

## The Mediterranean 2050, thoughts on a land in ruins

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The author explores the future of the Mediterranean region and the states comprising it in a forward-looking approach. In view of the widespread deterioration of all factors, such as climate, demographics, economics, and society as a whole, along with the worrisome development of situations of conflict, only one scenario emerges for the year 2050: a dark one. The article is structured in two parts. The first section analyses the crisis factors whose course of development is already known and generally immutable. The second section examines the areas of uncertainty whose progression can lead to significant changes in the future, including political changes, revolution, war, the breakdown of states, and the failure of the international community. The latter section seeks to identify ways in which this negative spiral can be reversed.

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## The Mediterranean 2050, thoughts on a land in ruins

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### The Centre de prospective générale

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## Overview

Identities are making a return. They seem to carry more and more weight internationally. Whereas we thought they had been dulled by the demise of ideologies, or erased by globalisation.

The nationalist tendencies generated here and there by the end of the Cold War, the termination of a post-colonial cycle, and the affirmation of new economies, are all encouraging the reaffirmation of specific identities or the demonstration of their own power. Added to this today is the challenge posed by technological globalisation triggering the search for real or dreamed-of roots, and the deconstruction of the international system inherited from the 1990s.

The rationale for the dismantling and reconstruction of this international system, in other words the emergence of conditions for coexistence between powers of a new age, will greatly determine the affirmation or confirmation of future political identities.

All possible breakdowns, all kinds of divergences are conceivable, as are all identity based solutions, both the worst and the best.

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"*Fluctuat nec ...?*"

This forward-looking study on the future of the Mediterranean region is characterised by the fact that there is only one foreseeable scenario on the 2050 time horizon: a dark one. Yet 2050 is just around the corner.

The classic approach of forecasting is to start from a theoretical medium or long-term scenario. Then the elements, their dynamics, and the logical consequences enabling the emergence of this situation should be unfolded in reverse. In the traditional forward-looking model, three types of scenario are most often proposed - positive, medium, and adverse. These generally provide the middle ground as the line of probability and reason<sup>1</sup>.

However, even if we subscribe to Olivier Appert's position that "the catastrophe approach is detrimental to the rational nature of the debate"<sup>2</sup>, if we examine the future of the Mediterranean region on this accessible horizon, no objective element enables us to foresee a positive evolution of the political, economic, social, and ecological conditions of life in the medium and long term, nor a peaceful environment in this part of the world. We will explain why.

From 1960 to 2010, analysts working on the Mediterranean question, including the author of these lines after having spent part of his life writing on the subject, adopted a rather positive approach. Indeed, while there might have been some concerns about the current or foreseeable deterioration of some factors, it was possible to imagine a rebalancing through the significant improvement of others. Henceforth, no genuine glimmer of hope seems to appear on the southern and eastern shores, while the northern shore will remain in a highly fragile state of affairs. This awareness

was already apparent ten years ago. "In terms of the future, nothing is really looking good for the countries of the region", noted the authors of *Méditerranée 2030*, even before the major tectonic shifts<sup>3</sup>. Since that time, all crisis signposts have been deteriorating<sup>4</sup>.

## The 2050 disaster

By the year 2050, between 600 and 700 million people will be living around the Mediterranean. Of this population, roughly half will be settled on the coast. This population will be affected by problems of access to basic needs on the southern and eastern shores such as decent housing, public lighting, access to administration, education, and security. The communities will be faced with severe water shortages. Moreover, this exacerbated coastalisation will intensively add to the pollution of the sea itself. This chronic scarcity will also affect the North Shore. Several European countries will be under severe water stress in the coming years, including Spain, Southern and Western France, Italy, and Greece, not to mention the islands. Hydraulic deterioration will have affected local agricultural production, which is already under pressure. Most countries in the South and East, with the exception of Turkey and parts of Israel, will be forced to import most of their basic foodstuffs, the cost of which will be passed on to the population. For hydrocarbon producing nations, the gradual albeit significant decline in oil revenue will not enable them to maintain the commodity subsidy levels of the boom times.

The demographic situation will force people into a paradoxical situation where families will be compelled to take care of ever-increasing numbers of older members. At the same time, the younger generations will no longer be able

<sup>1</sup> See Guillaume Alméras & Cécile Jolly, *Méditerranée 2030, Panoramas géostratégiques, humains et économiques*, IPEDM, Paris, 2009, 294 p.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.magazine-decideurs.com/news/o-appert-ifri-l-approche-catastrophiste-nuit-a-la-rationalitedu-debat>

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 224

<sup>4</sup> NB: Our Mediterranean region represents an enlarged Mediterranean. By strategic necessity, it extends to the borders of the Gulf and the Sahel, implicating the entire European Union (EU).

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to leave the family cocoon nor will they be able to marry for lack of work and housing.

Since the Covid-19 crisis extended over a further five years and was compounded by two other pandemics, foreign investment shunned the South Bank as social unrest and issues of poor governance made it difficult to attract investment back.

On the Sahelian frontier, the combined effect of the massive demographic growth experienced by countries such as Mali and Niger and the existence of several self-proclaimed emirates resulted in a double migratory pressure. First it was directed towards the southern coastal countries, then towards the European shore.

Politically speaking, while most countries remained members of the UN, the nation-state models resulting from decolonisation appeared highly challenged. Libya was split into various competing and cooperating entities - some taking the form of city-states along the lines of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. Others evolved into Garrison States, a mixture of military rule and Islamic authoritarianism along the lines of Pakistan in the 1980s<sup>5</sup> - Turkey was no exception to this pattern. Others, following the Syrian model, drifted into "Taifa" states where democratic legitimacy was replaced by allegiance to one or more dominant groups such as tribes and economic solidarity groups, etc.<sup>6</sup> These forms, close to the medieval model, were challenged by the push of the fourth global totalitarianism, revolutionary political Islamism.<sup>7</sup>

This situation strongly affected North Africa. The Western Sahara conflict once again found itself at the heart of local political competition

as Saharan-Sahelian jihadism introduced a new variable into what was once a simple power struggle.

The Gulf States, having played an influential, even leading role in this part of the world due to their unlimited financial resources until 2030, saw this influence diminish. On the one hand, their alliance with Israel in the covert war against Iran largely cut them off from their ties with North African countries, including Morocco; on the other hand, the rise of social and political unrest in the region, related among other things to the massive water crisis in the Gulf over the past twenty years, prevented them from deploying their strategy as they had in the past<sup>8</sup>. The clash of a very large, frustrated young population was opposed by conservative forces holding on to their worldview and privileges.

The already weak influence of the European Union (EU) on the southern and eastern shores deteriorated further. Successive global pandemics repeatedly hindered its resurgence. This resulted in a global retreat to the European home turf, reinforced by increased migratory pressure from many parts of the world: Africa/Mediterranean, of course, but also South-West Asia, the Indian continent, and Afghanistan. Within it, some states were particularly compromised due to local irredentism. Thus, Catalonia's declaration of independence, denied by Madrid, created a long-lasting insurgent situation in the Iberian Peninsula. In France, the political and social breakdowns evident since the yellow vest demonstrations, along with the increase in attacks, and the permanently tense economic situation of the country created a social and identity-based patchwork very difficult to stitch together. These factors reduced its historical

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<sup>5</sup> See our article, "Armées et sociétés dans le monde arabe: entre révolte et conservatisme", in J.F. Daguzan & Stéphane Valter (Dir.), *Les armées du Moyen-Orient face à Daesh*, MA, Paris, 2016, p. 57-89.

<sup>6</sup> "The word refers to a grouping, a set, an agglomeration of people, not necessarily united by religion." Maxime Rodinson, *L'Islam: politique et croyance*, Fayard, Paris, 1993, p. 154. Others take up Ibn Khaldun's age-old concept of *assabiyya* whereby the allegiance of the group, the gang, the tribe is at the heart of the modern

power of dictatorships, described by Michel Seurat in *Syria. L'état de Barbarie*, PUF, collection Proche-Orient, Paris, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> See our book, *La fin de l'État-Nation? De Barcelone à Bagdad*, CNRS Editions, Paris, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> The assumption is that Iran did not cross the nuclear threshold, although the situation devolved into a pattern of eruptive guerrilla warfare accompanied by hybrid strategies with terrorist and insurgent actions on both sides.

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capacity for international engagement, even if the country still remains militarily capable of sporadic intervention outside its borders.

Internationally, the EU continued to become more and more territorial. Global confrontation is now well established on the Pacific axis, where China and the United States are engaged in a competition that, as during the Cold War, often flirts with conflict. In Europe, the United States maintains only a symbolic presence in NATO, while in the Mediterranean, Israel's security is the only issue that matters, even if the latter country is now widely autonomous since the almost total withdrawal of American forces from the Persian Gulf. Conversely, China's maritime military presence increased in the Mediterranean to secure transport operations along the oceanic "Silk Road", thus enabling the Middle Kingdom to transport its goods to Europe through its harbours: Port Said, Latakia, Piraeus, Malta, and towards the South-West, Bizerte, Cherchell, and Tangiers. Combating piracy, an activity that has increased dramatically in recent years, is one of the priority missions of the Chinese navy.

On a political level, the EU is yet to restructure its institutions to become an effective force in global decision-making. The involvement of many so-called "illiberal" regimes within its midst has led to increasing its resistance towards immigration and a rise in its security component. The cessation by the now radicalised Turkey of its role as a transit point for migrants from the Eastern Mediterranean further exacerbated this phenomenon.

### How did we reach this point?

Experts from a range of disciplines point to a series of objective factors that are now inevitable, with only marginal variations. These factors are therefore already in place for 2030 and can be foreseen for 2050. The prospects known with certainty for 2035 and beyond

concern demographics and its breakdown, food security, employment, and migratory trends. The CIA's open-ended report "*Global Trends*" for 2030 summarises all the issues mentioned. "These trends include: ageing - a tectonic shift both for the West as well as an increasing strain on developing countries; a continued large but declining number of youth-rich societies and states; migration, increasingly a cross-border issue; and a rise in urbanisation. This is another tectonic shift that will fuel economic growth while placing new strains on food and water. Ageing countries will be faced with an increasing uphill battle to maintain their standard of living. The demand for legal and illegal labour will continue to inflate global migration<sup>9</sup>".

### What we know:

If we focus on the Mediterranean area, we can see that the forecasts indicate:

**In demographic terms, the Mediterranean basin is overcrowded and ageing.** There were 281 million inhabitants in 1970, 419 million in 2000, and 572 million are expected in 2030.

According to Yoann Doignon<sup>10</sup>, "All Mediterranean countries are committed to the transitional process. However, and this is the second characteristic highlighted by the typology, this generalised mortality/birth rate convergence towards low levels conceals significant diversity. The process is not taking place equally in all countries. There is no single model of demographic transition in the Mediterranean, but rather several models." The downward demographic trend is expected to continue, with varying degrees of intensity depending on the country, in the EU as a whole. However, it will especially affect countries such as Germany, Spain, and Italy. "In contrast to North America, which would see its population increase by 75 million, half as much as South America, Europe could stagnate at approximately 500 million inhabitants. Europe

<sup>9</sup> 9. This publication is issued every four years. These articles include the 2025, 2030, 2035, and 2040 versions. National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*, December 2012, p. IV.

[https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/GlobalTrends\\_2030.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/GlobalTrends_2030.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> A specialist researcher on demographic issues in the Mediterranean, Catholic University of Louvain.

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will see a loss of 49 million people of working age in the 20-64 age group, of which 11 million in Germany. Spain and Italy are also expected to lose 7-8 million potential workers. France might be looking forward to almost catching up with Germany, which in fact the UK should achieve before France<sup>11</sup>. Africa, on the other hand, is expected to experience an increase of 1,292 billion people compared to 2015, reaching 2,478 billion in 2050<sup>12</sup>. Yet, the pressure will not come particularly from North Africa - in demographic transition - apart from Egypt, which is growing steadily, and now apparently Algeria is also.

The novelty will be the coexistence of strong ageing in the South with younger generations, whereas this accelerated ageing will take place in the North without significant internal renewal. "Indeed, demographic ageing is unprecedented, insofar as human societies have never experienced an equivalent phenomenon. It is universal because it affects, or will affect, all the world's populations. It is sustainable because it will continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and its impact is irreversible and far-reaching".

Thus, in the South and East of the Mediterranean, adds Doignon, "We are witnessing the emergence of a "pivotal generation". That is to say, people, often women, who have to take care of one or more elderly parents in addition to their own children. (...) "However, researchers are concerned about a possible deterioration in family solidarity, both in developed countries and in the South. This will further complicate the social management of old age and dependency<sup>13</sup>".

**Regarding urbanisation:** Massive urbanisation is expected to continue along the Mediterranean coastline through 2050. Although "deflationary" trends exist at the global level - the Covid-19 crisis could accelerate them - they should not yet be noticeable around the Mediterranean basin<sup>14</sup>. "Already home to two thirds of the Mediterranean population in 2005, cities will see their population increase by 20 million between now and 2025, according to the Plan Bleu for the Mediterranean<sup>15</sup>. The rampant urbanisation of the countries of the South and East of the Mediterranean basin, estimated at 70%, is accompanied by a joint phenomenon of coastal development and the artificialisation of the coasts, increasing the anthropic pressure on the surrounding biodiversity. More than half of the 46,000 km of coastline could be developed with concrete by 2025, compared to 40% in 2000. The prevalence of informal settlements, precisely where the sewage networks and urban services exhibit certain shortcomings, testifies to the limits of the containment of urban sprawl in the Mediterranean area". (...) On the coastal areas, the population density, estimated at 96 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, is considerably higher than inland. The population of the coastal regions rose from 95 million in 1979 to 143 million in 2000. This could reach 174 million by 2025 (...) The density of the coastline is not necessarily homogeneous. Very low in Libya (20 inh/km<sup>2</sup>), it is surprisingly high elsewhere, in the Nile Delta, for example. The growing and territorially continuous urbanisation of the coastline is contributing to the saturation of maritime territories around the Mediterranean basin. This trend becomes more pronounced under the effect of seasonal variations in

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<sup>11</sup> "Europe 2020: Demographic suicide", *Questions d'Europe* no. 462, 12 February 2018, Robert Schumann Foundation, <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/fr/questions-d-europe/0462-europe-2050-suicide-demographic>.

<sup>12</sup> According to UN forecasts, Idem.

<sup>13</sup> Yoann Doignon, *Les transitions démographiques des pays méditerranéens depuis 1950*, 15 December 2020, [http://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/informationsscientifiques/dossiers-regionaux/la-](http://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/informationsscientifiques/dossiers-regionaux/la)

[mediterranee-unegeographie-paradoxe/articles-scientifiques/transitions-demographiques](http://mediterranee-unegeographie-paradoxe/articles-scientifiques/transitions-demographiques)

<sup>14</sup> For a comprehensive analysis, see Gérard-François Dumont, "L'urbanisation du monde: pourquoi, jusqu'où?", *Politique étrangère*, 2020/3 (Autumn), p. 113-128.

<sup>15</sup> An organisation created by and for the United Nations with the aim of usefully forecasting the Mediterranean future, particularly in terms of the environment. It plays a very long-standing role in forecasting the effects on the sea and the coastline.



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tourism, especially on the northern shores of the Mediterranean<sup>16</sup>.

**In terms of water:** According to Caroline Orjebin-Yousfaoui<sup>17</sup>, "North Africa has only 0.1% of the world's renewable natural water resources. The Middle East holds only 1.1% for a total population of 280 million, approximately 4% of the world population. This pressure is expected to intensify in the coming years. The regional climate change index of the Mediterranean region is, together with that of North-Eastern Europe, the highest in the world according to the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Temperature increases of 2°C to 4°C and a decrease in rainfall of 4% to 30% are predicted in the region. Population and urban growth on the southern and eastern shores is also expected to exacerbate the demands on water resources<sup>18</sup>." Water stress could then impact 300 million people<sup>19</sup>.

**As regards pollution:** Avitem estimates that "although the Mediterranean Sea represents only 1.5% of the world's surface area, its maritime trade, structured by the region's port cities, represents 30% of worldwide traffic<sup>20</sup>". This situation could be compounded by the rise in power of the oceanic "silk road" the Chinese intend to develop further.

In addition, massive coastal urbanisation will have a significant adverse effect on maritime pollution. Already, corridors such as Tangier, Rabat, and Casablanca are a reality, as is Greater Algiers, and the Tunisian coastal area, the "Sahel". This is even more the case on the

northern shore amongst the EU's neighbours, Turkey, Lebanon, and Israel.

The latest Plan Bleu report stresses the cumulative effect of the various factors. "The exploitation of resources and organisms, pollution, and climate change are expected to exacerbate pre-existing fragilities (...), endangering health and livelihoods<sup>21</sup>." Moreover, "Particularly vulnerable to global warming, the Mediterranean is also one of the areas in the world most affected by marine pollution<sup>22</sup>".

In terms of food security: The erosion of all these indicators will further affect an already weakened capacity to produce locally. "The preciousness of water is compounded by a scarcity of land," notes Sébastien Abis<sup>23</sup>, "Nearly 95% of the arable soil in Mediterranean countries is already being cultivated. There are almost no more land reserves on the Mediterranean rim, which is subject to urbanisation (...) erosion, and desertification. (...) These phenomena may result in the progressive loss of soil fertility or even in the demise of the vegetation cover<sup>24</sup>".

The import of agricultural products is already the single largest item in the international trade of the Southern states. This phenomenon will only continue to intensify. "For example, a quarter of the goods Egypt buys from abroad are agricultural products<sup>25</sup>."

The Covid-19 pandemic is unlikely to improve the ability of states on the southern and eastern shores, excluding Israel, to ensure their

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<sup>16</sup> AVITEM, Mediterranean urban territories facing demographic and environmental changes, <https://www.avitem.org/fr/content/avril-2018>

<sup>17</sup> Head of Sustainable Development at Suez-France.

<sup>18</sup> Caroline Orjebin-Yousfaoui, "Access to water and sanitation in the Mediterranean. Innovative financing: solution or illusion?" *IPEMED, Coll. Building the Mediterranean*, September 2015, p. 1 <http://www.ipemed.coop/fr/publications-r17/collection-construire-la-mediterranee-c49/financer-laces-aleau-et-a-lassainissement-en-mediterranee-les-financements-innovants-solution-ou-illusion--a2290.html>

<sup>19</sup> Hallegate S., Somot S. & Nassopoulos H., *Région méditerranéenne & changement climatique, une nécessaire anticipation*, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Avitem, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/provencealpes-cote-d-azur/populations-mediterraneennes-danhttps://planbleu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/RED-2020-Resume-pour-decideurs.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Florian Maussion, "Réchauffement climatique, pollution: alerte maximale sur la Méditerranée", *Les Echos* of 18 November 2020, <https://www.lesechos.fr/monde/enjeux-internationaux/rechauffement-climatique-pollution-alerte-maximale-sur-la-mediterranee-1266165>

<sup>23</sup> Researcher specialised in Mediterranean agri-food issues, General Manager of Club Demeter.

<sup>24</sup> Abis, p. 42-43.

<sup>25</sup> Abis, p. 47.

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already precarious food security for a growing part of the population. According to economist Dilek Gürsel, this pandemic "continues to throw the global system off course. (...) Existing inequalities in the MENA region and in the subgroup of Southern Mediterranean countries are expected to widen. The most vulnerable countries in the region are suffering disproportionately from its economic impact. Due to the continuing violent conflicts, political instabilities, and the ongoing economic crisis in the region, the capacity to respond and develop measures to absorb the devastating consequences of the emergency is limited. The lack of margin left within the economy reduces the ability to target responses towards the agricultural sector. (...) In the past, food insecurity resulted in people migrating from rural to urban areas due to the lack of agricultural opportunities, e.g. no water for irrigation, (...) hence the pressure on cities will increase<sup>26</sup>."

**Concerning the pandemic:** The impact of this scourge on the countries of the southern and eastern shores is far from being fully assessed. Already suffering under problems linked to terrorism and regional instability, as well as the vagaries of oil and gas revenues, Covid-19 further exacerbated a largely precarious socio-economic situation. It also weighs most heavily on areas where there are high densities of refugees and migrants, for whom preventive measures are often almost non-existent. "The burden of a region heavily impacted by internal migration and refugees will intensify resulting in high risks of infection in overcrowded urban spaces and saturated assembly camps in the face of overwhelmed administrations."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Dilek Gürsel, "Deterioration of food (in)security in the Southern Mediterranean and the MENA Region in times of COVID-19", *CMI-FEM Brief*, no. 13 December 2020, <https://www.femise.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CMI-FEM-Brief-13fnl.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Dilek Gürsel, *idem*.

<sup>28</sup> The possibilities are endless: coronaviruses, filoviruses, icosahedral, helicoidal, enveloped, complex, favouring the development of influenza, hepatitis, haemorrhagic fevers, poliomyelitis, and other plagues, not to mention diseases affecting animals and plants. (Thank God, of the 5000 known strains, only 129 are pathogenic).

The twentieth century suffered six global pandemics: Spanish flu, Hong Kong flu, SARS, bird flu, H1N1, and MERS-cov. The twenty-first century is off to a flying start with Covid-19. However, large-scale urbanisation and population shifts mean that contact between humans and nature is becoming increasingly intimate, making the reservoir of viruses available for new zoonoses<sup>28</sup>.

**As far as climate change is concerned**, experts from all over the world seem to agree that the situation will be dire from 2050 onwards if drastic measures are not taken to remedy global warming. However, we can already witness the immense difficulties that European states are having in achieving the objectives of the COP-21 Paris Climate Conference. "According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), by the end of the century, the average annual temperature in the Mediterranean is expected to rise by 2.2°C up to 5.1°C, which is significantly higher than the global average. Summer rainfall could diminish by 35% on the southern shore and 25% on the northern shore, while the number of rainy days is expected to decrease significantly<sup>29</sup>."

"Although the entire planet is now suffering from global warming, the Mediterranean basin is heating up 20% faster than the average." (...) Notes Sébastien Abis. "Such an increase will lead to more recurrent heat waves that will be magnified in cities, with a 10-15% decrease in rainfall during the summer. This intensified aridity will lead to "an increased risk of fires, both more frequent and more severe", as well as a "21% decline by 2080" in crop yields in all countries of the region, particularly in the Maghreb. (...) This global warming will be

<sup>29</sup> Sébastien Abis, "Agriculture et climat: liaisons dangereuses donc priorités d'action pour la Méditerranée", in Jean-François Coustillière (dir.), *Dimension stratégique du changement climatique en Méditerranée occidentale d'ici 2050*, FRS-L'Harmattan, Paris 2017, p 40. See also Hallegatte S., Somot S. & Nassopoulos H., *Région méditerranéenne & changement climatique, une nécessaire anticipation*, IPAMED, Paris, 2009, p. 3. <http://www.ipemed.coop/fr/publications-r17/collection-construire-la-mediterranee-c49/region-mediterraneenne-changement-climatique-une-necessaire-anticipation-a189.html>

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combined with an increase in water temperature that could rise between +1.8°C and +3.5°C by 2100. Their levels are also expected to increase more rapidly. Sea levels could rise by 3 cm every ten years, compared to 7 millimetres per decade between 1945 and 2000<sup>30</sup>."

In addition, the rise in the Mediterranean Sea's temperature "will cause acidification. This is expected to have negative impacts on marine biodiversity, with an increase in mass mortality events for sensitive species. It will also favour non-indigenous species and the human activities that depend on them". This situation is all the more alarming as fishing "plays a major socio-economic role throughout the entire region". More than 227,000 people are employed in the fishing industry generating annual revenues of over \$2.4 billion".<sup>31</sup>

**With regard to migration:** As Gérard-François Dumont notes, "the Mediterranean is a major migratory region in the world due to a combination of many factors, ranging from those stemming from geographical proximity to climatic factors, not to mention the various geopolitical factors"<sup>32</sup>. This analysis is supported by the work of the IPEMED, "The latest Mediterranean challenge, Mediterranean migration is set to continue due to both push and pull factors. *Push* effects arise from the demographic and revenue differential between the two shores and a phase of economic emergence favourable to the migration of the middle classes at risk of being downgraded. *Pull* factors come from labour shortages in Europe, coupled with high unemployment, the desire to attract highly skilled labour, and the deepening of regional integration"<sup>33</sup>. Food insecurity, as mentioned

above, will play a major role in migration related tensions. "If human insecurity increases in rural areas and food supplies become scarce, this area of the world will become uncontrollable and the number of would-be migrants will explode"<sup>34</sup>."

"Finally," adds Philippe Fargues, "we have to bear in mind that the refugee crisis is taking place against the backdrop of two other crises: an interminable economic downturn producing unemployment among Europeans and a demographic problem that raises the prospect of depopulation. Migrants can be seen both as a problem in that they compete with natives for scarce jobs, and as a solution for replacing missing natives. Whereas the economic crisis is likely to be resolved, the demographic crisis will grow and take time to overcome"<sup>35</sup>."

However, the food crisis on the coastal fringe obscures the deeper crisis facing sub-Saharan Africa. In this region, the combination of uncontrolled demographics and the foreseeable collapse of agriculture and living conditions as a result of climate change should lead to migration, starting towards North Africa, which has also become a land of immigration, and then on to Europe<sup>36</sup>. As Alicia Piveteau points out, "The G5 Sahel countries including Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Chad will increase from 83.7 million inhabitants in 2019, approximately 50% of whom are under 15 years old, to 196 million in 2050<sup>37</sup>." Yet, development opportunities are unable, in the medium term, to meet the food and employment needs of these future populations.

On the economic front: There are no indicators that are currently in the green. As the last link

<sup>30</sup> Idem.

<sup>31</sup> Florian Maussion, "Réchauffement climatique, pollution: alerte maximale sur la Méditerranée", *Les Echos*, 18 November 2020; op. cit

<sup>32</sup> "Le système migratoire méditerranéen", *Outre-Terre*, 2009/23 (no. 3), p. 257, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-outre-terre1-2009-3-page-257.htm?contenu=resume>

<sup>33</sup> "The Mediterranean in 2030: Pathways to a better future", *IPEMED, Etudes et analyses*, May 2010, [http://www.ipemed.coop/adminIpemed/media/fich\\_artic/1317808295\\_IPEMED\\_PPM\\_Med2030.pdf](http://www.ipemed.coop/adminIpemed/media/fich_artic/1317808295_IPEMED_PPM_Med2030.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Abis, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Philippe Fargues, "One million migrants entered Europe without a visa in 2015. Who are these people?" *Populations et sociétés*, no. 502 April 2016, p. 4. [https://www.ined.fr/fichier/s\\_rubrique/25200/532.population.societes.avril.2016.migrants.europe.fr.pdf](https://www.ined.fr/fichier/s_rubrique/25200/532.population.societes.avril.2016.migrants.europe.fr.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Gérard-François Dumont, "Le système migratoire méditerranéen", *Outre-Terre*, 2009/23 (no. 3), op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Alicia Piveteau, "Le Sahel est une bombe démographique", *Défis humanitaires*, 15 November 2019, <https://defishumanitaires.com/2019/11/15/le-sahel-est-une-bombe-demographique/>

in the globalisation chain, some of the countries on the southern and eastern shores suffered the full brunt of the industrial consequences of the financial crisis, which in turn devastated the EU economically. The tourist revenue vanished and the oil income probably reached its peak. The economic crisis triggered by Covid-19 was even more brutal than the financial crisis. This completed the demise of the tourism sector and brought the global economy to a standstill. "It is striking that, excluding Turkey and Israel, the countries in the area are even less industrialised today than they were in 1970. These countries remained generally outside the phenomenon of the emergence of developing countries hence their growth rates slowed down significantly. Their exclusion from the global economy, as noted in the 1990s, is therefore likely to increase. (...) The countries of the region conduct on average only 1% of their trade within the zone. This reflects the total lack of regional economic integration. (...) The countries within the area as a whole account for only 5% of world trade, taking oil into account<sup>38</sup>". This 2012 finding will most likely be re-evaluated ... to the downside<sup>39</sup>. Tourism may be able to revive in some countries. It is unlikely, however, to change the overall economic balance.

### Partial conclusion: disturbing deterioration of all indicators

From this irrefutable assessment, we can deduce, for the next ten years, a very serious economic, social, and political crisis<sup>40</sup>. The persistently huge profits of the oil-producing countries, and the technological and globalised Israeli society, cannot mask the lack of

dynamics and inclusion of the other countries. Similarly, political and terrorist violence, as well as the "hope" of immigration, are indicators that these societies are in crisis and that their authoritarian regimes are incapable of modernising their systems and their mentalities.

Taking a global geopolitical perspective, the situation is even more disturbing. Within the space of a few years, we have seen a shift in the world's centre of gravity. Once located at the Atlantic gateway, i.e. in Western Europe, during the Cold War, it is now situated in Asia. The global economic and financial crisis starting in 2008 and the Covid crisis beginning in 2020 hastened this process. The massive economic development of this area, the major global strategic issues, and the ecological question are all issues focused along a US-China axis.

In this scenario, the Mediterranean is sidelined, relegated to the margins of history and the fast-moving world. The European Union, which some saw as the major centre of a new dynamic for the 21st century, is now paralysed by its economic, institutional, and identity crisis, thus it is contributing to this marginalisation.

The "economic continental drift" that Henri Regnault once described as the bringing together of the Euro-American-Asian economies to the detriment of the Mediterranean and Eastern zones<sup>41</sup> has been transformed into a strategic American-Asian shift from which Europe is also excluded.

### What is movable:

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<sup>38</sup> Tancrède Jossier, Florian Louis, & Frédéric Pichon, *Géopolitique du Moyen-Orient et de l'Afrique du Nord, du Maroc à l'Iran*, PUF, Paris, 2012, pp. 86-87.

<sup>39</sup> "The fact remains that the MENA-6 have generally a large exposure to external financial threats that can quickly destabilise not only their external balances but also their fiscal positions", Doha Salman & Vassilis Monastiriotis, "External and Internal Imbalances in Southern Mediterranean Countries: Challenges and Costs", *FEMSE Research Papers*, FEM42-13, August 2018, p. 77, file:///C:/Users/JEAN-F~1/AppData/Local/Temp/FEM42-13.pdf

<sup>40</sup> An observation shared by Jurgen Scheffran, "The Geopolitical impact of Climate Change of the Mediterranean Region: Climate change as a trigger of conflict and migration", *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2020*, Barcelone, p. 55-61. [https://www.iemed.org/publicacions-en/historic-de-publicacions/anuari-de-lamediterrania/sumaris/iemed-mediterranean-yearbook-2020?set\\_language=en](https://www.iemed.org/publicacions-en/historic-de-publicacions/anuari-de-lamediterrania/sumaris/iemed-mediterranean-yearbook-2020?set_language=en)

<sup>41</sup> "La Méditerranée dans la division internationale du travail", in Xavier Gizard (dir.), *La Méditerranée inquiète*, Datar/Editions de l'Aube, La Tour d'Aygues, 1993, p. 52.

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The uncertainties surrounding the 2050 situation for the Mediterranean will have an impact on the areas and sectors for which predictive models reach their limits. Politics and war in particular. Indeed, among the litany of ill-fated rational choices made by decision-makers, war is an option that can never be ruled out, with no long-term ability to predict its outbreak or to forecast its outcome<sup>42</sup>. Unfortunate chance phenomena and secondary effects also exist. The possibility of the outbreak of civil war or very high intensity national-level violence also exists. No one could have foreseen in this form and in its duration the revolt of the "yellow vests" in France in 2018/2019, despite the fact that a social discontent and distrust of the elites had been palpable in this country for a long time. We can therefore only put forward a few broad-spectrum assumptions - bearing in mind, however, the certainty of continued sporadic or regular "violent flare-ups" <sup>43</sup>- supported here or there by other forward-looking analyses. The break-up of one or more heavyweight players - one or more so-called "pillars".

**In terms of political circumstances:** In light of the objective quantitative factors in the first part, the overall deterioration of living conditions should spill over into the political situation in the South and East zone. With the exception of Israel, which for its part will be disrupted by the growing rise of Jewish orthodoxy, the Arab countries and, perhaps to a lesser extent Turkey, will be adversely impacted by the global resource and economic crisis. In the Persian Gulf, the question will be whether its states, such as the Emirates and Saudi Arabia, will succeed in their transformation to a "Chinese-style

modernisation" i.e. technological society without democracy. In the Near and Middle East, Iraq and Syria appear unlikely to recover significantly, nor do Yemen and Lebanon. They are all countries caught up in a complex set of sectarian, social, and insurgent fragmentations.

Political developments in the countries of the southern and eastern regions raise questions about the resilience of countries with weak structures. Three scenarios may be considered:

- The reconstruction of states upon the ruins of the neo-patrimonial model of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships. The eventual emergence of a military-Islamist model along the lines of General Zia-ul-Haq's Pakistani example is not to be overlooked. This seems to be taking shape in Egypt. The situation may also evolve towards an official oligarchic/theocratic model as in Iran or an unofficial oligarchic model such as in Algeria. Moreover, the "pasharanisation" or "hezbollahisation" of security, i.e. the official creation of militias parallel to the traditional armies that are entirely devoted to the ruling power, has already begun in Syria, Iraq, and now also in Turkey<sup>44</sup>.

- The "Iraqi" model combining the fiction of a federal national state and the "continental drift" of religious, political, and ethnic groups exercising de facto enhanced autonomy (e.g. the Kurdish quasi-state).

- Somalisation or balkanisation: i.e. the disappearance of the central state in favour of local or regional groups in conflict with each other, operating in a situation of de facto independence (the Libyan model comes close).

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<sup>42</sup> For those interested in an analysis of the dire strategic trade-offs that led to the greatest disasters, one cannot recommend too highly the "invigorating" study by David C. Gompert, Hans Binnendijk & Bonny Lin, *Blunders, Blunders, and Wars*, December 2014, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR768.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR768.html)

<sup>43</sup> Taking up Frédéric Gros' formula, he seeks to conceptualise what no longer falls under the model of conventional warfare, but rather intermediate or hybrid

states more apt to characterise the world's current violence. *Etats de violence, essai sur la fin de la guerre*, Paris, Gallimard, 2006, 310 p.

<sup>44</sup> In reference to the Iranian model, an army parallel to the regular army was formed, entirely devoted to the government, the Revolutionary Guards, or Pasdarans. This model is nothing new. It is the same as what was set up by the Nazis with the Waffen-SS versus Wehrmacht and SD versus police and intelligence, or in Maoist China with the Red Guards.

**On the state level:** The beginning of the twenty-first century revealed the weakness of the Arab states and their political systems. Only Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, and Algeria escaped the protest and revolutionary wave of what was lyrically called the "Arab Spring". However, this situation may only be temporary. With 50% of the population under fifteen years of age with increasingly expressed dreams of a new way of life, free from the shackles of conservatism, the internal tension is likely to become more and more pronounced. After having escaped the "spring of 2010", Algeria got caught up in the Hirak ("the movement") in 2019. From now on, two models of society are confronting each other in this country, three if we add the Islamists.

On the question of the role of the state, ten years after the "Arab Spring" the picture is extremely mixed. Political rupture and tribalisation persist in Libya. The Syrian regime has survived at the cost of destroying its own country. Yemen is still in an endless civil war fuelled by proxies. Egypt revived its reinforced authoritarianism mixed with conservative Islamism, a path that the Algerian regime is trying to take to counter the popular protest (Hirak) born out of the fall of the Bouteflika clan. Tunisia, the only country to have successfully completed a genuine political transition, is sinking into a pattern of latent crisis and non-governability. Morocco is struggling to maintain an outwardly strong political structure, albeit one that is in danger of becoming gradually undermined by a lack of substantive reform, radical Islamism, and social crises. Within Europe itself, centrifugal tendencies are in play, such as the demands for independence from Catalonia, Scotland, Lombardy, and Flanders, etc. Finally, the spectre of Al Qaeda and Daesh looms over the whole of the Mediterranean, from East to West, and from North to South.

A threefold trend is now being put in place. On the one hand, certain regimes are bent on tightening authoritarianism justified by nationalist and Islamist excesses, as it is necessary to justify being more "Muslim" than the radical Islamists. On the other hand, there is the fascination of developing in the "Chinese way". In other words, growth without democracy, as the Gulf monarchies are trying to achieve and, under a different, more moderate, and subtle model, Morocco. Finally, the despondent efforts of the international community and the victories of one side over the other fail to mask the impossibility of rebuilding after situations of heavy conflict. Iraq, Syria, and Libya are prime examples of this, due to contemporary factors, along with a long-standing pattern of political and social violence in the area<sup>45</sup>.

The concept elaborated by Bertrand Badie and Pierre Birnbaum of a "centre" without a state may be relevant here<sup>46</sup>. "So, are we heading towards a generalisation of the Taifa (the grouping) in Rodinson's interpretation<sup>47</sup>?" "Are we on the threshold of a communitarian and Lebanese social-political model? This is not a trivial matter. It is quite clear that during the twenty-first century we will be confronted with a strong tension between minorities and larger collective spaces: states, national social bodies<sup>48</sup>. Fluidity tends to assert itself and the "bounded" state, i.e. with internal borders and administrative organisations, could gradually give way to a model of complex groupings or exchange and barter between the various socio-political stakeholders concerned. These actors would assume the role of provider of public goods including security and economy, etc. The democratic dimension could be ensured by tribal councils or other Loya Jirga...

On the subject of revolution: In 1995, the American sociologist Benjamin Barber predicted that the state would be threatened by two scourges: Jihad and McWorld! "Our

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<sup>45</sup> Hamit Bozarlán, *Une histoire de la violence au Moyen-Orient*, La Découverte, Paris, 2008, 324 p.

<sup>46</sup> Bertrand Badie & Pierre Birnbaum, *Sociologie de l'État*, Hachette, Paris, 1982.

<sup>47</sup> Maxime Rodinson, *L'Islam: politique et croyance*, op. cit. p. 154.

<sup>48</sup> "La question des minorités en Méditerranée, Paradoxes et paradigmes", in Carlos de Cueto Noguera & Abdelkader Sid Ahmed, *Droits humains et diversité ethnoculturelle dans l'espace euroméditerranéen: réalités et perspectives*, Editions Publisud - Fondation Euro- Arabe des Hautes Etudes, Paris, 2007, p. 255-268

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planet, gripped between these two trends, Babel and Disneyland, is being fractured at a frantic pace and, at the same time, is becoming unified, albeit not without reluctance<sup>49</sup>." Already at that time, Barber believed that globalisation through the economy and the rejection of the latter by a violent transnational political project, to which he attributed the generic name of jihad, could lead to the break-up of classical political units - i.e. states constituted on the late 19<sup>th</sup> century model.

Groups such as Al Qaeda and Daesh are pressing ahead with their fight for a global Islamic revolution. We agree with Scott Atran's analysis that armed radical Islam is by nature revolutionary. The movements associated with it, taken as a whole despite their tactical or ideological differences, are the expression of a third or fourth global totalitarianism after the likes of Stalinist communism, fascism, and socialist Nazism<sup>50</sup>. Regardless of the blows dealt to them, both groups are reconstituting on the basis of a mercury drop model. They establish themselves in the interstices of national channels where, using pre-existing situations of dissatisfaction and resentment, they fuel their fight against the governments in place. While still present in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, their action now extends as far as Mozambique in southern Africa. Nevertheless, the Sahel remains the area of choice for these movements given the territorial space available and the weakness of the political structures governing them. France's commendable efforts to counter this threat, at the risk of rapidly damaging its image in the country, may not be enough.

**In terms of influence:** Over the past few years, new actors have appeared in the Mediterranean area. Perhaps we did not see

them coming. In the context of the Syrian crisis, Russia, and later Turkey, made a comeback onto the Mediterranean scene. Playing it cool and taking advantage of the weaknesses of Western coalitions, they are trying to establish themselves as major players.

Russia gained a permanent foothold on the Mediterranean coast through its facilities at Tartous and Latakia in Syria. It carries military weight from the Syrian border all the way down to Iraq. It operates in Libya through its mercenary companies and its varying support for the parties involved. From a maritime perspective, the return of the Russian fleet to the Mediterranean symbolically marks the renewal of its presence. Russia's role as an arms dealer also provides it with a wider influence<sup>51</sup>.

Turkey, above all, is firing on all cylinders. It is active in Libya and the Caucasus with its mercenary forces, diplomatically dynamic in sub-Saharan Africa, now involved, thanks to Qatar, in negotiations with the Taliban, and playing a dangerous game around the off-shore deposits in the eastern Mediterranean. Pres. Erdogan is trying to place his country in the role of an *erga omnes* power. At the same time, its economic situation is highly insecure. The reality is that Turkey is struggling to make the most of a central geographical position though with limited predictive capabilities. This is why its ever-ad hoc alliances are fragile: cooperation and competition with Russia and Iran, hot and cold testing of the limits with the US and the EU, and awkward ties with Algeria and Egypt, etc. Its combined military and diplomatic "victories" in the Caucasus and Libya may conceal a worse and more limited situation.

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<sup>49</sup> The first scenario, based on race, raises the sad prospect of the re-tribalisation of large parts of humanity at the risk of war and bloodshed. We are in danger of witnessing a balkanisation of nation states, where culture will be pitted against culture, people against people, and tribe against tribe. (...) The second scenario portrays in charming pastel tones a future built upon economic, technological, and ecological movements and forces calling for integration and standardisation. It is a future that will fascinate people

around the world with its frenzied pace (...), *Jihad versus McWorld. Mondialisation et intégrisme contre la démocratie*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1996. (New York Times Books, 1995, for the US edition.)

<sup>50</sup> Scott Atran, *L'État islamique est une révolution*, Paris, Les Liens qui libèrent, 2016, 96 p.

<sup>51</sup> See Igor Delanoë, "Le retour de la Russie en Méditerranée", in *Les Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 89 / 2014: Recompositions géopolitiques en Méditerranée: un défi pour les Mediterranean Studies, p. 23-35. <https://journals.openedition.org/cdlm/7652>

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The less visible Gulf States likewise play an important role in the Mediterranean. Financially, Saudi Arabia supports Egypt, especially with regard to its military spending. The Emirates and Qatar are fighting each other in Libya by proxy with their respective champions. In the Middle East and the Gulf, it is against Iran and its supporters that the two countries are focusing their efforts. Finally, in the Sahel, the war for influence is raging on, favouring the rise of conservative Gulf-style Islam to the detriment of traditional Malekite Islam and the brotherhoods.

China is also playing a role by virtue of its economic power and its capacity to exert influence. Similar to Russia, during the Covid-19 crisis, the Middle Kingdom, now a major economic partner, distributed hundreds of thousands of doses of vaccine to certain countries, such as Algeria. Faced with a Europe struggling to inoculate itself and therefore to plan for the future, this country offers an alternative of "Third World brotherhood" devoid of European prerequisites in terms of values<sup>52</sup>.

**In matters of conflict:** Today, the Sahelian fringe, Northern Syria, and Libya are war zones. Could these be expanded? Some anticipate the warlike impulses of a Pres. Erdogan. However, will the Turkish leader or his successors be able to risk going beyond maritime provocations and the use of mercenaries? There may be a high price to pay for the "acid test" of military confrontations with Western countries or with Russia. Egypt may opt to militarily resolve the issue of dams on the Nile in Ethiopia and Sudan. Algeria, the most heavily armed country in Africa, might try to escape its internal problems through a confrontational return to the pretext of the Western Sahara<sup>53</sup>. The key issue continues to revolve around a conflict with Iran. The new alliance between Israel and the

two main Gulf states may suggest a military option in the Gulf for years to come. This could arise if the United States gradually withdraws from the issue or if a new agreement, obtained by the current Biden administration, is not respected.

In all circumstances. Beyond an open war, the use of hybrid threats mixing psychological action, cyber-attacks aimed at notoriety, economics, and infox, along with terrorism or even insurrectionary actions should represent the new strategic reality in the Mediterranean for an indeterminate period.

**As far as multilateral cooperation is concerned:** Beyond the European difficulties, there is a general failure of the cooperative models that raised so much hope after the Second World War. The UN system is spinning its wheels and regional organisations are producing few concrete results. The Trump presidency sought to liquidate this model, including the WTO. Although one detects a desire on the part of Pres. Biden to return to more multilateralism, it is unclear whether he will be able to go beyond a certain level with the limits immediately set by Russia and China and much smaller countries, including in Europe, that do not want to feel bound by international obligations.

The US services' 2035 outlook report views the future model according to three scenarios "islands, orbits, and communities<sup>54</sup>". The "island" scenario puts globalisation to the test. It projects either individual withdrawal or the aggregation of states into distinct and opposed associations, organised into empirical cooperations. The "orbits" scenario foresees the emergence of "spheres of influence". These will be "solar" systems centred around a champion that the weaker states will want to secure themselves behind. And the

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<sup>52</sup> François Lafargue, *La présence économique de la Chine au Maghreb: Ambitions et limites*, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, Note, 29 October 2018.

<sup>53</sup> The 2020 constitutional revision henceforth authorises its armies to operate outside the national framework to defend national security. Article 30-4: "The National People's Army shall defend the vital and strategic interests of the country in accordance with the

constitutional provisions." The President of the Republic, Article 91-2 "decides on the dispatch of units of the National People's Army abroad..." Algerian Constitution of 20 December 2020,

<sup>54</sup> National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends, Paradox of Progress*, January 2017, p. 11, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/nic/GT-Full-Report.pdf>



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"communities" scenario anticipates a more pronounced splintering and regrouping around basic values of identity and religion. It is possible that the latter scenario could be quite successful. Yet, perhaps the most interesting element of the US analysis, from the penultimate report, concerns the disappearance of Western dominance over global affairs. This publication looking ahead to 2025 saw the advent of a "world without the West".<sup>55</sup> The Mediterranean, taken in a broad sense, reflects this shift quite well. Certainly, for the time being, the sporadic intervention of "fire brigades" like France is possible. However, the overall evolution of the "market" for security and international relations should remain particularly open, fluid, and competitive. The EU could have provided a political and diplomatic counterweight to the United States, but in the short and medium term it does not seem to be able to offer a vision, firstly, and secondly, it lacks the capacity to act. The EU "Strategy" of June 2016 is, in this respect, an excellent catalogue of an analysis of the risks and threats, affecting or expected to affect our continent. Yet, the proposed responses, such as strengthening multilateralism or dialogue, are not equal to the pyramid of problems that are looming. In light of the internal rifts and the difficulties in regaining even economic coherence, it is not certain that we will see the emergence of a "powerful Europe" within the medium term.

From 1995 onwards, it was thought that the nascent European Union would successfully restructure the Euro-Mediterranean area. The Declaration and then the Barcelona Partnership, launched at the Conference of 27-28 October 1995, proposed a kind of market based on common security with a rejection of further proliferation of terrorism, peaceful resolution of conflicts, accepted by the South, on economic development supported by the EU, and on a positive evolution of social and

democratic issues in line with the criteria of the North. The years that followed brought a succession of disillusionments, punctuated by the constant deterioration of Israeli-Arab relations. The revival initiated by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008, the Union for the Mediterranean (UFM), was a political failure without any economic impetus. The relaunch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), after the Arab Spring, as well as the new EU Strategy, after the lucid and chilling assessment of the current situation, did not offer any serious options for recovery.<sup>56</sup> The initiatives offered by Pres. Macron, since being elected, have not met with any real response.<sup>57</sup> On the southern shore, the Arab Maghreb Union has been hamstrung for a long time by the Algerian-Moroccan opposition. Indeed, the political and economic context has changed so much that it would be impossible to sign today what was agreed by all in 1995 in Barcelona. Due to either a lack of leadership or a deep internal crisis, many countries in the South and East are today politically or managerially unable to commit to a serious cooperative policy.

### Conclusion: "more worse" or "less worse"?

These two splendid linguistic errors serve to emphasise the dilemma that underlies this paper throughout? Is there an alternative to the worst-case scenario?

The CIA report for 2035 is quite clear: "The trends in the region are all likely to head in the wrong direction."<sup>58</sup> In other words, by that date and beyond, the likely positive political and economic developments can only affect matters at the margin.

On the climate front, the need to avoid an increase in temperatures of more than two

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<sup>55</sup> National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025, A Transformed World*, p. 4.  
[https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/94769/2008\\_11\\_global\\_trends\\_2025.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/94769/2008_11_global_trends_2025.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> For those interested in a brief history of these failures, see this author, "Les politiques méditerranéennes de

l'Europe: trente ans d'occasions manquées", *Politique étrangère* no. 4 Winter 2016-2017, p. 11-24.

<sup>57</sup> See this author, "La France et l'UE en Méditerranée: entre esprit de système et réalités", *Politique étrangère*, no. 3 2020, p. 109-120.

<sup>58</sup> Digital version in English, p. 38. French version, op. cit. p. 100.

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degrees appears, for many countries in the area, already highly delusional. Water resources and food security will be adversely impacted. Even if experts such as Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd were able to demonstrate that transitional phenomena were underway in certain countries<sup>59</sup>, provided that ideological obstacles did not thwart them, the demographic curves are already established on the same horizon. They will therefore influence the situation of degraded coastal urban areas. The latest Plan Bleu report for the Mediterranean is, under a polished wording, quite dramatic.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, the risks of dissociation and dislocation of societies and states are ever present. They apply to the North as well as to the South and the East. The progressive establishment of a social and political "patchwork" of identities is a work in progress. The CIA's 2040 report lists fragmentation, imbalances, and contestation as key words, with only one answer: Adaptation. It is doubtful whether this quality is present in many countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean and, perhaps, in Europe itself.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, the Arab movements that began in 2010 in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere are by no means over. The region is far from having completed its transition. This will not come about without violence. The youth's longing for a change, including in religious values, is met with resistance from the ultra-conservatives. This will not go down well.<sup>62</sup>

Is there any room for hope?

The factors enabling the structural effects described above to be limited, at least partially, are known. They include:

- Drastically limiting the production of greenhouse gases;
- Focusing the economy on a sustainable green growth strategy with a long transition in which nuclear power cannot be excluded;
- Finding coherence in the European Union's governance enabling it to once again exert influence on its periphery;
- Convincing the southern and eastern Mediterranean states to join the new industrial revolution, despite having been excluded from the last one. This implies strong backing in economic and social terms by anticipating the end of mass tourism, as well as petroleum, etc.;
- Reaching a comprehensive agreement on migration;
- Return to enhanced regional multilateral cooperation leading to the peaceful resolution of conflicts;
- Thwarting Jihadi totalitarianism in consultation and cooperation with all political, economic, social, and military resources.

The chances of effectively activating any or all of these levers are minimal!

Can technology be instrumental in changing these disturbing trends? A pronounced shift towards the green economy is conceivable, especially on the EU side, although the effects of such a shift, if it occurs, will only be felt after 2050. Elsewhere, it is quite difficult to see any

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<sup>59</sup> In addition, there are changes in family structures, women, and work, etc. *Le rendez-vous des civilisations*, Seuil, Paris, 2007, 176 p.

<sup>60</sup> <https://planbleu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/File-RED-2020-Rapport-complet.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> *Global Trends 2040*, A more contested World, p. 2 and 3.

[https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/GlobalTrends\\_2040.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/GlobalTrends_2040.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> "Survey conducted for the BBC by the independent Arab Barometer research network of more than 25,000 people in ten countries including Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen, plus the Palestinian territories, between the end of 2018 and the spring of 2019", "Sondage, l'athéisme progresse parmi la jeunesse arabe", *Courrier international*, 26 June 2019, <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/sondagelatheisme-progresse-parmi-la-jeunesse-arabe>

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serious green effort, with Israel as always being the exception, due to the lack of effective governance by other states in the South and East.

Global R&D statistics paint a stark picture. The percentage of R&D spending in relation to GDP over 10 years reveals a world average of between 2% and 2.3%. No country in North Africa and the Middle East matches this average i.e. Algeria 0.34; Tunisia 0.60; Morocco 0.71; Egypt 0.72; Qatar 0.51, and Kuwait 0.06. Even Saudi Arabia 0.82 and the United Arab Emirates 1.30 are not moving the needle compared to Japan's 3.26, the United States' 2.84, Germany's 3.09, China's 2.19, and France's 2.20.<sup>63</sup>

Of course, the huge GDPs of Saudi Arabia and the UAE compensate for the paucity of these statistics. However, building a research-based society requires it to be constructed on a foundation capable of supporting the effort economically, sociologically, technically, and politically. Yet, the dynamics involved in initiating "new societies" by the Emirates and Saudi Arabia are fragile, essentially driven by a mercenary workforce. Opposition within the respective powers is extremely fierce, as it implies, in order to succeed, a profound social change as much for women as for men, which is deemed unbearable for the conservatives. All in all, only Israel is likely to be able to enter the technological power race of tomorrow. For the above-mentioned Gulf States, this will all depend on their political, economic, and social stability. In the absence of a strong proactive policy, the EU for its part risks ending up as an archipelago with scattered pockets of expertise. Some states, like Turkey, may find salvation through enhanced cooperation with

China and Russia. Elsewhere, research systems remain weak or poor. Brain drain and crises leave them with scant hope.

However, some very experienced observers of the Mediterranean are trying to put a positive spin on things. Thus, a former protagonist, now an analyst such as Jacques Huntzinger, opts for a proactive approach: "We need to reflect on the nature of a Mediterranean political project capable of mobilising our Mediterranean partners and bringing them into an organised trajectory of shared existence and mutual growth".<sup>64</sup> (...) "If we admit the existence of civilisational conflicts in the Mediterranean, if we take into account the new dynamics embedded in the heart of these cultural conflicts, which we attempted to do in this essay, we must conclude that it is imperative for the European Union to propose a new Mediterranean policy to its southern partners."<sup>65</sup>

The IPAMED, in *Méditerranée 2030*, attempted a "new opportunity scenario", citing the "centrality" of the Mediterranean, the hub of exchanges between the Gulf, Africa, and Europe.<sup>66</sup> Jean-Louis Guigou sees it today as the intermediary space of the Africa-Mediterranean-Europe (AME) "Vertical".<sup>67</sup> Yet, for the authors of *Mediterranean 2030*, the only hope for a new project to work could only be through "integration" with the EU, as had been done for the European states of Central and Eastern Europe and the islands. Needless to say, under current political conditions, this possibility is almost non-existent.

In the light of this analysis, can we nevertheless foresee a future that is less bleak than the one described? Since foresight is action. For

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<sup>63</sup> World Bank, Research and development expenditure (% of GDP), <https://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS>

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Huntzinger, *Il était une fois la Méditerranée*, CNRS Éditions, Paris, 2010, p. 264. New expanded edition taking into account the "Arab Spring" without changing the conclusions, Biblis, Paris 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Idem.

<sup>66</sup> Op. cit., p 228. The other scenarios being the "neo-colonialist", also unlikely, and the "Mediterranean

conflicts" scenario. Its implementation was ten years ahead of the forecast, p. 226-227.

<sup>67</sup> "The centre of gravity of this Europe-Africa relationship is Mediterranean Europe, including Spain, which for several centuries was distanced from the great events of history, and the Maghreb, which is where the connection between Europe and Africa will come from", Jean-Louis Guigou & Pierre Beckouche, *Afrique, Méditerranée, Europe, La Verticale pour un avenir commun*, p. 103, [http://www.ipemed.coop/adminIpemed/media/fich\\_article/1513334640\\_la-verticale-ame.pdf](http://www.ipemed.coop/adminIpemed/media/fich_article/1513334640_la-verticale-ame.pdf)

## The Mediterranean 2050, thoughts on a land in ruins

*Futuribles*, the task of forecasting "consists in identifying, analysing, and understanding the major transformations underway. It entails identifying the main uncertainties and designing decision-making and action processes that take into account the long term and the involvement of stakeholders in building the future".

The famous institution takes a dynamic perspective because "the future is the domain of freedom, the future is the domain of power, and the future is the domain of will? The future is freedom because, unlike some theologies, nothing is written in stone and uncertainty prevails. The future is power because actions or events, such as a pandemic, can change it.

The future is will because humans can, to some extent, change a foreseeable future, such as the objective of reducing climate change by less than two degrees is a good example. The problem is that the (forced or desired) withdrawal of people and governments inwards is such that there is no sign of a collective will to overturn the wall of difficulties that is now being erected for the Mediterranean. Future technology does not seem to be able to remedy this either. Optimism should be shifted to after 2050...

"La lucidité est la blessure la plus rapprochée du soleil."

René Char, Feuillettes d'Hypnos, 1946

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