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**THE NEW CENTRALITY OF  
THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA**

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# INDEX

INTRODUCTION.....	3
CHAPTER 1: MEMORIES OF A GLORIOUS PAST.....	6
1.1 THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA: WHERE EVERYTHING STARTED.....	6
1.2 FROM APOGEE TO DECLINE.....	9
1.3 A SEA IN PIECES: WARS, DECOLONIZATION AND DICTATORS.....	11
1.3.1 The case of Spain and Greece.....	11
1.3.2 The States of MEDA.....	18
CHAPTER 2: A SEA TO BE REBUILT.....	31
2.1 THE EFFECTS OF THE “ARAB SPRING” OF 2011.....	33
2.2 SECURITY ISSUES: IMMIGRATION AND TERRORISM.....	41
2.2.1 The evolution of terrorism and its perception in the Mediterranean.....	42
2.2.2 Immigration: a never-ending flow.....	49
2.3 THE MEDITERRANEAN A COMPARISON WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD.....	55
CHAPTER 3: TOWARDS A NEW FUTURE.....	62
3.1 PERCEPTION VS. REALITY: THE TRUE POTENTIAL OF THE MEDITERRANEAN.....	62
3.2 RETURN TO ECONOMIC GROWTH: SOUTHERN EUROPE AND NORTH AFRICA.....	67
3.3 MARITIME ECONOMY: NEW TRADE ROUTES.....	70
3.4 REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19.....	85
CONCLUSIONS.....	87
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	89
SITIOGRAPHY.....	91
SUMMARY.....	92

# INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean Sea, for better or for worse, has always been at the centre of the history of humanity. A complex story made up of an innumerable amount of encounters between different civilizations with their religions, social structures, cultures and origins. Precisely this connection has led to the creation of the foundations of modern society as we know it. The peoples of the Fertile Crescent, the Greeks, the Romans, then passing to the Arabs, the Ottomans, the Maritime Republics. The Mediterranean was literally the center of the world and of all human activity, but things changed with the discovery of the American continent and the subsequent expansion of the great colonial empires. The *Mare Nostrum* lost its dominant position to be slowly abandoned to itself, leaving the same destiny to the towns within it. The centre had become the periphery, and this was aggravated by the World Wars, which had little pity on the territory. The great and wonderful Mediterranean mosaic is now decomposed.

At the end of the Second World War, is a totally contorted region. The countries of Southern Europe such as Spain and Greece will not know democracy and economic stability until the gates of the new millennium; while in North Africa, the newly independent countries have to contend with the complicated process of national construction. In the Middle East where, with the birth of the State of Israel, a history of war and blood begins, which has not yet ended and has spread throughout the territory, with religious, political, economic and humanitarian implications.

The difficulties of the MENA region (Middle East North Africa) over the decades have expanded and developed in the form of phenomena such as immigration and terrorism. Instability and the lack of security have strongly negatively affected the entire Mediterranean region, slowing down the process of political and especially economic growth, necessary to restart the entire basin. The security issue has dictated and continues to dictate the main political agendas of the area, experiencing great concern among the local population, especially on the shores of the Southern Mediterranean, where the phenomenon of immigration is experienced daily with great frustration, especially due to the lack of adequate support from the European Union.

The economic crises of 2008 and 2011 hit throughout the area and contributed to new economic and political imbalances from which not all states have fully recovered. But although the premises do not outline a particularly positive panorama, the Mediterranean is regaining its global centrality thanks to new economic and commercial developments, giving the region prospects for an important and brighter future.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the evolution of the role of the Mediterranean Sea and the historical path of the countries bordering its coasts. From its heyday until the seventeenth century, until its inexorable decline and up to the present day, taking the road to return to the top.

The first chapter will propose a historical analysis of the Mediterranean basin, starting from the main civilizations of antiquity that helped lay some of the foundations of modern society; in particular of the peoples of the Fertile Crescent of the Greeks of the Romans, until the moment it lost its centrality.

In the last part of the chapter, the focus shifts to the democratization and nation building process to which the region was subjected following the Second World War. Important analysis on the southern European coasts where Spain and Greece find the causes of their political and economic delay due to the dictatorships that saw them chained until a few years before the new millennium. Further historical focus will look at the MENA region and its troubled history throughout the second half of the last century until today. Ethnic and religious conflicts, the struggle for the rich natural resources present in the area and other circumstances have contributed to creating a climate of palpable instability in the region.

The second chapter shifts its analysis to the level of safety. The great instability in the MENA region has contributed to the development of phenomena such as immigration and terrorism. The main event of the last ten years on the subject, namely the "Arab Springs" of 2011, will be analysed to detect the reasons that gave rise to it and the effects it caused throughout the Mediterranean, in what has not only had repercussions within the Arab community, but has represented a real shock for the entire international community.

In the last part of the chapter, the Mediterranean area will be compared with the rest of the world, using the main indicators with which the political, economic and social conditions of a state are assessed. The various rankings obtained from the evaluations of the indices will confirm the gap with the so-called "north" in the world, and further underline how the democratization process is fundamental for being fully involved in the international community and consequently being able to aspire to more opportunities to grow your country.

The third and final chapter will try to reverse the negative appearance of the Mediterranean region, and which instead see it more than ever in a new position of centrality.

In fact, in recent years, the region has made important steps forward, especially in economic terms. Above all, North Africa, has experienced constant economic growth due to the newfound greater stability and better exploitation of natural resources. Natural resources that have contributed and will contribute to benefiting the countries of the Middle Eastern shores and southern Europe thanks to new cooperation alliances for gas and oil. The most virtuous state in terms of growth in the region appears to be Egypt, which benefits particularly from the renewed Suez Canal.

The newfound importance of the Suez Canal for the new trade routes places the Mediterranean at the centre of the political and economic international system. New investments, especially from China, have significantly increased the importance of the maritime economy in the Mediterranean basin, giving the entire region the opportunity to benefit from the situation. Emblematic is the new Belt Road Initiative, a project placing the *Mare Nostrum* as the main commercial resource for Beijing, and representing a great opportunity for the ports of the Mediterranean and for all local governments.

Covid-19 pandemic has stopped the whole world and consequently also the positive trend of the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, the great potential of the region remains unchanged, at the cost of international governance taking the right steps towards a future that is still enigmatic today.

# CHAPTER 1

## MEMORIES OF A GLORIOUS PAST

### 1.1 THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA: WHERE EVERYTHING STARTED

The Mediterranean, Lawrence Durrell wrote, "is an absurdly small sea, but the length and grandeur of its history make us dream bigger than it is"<sup>1</sup>, but despite this it is not easy to deal with this sea, here are no privileged vantage points, no exclusive disciplines through which to look at it, let alone a unique view. The "Liquid Continent"<sup>2</sup>, like Fernand Braudel used to call it, in scientific terms, is a sea, its coasts delimit a shape, its waters fill the invaded and define its surface; it has a fauna, a flora, many waterways enter it from the western area and the eastern one. But this point of view, guarantees an observation of a portion of the Earth's surface, but without fully understanding the real essence of what is being analysed.

In fact, from a cultural point of view the Mediterranean is different from all other seas, because it represents all populations that were born and developed in them, the first great civilization of the human history. With the Mediterranean adjective, then, they qualify indiscriminately different cultures: Greek, Roman, Arab-Islamic, Venetian and so on, but it indicates the eponymous of the whole world known by classical Western civilization. From the shores of the Middle East to the mythological columns of Hercules, extends in all its splendor, the true cradle of civilization.

In the Mediterranean lives a multitude of realities, each bearer of its own truths, stories, forms of life and objects, mental, religious and philosophical forms. More than in other parts of the world, in this place of encounters, the many and varied forms of thought, knowledge and civilization of human history have intersected and integrated, creating a network of cultural areas. This had as result a concentration of unprecedented events, an immense deposit of overlapping historical sediments, mixed, confused, hidden, scattered and sometimes forgotten. In all the eras of its history the great phenomena of socio-cultural and political-economic change have had such a magnitude that even if it arose with regional perspectives they have always ended up involving the entire basin, interconnection that has consequently created a strong interculturality.

This interminable flow of relations and exchanges between peoples began as early as the Bronze Age, that is, at the time when the first "civilizations" of history developed.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Durrell, "Balthazar", 1958

<sup>2</sup> Fernand Braudel, "La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Epoque de Philippe II", 1949

The latter developed for first in the Middle East in the so-called “Fertile Crescent”, comprising Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Palestine, Syria and Egypt. These populations introduced for the first time some of the key elements at the base of the modern societies, and that is why a focus on the most important ones is needed to understand the roots of the Western society and culture. In this region, in fact, it is possible to find for the first time some of the typical elements of an organized community:

1. complex forms of associated life (cities)
2. forms of communication
3. metal, thanks to the use of metallurgy.

The cities built in this region were independent and formed a small autonomous kingdom, so much so that it was later defined as "city-state", a term that will be taken up in the Greek peninsula and their "*polis*". The *Sumerians*, settled in the southern part of Mesopotamia, were responsible for the creation of the most important and large urban centers of the period, including Uruk, the largest city in the Bronze Age. What characterized the cities, in addition to their urban aspect and political organization, was a new division of tasks within the community, a first version of production chain, with the division of labour, differentiated social groups were formed by wealth, prestige and power. In this period, we have some of the first developed religions, that gave to the group of priests, together with the one of the warriors, the highest relevance in the social hierarchies. In addition to priests, warriors and scribes enjoyed a position of privilege; merchants and craftsmen followed, while little social weight had workers and peasants, with in the last step were the slaves, mostly prisoners of war or for debts. The hierarchical social system in some cases where directed not only by the highest authorities, but even by a system of rules and laws. The *Amorites*, in this case, produced the first collection of written laws known in the history of man, known as the "Code of Hammurabi".

Halfway between Egypt and Mesopotamia, that is, among the most powerful empires of the time, stretched the "Land of Canaan", where was born and developed the civilization of the *Jews*. During the Roman domination, the Jews are obliged to leave “their”<sup>3</sup> land and from that moment the diàspora ("dispersion") began: the tribes dispersed in every direction and in every part of the world, even thousands of kilometers from their homeland. They will obtain this territory just after more than two thousand years, in 1948, with the creation of the State of Israel, and the consequent outbreak of the war against the people of Palestine.

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<sup>3</sup> It was needed to put the word "their" in quotation marks considering that the concept of belonging of this single word has led to the outbreak of what is in all probability the bloodiest religious and cultural war in history. I take no position on the question, despite the use of that word.

The first inhabitants of the current Palestine and Lebanon were the *Phoenicians*, of great sailors and merchants that created a web of commercial routes from the East and the West<sup>4</sup>, creating a sort of "Mediterranean extended market".

The populations of the Fertile Crescent laid the foundations for civilization, by giving life to the concepts of market, politics and organized society. With the end of the Bronze Age, new populations arrive from the Western shores of the Mediterranean, and the focal point of the region progressively moves away from the Middle East. Is a new era for the human civilization, a new and concrete step towards modernity.

In the Peloponnesian Peninsula, inside the wall of the Greek *polis* (State-city) of Athens, a great political revolution was in development during the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. *Pericles* perfected the political structure of the polis following the famous reforms made in 508 BC by his predecessor *Clistene*, giving birth to the political system that we use to call: democracy. Pericles' polis was "open to all," where there is the most scrupulous respect for legality and citizens are guaranteed access to public office on merit; a city where citizens could live in "full freedom" while taking care of both their private interests and public affairs<sup>5</sup>. As noticed by Karl Popper, the historical and epic conflict between Sparta and Athens is encapsulated as the clash the "closed society" and the "open society"<sup>6</sup>. For the first time in universal history not only was the individual's right to a private life within the community recognized, the free development of personality was even inscribed within the ends of the state. Unfortunately, the outcome of the Peloponnesian War had catastrophic consequences and left the Athenian experiment unfinished. The ideology behind this failure to revolutionize remained alive thanks to the colonies, mainly those in Magna Graecia, or in today's southern Italy, where the great philosophers of Athens escaped and kept alive what was called at the time by José Ortega y Gasset as the "tradition of anti-tradition"<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>They reached the British Isles passing through the Strait of Gibraltar, and according to some historians they even circumnavigated the African continent.

<sup>5</sup> L. Pellicani "*Dalla Società Chiusa alla Società Aperta*", Rubettino Editore, 2002

<sup>6</sup> K.R. Popper, "The Open Society and its Enemies", London, 1945, vol. I

<sup>7</sup> J. Ortega y Gasset, "*Idee per una storia della filosofia*", Sansoni, Firenze 1983



## 1.2 FROM THE APOGEE TO DECLINE

Taking a step forward in history we come to the civilization that brought the Mediterranean region to its apogee: Romans.

The contribution that this people has made to the history of humanity is invaluable in all areas, political, economic, social, scientific. Some important and innovative elements for the social structure are integrated during this large period and still today represents a solid base for the socio-political structures of nowadays societies. A first example is the Roman Law, source of inspiration for the drafting of laws, codes and constitutions throughout the modern world for centuries. The Roman law, together with British law, which has a more customary nature, are still the two main sources of law in the analysis of legal systems. It is not a case that the whole political structure of Western Christianity starting, at least from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, have been reproduction of the structure of the Roman-Greek world<sup>8</sup> Thanks to its exceptional size and duration, the Roman Empire offers one of the best opportunities to study economic development in the context of an agrarian world empire<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, the fact that the Roman period was the only time when the entire Mediterranean basin was contained within a single political domain raises the question of how much the specific characteristics of the Roman economy owed to imperial unification<sup>10</sup>. Roman conquest created favourable preconditions for production and trade. All its different regions could capitalize on their comparative advantage in producing goods for exchange<sup>11</sup>. Trade went as far as the Baltic coasts of Arabia, India and China, through the ancient “*Silk Road*”, to import luxury and prestige products at astronomical prices due to the high cost of transport.

With the division and then fall of the Western Roman Empire begins the slow decline of the Mediterranean region. The territories of the empire are stormed by the barbarians, who came from the north-eastern regions. Rome fall and begin the Middle Age, which is not called Dark Age by case, to emphasize the decline that the European continent and the Mediterranean basin had to undergo. During the High Middle Age there were three civilizations bordering the Mediterranean: the Christian West, Islam and the Byzantine world. The encounter between Western reality and that of Islam will result in countless conflicts, but from a cultural, scientific<sup>12</sup> and commercial point of view, it caused the Mediterranean region to increase exponentially.

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<sup>8</sup> A.J. Toynbee, “*La città aggressiva*”, Laterza, Bari, 1972

<sup>9</sup> Scheidel, Walter. “Approaching the Roman Economy.” Chapter. In “The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy”, edited by Walter Scheidel, 1–22. Cambridge Companions to the Ancient World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Scheidel, Walter. “Approaching the Roman Economy.” Chapter. In “The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy”, edited by Walter Scheidel, 1–22. Cambridge Companions to the Ancient World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012

<sup>12</sup> Thanks to this encounter the Arabic numerals and the *abaco* are introduced in Europe.

With the arrival of the Lower Middle Ages, Europe began a new process of development and modernization, with a rapid growth of trade mainly thanks to the port cities on the Mediterranean coast, especially the famous Maritime Republics in Italy. The Italian peninsula, at the center of the Mediterranean waterways, becomes a natural bridge for trade between Europe, North Africa and the East. The control of Mediterranean routes by the maritime republics marks a new start to European expansion to the East and guarantees them very high profits and centuries of wealth and splendor, because as Braudel writes, "the more precious riches come from the sea, the center of transport. Master of the riches are those who dominate the sea<sup>13</sup>".

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century scientific discoveries and new trade routes changed the comparative positions of power in the international economy<sup>14</sup>. The geographical discoveries undoubtedly had a decisive effect on European economic evolution and the development of capitalism, leading to the creation of a real "world economy", but the first noticeable effect was the decline of the economic and commercial centrality of the Mediterranean: in fact, with the discovery of America and with the new trade opportunities arising from the new routes to it, Africa and the Far East, the great Empires of the time shift their economic-political attentions beyond the Columns. These circumstances benefit countries with direct access to the Atlantic Sea, namely Spain, England, Portugal and partly France, which will not coincide with the birth of the greatest colonial empires in history.

The great civilizations protagonists of the ancient world are then seen to become a territory of conquest, subjected to countless rulers by different languages and origins. Italy, until its national union, sees itself divided and subjected to foreign domination with, as the only constant, the State of the Church in central Italy. The same fate for Greece, which finds itself the reason for international dispute and coveted territory of conquest since the Medieval period. North Africa will not see the real possibility of autonomous and concrete development until after the Second World War, due to the constant foreign domination, first with the Ottomans and then with the European colonizers. Spain, the only true Mediterranean power, no longer looks to its shores, too distracted by the fortunes of the New World with its Empire that "never sees the Sun go down", and to resist the constant attacks coming from France, England and Austria. The countries of northern central Europe are now the rulers of the European continent, a position of dominance that will be reinforced in the following centuries until the gates of the twentieth century also thanks to the industrial revolutions. Adding up all these aspects and the political and economic repercussions, there is an incredible difference in the disadvantage of the Mediterranean countries, which will remain etched in the fortunes of these countries for a long time.

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<sup>13</sup> Fernand Braudel, "La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Epoque de Philippe II", 1949

<sup>14</sup> Francesca Corrao, "Islam, Religion and Politics", LUISS University Press, Roma, 2017

### 1.3 A SEA IN PIECES: WARS, DECOLONIZATION AND DICTATORS

To conclude the chapter, we make an important leap forward in time coming to the end of the Second World War and analyze the evolution of the area until the contemporary times. At the end of World War II, when many European countries were about to find the correct political compromises to build moderate-centrist democratic governments, democracy in Southern Europe was “thwarted by authoritarian regimes whose power had been enhanced during the war”<sup>15</sup>. World War II led to the collapse to National Socialism and Fascism<sup>16</sup>, but it did not happen in all countries at the same time: in Spain, the authoritarian regime of General Franco survived due to its neutral position during the War, postponing the process of democratization of the country until almost the end of the century and in Greece, the political stability is mined in a first moment by a civil war, and then by the instauration of a military junta. In northern Africa and in the Middle East, in the meanwhile, starts a long, difficult and, in certain cases painful, process of decolonization.

#### 1.3.1 THE CASE OF SPAIN AND GREECE

Spain was no more the great Empire where the Sun never comes down. The loss of colonies was a severe blow for the country, above all in economic terms. After experiencing a brief period of democracy between 1931 and 1936, the General Francisco Franco assumed the role of ruler of the Iberic state. The country precipitated into a three-year Civil War, that became of international interest, as it represented not only a clash for the fate of Spain, but also between the two political ideologies of the time. Against Franco were the republicans, supported by Communist, socialists and workers. “Zealous leftists” tramped into Spain from Europe to fight against the forces of fascism, with the military aid from the Soviet Union<sup>17</sup>. Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy provided Franco military support, and the Catholics gave their political support in this clash against the “secular forces” guided by Marx’s ideology<sup>18</sup>. The Civil War, ended with the victory of Franco, marked by atrocities, costed almost 300,000 lives<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> W. Hitchcock, “The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present”, Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 269

<sup>16</sup> O. A. Westad, “The Cold War. A World of History”, Allen Lane, Great Britain, 2017, p. 73

<sup>17</sup> W. Hitchcock, “The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present”, Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 271

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Once established the dictatorship, Franco faced great difficulties, above all in economic terms. The Civil War destroyed trade relationships with Europe; the population suffered of malnutrition and disease and the neutral position during the World War II was not a solution to re-establish relations with the international community, due to the clear sympathies of the regime towards Germany and Italy. By 1945, the country was isolated in economic and political terms. Spain was not considered to become member of the United Nations and was the only European state to not receive the American economic support through the Marshall Plan. The latter had been crucial in the post-war Europe for the national rebuilding, and the lack of this support created many inconveniences in concrete terms. The economy was stagnant and the living conditions of most of the population was worsening day by day. The country emerged from this condition of stagnation during the 50s, when the new ministers of commerce and finance persuaded Franco to adopt a Stabilization and Liberation Plan: liberalized trade, cut public spending, raised taxes, abolished import controls and abandoned price and wage controls<sup>20</sup>. The Plan was supported by the World Bank and IMF, and in the same period, Franco gave his authorization for the establishment of American bases on Spanish territory, that yielded substantial economic aid to the regime<sup>21</sup>.

That was a rare moment of economic enthusiasm that led a GDP growth at 7.5 percent per year between 1960 and 1973<sup>22</sup>, but the situation worsened during the 70s. The sudden surge in energy prices and raw materials led to a new recession, while in the meantime the Spanish politics was experiencing a period of turmoil due to Franco's health conditions<sup>23</sup>. The latter decided to restore the monarchy in order to create a concrete political path for the country after his death, as a sign that he was conscious that he was close to his end. The evident political and economic weaknesses of the state gave rise to frequent demonstrations by the working class, which came from a period of economic boom and now found itself tackling the problem of unemployment concretely. The Basque nationalists, grouped in the ETA ("Euzkadi Ta Azkatasuna", which means "Basque Homeland and Liberty) turned to violence to archive an independent Basque state<sup>24</sup>. Basque terrorist killed almost fifty people in that years, even Luis Carrero Blanco, who had been delegated power by Franco due to the deteriorating health of the latter. Franco died on 20 November 1975, and his successor, the young king Juan Carlos, emerged as a champion of democracy<sup>25</sup>, marking the beginning of a new era for the Hispanic country.

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<sup>20</sup> W. Hitchcock, "The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present", Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 272-273

<sup>21</sup> Manzocchi, Cavallo, "L'economia spagnola da Franco a oggi", Carocci, Roma, 2005

<sup>22</sup> W. Hitchcock, "The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present", Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 273

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> W. Hitchcock, "The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present", Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 274

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

The process of democratization happened in a singular way, and that is why is usually called “*Ruptura Pactada*”. In this phase the oppositions opened a negotiation regarding the new democratic structure of the government, a rupture with the past through a solution of continuity, which explain the particular name of this process. The first free elections, after forty years, were held on 15 June 1977, and Adolfo Suárez, leader of the center-right party *Union de Centro Democratico*, won with almost 35 percent of the vote. But there were still a number of obstacles on the road to normalcy: the country needed a constitution; the Basque terrorists increased the number of attacks; the army was still in part loyal to Franco and never accepted the loss of influence<sup>26</sup>. The new constitution was adopted in October 1978 which, among the various innovations, guaranteed a certain degree of autonomy to certain regions such as Catalonia and the Basque regions; a compromise necessary to extinguish the fire of Basque terrorism, but without great success. The new democratic regime also had to face new economic difficulties following the oil crisis that broke out in 1973. To mitigate the effects of the crisis, the government focused on expanding public spending, providing subsidies to public enterprises and nationalizing private ones in difficulty, as well as increasing the social protections granted to the unemployed<sup>27</sup>. However, this solution could not be maintained for long, both because it caused an increase in public debt and because it clashed with the Community guidelines on state aid, thus resulting incompatible with the planned accession of Spain to the European Community<sup>28</sup>. A painful and inevitable process of economic restructuring started in 1982 by the Socialist Party<sup>29</sup> of Felipe Gozalez. The latter guided Spain’s entry into the European Community in 1986, and the development aid from Brussels helped boost Spanish modernization and exports<sup>30</sup>, opening the road towards the joining of the common European Currency in 1999.

Spain presented itself to Europe as one of the poorest states, several decades underdeveloped respect to the countries of the central north zone. Even Germany, which despite being the center of the political and economic dynamics of the Cold War at the time, found itself in a state of development more advanced from every point of view respect to Spain. Naturally, what has favoured the "miraculous" development of Germany, has a more exogenous than endogenous nature, considering the great political interests that the international community had in this territory, primarily the USA. However, the main cause behind the Spanish backwardness lies in the absence of democracy in the Iberian country.

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<sup>26</sup> W. Hitchcock, “The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present”, Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 276

<sup>27</sup> Manzocchi, Cavallo, “L’economia spagnola da Franco a oggi”, Carocci, Roma, 2005

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Manzocchi, Cavallo, “L’economia spagnola da Franco a oggi”, Carocci, Roma, 2005

<sup>30</sup> W. Hitchcock, “The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present”, Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 277

Most of the backwardness of the Mediterranean countries is mainly due to the delay in the democratization process or its total absence. As the recent history of Spain has shown, having a democratic (functioning) structure is strictly necessary to be included in the panorama of international relations, which importance is not only understood in political terms, but above all in economic terms. Once the World War II, democracy was internationally recognized as the ideal political system and the essential characteristic for taking part in the international community. After the tragic experience that Europe and the world underwent during the war due to authoritarian and dictatorial regimes, the aversion for the latter has rightly caused a political closure towards them. Spain experienced this aversion even in the early years of the new democratic government, hindered by countries like France on the road to becoming part of the European Community. The same fate was reserved in particular to two other European countries: to Portugal<sup>31</sup>, which came from the dictatorship of Salazar; and above all - as regards the analysis of this thesis - to Greece which too, was emerging from a period of dictatorship.

Greece had the longest and most painful transition to democracy in Europe<sup>32</sup>. Its strategic position in the center of the Mediterranean has placed the Hellenic peninsula under the political aims of foreign powers, during the World War but especially during the Cold War. Britain and Winston Churchill tried to deeply influence the postwar politics in Greece in order to keep some political influence in the Mediterranean and to avoid to let Soviet Union expand its sphere of influence in center Europe. In October 1944, as the Germans began withdrawing from Greece, Churchill bargained with Stalin, leaving the influence over Romania in exchange to keep British predominance in Greece<sup>33</sup>. Stalin agreed and Churchill appeared to impose a right-wing regime to Athens<sup>34</sup>. Elections were held in 1946 without the participation of the Communist party, and the new government favoured the return of the King<sup>35</sup>. In the meanwhile, the Communists betrayed and dissatisfied by the political developments that saw them first as fighters for the homeland and then excluded from the latter, were keeping a strong military force which were stronger than the Greek military army. The clash was inevitable, and in fact, the civil war begun. A new decade of war that saw the interventions of both new superpowers, the first of a series of clashes fought at a distance by the two factions where the "pawns" of this chess game will not wear Soviet or American uniforms but will fight in battle with the latter's weapons. The Cold War had already begun, and Europe will once again be the battlefield.

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<sup>31</sup> The Portuguese case will not be analyzed, since the country must be considered as an Atlantic State, and not a Mediterranean one.

<sup>32</sup> W. Hitchcock, "The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present", Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 281

<sup>33</sup> W. Hitchcock, "The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present", Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 282

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> The restoration of monarchy was Churchill's main political objective that he had for Greece.

For the USA was crucial to maintain a Western political control in Greece, just as the National Security Council stated: “The defeat of the Soviet efforts to destroy the political independence and territorial integrity of Greece is necessary in order to preserve the security of the whole eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, which is vital to the security of the United Nations<sup>36</sup>”.

The war leaved the Greek peninsula in pieces. The winner right-wing government provided a new constitution and banned the Communist party, which guaranteed the country the entry into NATO. Greece’s stability began to fall apart during the 60s due to the popular claim on the island of Cyprus which was still a British colony. Cyprus for Britain represented a useful and strategic position considering its interests in the Middle Est. In 1955 the Cypriots started to rise, and the National Organization of Cypriots Struggle began terrorist attacks on the British forces on the island<sup>37</sup>. The British withdrawal did not solve all the problems of the island since Turkey claimed to obtain part of the control of the territory due to the presence of a Turkish minority in the eastern part of Cyprus. The island obtained its independence in 1960, with a shared power system between Greece and Turkey, but the coexistence in the government and between the communities never worked<sup>38</sup>. A contrast between Turkey and Greece on Cyprus that extends its legacy until today, as we will see in the next chapter.

In the meanwhile, in Greece the right-wing was losing consensus and compactness in the internal ranks, until the point that the premier Georgios Papandreou decided to resign in July 1965, incapable to maintain a solid government and a social stability in the peninsula. Two years of political chaos followed<sup>39</sup>, with continuous strikes and demonstrations organized mainly by the left-wing militants. In April 1967 new elections were programmed to be hold and it was expected a victory of the reformist party<sup>40</sup>. The possibility of a left-wing oriented government triggered a reaction on the part of the leaders of the Greek army giving rise to a coup d'etat, which in the night of April 21 alone managed to arrest all the main political figures of the left and to take control of the government, without making even a victim.

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<sup>36</sup> Loy Henderson to Secretary of States, 9 January 1948, FRUS 1948, 4:12; and NSC 5, Report to the National Security Council, 6 January 1948, FRUS 1948, 4: 2-7

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> W. Hitchcock, “The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present”, Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 284

<sup>40</sup> The leader of the reformist party was Georgios Papandreou’s son Andreas.

Three were the colonels that took over the control of Greece: Geōrgios Papadopoulos, Nikolaos Makarezos and Ioannis Ladas. The so called “*Dictatorship of the Colonels*” starts, and a new period of darkness arrives in the peninsula that saw the birth of democracy. The *Junta* (another way to refer to the dictatorship), headed by Papadopoulos, was based on nationalism and absolute anti-communism, declared the articles of the Constitution that protected personal freedom no longer in effect, and the monarchy abolished. All political parties were dissolved, and they began arresting hundreds of known and suspected leftists, as well as politicians and public figures and the King, which escaped with his family in Italy after a failed counter-coup in December 1967. It was a brutal regime that killed anyone who could pose a threat to the Junta, without distinction. The international community clearly did not share the methods used in Greece. In September of the same year, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands to accuse Greece of violating most of the European Commission of Human Rights' conventions. The European Commission of Human Rights investigated 213 cases of tortures<sup>41</sup>. The tension with the international community culminated with the withdrawal of Greece from the Council of Europe in December. Emblematic was the repression of students in protest at the Athens Polytechnic using tanks on 25 November 1973, which led to the death of students and the wounding of hundreds of them.

Papadopoulos completely lost all political support after the events of Athens, and was suddenly replaced by General Ioannides, who however proved himself even more repressive than his predecessor. One of his first decisions was to support a coup d'etat in Cyprus on July 15, 1974, to depose Archbishop Makarios III, Cypriot president<sup>42</sup>. Ioannides aimed to the long-held dream of unification between Cyprus and Greece, in order to regaining the popular consensus<sup>43</sup>. Turkey decided in response to invade Cyprus, to defend the interests of the Turkish Cypriots, and occupied the northern part of the island and Ioannides was unable to effectively oppose the invasion and this, because the army refused to be mobilized<sup>44</sup>. For a regime that based much of its rhetoric on military nationalism, was a serious blow<sup>45</sup>, which led to the inevitable collapse of the Junta.

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<sup>41</sup> W. Hitchcock, “The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present”, Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 285

<sup>42</sup> “*Il Post*”, “*Il giorno che la Grecia diventò una dittatura*”, 27 April, 2017

<sup>43</sup> W. Hitchcock, “The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present”, Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 285

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> “*Il Post*”, “*Il giorno che la Grecia diventò una dittatura*”, 27 April, 2017



On 24 July, the venerable politician Constantine Karamanlis returned from exile in France after eleven years and contributed to a provisional government until new elections, then won by his democratic party in November 1974<sup>46</sup>. The main aim of the new government, just like what happened in Spain, was to enter in the European Community. It represented not only an important and advantageous political occasion, but moreover an economic one. Despite an economic growth after the end of the civil war, helped moreover by the economic aids provided by the USA, Greece presented itself at the European Community as one of the poorest countries of the continent. Being part of the European web represented a concrete possibility to give a new economic and politic flow to the peninsula. Indeed, the negotiations for the entry of Greece in the community began immediately. In 1979 was signed an accession agreement and in 1981 Greece became a full member of the European community. The European enthusiasm did not last that much. The membership in the community forced the country to dismantle its protectionist barriers and the reforms aimed to make Greece part of the European Monetary Union created quite a few problems for the economy, even if against all odds Greece managed to be part of it in 2001<sup>47</sup>.

Since the end of the World War II Greece and Spain have experienced some combination of civil war, authoritarian rule, weak economic growth and significant political turmoil<sup>48</sup>. Both two had to adapt to market capitalism and find the best democratic formula in short time to fit with the European and global reality. While the rest of Europe was sailing towards the new millennium with a stable status, Southern Europe was still fighting for its freedom. The tendency among the countries of the Northern and Western Europe to look down to the Mediterranean European states, it is not a case<sup>49</sup>. European integration has been one of the driving forces of the process of democratization in Southern Europe<sup>50</sup>. This process was seen at the South, as the only change to archive solid political and economic perspectives. The European Economic Community (EEC) influenced this process indirectly, firmly directing Spain and Greece within the western bloc<sup>51</sup>.

With their accession to the EEC these countries obtained a stronger standing both in European and international affairs and the positive meaning of their membership was widely promoted<sup>52</sup>.

Few years later, with the outbreak of the economic crisis challenged this narrative.

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<sup>46</sup> W. Hitchcock, "The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present", Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 286

<sup>47</sup> W. Hitchcock, "The Struggle for Europe. The turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present", Anchor Books, New York, 2004, p. 287

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Kornetis K., Cavallaro M.E. (2019) Introduction: Lost in Transition?. In: Cavallaro M., Kornetis K. (eds) Rethinking Democratization in Spain, Greece and Portugal. St Antony's Series. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11108-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11108-3_1)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Kornetis K., Cavallaro M.E. (2019) Introduction: Lost in Transition?. In: Cavallaro M., Kornetis K. (eds) Rethinking Democratization in Spain, Greece and Portugal. St Antony's Series. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11108-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11108-3_1)

Spain, Greece, and Italy, between the 1990s and the first years of the new millennium upset their economic system and hardly tested their political system in order to be fully part of the European Community and to adopt the common currency. Sadly, what should have been their source of political salvation became the reason for new problems, due to economic crises such as those of 2008 and 2011, and political crises due to the lost faith in European governance. Southern Europe had practically staked everything on Brussels. Not surprisingly, since they were the greatest enthusiasts and promoters of the European reality, these states became and still are the great skeptics and of the European community.

A focus on Spain and Greece was more than necessary to understand the real setback of southern Europe compared to the central north. Their delay in the democratization process was crucial in negative terms. Although Italy also emerged from a dictatorial regime, it has enjoyed a democratic political structure since 1946 and has immediately been a participant in European governance throughout its development and evolution during the post-Second World War and during the Cold War. The Italian economic backwardness finds its main motivation in the political failures of the last thirty years, not for lack of opportunities within the international community. The same goes for Turkey, which also enjoyed excellent development opportunities in the post-war period, thanks to its state structure, which, as we will see, looked towards the west, making it a perfect political partner for the US and UK, which had put Anatolia in the political sights due to its particularly strategic position in the Mediterranean. Turkey's recent crises are nothing more than the result of Erdogan's approach to the country, due to its incompatibility with Western governance and the extremely aggressive policy it adopts.

### **1.3.2 THE STATES OF THE MEDA**

The situation that arose on the other shores of the Mediterranean, in North Africa and in the Middle East at the end of the World War II, as it was for Spain and Greece, did not favor political and economic development, if not the opposite. Until the end of the war, these regions had been controlled by foreign powers<sup>53</sup>. France had its influence in Syria, Lebanon and Maghreb, while the UK occupied Palestine and had direct control of the governments in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and the Gulf states<sup>54</sup>. In less than a decade, all this system of colonies and political colonies fell: France abandoned all its colonial territories; the Arab nationalist revolutions were driving politics in Egypt, Syria and Iraq; Palestine was divided between the new state of Israel and territories occupied by Egypt and Jordan.

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<sup>53</sup> O. A. Westad, "The Cold War. A World of History", Allen Lane, Great Britain, 2017, p. 449

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Replaced the two former European colonial powers, the United States and the Soviet Union expanded the areas of competition influencing the internal political evolution of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in a particularly troubled period in which most states were called to difficult processes of decolonization, state-building and democratization. Consequently, the paths of independence of the Arab-Islamic states followed different paths, mostly determined by specific historical-cultural characteristics intertwined with the effects of the power dynamics of the international dimension. Accompanying these paths was the Arab-Israeli conflict that more than any other tore the Middle East, opening wounds and rifts within the Arab world. The Israeli-Palestinian question was the origin of misunderstandings and mistrust that would have characterized and characterize the way of relating with Western states.

An analysis of the various state-building paths that have characterized the MENA countries can only start from Egypt. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Egypt had the role of leading country, a true hegemon of the Arab-Islamic world, thanks to its history, geopolitical relevance, and cultural centrality for the Sunni Arab community ensured by the University of Al -Azhar of Cairo. Capitalizing on these elements was a charismatic leader, capable of capturing the hearts and minds of the Arab peoples, still deeply disoriented by the troubled colonial experience and the birth of the state of Israel<sup>55</sup>. The Egypt in which Nasser established himself was a very young republic born as a result of the liberal experience that lasted until the early 1950s and the overthrow of the monarchy of King Faruq.

Nasser's socialism presented a non-Marxist nature, rejecting the class struggle and the abolition of private property, and instead attributing full centrality to the role of the state. Moreover, an innovative aspect, 'Nasserism' explicitly recalled some values of Islam, which have become a legitimizing element. In other words, Nasser's socialism, while maintaining a completely secular political practice, had its ideological roots in Islam. The pan-Arabism introduced by Nasser consisted in the assumption of political responsibility towards the entire Arab world. Egypt became the reference point for all Arab claims. The product of this ideology was the brief institutional experience of the United Arab Republic (1958-61), born from the union of Egypt with Syria, as well as the outbreak of the Yemeni, Algerian and Libyan revolutions that drank from the Pan-Arabism of Nasser to give foundation ideological to their own political claims.

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<sup>55</sup> The birth of Israel is known in the Islamic Arab world as *nakba*, that means “disaster”

A first liberal phase was followed by a socialist one conditioned both by the Egyptian experience of Nasser and by the affirmation of the *Ba'th* party (Party of the Socialist Arab Revival) in Syria and Iraq.

Arab nationalism or pan-Arabism was not the creation of the Egyptian president, who rather appropriated an ideological current born between the two world wars in Syria. Pan-Arabism was a very complex phenomenon: the ideological father of was Sati al-Husri who was convinced that to bind and keep the Arab nation united are the common language, regardless of denominational affiliation, and the sharing of the historical path. From these ideas some concrete attempts to set up movements and associations such as the “League for National Action” were born, which, however, did not have great luck.

The experience of the United Arab Republic (1958), although it represented the first political body inspired by pan-Arabism, proved to be completely unsuccessful because Nasser pretended to play a predominant role, imposing choices in all sectors without taking into account the different conditions locals. In doing so, the Egyptian president on the one hand thwarted Syrian ambitions and on the other hand undermined the very foundation of the pan-Arab ideology, namely the equality of the Arab peoples. In fact, if the initial romantic idea of pan-Arabism aimed to overcome national particularisms, the experiment of the United Arab Republic highlighted the inability to form a common front going beyond tribal and national rivalries. Moreover, the unsuccessful policies and the lack of economic results produced a growing social malaise on which Islamic movements began to leverage, including the Muslim Brotherhood and some radical Salafist groups (al-Jihad) protagonists in the 1981 assassination of Anwar al -Sadat, Nasser's successor.

Nasser's delusion of omnipotence, who repeatedly stressed the need for a government 'for' the people but 'not' with the people, had favoured the constitution of an autocratic regime, characterized by a suffocating and corrupt bureaucracy and by the repression of all forms of dissent, political and civil.

Upon Nasser's death in 1970, Vice President Anwar Sadat replaced him in power and devoted himself to the task of improving relations with the West. On 6 October 1973, Sadat attacked the Israeli occupiers of Sinai in surprise and, although Egypt lost the war, the eastern bank of the Suez Canal was included among the territories subject to negotiations for the suspension of hostilities. In 1977 Sadat took substantial steps to achieve peace with Israel, which was later consolidated with the Camp David Treaty of 1978. Israel agreed to withdraw from Sinai and Egypt officially recognized the existence of the Jewish state. However, there was no solution to the Palestinian question and many in the Arab world regarded Sadat as a traitor. The Egyptian president was assassinated on 6 October 1981.

He was succeeded by Vice President Hosni Mubarak, who has remained at the head of the country from that moment on. Mubarak surprised many people by the political prowess he showed in trying to unravel the complex Palestinian question and in improving relations with Israel and at the same time with other Arab states. With the birth of fundamentalism in the Arab world, Mubarak sometimes found himself in an uncomfortable position, to the point of being subjected to numerous attacks. The Egyptian leader did not hesitate to send 35,000 troops to fight in Iraq at the time of the Gulf War, and although the war was seen as an attack by Western imperialists on Arab countries, Egypt's commitment proved very useful. In order to improve relations with the West.

In 1992, Islamic fundamentalists began a campaign of violence and intimidation against tourists and the Egyptian security forces. The mid-1990s were characterized by tensions with Sudan over the disputed territory of Halaib, as well as by intense floods in 1994 and by a series of conflicts with fundamentalists, which resulted in an attempted murder against President Mubarak in the 1995. The 1997 massacre by Islamic militants of more than 70 people, most of them tourists, shocked Egyptians and forced thousands of people around the world to change their vacation plans. The subsequent fall of the government to some extent stemmed the violence, and Egypt remains a relatively stable country - with a low level of unemployment, growing literacy and increased privatization in the economy - for the time being.

Mubarak is at the forefront of proposing plans to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The foreign ministers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan met with President Bush in Washington on 18 July 2002, presenting their detailed plan on the Middle East which called for the birth of a Palestinian state from January 2003, a written constitution, an elected parliament and a prime minister. However, in the absence of the necessary condition of the ceasefire between Israelis and Palestinians, any peace plan remains inapplicable.

As seen, one of the main political partners of the Egyptian government was Syria. Once having obtained independence, Syria began to deal with those internal divisions, both of a political and religious nature, which had so far been dormant due to the common struggle against foreign occupation<sup>56</sup>. A very complex phase in the internal life of the country thus opened, characterized by strong instability. The new state had to face a first crisis already in 1948, when the Syrian troops joined the others of the other Arab states to attack the newborn state of Israel<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020", Bordeaux, 2020, p.315

<sup>57</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020", Bordeaux, 2020, p.316

The defeat led to a serious internal crisis which was aggravated by the series of economic difficulties facing the country. In such an uncertain phase, the first of a long series of military coups that characterized Syrian life until the end of the millennium and beyond took place.

In 1950 a new constitution was approved which reintroduced the Chamber of Deputies, but the disastrous economic situation of the country and the palpable political instability made the attempt to resolve it through democratic instruments vain. Over the decades, the left became stronger and stronger in government and therefore the country became easy prey to the expansionist ambitions of the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, the relationship with Egypt was renewed as we have just seen. But a new coup d'etat in 1961, severed the ties between Egypt and Syria. Immediately after the blow and reorganized the movement, the Ba'th party managed to seize power in 1963. Between 1954 and 1956, a series of agreements were signed between Syria and the Soviet Union, both of an economic and cultural nature, until the signing of a real military agreement in 1956. This led to the isolation of Syria from other Arab states<sup>58</sup>. In a few months the revolutionary and socialist tones became even more accentuated and the Baathist revolution was ascribed to the broad framework of the anti-imperialist revolutions of the Third World, identifying in Israel the main enemy to be fought in the name of a war of liberation that involved all the Arabs. It was precisely the belligerent tones towards Israel that dragged Nasser and Syria into the third Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967, known as the 'Six Day War', the conflict ended in a bitter defeat for the Arabs, marking the beginning of Nasser's decline.

From a broader perspective, the 1967 war constituted a real watershed in Middle Eastern events. In addition to the crisis of Nasserism, the conflict sanctioned the birth of the special relationship between Israel and the United States, forced the Arab world to rethink its identity also in relation to Israel and the Western world and aggravated the problem of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, convincing King Hussein in September to intervene and crack down on organized combat groups. As for Syria, after the conflict the institutional structure became even more fragile due to the hostility between those who sponsored a civilian government in the hands of the Ba'th and those who, on the contrary, aspired to a greater military presence. The frictions were resolved in 1970 when the officer Assad arrested the ruling class of the Ba'th, stabilizing the country by strengthening power in the hands of the Alawite religious-tribal group.

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<sup>58</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020", Bordeaux, 2020, p.317

The 1980s were also marked by a serious internal crisis<sup>59</sup>. Ties with Moscow were maintained but adopting a pro-Iranian attitude in the war between Iran and Iraq led to the alienation of the state by the more moderate Arab countries<sup>60</sup>. In the new millennium, however, the country experienced its darkest period. Assad's death did not bring any detente in relations with Israel, and indeed brought the country to be included by George W. Bush among the members of the so-called "axis of evil"<sup>61</sup>. In the following years with the "Arab Spring" and the advent of ISIS on the lands of Syria, the situation became tragic which did not end with the reconquest of the territories subdued by the terrorist group.

The history of Syria, on the other hand, has been closely connected with that of Lebanon, another protagonist of the Middle Eastern region. The country became independent in November 1943, after being under the French administration since 1920. The 1943 National Pact was unwritten constitution, an agreement between the main Christian and Muslim leaders, based on four essential principles: Lebanon was to be a fully independent state and therefore Christians were to cease to identify with the West; despite Lebanon being an Arab-speaking Arab country, spiritual and intellectual ties with the West were not to be broken; Lebanon had to cooperate with other Arab countries; public offices had to be assigned on the basis of skills and not according to the confession of belonging<sup>62</sup>. The original intentions behind the Lebanese constitution bode well in terms of democratization and coexistence between Western and Arab realities.

A similar path was taken by General Mustafa Kemal "Ataturk" (that means "Father of the Turks") when he gave birth to Turkey after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. He introduced the universal suffrage with equality of both sexes; abolished the veil and the fez; the latin alphabet replaced the Ottoman one; the Swiss code was adopted mixed with some elements of the Italian penal code, and the one-party system was eliminated after the World War II<sup>63</sup>. Ataturk wanted a Turkey worthy of western civilization<sup>64</sup>, which proved to be a successful experiment from different points of view, supported by the economic and political support of the Western community and the USA during the Cold War period (also considering its great strategic importance given its position in the Mediterranean) although not despite this, political or economic crises up to the present day. The recent events concerning Erdogan are a concrete example.

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<sup>59</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020", Bordeaux, 2020, p.321

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020", Bordeaux, 2020, p.322

<sup>62</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020", Bordeaux, 2020, p.286

<sup>63</sup> F. Corrao, "Islam, Religion and Politics", LUISS University Press, Roma, 2017, p.88

<sup>64</sup> L. Pellicani, "Dalla Società Chiusa alla Società Aperta", Rubbettino Editore, 2012, p.389

Returning to the case of Lebanon, this deconfessionalization of the political sphere will never happen completely, and it was precisely the reason for serious political and social crises in the country. Already in the 1950s, Muslims began to protest the excessive presence of Christians in the highest ranks of the state, requesting a new census in order to verify the proportion between the two communities and consequently re-proportion the number of government representatives<sup>65</sup>. The pressures on the fragile Lebanese state were growing stronger. The effects of the Suez Crisis made the internal situation progressively less stable. In addition, Nasser's influence in the Muslim population in those years had become stronger and stronger, however, finding great opposition from Christians, who wanted at all costs to have a good relationship with the Western sphere to maintain the state politically independent<sup>66</sup>. Tensions between communities and a lack of government recognition by the Muslim side of the population led to nearly twenty years of political instability and public unrest, which saw large numbers of deaths and intervention on the territory of the US, UK and France. The Beirut government tried to maintain a balanced position between the Muslim component, determined to support the Palestinian struggle, and the Christian one, which instead feared that the activity of Palestinian groups could provoke a series of reprisals by Israel and put at risk internal stability<sup>67</sup>. Despite this, the activities of the Palestinian guerrillas against the Israelis increased in intensity, and thus Lebanon became the main battlefield of the war. The situation exploded in April 1975, starting a civil war. Syria and Israel fought for control of Lebanon, between clashes between the two armed forces and incensing terrorist attacks throughout the 1980s which saw religious leaders, foreign diplomats but above all simple civilians as victims. After the Israeli invasion in 1982, the organization of Hezbollah ("Party of God") was born, a militant Shiite grouping, which took sides very close to those of Iran, with the aim of creating the Islamic state. The old French jewel of the East, what must have been the meeting point between the West and the Arab world in the Middle East, was devastated and its cities razed to the ground.

Since 1989, Lebanon has been able to resume its democratic path, after having concluded the civil war with the summit in Taif in Saudi Arabia, in which the main Lebanese political components met, with the aim of finding an agreement<sup>68</sup>. Syria continued to play an important role, so much so that the troops remained in the country until February 2005, when Damascus was forced to withdraw them due to strong international pressure following the attack on former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, known for his anti-Syrian positions<sup>69</sup>.

Unfortunately for Lebanon, Hariri was planning the economic renaissance of the country with privatization of the public sector, through his society of reconstruction called "Solidiere". The popular movement that forces Syria to withdraw all its troops from Lebanon, triggered by the assassination of Hariri, was called

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<sup>65</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020", Bordeaux, 2020, p.287

<sup>66</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020", Bordeaux, 2020, p.287

<sup>67</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020", Bordeaux, 2020, p.289

<sup>68</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020", Bordeaux, 2020, p.295

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



“Cedar Revolution”: a pacific revolution, peacefully led demonstrations by developing civil resistance methods. The withdrawal of Syrian troops opened a new season in Lebanon's history, which saw as protagonist, Saad Hariri, son of the late Prime Minister who will win the elections in 2009 and go to the government continuing the project started by his father.

Lebanon tried to rebuild itself. Often confessional system in politics made it impossible to have a consensual democracy, with parliamentary elections and a consensual government. The Lebanese pluralism had one positive effect: the balance between the multiple components of Lebanon's "confessional society" was a barrier against the emergence of a dictatorship. The paradox is that the principle of the separation of powers between Lebanon's governing institutions was progressively replaced by the strangest of innovations: a "distribution of powers" between the communities which prevented government by one group, be it a majority or a minority, over the whole.

But the presence of Hezbollah continued to grow, as anti-Israel sentiment was still alive in the population. The repeated attacks by the Shiite group against Israeli forces caused new bombings on Lebanese territory<sup>70</sup>. The years that followed, up to the present day have been anything but peaceful for the population of the cedar country. the pattern of events is the same as it had occurred in previous decades. Hezbollah gains more and more weight in the world of politics and with it, anti-Israel actions are increasing.

Attacks on attacks, so much so that the European Union, in July 2013, included the military wing of the Shiite party in the list of terrorist organizations<sup>71</sup>.

Recently Lebanon finds itself in a new situation of uncertainty and political instability. during the whole of 2019 (and early 2020 unless stopped due to covid-19), the people of the country of the Cedars mobilized again against the government due to the economic crisis affecting the country and the subsequent increase in taxes and taxes that have brought the population to their knees. As it was during the Arab Spring, social networks were once again fundamental for organizing large mass demonstrations. bitter popular criticism led to the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri in October. To dramatically worsen the situation, last August 4th the great explosion in the port of Beirut caused such great damage that it is still difficult to ascertain in economic terms, but above all in human terms.

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<sup>70</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, “Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020”, Bordeaux, 2020, p.295

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Moving now to the southern coasts of Africa, it is possible to see how pan-Arabism was also a source of inspiration for other independence movements which during the 1950s carried on complicated struggles for emancipation and state building. This was the case in Algeria where the revolution was the daughter of French colonial rigidity and the inability of moderate nationalists to obtain independence. In 1956, eight years after its birth, the National Liberation Front (FLN) proclaimed a popular uprising in response to the brutal French repression. The urban warfare went on for several years with episodes of violence such as the battle of Algiers; a situation that convinced the newly elected French president Charles de Gaulle to start negotiations for the proclamation of Algerian independence. Despite opposition to the pacification process by the *pieds noir*, who organized armed gangs across the country, discussions between the FLN and the French government led to the signing of the Evian agreements in 1962.

The young independent state placed under the leadership of Ahmad Ben Bella was born as a one-party regime with a strong statist imprint. A few years later, however, the military wing of the FLN, feeling marginalized from the management of power, decided to react, deposed Ben Bella and conferred power on Colonel Houari Boumedienne. The new regime made a sharp turn by configuring the Algerian state as a democratic and popular republic, Arab and Islamic. Values that permeated the institutions and bureaucratic apparatuses of the country and were subsequently taken up and written down in the 1975 National Charter.

In particular, the Arab-Muslim character of the Algerian people was highlighted. Emphasizing some traits expressed by Nasser's Egyptian regime, the Algerian state became the interpreter of a progressive vision of Islam by shaping a state structure in which the convergence between the socialist conception of society and traditional religious values was central. In other words, the Boumedienne regime carried out a sort of 'Islamization of socialism'. The death of Boumedienne in 1979 opened a profound crisis within the FLN between the various currents of the movement.

Despite the gradual abandonment of socialist options and the consequent economic openings, the regime entered a deep crisis, proving itself unable to respond to the demands of the population. The general dissatisfaction of the masses resulted in a series of demonstrations, promptly repressed by the FLN. Meanwhile, the Islamic awakening following the Iranian revolution of 1979 led to the birth of various movements and parties, including the Islamic Salvation Front. The ISF, along the lines of what the Muslim Brotherhood tried to do in Egypt, was able to gain the trust of the masses thanks to a constant commitment in favour of the poorest. The shortcomings, if not the complete absence of the state in the field of social welfare, were quickly filled by Islamic charitable associations and foundations. The ISF won the 1992 elections, but military intervention prevented the rise to power by declaring the party outlawed.

As a reaction there was a rapid radicalization of the movement within which armed Islamic groups emerged and launched an incessant terrorist offensive, throwing the country into chaos. Only in 1999, with the election to the presidency of Bouteflika, former Foreign Minister of Boumedienne, did the army manage to crush, but not eradicate, the armed cells. With the progress made by the government against the armed opposition, the extremist sections of the population organized themselves into a terrorist group of an Islamic fundamentalist nature known as the "Salafite Group for Preaching and Combat"<sup>72</sup>. This group, since 2006, gave birth to a long series of attacks. In 2007 it changed its name to "al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb"<sup>73</sup>. The non-terrorist situation has not subsided despite the government's attempts, and everything exploded definitively with the arrival of the Arab Spring.

Algerian dynamics and the long wave of Nasserism also influenced the course of events in Libya. The defeat of the Italo-German forces in the famous battle of el-Alamein (1943) had put an end to Italian domination. However, at the end of the world conflict, the indigenous political movements that demanded the self-determination of the Libyan people increased.

A phase of peaceful transition favoured the proclamation of independence in 1951. For the next fifteen years Libya remained fundamentally a backward and feudal country, ruled by a religious and conservative monarchy which from the early 1960s was deeply shaken by the emergence of the progressive Arab nationalism and the spread of socialist ideas among the younger generations.

The discovery of rich oil fields did not improve the living conditions of the population which arose towards the end of the decade. The Libyan revolution of 1969 overthrew the Senussite monarchy favoring the rise of the Free Officers led by Muhammad Gaddafi. Gaddafi, at the time a fervent admirer of Nasser, formed a state with original characteristics. His goal was to establish a "third way" between capitalist democracy and Soviet socialism. Removing any reference to the classic structures of democratic power, Gaddafi theorized a "Republic of the masses" (*jamahiriyya*) in which there were no parties or constitutional bodies. The people were called to govern through a pyramid of representatives at the top of which was the General People's Congress. Gaddafi's utopia was inspired by the Islamic egalitarianism that the Prophet Muhammad had established in Medina (constitution of Medina)<sup>74</sup>. However, Islam too was reread and interpreted according to Gaddafi's personal vision, an approach that caused him many problems with the ulama class.

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<sup>72</sup> F. Anghelone, A. Ungari, "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo 2020", Bordeaux, 2020, p.112

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> J. Siebens e B. Case, "The Libyan Civil War: Context and Consequences", in THINK International and Human Security, 2012

On the international scene, Gaddafi moved for first in the direction of pan-Arabism of Nasserian origin, subsequently trying to distance himself from the long shadow of Egypt with the partly unrealistic goal of acquiring its own regional hegemony. Gaddafi also began to support various revolutionary and subversive movements, including in Europe, also subsidizing several terrorist attacks. A strategy that increased the distrust of the Arabs and the distrust of the international community worried by the mood of the dictator. The country was subjected to sanctions that brought its economy to its knees by convincing Gaddafi to soften his policies towards the West and to adopt a more “Africanist” projection.

The exploitation of oil resources and the economic reopening to European trading partners, including Italy, allowed Libya to become one of the wealthiest countries in the Arab world. Thanks to oil revenues, the Libyan leader was able to support his foreign policy and feed the internal client network, guaranteeing stability to the regime until 2011<sup>75</sup>.

Less influenced by pan-Arabism were instead two other important North African countries that gained independence in 1956: Tunisia and Morocco.

In Tunisia, the first anti-colonial uprisings date back to 1938, when the nationalists of the New Free Party of the Constitution (*Neo-dustur*), and the representatives of Tunisian workers organized a first revolt bloodily suppressed by the French army. At the end of the world conflict, faced with the emergence of new agitations, Paris promoted a Franco-Tunisian co-sovereignty, promptly rejected by the nationalists who in 1952 organized a series of demonstrations throughout the country. The French repression and the episodes of violence between Tunisians and Europeans increased, making the situation unsustainable. In 1955 the nationalist leader Burghiba signed an agreement with Paris which paved the way for the declaration of independence the following year. The new independent state gave itself a republican constitution which soon took on the characteristics of a one-party monarchy with Burghiba as absolute master.

The nationalist leader ruled as a ruler and in 1975 he was appointed president for life. During the reign of Burghiba, which lasted until 1987, the country went through a phase of profound transformations aimed at modernizing and secularizing Tunisian society. After a socialist experiment promoted during the 1960s that brought the country to the brink of bankruptcy, the Burghiba regime launched a new constitution in 1976 in which the return of the country to the market economy was central.

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<sup>75</sup> J. Siebens e B. Case, “The Libyan Civil War: Context and Consequences”, in THINK International and Human Security, 2012

During the early 1980s, Tunisia was not spared from the long wave of the Iranian revolution and, thanks to the intense social conflict and the worsening of living conditions, various movements of political Islam emerged, which spread above all among the more poor. The regime intervened by further suffocating civil society and banning new movements. Bourghiba's methods of government became more and more intolerant of any form of dissent, accentuating the malaise of the population. A situation that became unsustainable in 1987 when the prime minister, General Ben Ali, deposed the president in a painless coup, becoming himself head of the State, institutional position that he held until the outbreak of the “Arab spring” in 2011.

After the end of the political and social unrest resulting from the Arab Spring, Tunisia drafts a new constitution, of a clear classic European style. The new constitution is based on the principles of freedom, dignity, justice, and order, representing probably the most complete successful example of constitutional process in all North Africa. In the newly drawn text of the Tunisian constitution, the right of citizenship is recognized with no discrimination of race and religion; that implies a secular and democratic legislation on equal basis with the Shura, that is the Koranic law; an amendment to the Tunisian constitution postulates in particular the separation between State and religion and may set a possible precedent for other Muslim countries. Another meaningful example is the recently amended Moroccan constitution promoted under the auspices of Mohamed VI which allows a power-sharing between the majority political party, coming from freely held elections, and the Institutions representing the deep State, that is the founding tenets of the Monarchy.

Unlike what happened in the other states of the region, Moroccan independence saw the joint commitment of the nationalists of the *Istiqlal* (Independence Party) and the royal family, in particular of the sovereign Muhammad V, who after the Second World War became the spokesperson for Moroccan nationalism. Following a declaration in 1952 in which he asked for the full independence of the country, the sovereign was deposed by the French and sent into exile in Madagascar. The intensification of internal resistance in the country convinced the French to negotiate the end of the protectorate and to proclaim Morocco independent in 1956 with Muhammad V as ruler.

The particular path of independence explains the legitimacy of the Moroccan monarchy in the eyes of the nationalists and the people, a legitimacy also supported by Islamic bases. In fact, the kings in Morocco claim the title of sheriffs, or descendants of the Prophet. The lineage of the Prophet's family helps to understand why radical Islamism has not yet managed to take root in the country very much.

After independence, Moroccan sovereigns governed in an almost autocratic manner until the 1990s when a timid democratic party dialectic slowly developed in the country.

Even before the end of the Cold War, all countries chose to abandon the rigid socialist economic approach by opting for a rapid opening to the market. The dismantling of the public sector paved the way for the capitalist transformation of the economy which produced few results by accentuating social inequalities. Moreover, the economic openings were never followed by a real political opening, increasing the malaise and restlessness of civil society eager for greater democratization. A situation of discontent that would erupt between the winter and spring of 2011. During the nineties, the beginning of US unipolarity radically changed the systemic dimension<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> S.G. Miller, *A history of modern Morocco*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013.

## CHAPTER 2

### A SEA TO BE REBUILT

The Mediterranean region, as we have seen from its history, represents a geopolitically very important and strategic area. This characteristic has been confirmed and evolved over the centuries, making the basin the center of political and economic aims even for countries without direct access to its banks. In addition to the advantageous strategic position that a country in the region could offer during the Cold War, the main attention towards these territories was born and is still today based on an enormous amount of resources, primarily oil and gas. Only in the Middle East, in 2005, it has been calculated that almost 60% of the world's oil reserves are concentrated, not counting those discovered in Libya only in the 1960s. Even in the middle of its basin, the Mediterranean Sea is particularly rich in these resources, and the case of the island of Cyprus is emblematic.

As seen in the last chapter, the Cypriot island has been in the middle of a political dispute between Greece and Turkey for almost a century, which, although it may seem to have cultural roots, has for decades found its true motivation behind the economic possibilities deriving from resources in the underground of the island. Just during the month of September 2020, the question opened up again and degenerated with extreme speed. In January 2019 Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine reached an agreement for cooperation in the development and exploitation of gas resources recently discovered in the sea quadrant near the Cypriot island. A particularly important initiative to bring about an economic and political change in the eastern Mediterranean, also favoring southern European countries in difficulty such as Italy and Greece. Turkey was cut off, a fact that the Turkish leader Erdogan did not like it in any way so in the summer of 2020 he rekindled the issue of territorial sovereignty on the island of Cyprus. Turkey believes that Northern Cyprus, which is not recognised internationally as an independent state, is entitled to share the economic benefits of any gas finds around the island and should be able to determine who can drill in the water around its northern part. The government on the Greek Cypriot side is recognised as the legitimate authority for the whole island by every other country in the world and the EU, which controversially admitted Cyprus as a member in 2004, despite its divided status. Turkey also believes that Greece's claimed maritime border is being unfairly distorted by Greek islands in the Aegean Sea which it does not believe should have the same maritime rights in international law as countries with vast coastlines. It believes that international case law is on its side. Although, Turkey is not a member of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The dispute between Ankara and Athens intensified after Greece signed an agreement with Egypt on 6 August for the delimitation of their respective exclusive economic zones. The pact stands in stark contrast to Ankara's goals in the region. On November 27, 2019, Turkey signed a similar agreement with Tripoli's Government of National Accord (GNA), arousing the outrage of Greece, Cyprus and Egypt, who accused Turkish President Erdogan of violating their economic rights in the Mediterranean. Therefore, the leader of Ankara called the pact between Greece and Egypt "worthless" and reiterated that the only agreement valid in the region is the one between Turkey and the Libyan government.

Ankara claims to have the longest coast in the eastern Mediterranean, but its maritime area is enclosed in a narrow strip of water due to the extension of the Greek continental shelf, characterized by the presence of many islands close to the Turkish border. The Greek island of Kastellorizo, located about 2 km from the southern coast of Turkey and 570 km from mainland Greece, is a major source of frustration for Ankara, which claims those waters as its own. "Greece's request for a maritime jurisdiction area of 40,000 square km due to the 10 square km of land occupied by the island of Kastellorizo is absolutely illogical," said Erdogan. Greece's claims on the waters around the island are based on a United Nations maritime treaty, the Montego Bay Convention, signed in 1982, which however is not recognized by Turkey. The rapid escalation of events led, in the final days of September, to the movement of Turkish armed forces to the island of Kastellorizo, also breaking one of the main points of the Treaty of Lausanne which provides for the total demilitarization of the Aegean islands.

As it was possible to deduce from these circumstances, the Mediterranean has considerable potential at a geopolitical and geostrategic level, which could be exploited to the full if it were not for the widespread political instability (in addition to the economic one) present in the region. The region today finds itself fragmented, like small pieces of a beautiful mosaic that are unable to reassemble. Analyzing the history of the Mediterranean we were able to see how different the events that led to this circumstance were, but more concretely there are three phenomena that have further negatively affected the area in the last ten years: the "Arab Spring" of 2011 ; the incessant and widespread problem of immigration, and the problem of terrorism. Each of these will be analyzed in this chapter, to conclude with a further analysis that compares the Mediterranean region with the "North" of the world, emphasizing how all the factors considered up to now have contributed to concretely curb political development economic area of the region.



## 2.1. THE EFFECTS OF THE “ARAB SPRING” OF 2011

In the MENA region, democratic development continued to be limited by a number of factors related to the social, economic and political characteristics of the region as well as to the political priorities of the United States which, inevitably, after 9/11 focused on the fight against terrorism of Islamic matrix<sup>77</sup>. The various regimes of the region showed a great capacity for resilience to the different international context, essentially guided by the desire to guarantee the continuity of regimes, mostly autocratic, governed by small circles of families and oligarchs. The general Islamic awakening, following the Iranian revolution of 1979, proved to be a cause of instability across the various regional states as well as an element of cooperation with the United States. The so-called US “war on terror”, however, became a further element of legitimacy for the autocratic methods of government of the regional regimes. At the same time, the repression of moderate Islamic movements, including various political Islam organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, prompted many to embrace the cause of more radical groups such as Salafists and jihadist cells. A problem that in 2011 the collapse of the old state structures would have brought to light. The general internal stability of the countries of the region, only partially disturbed by the effects of 11 September and the consequent US war in Iraq, but was particularly shaken, as already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, by the wave of protests that broke out in the spring of 2011. Known as the Arab Springs, the riots were a protest movement born in Tunis in December 2010 and quickly spread throughout the Arab world. If the factors that determined the outbreak were for the most part shared by all the countries affected by the protests, their development followed different paths, even taking on very violent ones, to the point of leading to real civil wars still in progress.

The anger and discontent of the Arab peoples turned against the despotism of the regimes, which were increasingly used to exploit the terrorist risk to proclaim a state of emergency, a useful tool for legitimizing the denial of the main civil rights as well as masking abuses and violence against voices of political dissent. The first signs of protest claimed full respect for human rights and concrete actions to combat rampant unemployment, especially among young people. The masses of the countries of the region demanded greater social justice and the improvement of the living conditions of the poorest groups. Indeed, the Arab Springs can be understood in terms of political economy as the social desire of the people for further political and civil rights<sup>78</sup>. If the factors triggering the protests had common elements, the tools used to demand change and the opening of the economic and political system were also very similar in different countries.

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<sup>77</sup> F. Halliday, *Il Medio Oriente. Potenza, politica e ideologia*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano, 2007.

<sup>78</sup> L. Noueihed e A. Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring: Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era*, Yale University Press, New York, 2012.

Growing civil resistance highlighted similar patterns of strikes, demonstrations, marches and rallies, as well as the effective use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the like to organize, communicate and create awareness in the face of regimes' attempts to crack down. and censor dissent.

The old autocratic structures of the states reacted by increasing repression and violence both by exploiting the traditional security apparatuses (army, police force, secret services) and by creating militias and groups of counter-demonstrators. Despite the many efforts made by the regimes in an attempt to defuse the protests, three of the main regional countries - Egypt, Libya and Tunisia - underwent regime change. These developments have inevitably led to a radical change in regional balances, opening up to new crises and accentuating old ones, especially as regards the Mediterranean.

What has made the spread of this phenomenon so fast and its taking root in society so profound derives from common situations of an economic and social nature found in the various countries of the MENA region. The countries affected by the uprisings presented - and still present - heterogeneous economic conditions, with different productive structures and levels of development. On the eve of the protests, the domestic product (GDP) of countries such as Libya or Algeria was essentially based on oil and gas exports, while the main sources of income of countries such as Egypt and Tunisia consisted of an advanced - by regional standards - and varied industrial fabric and European tourism. The post-Cold War international balances had convinced almost all the countries in the area to adopt a series of reforms. In exchange for huge packages of economic development support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), many regimes on the southern shore of the Mediterranean had opened their respective economies, progressively reducing the interference of the state in the economy. However, privatizations had become a tool used by leaders to consolidate the oligarchies of power and increase personal wealth<sup>79</sup>. In 2008, although the countries of the region presented different starting conditions, they were all affected without distinction by the economic crisis that hit the western economies between 2008 and 2009. The collapse of oil prices, the reduction in exports and the drastic drop in demand of artifacts produced in the region led to a significant deficit in the trade balance and consequent worsening for the coffers of the states, which intervened also drastically reducing the various forms of state welfare. In other words, there was a significant worsening of the living conditions of the population<sup>80</sup>. In the same years (2007-09) some countries including Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt had to face a deep food crisis and the price of basic products such as wheat increased.

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<sup>79</sup> B. Chourou, "The Challenge of Democracy in North Africa", in *Democratization*, 2002

<sup>80</sup> L. Khalili, "Revolution in the Arab World: The Long View", Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Washington. 2011.

The first timid protests in the region broke out precisely because of the rise in prices. Twelve months before the riots, the inflation rate in the countries affected by the protests reached 25-30%. The situation was further aggravated by the decline in domestic and foreign demand, with the consequent increase in unemployment, especially among young people.

On the eve of the Arab Spring, one in four young Egyptians or Tunisians was unemployed. The rise in unemployment was not determined solely by the global crisis and the decline in production but also by the demographic boom which in North African countries has drastically reduced the average age since the new millennium. If from an economic and political point of view, the states of the region had different characteristics, from a demographic point of view the whole area had a common condition: at the time of the outbreak of the riots about 60% of the population was aged between 15 and 30 years. The so-called "Youth Bulge", that is the graphic representation of the age distribution of the Middle Eastern population was a characteristic feature of the various revolts of 2011<sup>81</sup>. The internal stability of many countries had allowed at the end of the Cold War to initiate radical reforms in the education sector, promoting access to and quality of education. In less than two decades, a new social category emerged made up of qualified young people aware of their role. This socio-economic situation played an important role, a real driving force, of the social change claimed during the protests. The young people present in the many squares of the region were calling for the start of a serious process of opening up decision-making structures. In other words, they pushed for effective democratization. In fact, if the structural reforms introduced in the mid-nineties had begun to bear fruit in terms of economic development, the middle classes, including a growing number of young people, were never involved in such processes. Furthermore, the total absence of reforms in the area of civil rights and freedom of expression contributed to increasing the sense of exclusion. Fundamental human rights such as the right to vote, freedom of association not only did not obtain any institutional protection but, on the contrary, were constantly reduced by regimes using constitutional supports such as the state of emergency<sup>82</sup>.

The link between economic and social factors was the introduction of new mass communication technologies, including satellite television and above all new social media, which rearticulated the socio-political communication modalities, transforming, in an as yet undefined way, state-society relational models and processes of political legitimacy. The rapid dissemination of information played a decisive role in the Arab riots of 2011, despite attempts by governments to block access to social media and to censor its content. One figure appears particularly significant; on the eve of the riots, Egypt and Tunisia were the countries in the region with the largest number of internet users.

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<sup>81</sup> L. Noueihed e A. Warren, "The Battle for the Arab Spring: Revolution", Yale University Press, 2012

<sup>82</sup> M. G. Müller e C. Hübner, "How Facebook Facilitated the Jasmine Revolution. Conceptualizing the Functions of Online Social Network Communication", in Journal of Social Media Studies, 2013

A few hours after the outbreak of the protests, users began to spread news and videos, bypassing the censorship of the regimes. Social networks, the internet and mobile phones have therefore played an important and innovative role in supporting the riots<sup>83</sup>. Popular platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were joined by large broadcasting channels such as Al-Jazeera which gave full and uncensored coverage to the protests, increasing the level of participation and awareness on the part of the entire Arab world.

As we have just seen on the eve of the Arab Springs, most of the countries in the region were ruled by long-lasting autocratic regimes. In some of them, the most important and immediate consequence of the protests was regime change.

The country where it all began was Tunisia, where the protests took the name of the “*Jasmine Revolution*”. Ben Ali, as seen as president since 1987, was the first Middle Eastern ruler forced to resign in the face of growing pressure from the streets. After nearly twenty-three years of unconditional and unchallenged domination, on 14 January 2011 he decided to take a step back by opening a transition phase for the country. After the escape of the dictator who found refuge in Saudi Arabia, then Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi, a militant historian of Tunisian political Islam, assumed the post of president proclaiming a state of emergency and the formation of a provisional government to lead the country in democratic elections, held in October, for the establishment of a Constituent Assembly. Since then, Tunisia has gone through a long period of stabilization. Despite some signs of restlessness that have arrived in recent months and determined above all by a worsening of the economic conditions in which the country finds itself and by the emergence of radical Islam movements, there is no doubt that among the countries affected by the 2011 uprisings, Tunisia is the one that has made more concrete steps towards an effective democratization of its institutions.

After Tunis, the protests spread to Libya where protesters turned their anger at Gaddafi's autocratic methods of government. Unlike what happened to Ben Ali and, in the same weeks in Mubarak, Colonel Gaddafi was not perceived by his own population as a puppet actor in the hands of Western powers. This is because despite his own delusions of omnipotence and violent methods of government, Gaddafi, while enriching himself and his family, always managed to ensure an effective redistribution of resources to the Libyans and a semblance of independence from external pressures. Economic malaise was therefore not a determining factor in the case of the Libyan protests, the demands of which were mainly directed towards the request for greater democratic openings and a significant inclusion of social sectors long excluded from the economic

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<sup>83</sup> H. H. Khondker, “Role of the New Media in the Arab Spring”, in *Globalizations*, 2011

management of the country<sup>84</sup>. When the first demonstrations took on a violent character, spreading to various cities in the country, Gaddafi chose to use an iron fist, with the aim of reasserting his authority. In doing so, he used the army and above all groups of regular mercenaries, real armed bands that threw the country into chaos. Faced with the increase in violence against the civilian population, NATO decided to intervene by putting an end to the regime of the Libyan colonel.

With the death of Gaddafi in October 2011, the militias loyal to him reorganized, catapulting the country into chaos; a civil war in which there is no lack of territorial claims, and power rivalries between Middle Eastern actors such as Turkey and the United Arab Emirates<sup>85</sup>.

The wave of protest that started in Tunis after Libya reached Egypt where power was still firmly in the hands of Hosni Mubarak who, managing the country like a monarchy, was preparing to pass the baton to his son Gamal. On January 25, on the day when Egypt celebrates Police Day, a growing number of Egyptians gathered in Cairo's main square, Tahrir Square, giving rise to the first signs of protest. The goal of the slogans was the Mubarak regime and the 'court' structured around the figure of the president. Egypt presented itself as a country governed by a small circle of oligarchs, many of them military or retired former officers, a corrupt system, defenceless in the face of deteriorating economic conditions, widening social gap and rampant youth unemployment. Furthermore, the constant call for a state of emergency gave the security forces broad powers which, more often than not, resulted in the violation of human rights through the practice of arbitrary arrests, torture and the disappearance of political prisoners. After the first few days, the protest quickly spread to many other Egyptian centers such as Alexandria and Suez. The first episodes of civil disobedience led to open confrontation with the security forces. Within a few days, thousands of people were arrested, and the repression became increasingly violent causing the first deaths. In one week, the deaths exceeded one hundred, increasing the condemnation of the international community on the methods adopted by the regime. Mubarak's government, under pressure from the US ally who has been the main financier of the Egyptian military for over thirty years, began to make a series of concessions to the opposition, until the resignation of the entire cabinet and the choice to appoint as vice president the head of the secret services Umar Sulaymān.

The countermeasures undertaken by Mubarak proved to be quite late and in the face of the worsening climate in the country, on 11 February the president resigned. The Nile Revolution had been completed. A transition phase began under the protection of the military. During this phase, the only movement able to capitalize on the push from Tahrir Square was the Muslim Brotherhood.

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<sup>84</sup> A. Farid, *La rivoluzione libica. Dall'insurrezione di Bengasi alla morte di Gheddafi*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 2012

<sup>85</sup> F. Kareem, "Violent End to an Era as Qaddafi Dies in Libya", in *The New York Times*, October 2011

Thanks to a widespread organization and consolidated ties during decades of action in hiding, the movement managed, in the late spring of the following year, to elect its own representative Mohammed Morsi to the highest office in the state.

The electoral outcome and the first reforms introduced by the government of the brotherhood, in particular the intention to increase the references of the order to the Koranic law (shari'a), aroused the concern of the military, the secular and liberal components of civil society and part of the Obama administration. In July 2013, as Tahrir Square began to repopulate with protesters exasperated by the unresolved economic difficulties, the Minister of Defense, General al-Sisi with the full support of the armed forces and the security services carried out a coup. General al-Sisi thus became the sixth president of the Egyptian Republic. Since his rise, the Egyptian president has been able to strengthen control over the country by restoring stability. Going back to the hectic weeks of 2011, the spread of images of Tahrir Square caused the population of other countries in the region to rise up. In a few weeks, outbreaks of protest against the old regimes multiplied.

After Egypt it was the turn of Syria where the protests underwent a rapid radicalization first and an almost simultaneous internationalization with the entry into the civil conflict of regional (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran) and extra-regional (Russia) actors. The deterioration of the Syrian situation was soon followed by the destabilization of Yemen where the internal protests and claims of the *Houthi* community soon turned into a battleground between the regional powers Iran and Saudi Arabia. Given the fate of Ben Ali, Mubarak and Gaddafi, the leaders of other regional autocratic regimes, from Morocco to Oman via Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, guaranteed a series of timid openings, ensuring greater economic rights to their citizens<sup>86</sup>. Simultaneously, the oil-rich countries increased royalties and benefits to their citizens, defusing any requests for greater decision-making participation in the bud. Even the sovereign of Morocco Mohamed VI, worried by the first signs of malaise on the part of the population, promulgated a series of institutional reforms including the adoption of a new constitution with the aim of meeting the demands of the population. As seen, the course of events in the countries of the region affected by the protests did not develop in a linear and univocal direction but followed different paths depending on the contexts.

Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen entered a period of uncertain transition which resulted respectively in a coup d'état and the subsequent consolidation of a new type of autocratic regime, in democratic elections and in the outbreak of a civil war still today the cause of the worst humanitarian disaster in the region.

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<sup>86</sup> L. Trombetta, Siria. "Dagli ottomani agli Asad. E oltre", Mondadori Università, Milano, 2014

Syria and Libya were involved in civil conflicts which immediately showed the intervention of other regional and extra-regional actors.

If in the first case the civil war would seem to be resolved with the consolidation of the power of the Assad family, in the second the situation is still very uncertain, generating instability along the southern Mediterranean coasts.

As for the rich petro-monarchies of the Gulf, the regimes, after some timid backlash, remained intact, strengthening their grip on the population both through instruments of intimidation and through an increase in subsidies. It is particularly interesting to note how the wave of instability generated by the protests has produced effects not only in the countries of the Arab world, but also in the countries of the neighboring southern Caucasus - in particular Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia - and in European states, in particular Albania, Croatia and Spain; in states of sub-Saharan Africa, including Burkina Faso and Uganda; and in various parts of Asia, including the Maldives and China, where demonstrators and resistance figures were encouraged by the images of Tunisia and Egypt to reorganize their own demonstrations of dissent. One of the effects of the Arab Springs was undoubtedly the development of greater awareness on the part of civil society. With 2011, the entire region witnessed a real explosion of political activity and organizations active in the social sector.

Especially in countries where uprisings led to the fall of old regimes, such as Tunisia and Egypt in its first phase (2011-14), a large number of political parties, associations, newspapers, television stations and media quickly emerged. online, giving new life to the public debate. The result is a very varied political landscape ranging from far-left organizations to liberals and Islamists (Salafists) but which also make it fragmented and fluid. Among the main effects of the Arab uprisings was the widening of the gap between the secular and the Islamist views. In countries where uprisings led to regime change, hopes for the inclusion and development of equitable cadres were immediately dashed<sup>87</sup>. The protests had favoured a sort of compromise between the two views, secular and Islamist, united in fighting authoritarian regimes.

However, the debate concerning the drafting of new constitutions and institutional arrangements has highlighted the deep divisions.

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<sup>87</sup> F. Battera, "Gli autoritarismi e le prospettive della democrazia in Africa settentrionale e Medio oriente", in Dispes Working Papers, Edizioni Università di Trieste, Trieste, 2012

In Egypt, Tunisia and Libya in particular, public opinion was divided between Islamists and secular people who fought intensely over the role of Islam in government affairs and in society<sup>88</sup>. In Egypt, the democratic victory of one of the main exponents of the Muslim Brotherhood, i.e. political Islam, Mohamed Morsi, was overthrown a few months after the military intervention, plunging the country back into chaos and favoring the development of a new autocratic regime under the protection of the armed forces. As the weeks went by, a profound mistrust was fueled between the various social components, significantly reducing the margin for compromise between the parties. In other words, over time the Arab Spring brought to light the political, social and religious divisions that had remained latent during previous regimes<sup>89</sup>. A further effect of the riots was the reconfiguration of regional balances. The collapse of historically important regimes for MENA balances such as Egypt and Syria opened a significant window of opportunity for those states that have long aspired to acquire regional leadership (Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey) or simply gain in terms of status and popularity ( Qatar, United Arab Emirates). During the first weeks of the protest, tension also increased within the main international organization of the Arab countries, the Arab League. Some member countries adopted a double standard policy, in that on the one hand they supported the demonstrators and their demands against the rulers of some states, while on the other they sided with the rulers of close-minded states. The situation is different within the other important body, the Gulf Cooperation Council where the positions taken by Qatar, and more precisely by the Al-Jazeera television channel headed by Doha, generated malaise and annoyance among Saudi and UAE politicians. These, in fact, considered the television coverage given by the channel to the Egyptian demonstrations an attempt by the Qatari regime to exploit and in some way influence the protests for its own benefit. Closely linked to the new configuration of the regional order was the radicalization of the sectarian clash between Sunnis and Shiites.

The tension between the two branches of Islam had already grown since 2005 in the face of the complicated process of state building in Iraq where the political claims between different factions had increasingly assumed the connotations of the sectarian clash and were also fed by two regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. The 2011 riots reinforced this trend in several countries involved in the wave of protests. The protests in Sunni-dominated Bahrain were largely the work of the Shiite majority who demanded greater political and social justice. Most Sunnis, even those critical of the regime, were afraid to side with the government. Similar speech for Syria, where most of the members of the Alawite religious minority sided with the Assad regime, drawing deep resentment from the Sunni majority. A situation that persists and fuels violence on a sectarian basis.

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<sup>88</sup> F. M. Corrao, "Islam, Religion and Politics", LUISS University Press, Roma, 2017

<sup>89</sup> G. Scidà, "La Lunga Primavera Araba: Mutamenti e Disillusioni", in *Società Mutamento Politica: Rivista Italiana Di Sociologia*, 2012



In terms of security, the presence of some hotbeds such as Libya, Yemen, Syria and Iraq created a particularly fertile circumstance for the proliferation of radicalism and paramilitary groups including the Islamic State.

However, the spillover effect of localized crises such as Libya and Syria had repercussions on the entire region with significant repercussions also on the north shore of the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, the consequences of the Arab Springs have both highlighted the interdependence between European and Mediterranean security and expanded the concept of security.

## **2.2 SECURITY ISSUES: IMMIGRATION AND TERRORISM**

The balances in the Mediterranean basin were characterized throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century by a condition of high volatility whose dynamics were partly attenuated by international bipolarity. Net of this attenuation, however, security in the Mediterranean basin is historically given by the dense interweaving between the international dimension, the regional one and the local peculiarities of the individual states. From the point of view of security, the end of the Cold War opened a new historical phase marked by the emergence of new challenges and, at the same time, a large number of opportunities for all actors, in Italy first of all, overlooking the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Inevitably, the collapse of the Berlin Wall initiated the progressive transformation of the Mediterranean region and favoured the development of new cooperation mechanisms. At the same time, the Atlantic Alliance's perception of the importance given to the region also changed. In NATO's perspective, during the Cold War period, the Mediterranean was conceived and perceived in the context of the East-West confrontation and firmly linked to the Israeli-Palestinian question. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the communist threat to Greece and Turkey, both NATO members since 1952, the special relationship with Israel and the growing Soviet influence towards the Arab states of the Mediterranean during the 1960s and 1970s, had favoured the strengthening of the US military presence in the Mediterranean as well as their direct involvement in the main political and security issues. As a result, the European allies, with the exception of France alone which pursued autonomous policies, were unable and in some cases unable to develop either their own agenda or even less a European policy for the Mediterranean. In other words, until 1989 the strategic environment and with it the priorities of the Atlantic Alliance in the region were a direct expression of the interests and preferences of the United States. In this context, although several US administrations had given much importance to the Mediterranean, in general the region was de-classified as of secondary importance. Only with the end of the Cold War did the European states begin to develop a common Mediterranean policy. Furthermore, the bipolar tension meant that in the member countries of the Atlantic Alliance a conception of security oriented towards global threats was developed rather than dealing with regional or national security issues.

### 2.2.1 THE EVOLUTION OF TERRORISM AND ITS PERCEPTION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 marked the beginning of a new dimension for security and the need to deal with threats of a profoundly different nature than in the past. The latter are not traceable to a single type, but they encompass a wider political, economic, social as well as military dimension.

International terrorism has become the greatest security threat for many nations. In addition, there is growing concern about the possible use by terrorists or other state actors of the proliferation of technologies and weapons of mass destruction. Another major problem is the increase in illegal drug trafficking, human beings and weapons and the rising tide of illegal immigration, particularly from Africa to Europe. The issue of piracy, which is particularly active on the coast of Somalia, should not be underestimated. In addition, potential threats may arise from the worsening environmental situation which is increasingly at risk due to water pollution and over-exploitation of marine resources, the latter caused by illegal fishing which can have potentially disastrous effects at local, regional and global level. All these security threats find fertile ground in the Mediterranean basin and have been incorporated into the European Security Strategy which will be dealt with below.

In recent years, therefore, the security of the Mediterranean has been one of the most pursued objectives by international actors. The security of the area and international politics are now an indissoluble combination within the wider catalogue of international global and strategic political activities. Over the last few decades, the Mediterranean has taken on an enormous geopolitical importance: its peculiar geographical position, between three continents, makes it a crossroads of civilization, the border of the European continent, a place of encounter but also of confrontation. In fact, as we have already seen this region is characterized by strong imbalances and conflicts within the state and between states, as well as unresolved disputes; here the issue of security finds its broader application including issues related to regional security and human security<sup>90</sup>.

In order to analyze the issue of security in the Mediterranean, it is appropriate to give a definition of the term, in order to better understand its complexity. The concept of security is controversial and elusive, since it cannot be defined objectively, but it has a multiplicity of meanings. The concept, as mentioned, has evolved over the last few decades and has become more and more broad, this is due to the development of new theoretical approaches and the change in the international geopolitical situation<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> A. COLLINS, *Contemporary Security Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

There are several definitions for the notion of "security" that could be summarized as protection and prevention of risks and threats. The concept of security has been central to the study of international relations since its inception as a discipline<sup>92</sup>, although it had a narrower value in the past. Barry Buzan in 1991 stated that security was an "essentially contested concept" and that the study of international relations was marked by an unsolvable debate about the meaning of security<sup>93</sup>.

For Buzan, security is freedom from fear:

*"Security is taken to be about the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change, which they see as hostile. The bottom line of security is survival but it also reasonably includes a substantial range of concerns about the conditions of existence"<sup>94</sup>.*

In the article "The Renaissance of Security Studies (1991), Walt states that Security Studies, and by extension security, can be defined as: "The study of the threat, use and control of military force. It explores the conditions that make the use of force more likely, the ways that the use of force affects individuals, states and societies, and the specific policies that states adopt in order to prepare for, prevent, or engage in war".<sup>95</sup> According to Walt, security is therefore the study of the threat, the use and control of military force, effectively reducing security at the military camp and favoring the position of the state that becomes its reference object. For Ken Booth<sup>96</sup>, on the other hand emancipation is security, while for Ayoobs<sup>97</sup>, security and insecurity are defined with regard to vulnerabilities, "both internal and external, that threaten or could threaten, leading to the collapse or weakening of the structures of the state and regimes"<sup>98</sup>.

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the Cold War period, in fact, there was consensus on the part of scholars that limited its significance to military security, so that, in practice, security studies became synonymous with strategic studies. According to the classic American approach security is a military phenomenon and the protection and deterrence of military force are central to the smooth functioning of international policies. The traditional security paradigm refers to a realistic approach to the concept of security in which the reference object is the state and military power is the means by which security is pursued. The prevalence of this theorem peaked during the Cold War period, the prevalence of the so called "hard security". For nearly half a century, the world's major powers considered their nation's security in terms of the balance of power between states.

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<sup>92</sup> Security Studies as a separate field of study were born in the 1940s in the US

<sup>93</sup> COLLINS, Contemporary Security Studies, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013

<sup>94</sup> B. BUZAN, New patterns of global security in the twenty-first century, in "International Affairs", 67, 1991, 3, pp.432-433

<sup>95</sup> S. M. WALT, The Renaissance of Security Studies, in "International Studies Quarterly", 35, 1991, 2, pp. 211-239

<sup>96</sup> A. COLLINS, Contemporary Security Studies, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013

<sup>97</sup> Mohammed Ayoob is a distinguished professor of international relations at Michigan State University's James Madison College and the Department of Political Science

<sup>98</sup> A. COLLINS, Contemporary Security Studies, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

With the end of the conflict between the U.S. and Soviet blocs, it became clear that the security of citizens was threatened by both internal state activities and external aggression. The following period was characterized by civil wars, increasingly common, and aggravated by the persistent conditions of poverty, disease, violence and human rights abuses. Traditional security policies had, in fact, masked the basic human needs in favor of state security. This negligence on the part of the members of the states had led to the failure of their primary objective. Over time, the traditional state-centric notion of security has been challenged and other approaches to security have arisen.

The Copenhagen School<sup>99</sup> expanded the concept by adopting a multi-sectoral approach, with the identification of five general categories of security: military, environmental, economic, political and social. Interesting, for the purposes of this research, is to consider the concept of human security, necessary to understand the human dimension of the European concept of security at present. The term *human security*<sup>100</sup> first appeared in the pages of a 1994 United Nations Development Program report, whose purpose was to focus more attention on development, financial and human resources, and assistance to the weakest and most needy, especially for victims of conflict. According to the United Nations Agency on Human Development, human security is defined as: the liberation of human beings from those intense, persistent and multidimensional threats to which their lives are vulnerable" (United Nations, 1994).

Human security considers the individual as the reference object of security. The traditional approach to security sees the state as the reference object; the notion of human security, on the other hand, reconsiders the state-centric model and puts the individual at the center, focusing on the citizen and the risks of violence. Human safety is a contested concept and has generated debates and divisions, which can be recognized in two main schools: the *narrow School* and the *broad School*. The first focuses on threats arising from violence, labeled as freedom by fear; the second focuses on threats arising from underdevelopment and other threats, typically defined as freedom of will. Human security is therefore meant to protect the state and the population. Over the years the classic concept of security has acquired new connotations, expanding its meaning and including terrorism, piracy, organized crime, cyber-security, transactional crime, weapons of mass destruction, economic security. With the term security today, in the globalized world, it is meant global security, that is, the worldwide extension of problems and threats that undermine people security. Today, the strategy used to deal with security threats is that of the comprehensive approach, a multi-dimensional approach that no longer includes only the military aspect but encompasses the political, economic and social dimension within it.

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<sup>99</sup> The main exponents of the Copenhagen School are Buzan, Waever and Japp de Wilde.

<sup>100</sup> Defined in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, it is composed of seven factors: economic safety, food safety, health safety, environmental safety, safety personal, community security, political security.

The new dimension of international security in the Mediterranean area a field privileged application. Here, the identifying factors of instability, prevention and elimination of threats are hampered by the different perceptions of the actors, their mistrust and their lack of cohesion. The security threats of the Mediterranean are complex, different and multiple. The decline of conventional wars between states is accompanied by the increased threats such as international terrorism, proliferation risks, drug trafficking illegal immigration, piracy and environmental risks. There are many factors of crisis and instability that generate problems and tensions in the Mediterranean basin. The Arab-Israeli conflict continues to be a source of great concern. In the same way, the situation that has arisen since the Arab Spring is a source of instability and uncertainty. Other issues can be identified as access and exploitation of energy resources, in the intensifying migration and demographic changes, environmental problems, in the political instability of the countries on the south shore and in the resource gap between the two sides of the Mediterranean. Globalization has facilitated the expansion of these phenomena by creating interaction and interconnection between organizations and individuals. In this situation, security threats also take on a transnational connotation, crossing state borders and creating new situations of insecurity.

The instability of the Mediterranean basin can be divided into three different categories: political-religious, economic and environmental.

The political instability is caused by the fundamentalism, ethnic conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. It manifests itself in the various forms of violence: widespread corruption, proliferation of mafia and criminal organizations, and therefore contributes to the increase in migration. The events of the Arab Spring give a clear example of this.

The economic instability has arisen as a result of economic changes, national and international political crises that, instead of improving the living conditions of populations, offering opportunities for growth and well-being, have led to economic deterioration. Globalization and market liberalization are an example of this.

For environmental instability therefore, it intends to degrade the scarcity of resources, desertification, climate change, climate change, worsening living and health conditions, all potential security threats. This issue is becoming increasingly more important and is causing increasing concern. In recent years, the international community has classified climate change as a "threat multiplier" that can accelerate tensions and instability<sup>101</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup> "Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale, Cambiamenti climatici e governance della sicurezza: la rilevanza politica della nuova agenda internazionale", curated by *CeSPI*, 2010

The Arab Springs have further reshuffled the Mediterranean balances, highlighting all the limits of the policies implemented in the previous two decades by the European Union and the individual member states towards the southern Mediterranean. If, as we have seen, since the introduction of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) in 1995, moving on to the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the subsequent Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the European Union has actually tried to encourage integration regional in the Euro-Mediterranean area, these efforts have proved futile in reducing the gap - economic, democratic and social - between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

Furthermore, if among the main objectives of these Community policies there was the intention to create a more prosperous region, and therefore more stable and peaceful, the 2011 riots in Brussels demonstrated how little concretely these initiatives have directed and influenced the course of the events. As an immediate consequence, the European Union has adopted a series of policies aimed at substantially changing the ENP<sup>102</sup>. Despite the immediate reaction of the community institutions, many scholars immediately said they were very skeptical, expressing their reservations about the hope that these new initiatives could achieve fundamentally better results than the previous ones<sup>103</sup>. A skepticism that today, eight years, later and in light of the little impact it had on developments following the riots, it appears more than justified. As evidenced by various studies, despite the desire to forge sustainable stability in the entire Mediterranean basin by promoting change and economic, political and ideational convergence, the various policies adopted in practice from the EU revealed an attitude aimed above all at demonstrating many more principles of a defence perspective, symptoms rather than causes on security in North Africa and the Middle East. Among the main consequences produced by the undemocratic policies of many countries in the MENA area, as already seen, there was the gradual development in clandestinity of Islamic radicalism movements, mostly attributable to the orthodox Salafist current of thought.

Terrorist organizations represent today the main transnational threat to security in the Mediterranean. Despite having jumped dramatically into the daily lives of millions of European citizens only since 11 September 2001, terrorist groups like al-Qaeda are born in most cases, as forces of reaction to the repressive policies implemented by authoritarian regimes in Middle East and beyond. The repressive policies of the latter, implemented through a widespread use of the security services and in many cases of the military apparatuses, combined with the poor economic and development conditions in which the countries of the southern shore have been experiencing for decades, have generated since the 1980s a perfect humus in which the radical message was able to take root and make proselytes, presenting itself to the new generations as the

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<sup>102</sup> European Union, "A new response to a changing Neighbourhood", Brussels, 25 May 2011F

<sup>103</sup> T. Schumacher, "The EU and the Arab Spring: Between Spectatorship and Actorness", in *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, 2011

only concrete alternative. In other words, Islamic terrorism has its roots in the anger and frustration of the peoples once the subject of colonial exploitation and subsequently of dictators and sovereigns supported or at least tacitly supported by the Western world<sup>104</sup>. Following the dramatic terrorist attacks of 11 September, the European security environment as a whole has been largely shaped by terrorism and the threat of terrorism emanating from the southern periphery of Europe. The collapse of various regimes following the 2011 riots opened new spaces for transnational organizations that were able to acquire even greater power. In the light of the anarchy in various Mediterranean states and persistent economic and social pressures throughout southern Europe, the terrorist risk has not only increased but has even acquired a new dimension closely linked to the phenomenon of immigration.

Unlike the jihadist cells linked to al-Qaeda at the beginning of the new millennium, the latest generation of terrorists showed new attack techniques, new objectives and above all a long-term strategy. As the work of the Islamic State demonstrates, the control of a territory has become an achievable and necessary objective in order to feed the network and the network of groups. At the same time, the optimal management of media channels, in particular social networks, has allowed virtual proselytism, increasing the number of those who try to emulate or follow the actions of terrorist groups. Inevitably, the rapid technological revolution of the last decade has posed new important challenges to individual European states and the community. Consequently, anti-terrorism activities have also had to evolve rapidly, concentrating many of the resources on the informatic departments of the security forces<sup>105</sup>.

Regarding the problem of piracy, which, although not present in the Mediterranean in the strict sense, threatens its security and economic well-being. International piracy, particularly active in the Horn of Africa and in India, has clear and strong repercussions on trade and security in the Mediterranean. Despite the sharp decrease, the phenomenon of piracy is all nothing but tamed or disappeared. It has a set of negative implications, such as the discouragement of transit through the Suez Canal and the consequent diversion around the Africa of trade flows, and increased transport costs due to security risks. All this could lead to a marginalization of the Mediterranean which, to date, has produced activities to counter concrete initiatives only by the EU and NATO with the start of two challenging, onerous but at the same time effective and noteworthy, international missions. The first to lead the European Union called "*Atalanta*", with the preventive objective of reducing, with the deterrence offered by the military aero-naval structures, the realization of piracy phenomena by continuing, obviously on a need basis, also with repressive activities against acts of piracy towards European commercial naval units.

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<sup>104</sup> G. Kepel, *Jihad: Ascesa e declino*, Carocci, Milano, 2001

<sup>105</sup> T. Sandler, "The analytical study of terrorism: Taking stock", in *Journal of Peace Research*, 2014

The second NATO-led mission is the "*Ocean Shield*" mission, which was also born to contrast to the growing and long-established pirate phenomenon in the wide expanse of sea east of the Horn of Africa, the subject of similar NATO-led missions in the past<sup>106</sup>. Piracy is not only one of the many criminal activities that act, but it has a real form of transnational crime to take into account in the scope of all the studies on the Mediterranean security. Also Thanks to the military efforts made in recent years, in 2012 the phenomenon has recorded a significant reduction in the number of ships attacked and seizures carried out, demonstrating that concrete actions, well organized and perhaps characterized by extensive international support, can make a difference in promoting the safety of Lines of Communications (LOCs) towards the Mediterranean and, therefore, to the security of the Mediterranean itself. Despite positive trend However, the fight against piracy is getting harder and harder.

While the traditional criminal activity near the coast has decreased, the pirates have gone further. The main partner among the Mediterranean countries of these international fleets, that have been deployed under NATO and EU command to combat piracy, is Italy, which, for obvious geographical reasons, is directly interested in supporting a safe Mediterranean. To support the need for security in the Mediterranean from the Italian point of view, it is interesting to point out also that its national Navy has set up the Military Protection Units (NMP) to more effectively combat piracy against Italian merchants in transit in areas deemed to be at risk. Although small in terms of uniformed personnel, it is unusual to use military personnel on board merchant ships apparently in defense of private interests but, as enshrined in the law below, in defense of national interests. From October 2012, in fact, under the 130 protocol of 2001<sup>107</sup> and the protocol agreement between the Ministry of Defense and the *Armatoria Nazionale*, it is allowed to embark on the flag merchants soldiers of the national Navy, highlighting the need for security of the Mediterranean, as a result of the projection of the same even outside the Mediterranean geographically understood. Their role is to ensure direct protection from piracy or armed depredation during transits in areas at risk<sup>108</sup>. For a more complete and up-to-date deal with the military commitments expressed by Italy with the aim of increasing the level of security of the Mediterranean, it is necessary to mention also the recent use of our Armed Forces in the operation called "*Mare Nostrum*". Unlike previous activities, this operation approaches the aspect of security not from a purely economic and commercial point of view but from a more humanitarian one. The mission, which began on 18 October last year, involves a massive commitment of all the Armed Forces and staff of the Ministry of Internal that, with obviously different tasks, have already guaranteed, in a few months of activity, assistance and relief to many desperate people who have seen in the "safe" Mediterranean a lifeline to escape from its battered lands towards modern Europe<sup>109</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies, "The Maritime Dimension of CSDP: Geostrategic Maritime Challenges and their Implications for the European Union", 2013

<sup>107</sup> European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies, "The Maritime Dimension of CSDP: Geostrategic Maritime Challenges and their Implications for the European Union", 2013

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Informazioni della Difesa, A. Busonero, "Operazione "Mare Nostrum": una grande operazione umanitaria", 2014



## 2.2.2 IMMIGRATION: A NEVER-ENDING FLOW

Several scholars have studied the Mediterranean as a geopolitical region, defining it on the basis of the many migrations that have characterized it over the centuries, making them assume the multicultural character as we know it today. It should be added that the twenty-first century is the century of the migrant par excellence, global mobility having become a highly stratified phenomenon that ranges from the global tourist to the businessman, passing through the dramatic trafficking of human beings and those who climate change, poverty or wars are forced to leave their country of origin. With the end of the Cold War and the rapid development of the European integration process, the context changed radically. If one of the most important results achieved by the community process was the abolition of internal borders, it also proved to be a destabilizing element.

In fact, the abolition of the internal borders of the European Union has favoured the diffusion of a perception, fed by the narration of some political groups, according to which there is a significant security deficit<sup>110</sup>. A feeling that with the increase in migratory flows from the southern shores of the Mediterranean, the effect of the so-called Arab Springs, has favoured the progressive securitization of migration issues. The management of the increase in immigration in the European Union has put policy makers to the test, leading to a series of modifications and changes that are not always coherent and easy to apply. In managing migration, security actors such as police, coast guards and border agents have become increasingly important and even the military has been called upon to play a greater role. The new challenges that the states of the northern shore of the Mediterranean found themselves having to face, integrating them quickly into the various community defence agendas, were largely the result of two interrelated factors, that we have already met during our analysis: the poor economic conditions and the nature of the regimes.

Despite community projects aimed at building greater interdependence between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea, the economic gap increased during the 1990s and first decade of the new millennium. The worsening of living conditions forced many, even before the 2011 riots, to migrate in search of work to Europe (economic refugees). The poor conditions of the southern Mediterranean economy and the nature of the political regimes were the crucial motivation behind the great flow of migrants.

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<sup>110</sup> F. Vietti e T. Scribner, "Human insecurity: Understanding international migration from a human security perspective", in *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, Vol. 1, No.1 (2013)

The autocratic policies of most regimes, the outbreak of civil wars and conflicts of an ethnic and sectarian nature within a state have accentuated the migration of people (political refugees) to the northern shore<sup>111</sup>.

As already seen in this chapter, these factors were also at the basis of the revolts that broke out in almost all the states of the Middle East in 2011. The European states were complicit in this situation. Despite the differences in approach between the United States and the European Union, and the many proclamations in support of democratization made by the latter in particular, both have always conditioned political stability in the region for the survival of regimes, regardless of their undemocratic nature. For this reason, even today the European Union has not shown itself really willing to implement coherent initiatives for the effective promotion of democracy in the countries of the southern shore, with the fear that, by doing so, the already precarious balance of many regimes. In other words, however weak and autocratic, the regimes of the MENA region are useful in preventing chaos and at the same time are seen by European countries as a reliable partner on security issues. Stability seems preferable to democracy.

Among these, one of the main challenges, as shown by the most recent events, comes from immigration both for its immediate effects and for the deeper effects ranging from the growing power acquired by transnational criminal organizations that manage the smuggling of migrants to problems of nature socio-political products in European countries. In fact, the increase in migration has had significant repercussions on the domestic politics of many European countries, as demonstrated by the increase in episodes of xenophobia and the growth of far-right political forces. What changed was the perception by the European public, with an overestimation of the phenomenon and a narrative, fomented by the forces of the far right, which plays with fears and stereotypes. Consequently, the impact on the security policies of many European states has been much more significant than the actual threat<sup>112</sup>. Generally, European policy-makers try to take an intermediate approach between the approach based on the protection of rights by prioritizing legal pathways for immigration and refugee protection and the approach that emphasizes the need for border controls and a regulated management of incoming flows. However, despite the information efforts promoted by the EU institutions in recent years, the issues related to migration have been strongly politicized and exploited, assuming the dimension of the threat and crisis (migration crisis). Migration flows from the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea are increasingly perceived and presented in public speeches and through the media as an unstoppable wave, thus becoming a potential threat to Europe.

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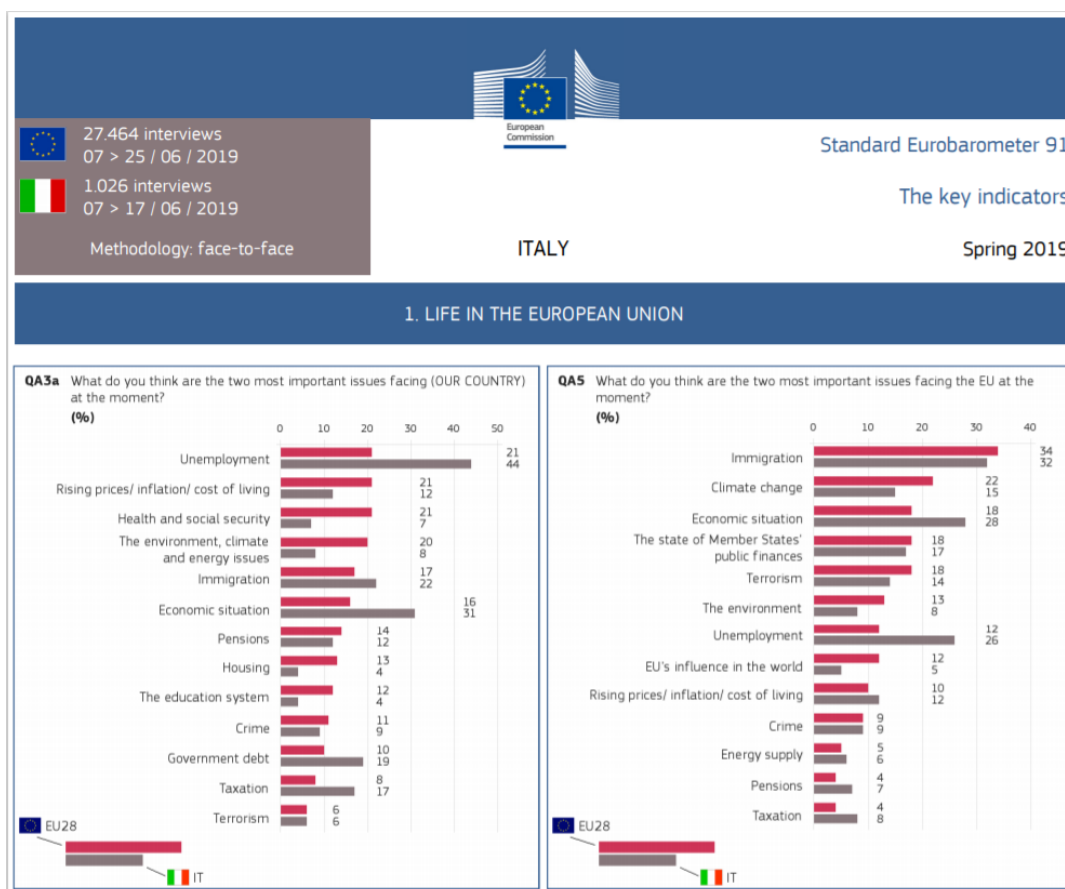
<sup>111</sup> P. Fargues, "Mass Migration and Uprisings in Arab Countries: An Analytical Framework", in *International Development Policy*, Vol. 7 (2017)

<sup>112</sup> L. Brynjar, "Security Challenges in Europe's Mediterranean Periphery - Perspectives and Policy Dilemmas", in *European Security*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1999), pp. 27-56; I. Lesser, "The Changing Mediterranean Security Environment: a Transatlantic perspective", in *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1998)

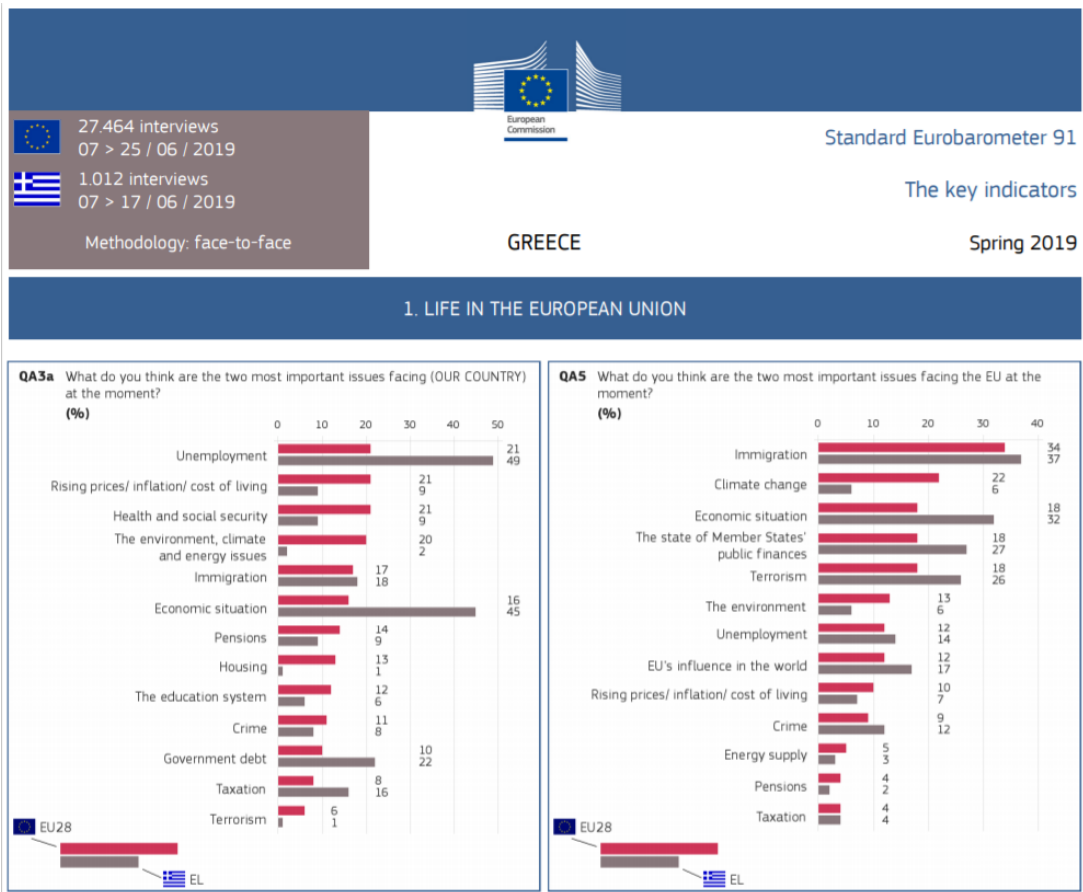
In recent years, the securitization of the migratory phenomenon, which has no longer become a political issue but a question of security, has led to a community approach aimed at restricting freedom of movement. Stricter legislation and coordination between states as well as the application of advanced technologies have led to greater control of the external borders by European institutions and individual member states.

A clear example of the spread of this thought is given by the customary annual report of the European Union: the Eurobarometer. After the refugee crisis of 2015, concern about the issue has increased significantly, but above all in the countries mainly affected by this large influx of migrants, namely Greece, Italy and Spain (not surprisingly the countries of Mediterranean Europe).

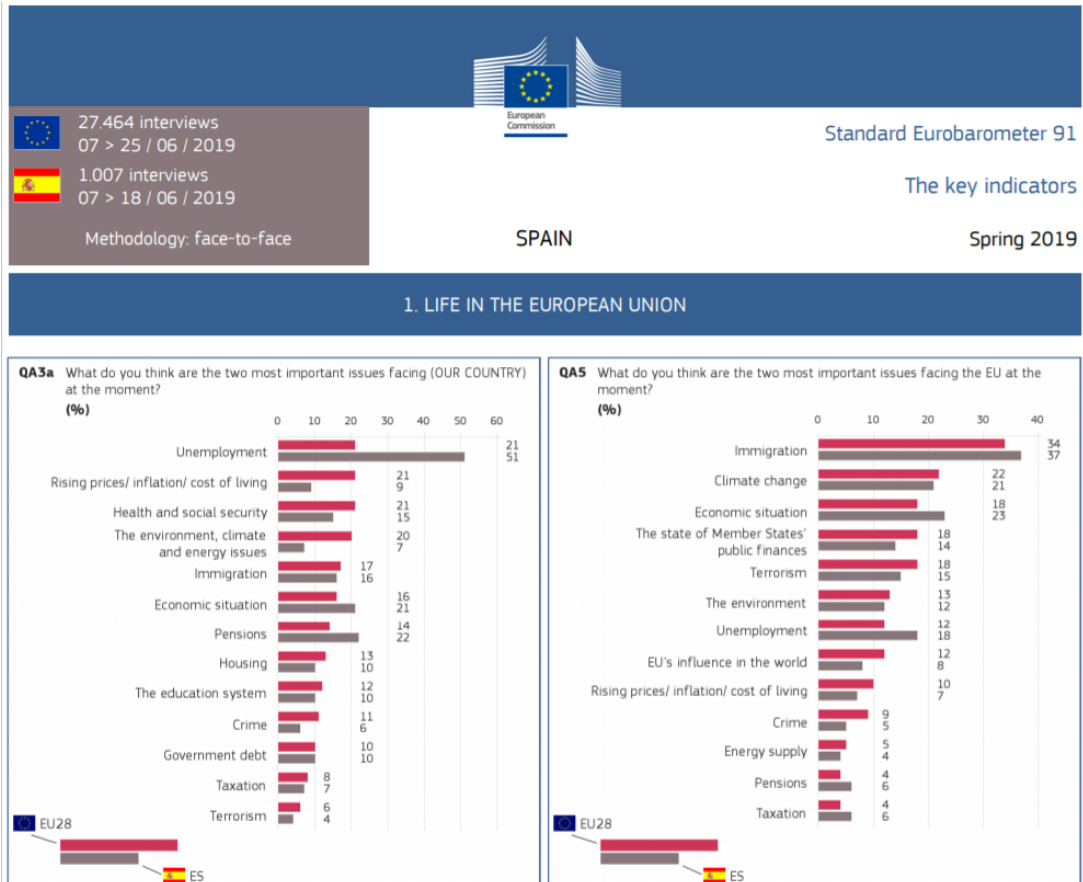
Down below, from graphs 1,2 and 3 (developed with European research data) it is possible to see the perception of the "immigration" issue in both national and European context of the countries just mentioned.



**Graph 1: The key indicators in Italy and in the EU according to Italians, Standard Eurobarometer 91, Spring 2019**



**Graph 2: The key indicators in Greece and in the EU according to Greeks, *Standard Eurobarometer 91, Spring 2019***



**Graph 3: The key indicators in Spain and in the EU according to Spanish, *Standard Eurobarometer 91, Spring 2019***

As it is possible to see, to question A5, on the major problems that the European Union is currently facing, the answer with the highest percentage was that concerning immigration. Both the individual responses from the three countries and the European average<sup>113</sup> are undoubtedly very high in percentage terms. We can see that the issue of immigration in the national context does not have the same numbers and there are basically two reasons: the first is that after the great migration crisis of 2015 there was a partial reduction in the smuggling of migrants in the Mediterranean, for this reason the topic has seen its natural decrease in national political debates; the second because the matter under discussion is considered by most national governments as a problem that should be handled more by Brussels than by the latter. The criticisms that the European Union receives due to the current inefficiency of the management and relocation of migrants are harsh, accompanied by equally harsh accusations of leaving individual countries alone to manage a situation at the limit of the manageable.

The Member States, especially the Mediterranean ones, have towards Europe in terms of immigration policies great expectations, and looking at the 2018 edition of the Eurobarometer, focused on the electoral campaign of the European Parliament elections of the following year, this is easily ascertained.

The Italians – a clear example of what has just been said - when asked what were the topics that should have been treated with priority during the political campaign for the European Parliament, answered 66% "immigration". Twenty-one points above the Union average, and respectively 6 and nine points at the national level, on topics such as youth unemployment and economic growth (60% and 57%)<sup>114</sup>.

An important aspect that emerges from this analysis to consider is the different perception of threats to Mediterranean security. Key issues such as immigration, the control of weapons of mass destruction, the security of maritime routes, terrorism, environmental protection, are all perceived as threats differently from various international actors. The lack of a common vision on these issues is one of the main obstacles to the definitive (or almost) resolution of the problems plaguing the area. Populations on both sides of the Mediterranean have different ways of conceiving security threats. The diversity between perceptions of the northern and southern shores is an essential element that allows us to understand the various views of the populations of the Mediterranean basin, the result of different historical and political experiences. The European interference in the territory, colonialism, wars, Western support for Israel have fueled anger and distrust of Europeans and the United States.

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<sup>113</sup> 37% in Spain and Greece; 34% EU28; 32% in Italy

<sup>114</sup> European Parliament, Eurobarometer 89.2: "A year before the European elections of 2019", 11 May 2018

As we have already seen in this chapter, the Arab populations have a strong resentment towards Europeans because of colonialism, an even stronger feeling for countries that have had a harsher colonial experience (such as Algeria). During the Cold War the basin became an integral part of the world security environment, as it was considered an area of instability and insecurity, while economically Member States and third countries of the Mediterranean sought to establish a relationship based on trade. From a security point of view, in recent years the focus has been on two main issues: terrorism and oil.

The dissolution of the Soviet threat, however, has changed relations between Europeans and their southern neighbors. The logic of the confrontation between the US and the USSR had frozen this sentiment, but it returned to the fore with the Gulf War of the early 1990s. During the Cold War, the main concern of Western countries was dictated by loyalty to the foreign policy of the two superpowers. According to this scheme, the alternatives to security consisted either of aligning with the US or Soviet blocs. The ideological closeness between Arab nationalism and Communism in foreign policy towards the former colonial powers strongly influenced European perceptions during the early years of bipolar confrontation. Following the dissolution of the Soviet threat, the system of international alliances underwent a major change which resulted, on the one hand, the loss of the strategic importance of the Mediterranean basin; on the other, promises of friendship towards European nations. However, new security issues have been identified, and others have been scaled back. The loss of the alliance to the Communist bloc, following the collapse of the Soviet threat, has led to the reduction of the military capabilities of European countries.

The focus has moved now on dangers such as terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism and perceived migrations, now, as new security threats. These risks, although they were already present in the past, now acquire a new dimension because of their interconnectedness. Terrorism has not been a new phenomenon for Europeans, but it has become increasingly important in relation to fundamentalism. Until the 2001 terrorist attacks, the issue remained at a possible level, only to become one of the main real threats to global security. Related to terrorism, it is the problem of Islamic fundamentalism that has become increasingly important. Migration, as seen, is the main problem in the Mediterranean context in the years after the Cold War. In the past, the challenges posed by migration were perceived differently across Europe, but the widespread feeling was that the threat was able to ignore borders and attack European security from within<sup>115</sup>. Therefore, border controls were strengthened and various initiatives such as EUROFOR<sup>116</sup> and EUROMARFOR<sup>117</sup> engaged in

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<sup>115</sup> F. BICCHI, "European security perceptions vis à vis the Mediterranean: theoretical and empirical considerations from the 1990s", in "Jean Monnet Working Papers", 39, 2001

<sup>116</sup> The European Rapid Operational Force was a multinational rapid reaction force composed of forces from four states of the European Union: Italy, France, Portugal and Spain. Formed in May and defined in the Petersberg Declaration, the EUROFOR was tasked with performing humanitarian, peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions. Dissolved in 2012.

<sup>117</sup> The European Maritime Force (EUROMARFOR or EMF) is military force with the current participation of France, Italy, Portugal and Spain. It is engaged in humanitarian management, peacekeeping and crisis missions, according to the principles of the Petersberg Declaration, both independently and within the framework the European Union or other international organizations such as the UN, NATO, OSCE or multinational coalitions.

humanitarian and management missions of the crisis. The key institution is the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, commonly known as Frontex, which operates along the external borders of the European Union covering a wide range of tasks, including the monitoring of migratory flows, the fight against organized crime, the intervention of the Member States for humanitarian emergencies and the rescue at sea and the repatriation of illegal migrants to third countries or countries of origin. These initiatives have increased the presence of the army and the increase in the use of military technologies in the management of migration. A trend destined to increase which has had and will have the effect of accentuating the perception by public opinion that the phenomenon of migration is actually linked to the security of European countries. But as just mentioned, the security approach to migratory phenomena is not without criticism. Another practical example of the lack of a common vision is the *Barcelona process*: an initiative of the European Union whose political objective was the creation of a safe and stable area. The process is, in fact, considered a political failure also because of the failure to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition, many Arab countries see the European initiative as another attempt at Westernization and interference in their national sphere. It seems clear that in the absence of a unified and uniform view on these issues it is difficult to find adequate solutions to solve problems. The difference of view on key issues to the security threat undermines any attempt at cooperation.

### **2.3 THE MEDITERRANEAN IN COMPARISON WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD**

As we have seen in this chapter, the reasons behind the backwardness of the Mediterranean countries are more exogenous than endogenous. Political deficits and foreign strategic aims have weighed heavily on the territory, and the result of all this has been a slowed down or completely absent democratization process. We could understand how having a democratic structure, in the modern international system, is a fundamental characteristic for being able to develop any kind of social, economic or political activity outside one's own national borders. The possibility of being able to have developed contacts with the rest of the international community, especially of a commercial and economic nature, entails great benefits for the state itself. Consequently, a state well integrated into international relations finds advantages that have a direct positive effect in the national economic-political sphere. This means, following the reasoning, that in theory there is a relationship of direct proportionality between the rate of democratization and the economic prosperity of a country: the more a state has solid democratic foundations; more guarantees of stability from another country with which it wants to enter into a relationship (of a political or economic nature); the more the guarantees of stability, the less the probability that there may be negative repercussions for both parties, consequently you have an optimal scenario to develop the relationship. Being able to develop multiple relationships allows for greater commercial / economic opportunities, which guarantees the State to be able to take advantage of the fruits of these relationships to invest in its own territory.

It is not only the public sector that benefits but also the private sector, and the population can enjoy the benefits. The population in such a favourable climate will consume more and consequently investors will be able to invest more.

From this we can derive a new equation: a structurally stable government can guarantee greater economic possibilities; the latter have a direct effect on both an economic and social level, consequently a stable and prosperous social situation is created. If the social equilibrium is stable, the government will also be stable, and if this is stable provides guarantees, then the economy will also (theoretically) flourish. If this relationship just defined were true, then the exact opposite must also be true. An unstable or undemocratic government will have a less developed system of international relations and consequently less economic opportunities due to the few political-economic guarantees it gives; these circumstances lead to a poor domestic economy, with less consumption and less investment and consequent social instability; the latter will ultimately burden even more on the already complicated political situation.

Doesn't this latest pattern of events remember something? The circumstances just described are none other than those that occurred in the Mediterranean countries, and which in some cases are still easily observable today.

Franco's Spain, closed both diplomatically and economically to the rest of the world, was one step away from disaster. Participation in the European Community, not for anything else, once regained a democratic order, represented the greatest opportunity to bring the country back to a sustainable economic situation. A similar story also applies to Italy, which at the gates of the new millennium has seen its political and economic system fall, aiming at the single European currency as the only ramp for relaunching its country. Even today, EU membership is hoped for more for economic reasons than for the desire for political commitment. In the MENA countries this relationship of factors is more than evident, which, together with the religious contrasts, perfectly explains the setback in economic and social terms in the region.

In order to give a partially empirical validation to what has been observed, to individually analyze the countries of our focus and compare them with the rest of the world, we can appeal to the ten main indexes of international rankings. These indicators focus on the main aspects of today's national societies by giving them, through an evaluation system, a score.

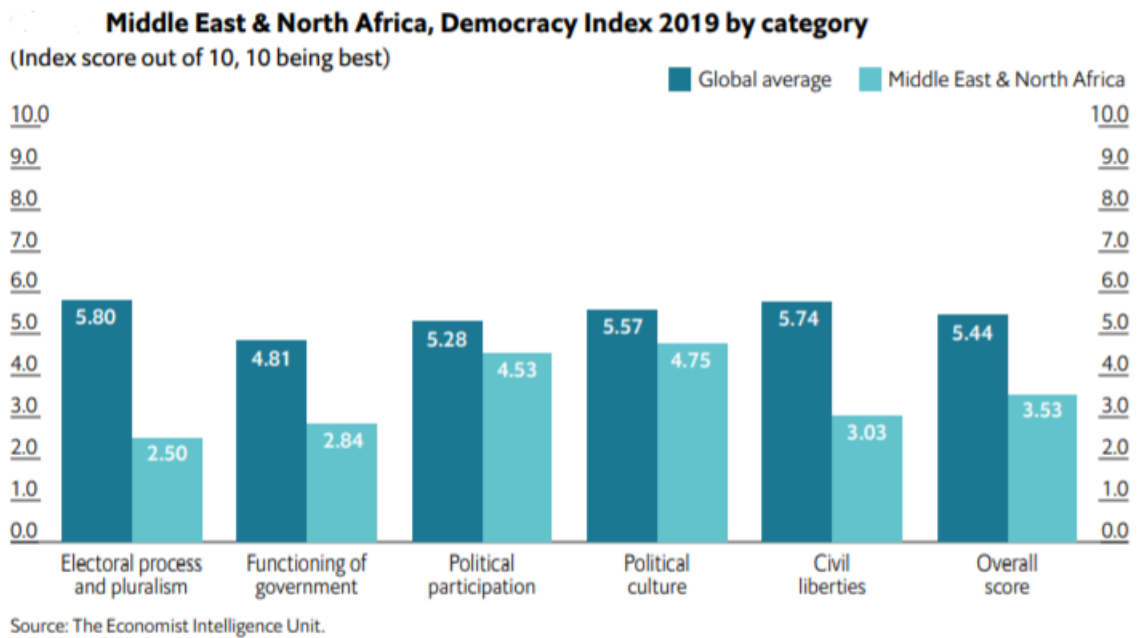


These 10 indicators are:

1. *Doing Business* (developed by “*The World Bank*”, measures business regulations)
2. *Human Development Index* (developed by “*UNDP*”)
3. *Global Competitiveness* (developed by the “*World Economic Forum*”)
4. *Global Attractiveness Index* (developed by “*The European House Ambrosetti*”)
5. *Democracy Index* (developed by “*The Economist*”)
6. *Corruption Perception Index* (developed by “*Transparency International*”)
7. *Freedom of Press / Global Freedom Index* (developed by the “*Freedom House*”)
8. *The Global Gender Gap Ranking* (developed by the “*World Economic Forum*”)
9. *Global Innovation Index* (developed by “*SC Johnson College of Business*”, “*WIPO*” and “*INSEAD*”)
10. *E-Government Development* (developed by the “*United Nations*”)

From the data taken from the 10 different rankings, the differentiations and characteristics of the individual States described in this chapter clearly emerge. If we formulate a ranking from those provided by the indicators, it emerges that Syria is without any shadow of a doubt in the last place, with a fourth last place in the democracy index (last is North Korea), a third last place with regard to perception of corruption, and a hard but realistic score of zero on the Global Freedom Index. Followed by Syria, Libya, which is not surprising considering the total instability and uncertainty that is experienced in these two countries, which have not yet recovered from the effects of the events that the Arab Spring brought in their territories.

The countries of Mediterranean Europe, despite having obtained scores that give them a medium-high ranking, still find themselves several steps behind the top of the class. In Italy and Greece, we can see how the difficulties regarding the opening and maintenance of commercial activities weigh, appearing in the ranking of the "Doing Business" ranking below Morocco (53<sup>rd</sup>).



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**Graph 4: graphic representation of the score made by the MENA countries according with the *Democracy Index* in 2019**

With the exception of the State of Israel which represents a unicum in its region, the remaining countries of the MEDA all find themselves on the same level, from the parts of the lower middle zone of the ranking, with a small surprise that is represented by Tunisia. The latter is undoubtedly the most pleasant note in the region. A case? Not really, this is because as already seen, Tunisia is the only country in the region that after 2011 managed to complete the democratization process by drafting a new constitution.

The scores in the Global Freedom Index and in the Democracy Index should be mentioned in particular: in the first with a score of 70 points it is better than Turkey (32) and in the second it places itself in 53<sup>rd</sup> place in the world ranking, also here surpassing Turkey (110<sup>th</sup>) and not far from Italy and Greece, respectively in 35<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> place, as confirmed by the report "Democracy Index 2019.

“A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest” published by The Economist Intelligence Unit affirms:

*“Despite the overall weakness of democracy in the MENA region, the picture is not uniformly gloomy. The overall rank masks considerable advances in some countries on the path to democratisation - despite ongoing political instability - although the gains could easily be reversed. The most notable positive change is in Tunisia, which remains the only “Arab Spring” state to have transitioned from dictatorship to meaningful democratic freedoms. Tunisia’s score and ranking advanced again in 2019 as the country held a second round of free elections, in which new political groups and actors entered the fray.*

*Tunisia jumped ten places in the ranking to 53<sup>rd</sup> globally, having made significant gains in the electoral process and pluralism category. New parties dominate the parliament following the 2019 parliamentary election, and a political outsider has been elected president.<sup>118</sup>”*

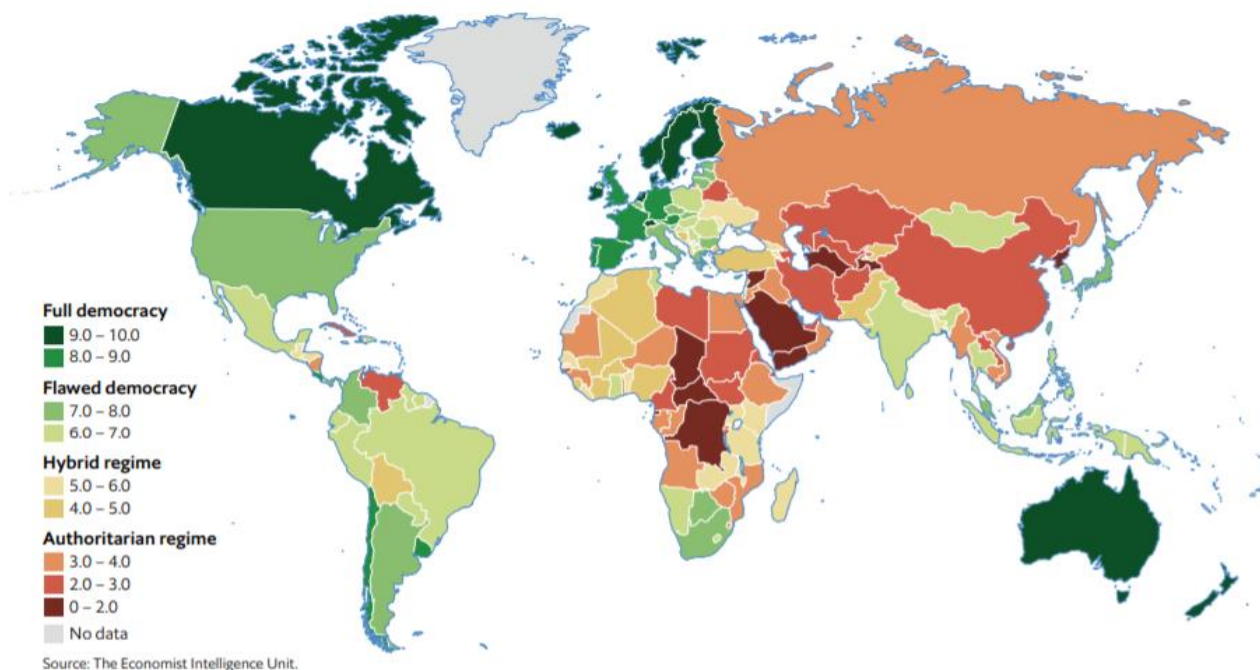
The gap between the famous North and South of the world has grown exponentially, and in the Mediterranean the difference is undoubtedly felt. In a way it hurts to see what was once the center of the world under these conditions. Wanting to describe the situation through a metaphor, the Mediterranean seems like a toy which has gone from being loved to being forgotten and left to itself. It is undoubtedly true that the region during the years after the war was not used, but exploited, by the two superpowers, playing with the peoples and local governments considering them no more than mere pawns in their world chessboard. A two-person fight that has had vital repercussions well beyond the official end of the games and probably well beyond what was expected 30 years ago. But even Europe is not exempt from criticism, especially harsh is the dutiful criticism towards the old colonizers of the MENA. The process of decolonization by France and Great Britain was disastrous from all points of view. The justification regarding the critical state of the two countries at the end of the Second World War should be considered only partially, as a correct supervision of the independence and democratization process on the territories managed up to that moment was an obligation not only towards the local population but also with respect to the international community.

The failure of decolonization has not only compromised the MENA region, but above all also sub-Saharan Africa. There are very few states that have succeeded in the political transition after the exit of the colonizing state, but for the most part the political and social structure left was unable to carry out this process, and it is no coincidence that the situation is devalued, giving way to civil wars and authoritarian regimes.

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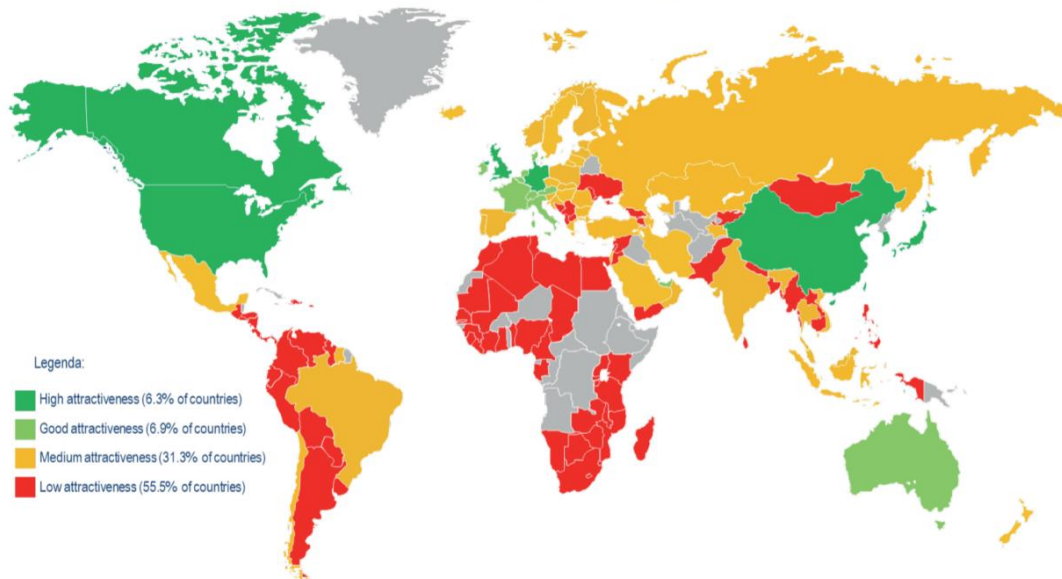
<sup>118</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2019. A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest", 2020

The reflections made on the correlation between the democratic nature of a regime and the greater possibility of affirming itself economically, let us extend it for a moment to the rest of the former European colonies in Africa. With the help of the data provided by the rankings cited at the beginning of the paragraph and illustrated below in maps number 2.1 and 2.2, we are confirmed again as: in the former colonial territories the type of regime formed is almost exclusively authoritarian or "hybrid" and that the such a low attractiveness index is a consequence of this.



**Map 2.1: Democracy Index 2019, global map by regime type**

Global Attractiveness Index (Positioning Index), 2020



Map 2.2: Global Attractiveness Index 2020, conceptual map

Despite the considerations made in this chapter, as well as the purpose of this paper, it should be emphasized that the Mediterranean region, despite everything, has made progress in recent years, which have perhaps gone unnoticed considering the enormous difficulties that these countries have had to face, in all the shores of this sea.

The narrative in international relations too often tends to distort reality by focusing only on the negative aspects of certain issues, giving a perception too often based on too restrictive biases, failing to offer a concrete overview of what may be the real future prospects. The Mediterranean area is particularly a victim of this dynamic. Southern Europe suffers from it when confronted with the rest of the European Union and the MENA countries suffer from it in comparison with each other and with the whole Western world. But as we will see in the next chapter, the chains of this biased, cynical capitalist mentality-based pre-placement nature can be broken by looking deeper into what the Mediterranean and its countries really hold in their hands and what they can take, because there are future prospects, and the ways are many.

## CHAPTER 3: TOWARDS A NEW FUTURE

### 3.1 PERCEPTION VS. REALITY: THE TRUE POTENTIAL OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

The perception of the region and the countries that are part of it is too often negatively accentuated. The gap between North and South is still insurmountable, but we have been able to see how the reasons for these differences and for the economic and political backwardness are more of an exogenous than an endogenous nature. The classic paradigm of the social sciences between "center and periphery" sees its materialization again in the comparison between the Mediterranean and the rest of the Western world, a periphery created and increasingly isolated from the latter, at the mercy of a globalized economy and society for which these peoples were not quite ready. Inadequacy which, as we have also seen with the phenomenon of terrorism, has developed becoming a cause of instability.

Despite the political, economic and social difficulties that have been reported in the previous chapters, the Mediterranean region has managed and is managing to regain a privileged position within the international system, especially thanks to new economic and commercial implications that may in the future bring advantages on all shores of the sea. In fact, the importance of the Mediterranean in the global economy is too often underestimated: the economic activity within the Mediterranean area represents almost 15% of the world GDP, second only to that of the United States<sup>119</sup>.

The researches carried out by *Ernst & Young* through the "*Baromed Attractiveness survey, The Next Opportunity*" in 2015 and 2017 highlighted how the Mediterranean basin is returning to be central to the world economy<sup>120</sup>. Over the last fifteen years, the entire area of the southern Mediterranean countries recorded an annual average increase of 4.2% above the average rate of mature economies. There is still a difference in per capita income between southern European countries and those on the South shore, moreover, as we already seen, the economies of the countries involved in the "Arab Spring" have had negative economic effects even after 2011. But despite the political and social instability of the region, several economic indicators show positive signs.

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<sup>119</sup> Schilirò, Daniele (2015): *Mediterranean, migrations and economic development*. Published in: Journal of Advanced Research in Economics and International Business, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 2015)

<sup>120</sup>Federico Rendina, "Macroregione Mediterranea. Ecco il nuovo continente degli affari e non solo", *ilSole24Ore*, April 2015

The southern shore of the Mediterranean, the commercial exchange has grown; sea trade has increased and market shares of many ports in the South Mediterranean have increased: only between 2005 and 2014, the market share in container shipping of the south shore ports has risen from 18% to 27% and in the last years has increased even more than above all to the enlargement of the Suez Canal and the new Belt Road Initiative, as we will analyse deeply in the last paragraph of the chapter.

The Mediterranean, according to the *Baromed* researches, is a more attractive area than Europe (51%), Africa (60%) and Asia (52%)<sup>121</sup>. Thanks to faster economic growth than in other regions and therefore to better business opportunities. All this is the sign of a significant unexpressed potential of the area. Regarding to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), have been growing in the last years too. In 2013 amounted for 85 billion dollars, more than what the bursting China has channeled onto itself, helping to feed a GDP that in the area has exceeded 10 trillion dollars, materializing between 2009 and 2013 over 17 thousand projects<sup>122</sup>. It is evident how the economic potential of the region has attracted investors from all over the world, in particular from the USA and China. Some investors are also bringing their activities from Asia to the Mediterranean in order to better manage their supply chain for the demand of the European markets. Moreover, the discovery of the already mentioned gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean shores has been met with enthusiastic response owing to their potential impact on the economic, geopolitical and political balances in the region since that could concretely decrease their dependence on gas imports from Russia. If the crisis with the Turkish government is successfully resolved, the project inherent to the area could open a significant new chapter in the regional economy with important global effects.

In the Mediterranean basin as we have already seen, the energy issue has played and still plays today a role of strategic importance, both for the presence in the region of significant oil and gas fields, and for the maritime transport network. They are always functional to ensure the supplies necessary for the recipient countries. The 30% of the maritime flows of liquid bulk transit through the Mediterranean, constituting one of the most important articulations of the maritime economy, in a value chain that is articulated from the places of production, through transport, to the places of consumption<sup>123</sup>.

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<sup>121</sup> Federico Rendina, "Macroregione Mediterranea. Ecco il nuovo continente degli affari e non solo", *ilSole24Ore*, April 2015

<sup>122</sup> Schilirò, Daniele (2015): *Mediterranean, migrations and economic development*. Published in: *Journal of Advanced Research in Economics and International Business*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 2015)

<sup>123</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

Around the theme of energy resources, and the control of these fundamental raw materials, an essential part of geopolitics and geostrategy has been played in the various quadrants of international politics (the question Turkey-Greece is just the last example), in particular in the Middle Eastern area, and more generally in the Mediterranean basin. Also, from this point of view, the Suez Canal has played in the past decades, and still plays, an essential role, ensuring the transit of liquid bulk, both towards the European markets and towards the Asian markets<sup>124</sup>. The certainty of the safe trade of energy raw materials has always been one of the fundamental issues for the balance of international politics in this quadrant. In addition to being a key area for the energy production of gas and oil, from an energy point of view, the Mediterranean region is third after China and the USA for total energy consumption and CO2 emissions<sup>125</sup>.

Therefore, within the Mediterranean area, one of the most important matches for economic conversion and for the reorganization of the world energy market is being played, not only on the supply side but also on the demand side. We are in the presence of a differentiated scenario, in which the exchanges between countries bordering the *Mare Nostrum* are relevant, and also differentiated from each other. Schematically, the European countries bordering the Mediterranean, the Balkans and Turkey record a high dependence on energy imports, while the MENA region is a net exporter, thanks above all to the contributions of Libya and Algeria.

Maritime connections and fixed connection infrastructures represent the two ways in which the exchange of energy products takes place on a supranational scale. Where flows reach high economies of scale, mainly over medium-range distances, the advantages of investing in oil and gas pipelines emerge. The connection networks, organized to ensure the supply of energy products from producing countries to consuming countries, constitute the backbone that allows the industrial and civil economy to function<sup>126</sup>. It was in this direction that relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean developed. Energy is a fundamental component of the economic relationship between the European Union and the Southern Mediterranean countries. This data dates back to the 1960s, when discussions began on the first large-scale infrastructure in the Mediterranean region, a gas pipeline connecting Algeria. to Italy through Tunisia. Since then, more than 6,000 km of gas pipelines have been set up across the Mediterranean to connect Algeria with Spain and Italy, and Libya with Italy<sup>127</sup>.

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<sup>124</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.



Precisely in the delicate phase of transition towards the consolidation of the independence of the countries of North Africa, in the decades immediately following the Second World War, the construction of energy networks played an extremely important role in the articulation of economic and political relations with the Economic Community European. The energy ties between the two shores of the Mediterranean have been and remain fundamental. The aspect that is now clearer than a few years ago is the complementarity of relationships and the need to converge on integrated interests. At the beginning of the new millennium, an attempt was made to replicate the successful formula tested in the case of gas pipelines by expanding Mediterranean cooperation in the area of renewable energy, through two projects based on wind and solar energy. However, these two initiatives failed essentially due to the high costs of electricity generation and the lack of adequate interconnection systems between the South and North of the Mediterranean.

This experience should lead us not to focus on new projects for the development of alternative energy sources towards exporting to Europe, but towards satisfying the growing energy needs of the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Moreover, between 2000 and 2015, the demand for electricity in the southern Mediterranean countries more than doubled<sup>128</sup>. Precisely starting from 2015, following the Paris agreement to combat climate change, on the one hand each country must define specific targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and on the other hand significant financial resources have been introduced to support the countries developing countries in their efforts to reduce emissions. The European Union, with 20.2 billion euros in 2016, is the most important contributor to this line of financing. Europe, on the other hand, has adopted a strategy for building a trans-European network of connections in order to consolidate an integrated energy market: nine priority corridors and three priority thematic areas have been defined, with funding from EU funds equal to 5.35 billion euros in the period 2014-2020<sup>129</sup>. Part of this trans-European interconnection program also concerns the southern front of the Mediterranean basin, to consolidate links in particular to the Balkans and North Africa.

In the oil and gas sector, market forces play a major role. These markets are also going through a phase of profound reconfiguration. The organization and operation of the infrastructural networks of connections represents a strategic element for the structure and prospects of energy exchanges. In the gas sector, the Mediterranean market can be divided into three corridors: western, eastern and central. The western area includes Algeria as a supplier, with Spain, Portugal and France as consumers. In the central area the consuming countries, Italy and the Balkans, are interconnected, while the main exporting countries are Algeria and Libya, together with Tunisia.

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<sup>128</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

In the Eastern area there is the least degree of interconnection through primary infrastructures, with the inevitable consequence of a greater need for maritime connections. The two main gas markets in the region, Egypt and Turkey, are not interconnected.

During the most recent phase, while gas has assumed an increasing strategic importance, also for investors underway at the supranational level for the construction of new gas pipelines, an energy source is emerging, the “liquefied natural gas” (LNG) which has potentially interesting uses also for the maritime sector itself<sup>130</sup>. LNG has reached an appropriate technological maturity for heavy land vehicles and large ships, allowing the large-scale distribution of this energy source. In perspective, the economic and ecological advantages exist for a consistent large-scale international development of LNG<sup>131</sup>. LNG has great potential for use both in the civil sector (industrial and domestic uses) and as a fuel for maritime and land transport. It is an energy source with low environmental impact: it eliminates particulate emissions and significantly reduces CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

As can be seen, there are economic prospects for the region, despite whether at the present time some national economies are going through some of the most complicated moments of recent decades, such as in Italy and Greece, or if there is not yet a situation of stability in political and social terms in certain countries, such as Libya and Syria. There are difficulties, as has already been stressed several times, but at the same time there are also excellent possibilities of returning the Mediterranean to the center of world economic and political life. A correct commercial and economic coordination will be fundamental for the future development of the area, in order to make the most of the recent economic implications. A political coordination will be fundamental as well. This one could also aim at a better stability within the region, which is still the determining factor for the area's economy.

The European Union in this sense will have to play an even more incisive role than it has done up to now. It is difficult to consider the Brussels initiatives as satisfactory and successful so far.

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<sup>130</sup> SRM, “Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell’energia”, Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

### 3.2 RETURN TO ECONOMIC GROWTH: SOUTHERN EUROPE AND NORTH AFRICA

The growth in the MENA region, according to the World Bank, improved to 1.7% in 2018, contributed by acceleration in activity of both oil exporters and importers<sup>132</sup>. Growth among oil exporters is estimated to have strengthened even more in 2019 until 1.9%. The growth in Algeria has reached to 2.5% last year, supported by public spending<sup>133</sup>. Favourable agricultural situation and increased in the tourism sector led to a concrete growth in Morocco and Tunisia in 2018, which are estimated to grow at a 3.2% and 2.6%, respectively<sup>134</sup>. Despite a possible slower global trade, (before the pandemic) the growth among oil exporters was expected to pick up to a 2,6% rate from 2 percent in 2018 in all oil-export-countries.

According to the data, the most virtuous state in the area was Egypt, recording excellent results until before the pandemic. The latest report released by Goldman Sachs notes that the Egyptian economy is still strong and growing in a way that can make it one of the strongest of emerging markets. Cairo in particular, achieved considerable success thanks to the economic reform program launched in November 2016<sup>135</sup>.

Egypt's real interest rate, at 6.5%, and debt proceeds, at 6.7%, they are, according to the American investment bank, among the most interesting rates globally, where many counterparties register respectively 1% and 0.5%. This increases the appetite of foreign investors and supports inflows of foreign investment, the report noted. On interest rates to be reviewed by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) on 24 September, Goldman Sachs said it expects the CBE to find a balance between the inflation rate cap, set at about 9%, and foreign investment inflows<sup>136</sup>. In the medium term, the bank's intention seems to be to cut interest rates to reach a real level of around 2.5%, down from the current 6.5%<sup>137</sup>. As for inflation rates, on the other hand, the CBE expects that in the next two months these will be around 4.5%, below the set limit, with projections that in the future they will increase up to 7 or 7.5%<sup>138</sup>.

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<sup>132</sup> World Bank, "Global Economic Prospects Middle East and North Africa", January 2019

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> LUISS Osservatorio sulla Sicurezza Internazionale, "L'economia egiziana tra le più forti dei mercati emergenti", 17 September 2020; <https://sicurezzainternazionale.luiss.it/2020/09/17/leconomia-egiziana-le-piu-forti-dei-mercati-emergenti/>

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

In addition, the Goldman Sachs report revealed that while about \$ 20 billion exited the Egyptian market from March to June during the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, about \$ 10 billion has returned in recent months, with hopes. future of an increase in remittances that Egyptian emigrants will send to their country<sup>139</sup>. Finally, the document stressed that Turkey can no longer compete with Egypt in the field of emerging markets due to the deterioration of its economic situation, which makes the country unattractive for investors. On the performance of the Egyptian pound, the report stresses that its value will remain significant with an upward trend. In addition, Goldman Sachs assured, the increase in its price against the US dollar will not pose a major risk to the competitiveness of Egyptian exports.

However, the financial institution's report highlighted that the Egyptian government needs to increase support for the private sector if it intends to increase its investment in research and development of new capacities. As for tourism, the report expects the sector to recover in the third quarter of 2021 after being hit hard by the Covid-19 crisis. Tourism, in Egypt, represents 20% of the total economic activity of the North African country.

Egypt achieved one of the highest economic growth rates among emerging countries during 2018, equal to 5.6%, an important progress compared to the previous 2.3% recorded between 2011 and 2014, also maintained during the first quarter of 2019<sup>140</sup>.

Growth was driven by a macroeconomic stabilization program that generated a solid primary budget surplus, reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio and replenishing reserves. In this sense, the Cairo government has undertaken to implement reforms that have generated effective improvements especially in the manufacturing and tourism sectors. Specifically, mining activities, tourism, wholesale and retail trade, the real estate sector and construction were the main drivers of growth before the coronavirus crisis. This helped reduce the unemployment rate from 9.9% in 2018 to 7.5% in the fourth quarter of 2019<sup>141</sup>.

Nonetheless, some vulnerabilities remain in the North African country, including the poor performance of exports and foreign direct investment, aggravated by the repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic.

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<sup>139</sup> LUISS Osservatorio sulla Sicurezza Internazionale, “L’economia egiziana tra le più forti dei mercati emergenti”, 17 September 2020; <https://sicurezzainternazionale.luiss.it/2020/09/17/leconomia-egiziana-le-piu-forti-dei-mercati-emergenti/>

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

The health emergency underlined the urgency for Cairo to resolve structural challenges in order to safeguard sustained recovery and create the fiscal space necessary to invest more in human capital.

Regarding the Southern Europe area, Spain recorded the best data, in fact, according to Eurostat updates, in the last quarter of 2018 the greatest contribution to the growth of the Eurozone came from Spain, the country that is growing the most among the major continental economies<sup>142</sup>. In the fifth consecutive year of robust growth, the Spanish GDP closed last year with a round 2.6%: it is true that it is the lowest rate since 2014 but it still travels at almost three times the speed of Italy<sup>143</sup>. And economic growth is expected to keep pace in the future as well, with the Bank of Spain forecasting 2.2% for this year (more than double that of Germany), 1.9% in 2020 and 1.7% in 2021.

An incredible performance for a country that between 2007 and 2014 burned 3.8 million jobs, with real wages dropped by 10% and a construction sector literally imploded (from the 20,000 building permits of March 2007 collapsed to just 700 in August 2013, and still today we travel around two thousand permits per month)<sup>144</sup>.

But that of Spain is a "miracle" still full of contrasts and questions considering its increasingly fragmented political landscape but above all to the largest number of unemployed in the European Union (3.3 million) and to one of the highest poverty rates, as well as that at a jobless rate (14%) second in the EU only to that of Greece<sup>145</sup>. A circumstance that in addition to arousing disbelief, however, highlights how substantial economic growth can be found even in such adverse situations. It is precisely the depth of the collapse during the crisis that has allowed Spain such an impressive recovery: Iberian employment has grown by about 3% in each of the last four years, with job creation in the last two years barely less than the German one despite a workforce that is less than half<sup>146</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> E. Marro, "Spagna crescita record in Europa. Breve storia di un «miracolo» economico", *Il Sole24Ore*, March 2019

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

The growth of Iberian employment has created a virtuous circle in terms of household consumption, which with a growth of 2.2% last year (compared to an average of 1% in the eurozone) led the GDP race<sup>147</sup>. Also, because the Spanish economic structure is less dependent on exports than those of other large countries such as Germany. Madrid took advantage of what has always been indicated as its historical weakness, its dependence on domestic demand, which is now very tonic thanks also to the recovery of the banking sector (with bad loans more than halved compared to 2013) and to the boom in investments, which have increased last year by as much as 4.6%<sup>148</sup>.

### **3.3 MARITIME ECONOMY: NEW TRADE ROUTES**

In recent years, with the expansion of the emerging economies, especially the economies of India and China, the Mediterranean has returned to occupy a central position to connect the continents surrounding Asia, Africa and Europe. Indeed, the processes of globalization involve the countries of the South Mediterranean shore. In particular, the role of the Mediterranean in the field of global maritime traffic is growing. Maritime traffic in the Mediterranean has increasing despite the political tensions in the area.

The Mediterranean plays a strategic role as it concentrates 20% of global shipping which is further consolidating due to a series of factors. In fact, the Mediterranean, on the geo-economic level, interfaces the large Atlantic and Northern European markets on the one hand and the Asian and African ones on the other. For these reasons, the centrality of the basin in international scenarios is a strong attraction factor for public and private investments in the transport and logistics sector which continue to grow despite some critical social and political situations. The numerous Chinese Turkish Emirati investments in Singapore and in the ports and maritime terminals of the many Mediterranean countries indicate a very specific interest in developing and strengthening the transport routes in the area. It is also a consolidated fact that the Mediterranean represents a privileged transit route for containerized traffic, in fact it concentrates 27% of world scheduled services and is also a very significant area for short-haul traffic in the north-south direction and in particular in RORO mode (Roll-On, Roll-Off)<sup>149</sup>.

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<sup>147</sup> E. Marro, “Spagna crescita record in Europa. Breve storia di un «miracolo» economico”, *Il Sole24Ore*, March 2019

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> SRM, “Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell’energia”, Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

The new Suez Canal has contributed significantly to increasing the centrality of the Mediterranean, now able to accommodate large ships in both directions at the same time, significantly shortening waiting times which is also the subject of an advanced masterplan for development. Ports, industrial zones and service centers along its entire course in order to make the canal itself not only the traditional East-West transit but to make it one of the centers of world trade. The Suez Canal is today a key hub both for the transport of oil from Arab countries to Europe and for the transport of goods. About 8% of world trade passes through its waters every year.

The purpose of the Egyptian government also pursued through targeted marketing policies is to attract traffic by increasing the convenience of passage also for some routes of Asia through the east coast of the United States that develop their natural route through Panama<sup>150</sup>.

An example of such policies is the fare line that provides discounts of 45%, 55% or 66% for containerships that travel on some routes that depart from the ports of the East Coast of the United States and are directed to South / Southeast Asia<sup>151</sup>. These discounts in place since 2016 to coincide with the opening of the new Panama Canal have been renewed for six months in six months and are currently in effect and are clearly aimed at encouraging carriers to travel longer journeys. but which allow to achieve important savings in terms of costs. The Egyptian government also did not put an end to the project with the construction of the new canal but expanded and developed it by adding a vast special economic zone to the actual canal in which to attract foreign capital to develop logistics and industrial manufacturing activities<sup>152</sup>.

The Suez Canal confirms itself as a strategic hub for world merchant maritime borders: 9% of the globe's international trade uses this great passageway<sup>153</sup>. The growth of goods in transit recorded important values confirmed also in 2018, the year in which a double record was marked in terms of number of ships over 18 thousand or + 3.6% and a new record of cargo transport with 983.4 million t or + 8.2%. Thanks to the enlargement, in 2018 the average size of the ships that crossed the canal grew by 12% compared to four years before or the previous year of the expansion, highlighting that the new infrastructure is satisfying the needs of the gigantism phenomenon that affects all the types of ships.

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<sup>150</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

The container ports are the most numerous ships among those that have carried out complete trans through the Suez Canal representing here we are an increase of 2.5% or 5706 units<sup>154</sup>. Before the last expansion, the Suez Canal developed along 192 km between the bay of Port Said and the Gulf of Suez, and allowed the transit of three alternating convoys, from North to South (Port Said-Suez) and from South to North (Suez-Port-Said) with two by-passes, Great Bitter Lake and El Ballah. There was a transit speed limit of 6-8 knots, a speed that made it possible to cross the Canal in 12/16 hours<sup>155</sup>. Freight traffic amounts to over 983 million tons, an increase of 8.2% compared to 2017 when the previous historical peak of loads embarked on ships passing through the Egyptian channel was marked.

In 2008, over 21,000 ships crossed the Canal, with a daily average of 58 ships, while in 2014 17,000 ships passed, with an average of 47 a day, generating revenues of over 5 billion dollars, or approximately 2% of the Egyptian GDP. The modernization work that took place in 2015 for a total cost of 8.2 billion dollars doubled the capacity of the Canal by about 50%, allowing the simultaneous transit of a greater number of convoys. In fact, it is expected that the daily average will increase from the current 47 ships to 97 in 2023, also allowing a saving of about 4 hours in the crossing<sup>156</sup>. The new record was set thanks to the freight on ships that crossed the canal both from north to south which amounted to 524.6 million tons or +9.8% both from south to north which stood at 458.8 million t or an increase of 6.6%, new records that surpassed both previous ones recorded in 2017<sup>157</sup>.

The intervention, thanks to the shorter crossing times, involves a potential growth in maritime traffic between Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the East Coast of the United States and will produce an indirect effect connected with the support and logistics services for port activities, with further economic repercussions for the Egyptian economy, as we have already seen.

The traffics that will benefit most from the new Canal are mainly containerized ones, both for the higher value of the goods and for the organizational methods of the associated services, which require reliability and punctuality as requirements. At the same time, the advantages for ships lie in the lower operating costs necessary to carry out the transport and in the time savings.

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<sup>154</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

<sup>155</sup> V. Amato, "La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo", Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>156</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2015, Rapporto Annuale", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2015

<sup>157</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019



The reduction of waiting times will allow the reduction of all those costs that are proportional not so much to the distance traveled, but to the travel time. This is true, in particular, for the management costs of assets related to the ship (depreciation of the ship, crew costs, lower consumption of bunkers, insurance and administrative costs) and for the costs of immobilizing the goods. This reduction in costs, combined with the increase in the capacity and safety of the Canal, will have important repercussions in the medium term especially on the main routes between the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, also in consideration of the impracticability of many land routes to cause of conflicts in the area<sup>158</sup>. Furthermore, the considerable savings in operating costs and capital costs will induce shipping companies to choose the Suez-Gibraltar route to reach the United States rather than slow steaming through the Cape of Good Hope. The reduction of uncertainty in crossing times and the decision by the Egyptian government not to increase fares are two elements capable of reducing the competition of alternative routes between Asia and the East Coast of the United States, linked above all to the important enlargements of the Canal of Panama in 2016.

If we look exclusively at the distance factor, it seems obvious to assume that maritime companies operating on the routes linking China to the East Coast of the United States find it more convenient to use the Panama Canal than the Suez. In fact, the strategic elements taken into consideration by the companies in the choice of routes include not only the distance, but also the possibility of maximizing the economies of scale in the consumption of bunkers, with the use of large ships<sup>159</sup>. It should be considered that such a strategy is not allowed by crossing the Panama Canal given the physical limit of 14,500 TEU<sup>160</sup>, the maximum capacity threshold for access. Added to this is the possibility of crossing several relevant hubs along the Suez route (Dubai, Port Said, Piraeus, Gioia Tauro, Malta, Valencia, Algeciras, Tanger Med). In light of these circumstances, Suez seems to have nothing to fear, not even taking into consideration the competitor Panama<sup>161</sup>.

The Suez Canal is also the third route in the world for the transport of oil and natural gas departing from the Gulf to Europe and North America. These two routes account for approximately 9% of the world's oil trade by sea. In 2018, crude oil and derivative products represented respectively 24% and 3% of the goods transited and the expansion of the channel allows more than 60% of the tankers to pass<sup>162</sup>.

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<sup>158</sup> V. Amato, "La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo", Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> According to OECD, TEU is the "standard unit for counting containers of various capacities and for describing the capacities of container ships or terminals. One 20 Foot ISO container equals 1TEU. Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit (TEU)"

<sup>161</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2015, Rapporto Annuale", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2015

<sup>162</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

The trend in traffic also shows that the doubling of the canal is gradually changing the world structure of maritime transport, especially along the east-west route: in the last 10 years the traffic from Southeast Asia to the Mediterranean is increased by 37% sine ballet, together with the growth of traffic to and from the Gulf, a +77% where a lot of trade has China as its reference.

This also underlined the relationship of the Mediterranean ports for the motivation of goods in transit through the channel in both directions: the ports distributed along the coasts of the basin and divided into the west and south west Mediterranean, north Mediterranean, Black Sea and south east Mediterranean they originate 55% of the cargo heading south and destination 55% of the goods heading north<sup>163</sup>. Suez is not only a strategic gateway for global maritime trade but represents a model of a port system that integrates areas dedicated to industrial manufacturing with investments in technologies.

Moreover the "Suez Canal Corridor Area Project" (SCZone) was launched in 2014, and represented a huge investment plan that looks to the Canal region as a center of economic. To achieve these ambitious objectives, the SCZone project intends to enhance three areas of the region, from north to south, respectively Port Said, Ismailia and Ain Sokhna<sup>164</sup>. The project can be considered the starting point from which the Egyptian government took steps to exit the economic crisis and lead the country into a new phase of development. The SCZone program is representative, in fact, of the new orientation in foreign policy of Egypt characterized by the desire to exploit the full potential of the country to be able to attract investments, especially in those sectors of the economy that today appear to be among the most dynamic, namely transport, logistics, energy, tourism and ICT<sup>165</sup>.

Considering what has been said up to this point is evident how the maritime economy is so crucial for the Mediterranean basin and the latter for the global trade in general.

On a global level, the sea route is the mode of transport mainly used in export, in fact the share of sea freight only of finished car vehicles is equal to 75% of the total. If we consider the export by sea on the total product of the total share this falls to 24.3% since the denominator of the total volume also takes into account the domestic sales made in the same countries of production, always by understanding the cars<sup>166</sup>.

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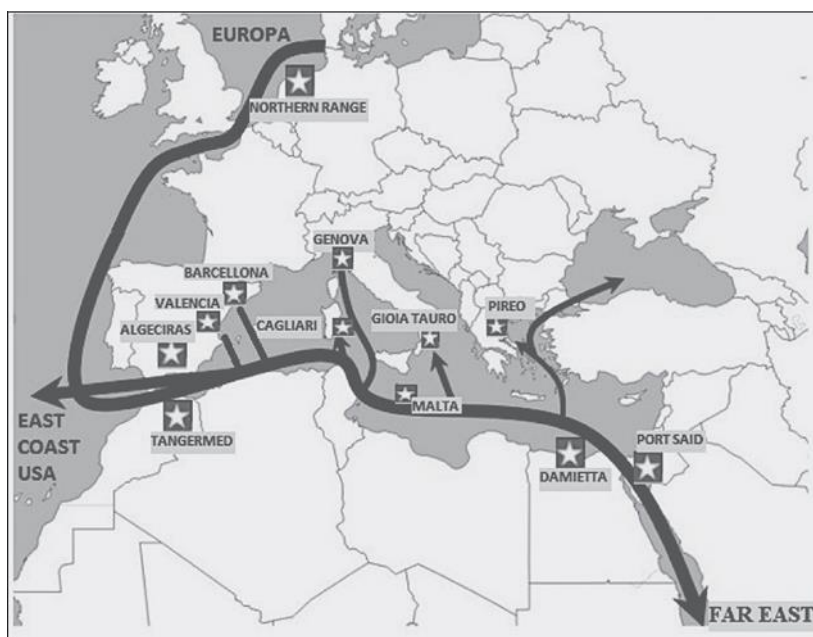
<sup>163</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

<sup>164</sup> V. Amato, "La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo", Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

In 2017 shipping grew by 7.3% a higher rate than the growth in global vehicle sales which was 3.1%. One of the reasons not to be underestimated underlying the growth of this mode of transport of cars is that it, even to overseas ports, does not affect the costs of the product too much on average between one and 3% of the price of the car, including as an example, also based on the ship's capabilities<sup>167</sup>. The forecasts for 2022 confirm an overall average growth in maritime vehicle trade equal to an average annual 2.5%, driven by a recovery in volumes from Asia to Europe but above all by the growth of intra-Asian trade<sup>168</sup>. For the Mediterranean, therefore, the conditions now exist to resume a leading role in world trade as long as its ports know how to follow the path of intermodality and technological innovation. The historical moment seems to favour the basin since, as mentioned, the powerful economic advance of the Asian countries and the consequent increase in Far East-Europe traffic have repositioned its centrality. It has been noted that the larger size of the container ships, favouring the transoceanic routes that pass through the Suez Canal, have made the Mediterranean the preferred transit place for mega container ships. In addition, the recent modernization of the Canal may attract an even greater intensity of flows, thus increasing the importance of the Mediterranean corridor, especially along the Suez-Gibraltar axis, the main route of traffic between Far East-Europe-North America. However, it is precisely on this route that the competition between Mediterranean ports intensifies. Competition concerning the main transshipment ports along the Suez-Gibraltar route: Piraeus; Tanger Med; Gioia Tauro; Port Said; Damietta; Algeciras; Valencia; Marsaxlokk and Cagliari<sup>169</sup>.



**Map 3.1: Hub ports on the main Mediterranean routes<sup>170</sup>.**

<sup>167</sup> V. Amato, "La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo", Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

Looking at the Table 1 below, based on the statistics provided by *Assoporti* in 2014<sup>171</sup>, among the harbour ports the best performance are confirmed Algeciras and Valencia (4.5 million and 4.4 million TEU), Port Said (4 million TEU), the port of Malta (2.9 million TEU), the Moroccan port of Tanger (3 million TEU) and the Greek port of Piraeus (3.5 million TEU). In particular, the latter two are the most competitive realities of the area, managing to do better than Gioia Tauro, which instead recorded a drop of 3.8% with 2.9 million TEU<sup>172</sup>.

**Table 1: TEU handled in transshipment ports in the southern Mediterranean since 2010 to 2014**

Ports	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Var % 2010/2014
Algec.	2.806.884	3.602.631	4.111.840	4.337.816	4.554.901	62
Valen.	4.206.937	4.327.371	4.469.874	4.327.838	4.441.949	5,5
Port Said	3.627.813	4.306.468	3.622.821	3.671.870	4.060.500	11
Piraeus	885.155	1.679.052	2.734.014	3.163.755	3.585.000	305
Tanger	2.058.430	2.072.948	1.826.313	2.558.426	3.077.750	49,5
Gioia Tauro	2.852.264	2.304.987	2.721.108	3.094.254	2.969.802	4
Marsa.	2.370.729	2.360.489	2.540.000	2.750.000	2.900.000	22
Geno.	1.758.858	1.847.102	2.064.806	1.988.013	2.172.994	23
Barc.	1.931.033	2.013.967	1.749.974	1.718.779	1.893.557	-1,9
Cagl.	629.340	603.236	627.609	702.143	717.016	13
Dam.	1.072.176	929.867	822.867	688.070	nd	nd

Piraeus is a natural port with several inlets and secondary ports. Its importance in the Greek and Mediterranean economy goes back thousands of years. Since the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., it was the port of classical Athens and had already played an important role in economic and military growth ever since. With a traffic of about 3.5 million tons of goods, it is the largest commercial port in Greece, as well as the largest in the Eastern Mediterranean for container traffic<sup>173</sup>. Its success is linked above all to massive Chinese investments, which have increased commercial traffic by eight times, also attracting American investors including Hewlett-Packard (HP), a world leader in the shipment of PCs assembled to China. Piraeus was thus elected as a preferential hub for the sorting of their goods in the Mediterranean and the main maritime gateway for South, Central and Eastern Europe, for Central Asia, North Africa and some areas of the Middle East<sup>174</sup>.

<sup>171</sup> *Assoporti* Italian Ports Association, “Il Mar Mediterraneo. Scenari geo strategici della portualità italiana nel quadrante Mediterraneo-Mar Nero”, 2016

<sup>172</sup> V. Amato, “La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo”, Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

The port of Tangier in Morocco is strategically located on the Strait of Gibraltar, along the East-West trade route that connects Asia, Europe and North America. The position is certainly one of the variables of the success of the Moroccan port which is at the center of the interest of several global shipping companies<sup>175</sup>. *Tanger Med*<sup>176</sup> went into operation in 2007, handling almost one million TEUs in the first year of operation<sup>177</sup>.

In 2009, construction work began on *Tanger Med 2*, completed in early 2015. *Tanger Med 2* has a capacity of 5.2 million containers which, combined with the 3 million *Tanger Med 1*, has made the entire port complex a leader between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, with a total capacity of 8 million TEU, 7 million passengers, 700 thousand trucks, 10 million tons of hydrocarbons and 2 million vehicles<sup>178</sup>. Moreover, three free zones are identified within the logistics area, *Tanger Free Zone*; *Medhub* and *Melloussa Industrial Zone*. The benefits granted to companies within the free zones range from tax and customs exemptions with simplification of procedures, to the freedom to repatriate capital and the freedom to carry out foreign currency transactions in the Free Zone<sup>179</sup>. The synergies between the port and the free zones, together with investments in infrastructure, have made *Tanger Med* an important commercial hub, increasing its market share from 6% in 2009 to 11% in 2014<sup>180</sup>.

A further strength of Tangier is that of having been able to enter into intense relationships with other parties, such as the agreement stipulated in 2004, the year of construction of *Tanger Med 1*, with the railway operator ONCF, aimed at promoting traffic between Tangier and Casablanca, but also the agreements undertaken with other airports, such as the agreement with Algeciras, a border port in Spain, in order to promote cooperation and share information for new business opportunities. It is therefore a reality with a particularly favorable geographical position, open to a market estimated at more than 600 million inhabitants (North Africa, West Africa and Europe), with a strong efficiency guaranteed by the management of leading operators connected to the flow regional and global logistics, with highly qualified and competitive human resources. And finally, with free trade agreements with the EU, the United States, Turkey and Arab countries, from which the conditions for free zones, agreements and collaboration agreements with other ports have arisen.

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<sup>175</sup> V. Amato, "La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo", Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>176</sup> Tangier Med is a maritime port of Morocco, whose construction began in 2004 and the inauguration took place in July 2007, with a further extension that began in 2009 and the inauguration took place in June 2019

<sup>177</sup> V. Amato, "La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo", Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

A mechanism linked, therefore, not only to investments in infrastructures, but also to the creation of relationships with national and international bodies for the management of transport networks, cooperation with other ports and efficient management by leading companies in the sector<sup>181</sup>.

The Spanish port system is characterized by constant growth, proven by the fact that the sector's activities represent 1.8% of the country's GDP, providing an annual added value of over 9 billion euros which double if the effects are taken into account. indirect and induced<sup>182</sup>. The Spanish ports represent, after the ports of Northern Europe, the fourth force in the European Union by volume of goods handled: about 11% of total traffic and Valencia and Algeciras are the main hubs.

The port of Algeciras extends within a bay in southern Spain, along the Strait of Gibraltar, bordered to the east by the peninsula of the same name. The port infrastructures also continue to expand along the rest of the coast, in the municipalities of Los Barrios and San Roque, forming an immense port area that takes the name of *Bahía de Algeciras*. Currently, the airport is constantly growing, both in terms of available areas, and in terms of operational capacity and logistic services<sup>183</sup>. Its geographical position, very close to Africa, gives it the particular function of an intermodal bridge between the continent and Europe and makes it possible for over 5 million passengers and 200,000 industrial vehicles to pass through the Strait of Gibraltar per year. The existing infrastructures and those nearing completion favour the intermodal vocation of the port and the development of road and rail infrastructures at its service.

In the port there are two main container terminals, one is managed by APM Terminal<sup>184</sup> and has a slot capacity of up to 10,476 containers, while the other is managed by Total Terminal International Algeciras (TTI Algeciras), which belongs to the Korean company Hanjin Shipping<sup>185</sup>. The latter is located in Isla Verde and is the first semi-automatic terminal in the Mediterranean area, with a capacity of 1.8 million TEU, capable of handling the latest generation of mega container ships with a capacity of up to 18,000 TEU<sup>186</sup>.

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<sup>181</sup> V. Amato, "La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo", Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> APM Terminals is an international container terminal operating company headquartered in The Hague, The Netherlands. It is one of the largest ports and terminal operators in the world, as well as providing cargo support and internal container services. The company is ranked as the fifth largest container terminal operator.

<sup>185</sup> V. Amato, "La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo", Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

The Port Authority of Algeciras has woven a dense network of relationships with various shipping companies, guaranteeing the port a certain stability and numerous financing, as evidenced, to mention just one case, the 73 million dollars invested by APM Terminal in 2013<sup>187</sup> for the purchase of new cranes capable of operating with 18,000 TEU vessels and to carry out some dredging works. The structure of the Spanish airport has largely favoured the excellent performances achieved in recent years.

Always in Spain, the port of Valencia represents one of the most important in the Mediterranean with an annual traffic of over 55 million tons of goods and 3 million TEUs. The port also generates a strong added value for the region especially for employment with over 15,000 employees<sup>188</sup>. The geographical position places the port as the first and last port of call for the main shipping companies that carry out scheduled services between America, the Mediterranean and the Far East. It offers a vast network of connections with the main airports in the world through 140 regular lines and a widespread service of regional connections<sup>189</sup>. This characteristic, together with its geographical position, makes it one of the most successful Mediterranean hubs.

The analysis of the ports of Greece, Morocco and Spain tangibly underlines the different dimensions in which the strategic advantage of a port can be articulated: infrastructural equipment, quay spaces, container handling capacity, streamlining of bureaucratic and administrative procedures, dock economic reference, capacity for efficient and fast connections with the backport, presence of large logistics operators, in addition to the importance of a favourable geographical position. However, although the latter is fundamental, it alone is not enough to guarantee the success of a port complex and Italy is the most obvious example of this.

The Italian port system has a significant weight in Europe too. This is 477 million tons which place Italy in third place for managed traffic, equal to 12.8% of the European total, after the Dutch and British ports. This is mainly due to the geographical advantage the country enjoys<sup>190</sup>. Italy, in fact, with its centrality in the Mediterranean is able to intercept both traffic from Europe to the Far East and vice versa, as well as North-South traffic, but the pace with which this volume of traffic is even before the start of the crisis, it is lower than the European average and that of the main ports analysed above.

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<sup>187</sup> OffShore Energy, "Algeciras Port Takes Lead in the Med", July 2014

<sup>188</sup> V. Amato, "La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo", Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, between 2007 and 2011, the exchange of containers was reduced by 9.7%, with 1.1 million TEUs lost and even if in the following two years about half was recovered, returning to 10, 1 million TEU in 2013, this growth stopped again in 2014. The main Italian transshipment port, Gioia Tauro, recorded in 2017 a 20% decline from 2007, handling only 2,969,802 TEUs<sup>191</sup>. But it is not the only Italian port to record negative trends.

The reasons for the negative trends in Italian ports are to be found in the great changes in global shipping. The large sector alliances risk putting the Italian port system on the sidelines. This requires infrastructural equipment capable of meeting the challenges of naval gigantism so that the requests of shipping companies can be satisfied. The road carrier alone is no longer sufficient, but faster connections through efficient rail networks are needed and road connections should also be upgraded and made more accessible<sup>192</sup>. In Italy, the maritime sector represents over 43 billion euros and nearly 800,000 jobs, and it is bound to increase, due to intensification of flows as an effect of the enlargement of the Suez Canal and moreover thanks to new trade routes opened with the East, first of all *The Belt Road Initiative* (BRI)

The Belt Road Initiative (BRI) is a complex set of economic, financial and geopolitical actions, which have different final objectives depending on the geographical area of reference, and on the objectives directly or indirectly pursued with them. Moreover, the BRI is a dynamic ecosystem, in the sense that it is not a fixed and defined package of actions, but an "umbrella" container, under which one can easily insert, or remove, actions and/or views of intervention, even in successive moments and by progressive approximations.

In this sense, what was initially, in the two-year period 2013-2015, mainly a project to improve the infrastructures linked to international trade, has evolved into an instrument for expanding Chinese influence also in a cultural sense, supporting initiatives of research and development, even of actions linked to educational exchange policies, especially in emerging countries. The geopolitical motivation behind this initiative is not to be underestimated, and it is worth deepening it.

Since 1978, the year of (re) opening to the world, China has adopted a profile of modesty and moderation in foreign policy. The path of progressive adhesion to a global economy culminated with the entry into the WTO in November 2001. This step led to an increase, recorded in 2017, of 200% compared to the levels of international trade registered in 1978<sup>193</sup>.

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<sup>191</sup> V. Amato, "La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo", Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019



The same it should be noted, however, that this membership was not "automatic" but gradual and mediated, guaranteeing a period of grace for China to be able to substantially enjoy the benefits of belonging to the WTO without adjusting one's economic and productive system to the rules of the game practiced by others players. In this sense, the progressively produced imbalances have in fact resulted in a heavy distortion in the evolution of the dynamics of global trade. And even the recent trade battle, initiated by the American administration, can be read as a belated and disordered attempt to rebalance this situation; an attempt that, however, is based on absolutely founded assumptions and motivations.

In this economic-financial, investment and geopolitical context, the Mediterranean has regained, after about five centuries of relative tarnishing, a central role in the development of trade. The doubling of the Suez Canal, done in record time by Egypt, together with the increased traffic volumes pushed by China, but also by the other countries that overlook the Maritime Silk Road, have put the Mare Nostrum back at the center of the maps. Chinese investment in Piraeus mainly has this function: to ensure control, with a barycentric position, of many of the trades developed in a BRI key and aimed at the Mediterranean basin of Europe<sup>194</sup>. Greece guarantees, geographically, the possibility of governing the exchanges addressed to and from the Black Sea, the routes of the Near East, the ideal trans-shipment hub for oceanic container services, whose shipping dimensions require a transshipment on ships of dimensions compatible with both the infrastructures and, above all, with the economic dynamics of the carriers.

As recently highlighted by a report drawn up by *Assoport*<sup>195</sup>, the centrality of the Mediterranean basin is certainly an attractive factor for public and private investments in the key sectors of transport and logistics. The rebalancing of the weight of ocean routes is significant in this process. While in 1995 the transpacific routes were worth 53% of global transits and the Asia-Europe ones only 27%, the 2015 figure puts them in substantial balance, with a distribution of 45% and 42% respectively<sup>196</sup>. China has heavily invested in the development of port infrastructure within the Mediterranean in recent years. In addition to the well-known investment in Piraeus, there are interventions in Cherchell in Algeria, Port Said and Alexandria in Egypt, Ashdod and Haifa in Israel, the Kumport terminal in Ambarli in Turkey<sup>197</sup>.

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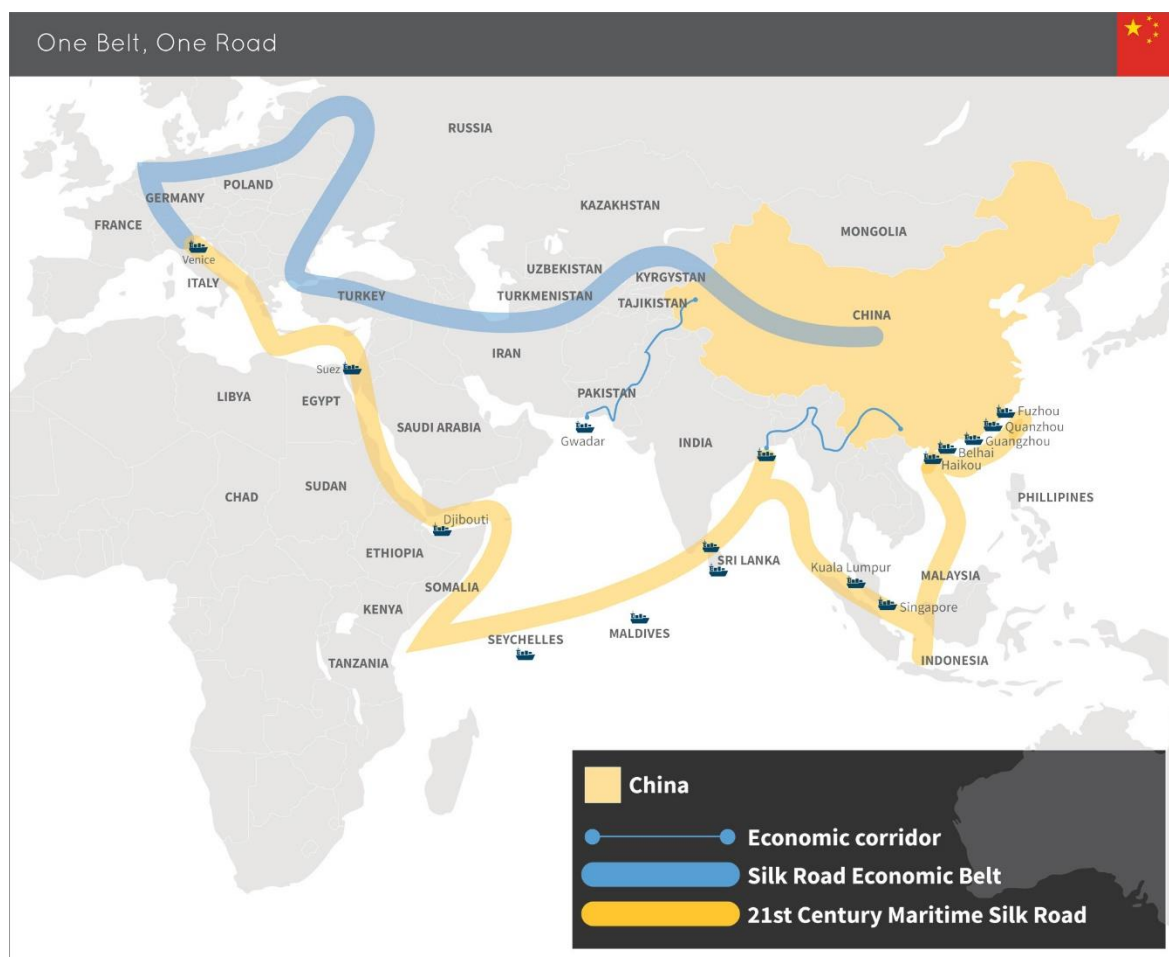
<sup>194</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

<sup>195</sup> Assoport – SRM (2019), Port Infographics

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

Not to mention the interventions already made or being defined in the Italian ports of Savona, Trieste, Genoa and Venice. This composite set of interventions is clearly proportional to the importance of the European market for Chinese interests<sup>198</sup>.



**Map 3.1: Lowy Institute, graphic illustration of the commercial routes of the BRI**

The European Union is China's largest trading partner and reducing transport costs and times is imperative, considering that currently the 80% of trade between the two parties moves by sea. The fact that the largest part of these investments is made through State-Owned-Enterprises (SOEs), and that even the private companies of Chinese origin still maintain a close link with the government, cannot raise doubts and fears, given the influence and control that these types of investments can play a role with respect to independence in the choices of countries where the investments are made<sup>199</sup>.

<sup>198</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

It is clear that, in addition to facilitating trade and international exchanges, the control of ports as infrastructures allow access to a broader concept of utility, because they also allow the acquisition of extremely useful data, with respect to logistics and local economies.

Territories where they insist and operate, thus ensuring greater control and supervision of larger value chains than those directly connected to port traffic per se<sup>200</sup>.

The effects deriving from the processes of globalization have therefore led to a series of transformations in maritime transport, favouring what in the literature is known as the "container revolution". The emergence, as seen, of Asian economies in the global economic scenario and the subsequent intensification of trade from the Far East, led to the saturation of the Panama Canal and the progressive replacement of the Round the World routes with the Pendulums linking Asia-Europe and United States passing through the Mediterranean, restoring its centrality to the basin. The ports of the Mediterranean therefore have the opportunity to exploit a favourable opportunity also in anticipation of the advantages envisaged by the expansion of the Suez Canal. It was highlighted how much the work of widening the Canal can be useful in intercepting new and more substantial flows of traffic from Asia and the Gulf countries, which are growing and represent new opportunities for Mediterranean countries. The BRI represents also an opportunity to demonstrate, in the international scenario, the value of Mediterranean countries. It is a game in which the possibility of a future of well-being and growth for the next generations of the region is at stake. The Chinese project undoubtedly represents a challenge rather than an opportunity, as it will require a reasoned approach by each individual state, which must be ready with the necessary structures and infrastructures.

The analysis of the main transshipment ports in the Mediterranean, highlights the main territorial repercussions arising from the transformations of shipping. Looking back, it is clear that one of the most direct consequences of the containerisation of goods was that of the structural and functional transformation of the port and the factors connected to it. In this context, port authorities play a key role in improving the competitive position of individual ports through the support of other actors: national governments, cities and private terminal operators. In situations where the synergies between these subjects have been channelled towards common objectives, as in the case of Egypt, Morocco and Spain, port activities have had a positive impact on national income, while Italy must find the right formula in order to make the most of the new possibilities.

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<sup>200</sup> SRM, "Italian Maritime Economy 2019, 6° Rapporto Annuale. Nuovi Scenari nel Mediterraneo: Suez e la Cina, le strategie dei grandi carrier, le nuove tecnologie e le rotte dell'energia", Giannini Editore, Naples, July 2019

The success of the ports of Northern Europe is also linked to the presence of far-sighted policies, based on maintaining control of the individual hinterlands and on the necessary adjustments to offer an increasing number of services<sup>201</sup>. The ports of the Mediterranean, unlike the Northern Range, have had fewer opportunities for development due above all to the lack of large, connected and infrastructure hinterlands, although the willingness of some of the countries in the area to want to overcome these limits appears clear<sup>202</sup>.

Accepting the requests of shipping companies for port infrastructures capable of accommodating the new generations of mega ships is a crucial factor in increasing the competitiveness of a port, as are the geographical position, the efficient and fast intermodal connections and a clear and unclear bureaucracy. cumbersome, combined with competitive prices. We must not forget, however, that, except for the geographical component, these ingredients are those of a recipe that involves not only the port authority, but also local and national administrations<sup>203</sup>. The future of the Mediterranean lies precisely in the waters of the latter, and every single national government must not miss the possibilities that are being created thanks to the maritime economy. The benefits will enjoy the individual ports on the banks of the basin will represent a great boost for local economies, giving new life to what seemed economies doomed after the crises and political instabilities of recent decades. There is a future for the region, and we can see it.

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<sup>201</sup> V. Amato, "La nuova centralità del Mediterraneo", Aracne Editrice, October 2017

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

### 3.4 REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19

The Mediterranean, for the first time in a long time, is faced with new finally promising prospects for the future. Unfortunately, the region like the rest of the world at this moment finds it very complicated to be able to speak with certainty, due to the pandemic that hit the entire globe between the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. The positive trend of the Mediterranean had to stop together with the rest of the world due to Covid-19. The latter started its outbreak from the city Chinese from Wuhan, it quickly spread around the world. At the time of writing, Europe and the world have already lived and tried the experience of quarantine, which has had a variable duration throughout the world. China and Italy were the most affected countries during the first phase, and for this reason they first imposed lockdown measures as early as March, to then be followed by the remaining European and non-European countries, and with significant delay by the USA, where now the virus has spread more and caused more victims.

Official data at the end of September 2020 state that in the month there have been over 31 million cases, about 21 million healings and almost one million deaths<sup>204</sup>. The Mediterranean countries initially suffered an important and physiological decline in industrial, agricultural and tourism production due to the restrictive measures of quarantines and then timidly recovered at the end of the latter. What is of major concern is the oil market, as it is vital in the region. In fact, parallel to the outbreak of the pandemic, the global scenario was further shaken by the so-called "price war" between the largest oil producers and exporters in the world: Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United States. This conflict has led to a vertical collapse in oil and gas prices. At one point, the excess oil supply over demand was such that storage capacities were close to exhaustion with the consequence that towards the end of April 2020, producers were paying around \$ 40 to anyone willing to buy a barrel of US crude oil. As it is easy to imagine, the crisis in the hydrocarbon market has had its repercussions also in the Mediterranean basin considering the presence of countries such as Algeria and Libya which base their economy on the energy sector, but the slow reorganization of the market and the discovery of new fields in the basin contributed to a slow return to an apparently more stable situation.

Europe, shaken by the dramatic Covid-19 crisis, must nevertheless demonstrate that it is able to find the strengths and ideas to relaunch a unitary political project, which in recent years has been too often held back by national selfishness and particular interests.

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<sup>204</sup> World Health Organization, "Health Emergency Dashboard"

The Mediterranean, from this point of view, is a fundamental test for the EU. In this region, in fact, the Union can and must demonstrate its ability to influence international political dynamics.

Certainly, an ambitious challenge but no longer postponable for the Union that really wants to become a major player on a global level in the coming years. The challenge facing the world is comparable to the great crisis of 2008, if not worse in economic terms as well as in human terms and many governments still do not know how to move. The pandemic of 1600 contributed to the final fall of the Mediterranean region, a precedent that historically is scary, but today the circumstances are totally different.

Talking about the short-term future seems almost dystopian, since everything can change in a matter of days. Certainly, the pandemic has revealed the weaknesses of our political and economic systems, but this with good chances will trigger new courses that will speed up some processes already underway like the decline of the USA and the regionalization of markets. Globalization as we know it has been interrupted in a certain sense during the peak of infections in recent months, and this in the short and medium term will lead to the downsizing of markets in geographical terms, creating models of regional globalization. An example was given to us by the trade war between China and the US in 2017, which turned Mexico and Canada into the main trading partners of the Americans, making them less dependent on exports.

The regional-globalized market that could be formed in the Mediterranean area could play into this condition in the long term, as it will remain at the center of both Chinese and American commercial interests. If everything is accompanied with the right support of the European Union, the Mediterranean Sea could become one of the main reboot hubs in the post covid-19 era. The variables are undoubtedly very numerous and above all it will depend on the approach that will be adopted by the main governments within the first months of 2021. The only certain thing is that to avoid a further damaging collapse of the world economy and a new and extensive crisis in the international system, States will not have to focus on isolationist policies, but will have to focus on global support and solidarity.

The degree of interdependence between states is now too high, and it is impossible not to understand that every single national policy has its own international repercussions. While waiting and with the hope that the right choices will be made, the Mediterranean still remains undoubtedly a new and rediscovered fulcrum for the international economy and politics, with good chances that it will represent in the future a reference region for the global restart.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Mediterranean area has shown that, despite adverse circumstances, it has managed to achieve results, which underlines its immense potential. The gap between North and South is still far from being bridged, after all decades of economic and political inequalities cannot be redressed in a short time, but the Mediterranean region could take concrete steps forward to aspire to partially rebalance the situation. The great world powers such as the USA, China and Russia have understood the importance of the basin and have long begun to take advantage of it, it will not be long before the rest of the "Northern" countries begin to look at this territory with different eyes.

The new centrality of the Mediterranean today represents a concrete opportunity to generate development and stabilize the area with benefits for both sides. Development and growth for these countries but also new business and investment opportunities for Europeans. The amount of investments in the area is already particularly significant, but individual countries still have to work hard in the future. In order to make the most of new economic opportunities, an enrichment is needed in terms of infrastructures, which are lacking or not always adequate.

Governments in the region must therefore adopt strategies to improve the economic situation and development prospects by simplifying by encouraging the growth of the private sector, by discouraging isolationist policies, by breaking down customs barriers, by increasing regional cooperation and coordination. In this way, together with an increase in legal transparency, the Mediterranean will represent an increasingly attractive investment hub. Taking advantage of the new possibilities that have arisen must become the main objective of every single government on the shores of this sea. These represent a concrete possibility of restarting and confirming what has been done up to now.

Cooperation above all is the fundamental tool for obtaining the desired results in the medium and long term. A great role in all this is played by the European Union more than by individual states. Past attempts in terms of policy in the Mediterranean region have been almost unsuccessful, but now more than ever Brussels has to look south with different eyes. First of all, to improve the security and stability of the region, a substantial modification to the Dublin Convention is necessary in terms of immigration, which will benefit all of Europe but first of all the countries of Mediterranean Europe.

The latter will enjoy a new and deeper political tranquillity which will represent an important fuel for increasing investments and improving the economic situation. With a more stable economy it will be even easier to take advantage of the new opportunities that “come from the sea”. A climate that will also positively affect the surrounding economies, initiating a further positive domain of regional growth.

What I wanted to demonstrate with this thesis is that a Mediterranean once again at the centre of the world is possible, and is already happening, without anyone fully realizing it. That of the Mediterranean could be a story of revenge. A revenge that had to wait for dark, bloody centuries with no great future prospects. The Mediterranean is the true great cradle of civilization, but it can no longer be linked only to its past, on the contrary, where it can play an important part in writing the future of modern civilization. Until a few decades ago it was unthinkable, but now the possibilities are there. We have seen how the countries of the MENA have grown metaphorically like real flowers in the desert and that southern Europe is not doomed as everyone gave until a few years ago.

The path to be taken is still long and there will be further challenges in the future, the first of many represented today by Covid-19, but this does not take away from them the merit of the successes achieved so far. A concrete future is now after a long time between the coasts of the Mediterranean, a future previously dreamed of, long desired and considered almost impossible. The foundations for a new and central Mediterranean are there and the opportunities it brings with it are of vital importance for every single State in the region, which has the essential task of taking a step forward towards this future and making it their own, under the eyes of the whole world, waiting anxiously.



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# SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the Mediterranean region and how it has found its centrality in the world economy and politics today. Before looking at the current factors that have repositioned the international spotlight on the region, we will understand why, how and when the Mediterranean Sea has lost importance. In this sense, in the first part of the paper, the analysis will be purely historical, retracing the steps of the great civilizations of the past up to the post-Second World War, or passing from the apogee to the moment of maximum decline of the Mediterranean region.

As a starting point we look at the Middle East during the Bronze Age, in the land known as the "Fertile Crescent" which includes Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Palestine, Syria and Egypt. The populations of these territories laid the foundations for modern civilization, by giving life to the first examples of market, politics and organized society. Moreover, three were the most important elements introduced in this period: 1. the creation of the first cities; 2. forms of written communication; 3. the use of metallurgy.

With the end of the Bronze Age, the focal point of the region progressively moves away from the Middle East. In the Peloponnesian Peninsula we are witnessing the birth of democracy in Pericles' Athens, which at the time remained an isolated and incomplete experiment, forgotten by the Greek people for centuries due to the consequences of the war in the peninsula, but which remained alive in the philosophers who took refuge in the colonies, spreading the new political thought and influencing the development of what will be the greatest civilization of antiquity: Rome.

In addition to having had a history of conquests and glory, Roman civilization has further contributed to introducing new elements that have brought civilization closer to what we now consider "modern". Roman jurisprudence and its law were at the time very advanced, and still today represent a point of reference for the studies of the matter. Furthermore, the Romans created at the time a very first example of international trade, at the time to be considered global considering that it extended throughout the known territory, so as to reach China via the famous Silk Road which still today, as will be seen in the last chapter, plays a vital role.

The fall of the Roman Empire gave way to a not insignificant regression in the region. The sea is once again the main aim of conquest and sees the clash between the European and Arab populations, giving way to an era rich in both religious and territorial wars and very important cultural exchanges. Whoever controlled the Mediterranean controlled the whole world in a nutshell, but that was true until the world itself expanded. The discovery of America starts a new era, and together with the new routes that connect Europe to all of Africa and even the most remote east, the Mediterranean sees its decline.

The great civilizations protagonists of the ancient world are then seen to become a territory of conquest, subjected to countless rulers by different languages and origins. North Africa will not see the real possibility of autonomous and concrete development until after the Second World War, due to the constant foreign domination. Spain is the only true Mediterranean power, no longer looks to its shores, too distracted by the fortunes of the New World with its Empire that "never sees the Sun go down", and to resist the constant attacks coming from France, England and Austria. Adding up all these aspects and the political and economic repercussions, there is an incredible difference in the disadvantage of the Mediterranean countries, which will remain etched in the fortunes of these countries for a long time.

Moving forward a few centuries, we arrive at the end of the Second World War, which is the lowest point in the history of the Mediterranean. Here the analysis focuses on two main topics: dictatorships in Spain and Greece and on the nation building process in the MENA region (Middle East North Africa). This focus will highlight how the failure or delayed democratization process within the region has been a decisive factor in the political and economic backwardness of the Mediterranean countries. Spain and Greece compared to all other European countries saw the realization of democratic hopes only in the mid-70s after decades of devastating dictatorships in the political, economic and social spheres. In the MENA, the lack of adequate political structures weighed particularly on the stability of the countries which, moreover, are constantly under pressure due to their geostrategic importance (in terms of geographical position and wealth of resources) during the Cold War and further torn apart by the growing political and religious conflict that will see the Arab majority states take sides against Israel, directly and indirectly involving the whole region.

The second chapter starts from the lack of stability that has appeared as a constant within the dynamics of the Mediterranean. Having observed how the history of the individual countries considered has contributed to the political and economic backwardness of the region, we will now look mainly at the reasons that have had the same effect, but concerning security within the basin. Stability and security are two key factors in the world of commerce, as we can affirm that the safer and more stable an area is, the more desirable it will be for investments and consequent possible economic success.

In the light of what has been observed we can say that there is a relationship of direct proportionality. Unfortunately, as already mentioned, the Mediterranean region has been particularly lacking in terms of security, and in recent years there have been three main phenomena that have contributed to maintaining this negative trend: the “Arab Spring” of 2011; terrorism; immigration. The chapter will proceed by analyzing all three phenomena just mentioned, their historical context, their evolution and the political and economic effects they have had on the Mediterranean region and beyond.

The so-called "Arab Springs" were the symbol of the anger and discontent of the Arab peoples turned against the despotism of the regimes, which were increasingly used to exploit the terrorist risk to proclaim a state of emergency, a useful tool for legitimizing the denial of the main civil rights as well as masking abuses and violence against voices of political dissent. The first signs of protest claimed full respect for human rights and concrete actions to combat rampant unemployment, especially among young people. The masses of the countries of the region demanded greater social justice and the improvement of the living conditions of the poorest groups. In political and economic terms, the Arab Springs were a protest with the aim of obtaining greater civil and political rights. If the factors triggering the protests had common elements, the tools used to demand change and the opening of the economic and political system were also very similar in different countries. The socio-economic situation in the MEDA region played was the real driving force of the social change claimed during the protests. The young people present in the many squares of the region were calling for the start of a serious process of opening up decision-making structures. They pushed for effective democratization. Furthermore, the total absence of reforms in the area of civil rights and freedom of expression contributed to increasing the sense of exclusion of the majority of the population.

The protests, which started in Tunisia, soon spread to all Arab countries which shared almost the same socio-economic circumstances and the same desire for greater rights. The protests, however, soon resulted in religious conflict, creating fertile ground for the development and proliferation of integralist radical cells and paramilitary groups, mainly ISIS. This led to deep national crises, especially Libya and Syria, which still after almost ten years have not recovered. The spillover effect of localized crises had repercussions on the entire region with significant repercussions also on the Northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, highlighting the interdependence between European and Mediterranean security and expanded the concept of security.

Having introduced the issue of terrorism, the focus is now on it. The perception of the phenomenon has changed radically in recent decades, causing the great scholars of the subject to discuss its concrete and explanatory definition.

But the perception of terrorism has changed radically since the catastrophic event of 11 September 2001, marking the beginning of a new dimension for security and the need to deal with threats of a profoundly different nature than in the past.

The latter are not traceable to a single type, but they encompass a wider political, economic, social as well as military dimension. International terrorism has become the greatest security threat for many nations. The security of the Mediterranean has been one of the most pursued objectives by international actors. Over the last few decades, the Mediterranean has taken on an enormous geopolitical importance too, due to its peculiar geographical position, between three continents, makes it a crossroads of civilization, the border of the European continent, a place of encounter but also of confrontation. The Arab-Israeli conflict continues to be a source of great concern. In the same way, the situation that has arisen since the Arab Spring is a source of instability and uncertainty. Moreover, globalization has facilitated the expansion of these phenomena by creating interaction and interconnection between organizations and individuals. In this situation, security threats also take on a transnational connotation, crossing state borders and creating new situations of insecurity. Terrorist organizations represent today the main transnational threat to security in the Mediterranean. Terrorist groups like al-Qaeda are born in most cases, as forces of reaction to the repressive policies implemented by authoritarian regimes in Middle East and beyond.

The repressive policies of the latter, implemented through a widespread use of the security services and in many cases of the military apparatuses, combined with the poor economic and development conditions in which the countries of the southern shore have been experiencing for decades, have generated since the 1980s a perfect humus in which the radical message was able to take root and make proselytes. Unlike the jihadist cells linked to al-Qaeda at the beginning of the new millennium, the latest generation of terrorists showed new attack techniques, new objectives and above all a long-term strategy. As the work of the Islamic State (ISIS) demonstrates, the control of a territory has become an achievable and necessary objective in order to feed the network and the network of groups. At the same time, the optimal management of media channels, in particular social networks, has allowed virtual proselytism, increasing the number of those who try to emulate or follow the actions of terrorist groups. Inevitably, the rapid technological revolution of the last decade has posed new important challenges to individual European states and the community.

One of the direct effects of terrorism has been the creation of new and constant flows of migrants from the south, south-eastern coasts of the Mediterranean, towards Europe. We therefore observe again that the different problems of the Mediterranean region are always somehow connected to each other, in cause-and-effect circumstances.



The phenomenon has always been present within the region and has increased considerably with the abolition of internal borders thanks to the Europeanization process at the turn of the 90s and the early new millennium.

With the events of 2011, the migratory flow has grown like never before, putting the European Union and its countries to the test, not always contributing with adequate measures and initiatives. In recent years, the securitization of the migratory phenomenon, which has no longer become a political issue but a question of security, has led to a community approach aimed at restricting freedom of movement. Stricter legislation and coordination between states as well as the application of advanced technologies have led to greater control of the external borders by European institutions and individual member states. After the refugee crisis of 2015, the concern about the issue has increased significantly, but above all in the countries mainly affected by this large influx of migrants, namely Greece, Italy and Spain (not surprisingly the countries of Mediterranean Europe), becoming the most concerned topic for the national and international politics.

The chapter concludes by evaluating the Mediterranean region through the main geopolitical indexes, which are:

1. *Doing Business* (developed by “*The World Bank*”, measures business regulations)
2. *Human Development Index* (developed by “*UNDP*”)
3. *Global Competitiveness* (developed by the “*World Economic Forum*”)
4. *Global Attractiveness Index* (developed by “*The European House Ambrosetti*”)
5. *Democracy Index* (developed by “*The Economist*”)
6. *Corruption Perception Index* (developed by “*Transparency International*”)
7. *Freedom of Press / Global Freedom Index* (developed by the “*Freedom House*”)
8. *The Global Gender Gap Ranking* (developed by the “*World Economic Forum*”)
9. *Global Innovation Index* (developed by “*SC Johnson College of Business*”, “*WIPO*” and “*INSEAD*”)
10. *E-Government Development* (developed by the “*United Nations*”)

The evaluation that emerges using these indicators confirms the state of apparent delay with respect to global political and economic realities. Further confirmation is given to the importance of the "democracy" factor for the development of individual states, seeing how the countries with the greatest economic and commercial attractiveness have a purely democratic political system. Democracy, stability and security, all three fundamental elements for the prosperous development of a single state, and all three elements particularly lacking in the recent history of the Mediterranean Sea.

Although a rather negative scenario has emerged towards the Mediterranean region, as the aim of this thesis, it should be emphasized and emphasized how much the region has instead grown in recent years, despite the many difficulties. Progress on the various shores of the Mediterranean has gone unnoticed by most, as the international narrative focuses more on what is negative happening in this region, ignoring the positive results achieved step by step with immense effort. The task of the third and final chapter is to put this reality in the spotlight, highlighting how the Mediterranean Sea is returning to play a central role in world politics and economy.

The perception of the region and the countries that are part of it is too often negatively accentuated. The gap between North and South is still insurmountable, but we have been able to see how the reasons for these differences and for the economic and political backwardness are more of an exogenous than an endogenous nature.

Despite the political, economic and social difficulties that have been reported in the previous chapters, the Mediterranean region has managed and is managing to regain a privileged position within the international system, especially thanks to new economic and commercial implications that may in the future bring advantages on all shores of the sea. In fact, the importance of the Mediterranean in the global economy is too often underestimated since the economic activity within the area represents almost 15% of the world GDP. The southern shore of the Mediterranean, the commercial exchange has grown; sea trade has increased and market shares of many ports in the South Mediterranean have increased: only between 2005 and 2014, the market share in container shipping of the south shore ports has risen from 18% to 27% and in the last years has increased even more than above all to the enlargement of the Suez Canal and the new *Belt Road Initiative*. In fact, the maritime economy now is becoming the instrument for the present and future economic success of the region.

In recent years, with the expansion of the emerging economies, especially the economies of India and China, the Mediterranean has returned to occupy a central position to connect the continents surrounding Asia, Africa and Europe, in fact the Mediterranean, on the geo-economic level, interfaces the large Atlantic and Northern European markets on the one hand and the Asian and African ones. For these reasons, the centrality of the basin in international scenarios is a strong attraction factor for public and private investments in the transport and logistics sector which continue to grow despite the political tensions in the area. As already mentioned, the new Suez Canal has contributed significantly to increasing the centrality of the Mediterranean, now able to accommodate large ships in both directions at the same time, significantly shortening waiting times which is also the subject of an advanced masterplan for development.

Ports, industrial zones and service centers along its entire course in order to make the canal itself not only the traditional East-West transit but to make it one of the centers of world trade. The Suez Canal is today a key hub both for the transport of oil from Arab countries to Europe and for the transport of goods. About 8% of world trade passes through its waters every year. The Suez Canal is now also the third route in the world for the transport of oil and natural gas departing from the Gulf to Europe and North America.

Considering what has been said up to this point is evident how the maritime economy is so crucial for the Mediterranean basin and the latter for the global trade in general, leading to an intensified competition between Mediterranean, now with a more central role and aim of important foreign investments. Another element that gave back to the Mediterranean its central position in the international community has been the Belt Road Initiative (BRI). This Chinese commercial initiative is a complex set of economic, financial and geopolitical actions, which aims to exploit the Mediterranean basin as strategic to connect the country with Europe, and in some way enlarge the economic influence of Beijing in the region, in silent contrast with the USA.

The ports of the Mediterranean therefore have the opportunity to exploit different favourable opportunities, moreover, the BRI represents also an opportunity to demonstrate, in the international scenario, the value of Mediterranean countries. It is a game in which the possibility of a future of well-being and growth for the next generations of the region is at stake. The Chinese project undoubtedly represents a challenge rather than an opportunity, as it will require a reasoned approach by each individual state, which must be ready with the necessary structures and infrastructures.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic had to stop the whole world, and consequently also the positive trend of the Mediterranean, a concrete future is for the first time in a long time between the coasts of the Mediterranean, a future previously dreamed of, long desired and considered almost impossible. The Mediterranean has shown that despite adverse circumstances it has managed to achieve results, which underlines the immense potential of the region and its inhabitants, and its new centrality today represents a concrete opportunity to generate development and stabilize the area with benefits in all the Mediterranean shores. The gap between North and South is still far from being bridged, after all decades of economic and political inequalities cannot be redressed in a short time, but the Mediterranean region could take concrete steps forward to aspire to partially rebalance the situation. The great world powers such as the USA, China and Russia have understood the importance of the basin and have long begun to take advantage of it, it will not be long before the rest of the "Northern" countries begin to look at this territory with different eyes.