Integration Area in partnership with the rest of Africa, combined with a better alignment with the aspirations of the Global South, is just as urgent and one of the major tasks for the European Union to build and help decide on this common future.

### Bibliography

ANTHONY, Ian "A new security order in Europe." GLOBSEC, 2022.

- BACHULSKA, Alicja and LEONARD, Mark "China and Ukraine: The Chinese debate about Russia's war and its meaning for the world." European Council on Foreign Relations, 2023.
- CHATHAM HOUSE "Seven ways Russia's war on Ukraine has changed the world." 2023.
- FERNANDA ESPINOSA, María "Una oportunidad para reinventar el sistema multilateral", *Política Exterior*, n. 212, March/April 2023.
- FERRARI, Aldo and TAFURO AMBROSETTI, Eleonora (ed.) "Multipolarity After Ukraine: old wine in new bottles?" Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2023.
- FURNESS, Mark and KEIJZER, Niels "Europe's Global Gateway: A New Geostrategic Framework for Development Policy?" German Development Institute, 2022.
- GARTON ASH, Timothy; KRASTEV, Ivan and LEONARD, Mark "United West, divided from the rest: global public opinion one year into Russia's war on Ukraine." European Council on Foreign Relations, 2023.
- GONZÁLEZ LAYA, Arancha "Un nuevo multilateralismo comercial para un mundo multipolar." *Política Exterior*, n. 212, March/April 2023.
- GOWAN, Richard "The Global South and the Ukraine War at the UN." International Crisis Group, 2023.
- HILTMANN, Joost "Tackling Intersecting Conflicts in the MENA Region." Crisis Group's Middle East, 2020.
- IVESON, Micaela and MCNAIR, David "Multilateral development: How Europeans can get real with the global south." European Council on Foreign Relations, 2023.
- KATARZYNA, Sidlo and COHEN-HADRIA, Emmanuel "A new agenda for the Mediterranean: Are the EU tools and means of action up to its ambitions?" Directorate-General for External Policies, European Parliament, 2022.
- LEHNE, Stefan "After Russia's War Against Ukraine: What Kind of World Order?" Carnegie Europe, 2023.
- MALIK, Khalid "The great transition: non-alignment and the rise of the Global South." *Other News*, 2023.
- MCKINLEY, Gibbs "Russia and China: A Budding Alliance in the Mediterranean?" *The National Interest*, March 2021.
- MENGELBERG, Sabine "A new world order? European security after the war in Ukraine." Stichting Atlantische Commissie, 2022.
- PIROZZI, Nicoletta "Un cambio de Tratado para una Unión Europea de Defensa", *Política Exterior*, May 2023.
- RIZZI, Alberto and VARVELLI, Arturo "Opening the Global Gateway: Why the EU should invest more in the Southern Neighbourhood." European Council on Foreign Relations, 2023.
- SAXER, Marc "The war in Ukraine is part of the struggle for a new world order. But how will it look like?" *IPS Journal*, 14 April 2022.
- SIMÓN, Luis "Autonomía estratégica y defensa europea después de Ucrania." Real Instituto Elcano, 2022.
- WITNEY, Nick "Spirit of ambition: The Ukraine war and European defence integration." European Council on Foreign Relations, 2023.