

**Shared Awareness and Deconfliction in the Mediterranean  
SHADE MED 2020**

**Challenges for cooperation in the Mediterranean  
after the global pandemic**

*Food for thought*



**Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI**





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The opinions expressed in this publication do not represent  
the policies or points of view of either Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI  
or European Union.

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# Introduction

*Fabio Agostini*

*IRINI's Operation Commander, Rear-Admiral*

The Mediterranean is a small sea: on a map, it seems almost the size of a large lake. It is the crossroads of key world traffic routes: although it represents barely 1% of the world's maritime surface, nearly 20% of the world's maritime traffic transits through it, 25% of line services on containers, 30% of global oil flows, 65% of the energy flow for EU countries. It is a market of 500 million consumers, 10 % of the global gross domestic product (GDP). That GDP grows at approximately 4.5 % annually. The renewed international attention for such small "bowl" of water is well represented by the growth of Chinese investments: in just a decade, it increased from 16.2 billion USD in 2001 to 185 today. Although the small dimension of the Mediterranean, an important part of our global stability and security is played out there. It is a fact that a great number of the world's crises originate in this basin — the *Da'esh* threat, Libya's instability, the Syrian war, tension in Eastern Mediterranean, foreign terrorist fighters, militias and contractors and the migration crisis.

The aftermath of the Arab Spring has changed key Countries causing persistent instability and negatively affecting both internal and external security of Europeans' and NATO's Member States.

The Mediterranean is home to multiple humanitarian, security and developmental challenges, affecting vulnerable populations. It is our common responsibility to take collective action against these issues.

Failed and fragile states as well as poorly handled economic and ethnic pleas, opened spaces for violent extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Terrorism across the southern Mediterranean easily intertwines with criminal activities and fuel all sorts of il-

legal smuggling: arms, drugs, oil, human trafficking.

As these risks from non-state actors persist, the central-eastern Mediterranean basin has become the centre of regional rivalries. Last but not least, the military role of some countries in both Syria and Libya creates new challenges both for Europe and NATO. For these and other reasons an increasingly stronger European and NATO cooperation in the Mediterranean would have fundamentally positive consequences for regional stability. Such approach would enhance the EU-NATO capability to deal with multiple challenges and security threats.

The Covid-19 Pandemic presents a further challenge not only for the health care systems. It also affects humanitarian crises, military operations, energy supplies, shipping industry and worldwide economy. Covid-19 has already exacerbated inequality, and gender-based violence, with a disproportionate impact on women in particular. It has also amplified the multiple crises which threaten the right to free, independent, varied and reliable information: the Mediterranean region has become a battlefield for information. Media weaponization is increasingly affecting conflicts, energy resources' competition, humanitarian crises, COVID-19 pandemic responses.

This is the strategic context in which Operation IRI-NI is moving: a complex crossroads of multidimensional challenges and threats, but also an opportunity for the European Union and the international community.

The 9th edition of *Shared Awareness and De-confliction in the Mediterranean* (SHADE MED), scheduled on the 26th and 27th of November 2020, will develop on these premises. SHADE MED is a forum where representatives from different nations and organiza-

tions interested in the Mediterranean area can meet to reach common aims. Far more than just an international meeting, the SHADE MED Conference wants to be a powerful tool helping everyone to reflect upon and, accordingly, better understand, cooperate and to accomplish each their own mission.

Shade Med aims at de-conflicting and, where possible, coordinating military and civilian resources, military & civilian operations as well as industry practices in order to achieve the maximum efficiency and effectiveness for all.

This year's theme "*Challenges for cooperation in the Mediterranean after the global pandemic*", will allow to

analyze the role of Operation IRINI in conjunction with other Missions and Operation within the scenario of instability and conflict that characterizes the Mediterranean and its neighboring areas.

Following the above mentioned trends, challenges and objectives, this volume collects 10 contributions from different independent authors to be considered as "*food for thought*" to stimulate every participant's reflection and discussion at the SHADE MED.

The aim is also to build a base to develop, within the international community in its broadest sense, a common understanding to face future regional challenges with an inclusive and balanced approach.



# The fragile geopolitical scenario of the Mediterranean and the need for a stronger EU vision

*Alessia Melcangi*

During the last decades the Mediterranean has turned into one of the main geopolitical hotspots where new economic, military and ideological struggles are underway. While the fragile regional security architecture seems governed by a “Hobbesian” state of relations, many drivers of instability and turmoil have arisen, pushing the region into a situation of permanent tension. What appears today is the image of a Mediterranean fragmented into a series of inter-connected geopolitical as well as domestic crises which involve international and regional powers and local, national as well as subnational actors through new proxy wars. The roots of this instability are very complex and dependent on the history and social fabric of this region.

The transformations of the Arab world in recent years have contributed to the weakening of state structures and the creation of hotspots of instability and fragmented territories (i.e. Syria, Iraq, Yemen) that are exploited by non-state actors such as militias or jihadist movements. The presence of fragile, unstable, dysfunctional or even failed states seems to highlight the decay of the idea of modern state and of the post-First World War colonial order. That condition can have important destabilizing consequences in the regional framework if not for the entire international system. What is happening in such countries as Syria or Libya cannot be understood without reference to the large crises involving the Mediterranean in general. The evidences brought about by these crises show us the prev-

alence of centrifugal forces over the now outdated idea of unitary states and traditional borders. In particular, the principal conflict drivers are based on territory – whether land or sea – in long-standing disputes, such as the ones between Greece, Cyprus and Turkey, that have been reshaped by newer rivalries about access to gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>1</sup>.

The absence of an external guarantor, which in the past had ensured an “unstable stability” (from the Ottomans to the Pax Britannica to the US), could be considered an important source of turmoil: the increasing decline in US interest and presence in the region, which began under the Obama presidency, seems evident from the uncertain path of the Trump administration in Syria and by Trump’s administration dysfunctional strategic proximity to leaders such as Vladimir Putin or Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Twenty-five years after the Barcelona Declaration and the launching of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the European Union seems to be in a critical phase.

Any attempt to articulate a European regional security project has been weakened by the EU’s internal divergence in political priorities and in the perception of risks and challenges within the enlarged borders of the Union. This condition is giving space to purely national logics that have exposed the Union to diverging policies, unilateral initiatives or open intra-European rivalries<sup>2</sup>. When it had to deal with critical challenges such as the migration crisis, the Libyan civil war, the

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1 Asli Aydintasbas, Julien Barnes-Dacey, Cinzia Bianco, Hugh Lovatt and Tarek Megerisi, “Deep sea rivals: Europe, Turkey, and new Eastern Mediterranean conflict lines”, ECFR, May 2020, [https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/eastern\\_med](https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/eastern_med).

2 Alessia Melcangi, “Strategizing Toward Irrelevance in Libya”, The Cairo Review of Global Affairs, n. 38, Summer 2020, <https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/strategizing-toward-irrelevance-in-libya/>.

possibility of jihadist infiltration and human trafficking along Libya's out-of-control southern borders, the EU appeared to converge its efforts only on security co-operation for counterterrorism and on limiting migration. Accordingly, we are witnessing a dangerous rise of the political divide and identity conflicts between the two shores of a basin that has become perceived as a "barricade". It is evident that the growth of populist and anti-migrant movements in the northern part and the progressive decline of the past Euro-Mediterranean programs has been caused by this phenomenon. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the US' apathy and the EU's strategic impasse have led to a geopolitical reconfiguration and rebalancing at a regional level that is opening new opportunities for the ambitious agendas of regional and international actors. Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, but also China and Russia, have taken bold steps, either directly or through proxies, to advance their interests in the Eastern Mediterranean basin and on its shores.

In particular today, the Mediterranean represents the main battleground where sectarian and geopolitical rivalries between competing regional powers and inside the different denominations of the Muslim world is playing out<sup>3</sup>. Besides the well-known cold-war between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Levant and in the Gulf, there is another important one that sees on the one hand, Turkey and Qatar in support political Islamist movements in the region versus Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with Egypt who oppose this position. All these tensions are evident in

the Eastern Mediterranean geo-energetic dispute, in Syria and especially in Libya, which represent the main current drivers of conflict.

In Libya in particular, closer to the heart of Europe, the two rival camps face each other in what is one of the most serious contemporary proxy wars. The involvement of the Emirates and Saudi Arabia in support of General Khalifa Haftar, to prevent the consolidation of an Islamist-leaning Libya in the west of the country has been counterbalanced by Turkey's increasingly strong assertiveness in the country, in support of the internationally recognized Tripoli Government of National Accord (GNA). A conflict that spills over into the waters of the Mediterranean, which for a number of years has been at the centre of geopolitical interest: in fact, the concurrent discovery and prospect of exploiting large natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean exacerbates existing securitization relations.

Turkey is flexing its muscles also in the Eastern Mediterranean through<sup>4</sup> gas exploration and drilling around Cyprus, mostly in contested waters, and through the deal<sup>5</sup> Ankara signed in November 2019 with Tripoli demarcating new maritime borders, at the expense of Greece and Cyprus. These strongly assertive moves on Turkey's part are a response to Ankara's exclusion from Mediterranean gas exploitation projects, in particular from the EastMed gas project. This represents a sort of "gas cartel" through which Greece, Israel, and Cyprus aim to bring gas from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe, bypassing Turkey<sup>6</sup>. In the face of Ankara's aggressive stance, Greece and France decided to react

3 Alessia Melcangi and Riccardo Redaelli, "The Re-Sectarization of the Middle East: Minorities, Communities and Identity Politics within the Current Geopolitical Confrontation", in Ida Caracciolo, Umberto Montuoro (eds.), *Protection of Cultural and Religious Minorities Leadership for International Peace and Security*, Giappichelli Editore, Torino 2019, p. 127.

4 Marc Pierini, "New Power Struggles in the Mediterranean", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 30, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/07/30/new-power-struggles-in-mediterranean-pub-82403>.

5 Daren Butler and Tuvan Gumrukcu, "Turkey signs maritime boundaries deal with Libya amid exploration row", Reuters, November 28, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-libya-idUSKBN1Y213I>.

6 Göktuğ Sönmez and Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar, "Making Sense of the Crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkish Involvement in Libya", Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, June 15, 2020, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2020/06/15/making-sense-of-the-crisis-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-and-turkish-involvement-in-libya/>.





### 1. Regional rivalries in MENA region

with a similar boldness that might evolve into more worrying scenarios. In this situation the internal division and poor effectiveness of the EU as security provider clearly emerged. At the same time, NATO has to re-adjust Turkey's traditional role as the predominant actor on its southern flank after Turkey's controversial procurement of the Russian S-400 air defense system and its observable glide towards Islamism and authoritarianism. All these controversies risk hampering any NATO's moves in the Mediterranean region<sup>7</sup>. To further aggravate this picture, the current Covid-19 pandemic has captured the energies of most Western governments and has partially frozen their actions in the Mediterranean region. This period of uncertainty was also exploited by Russia, which is trying to regain part of its past influence in the region by acting decisively in some strategic theatres such as Syria and Libya.

All these destabilization factors continue to feed

each other in a spiralling effect that has made the conflicting stances of the various actors much more aggressive and bolder. Due to its limited "tunnel vision", the EU is risking to move toward geopolitical irrelevance vis-a-vis the real drivers of regional instability. But the risk is to head towards failure in fundamental issues, such as its Common Security and Defense Policy or the "European agenda" on migration in the Mediterranean. On the other side, NATO is confronted with a new unstable configuration of the Euro-Mediterranean security scenario.

The war in Syria, the fight against jihadist movements and the Libyan crisis show that the military instrument may obtain results on the ground but that these results can hardly be translated into a stable political outcome. Therefore, there is a need for determined multilateral political and international diplomatic action able to rebuild the regional security architecture

<sup>7</sup> Heather A. Conley and Rachel Ellehuus, "How NATO Can Avoid a Strategic Decoupling in the Eastern Mediterranean", CSIS, July 17, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-nato-can-avoid-strategic-decoupling-eastern-mediterranean>.

and mechanisms for the de-escalation of crises based on arms control agreements, and to strengthen confidence-building measures (CBMs). This scenario could create an opportunity to update NATO's existing partnership frameworks such as the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) with the aim of further developing political dialogue and practical cooperation with its partners in the Mediterranean and the Gulf regions. At the same time, the EU is trying to support the process of Libyan stabilization with the creation of a new naval military mission, supervision of which has been entrusted to Rome. In fact, the European Council decision taken at the end of March to replace the 2015 Operation Sophia with a new maritime one called "Irinì"<sup>8</sup> might be instrumental to revitalizing the European Common Security and Defense Policy. Unlike the Sophia mission, which operated with the aim of disrupting human trafficking across the Mediterranean, Irini's primary task is to implement the largely ignored arms

embargo on Libya (which was imposed by the UN Security Council through Resolution 1970 in 2011 and further enforced through Resolution 2292 in 2016) by patrolling eastward along the Libyan coast, and thus create the conditions for a permanent ceasefire.

If able to conciliate their different interests and visions, NATO and the EU could once again become fundamental to relaunching international diplomatic processes and CBM dialogue initiatives, contributing to shifting strategies from a zero-sum logic to cooperative approaches towards better security for and stabilization of the Mediterranean region.

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8 Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI website, <https://www.operationirini.eu/>.



# The Mediterranean sea in the time of pandemic crisis: no change to the EU maritime priorities

*Fabio Caffio*

The pandemic crisis does not seem to have had a deep impact on Mediterranean trade. As it has been observed, “Various signals coming from the type and frequency of maritime routes tell us that a process of regionalization of world trade is accelerating... We see this from the growing number of ships passing through regional routes (America, Europe-Mediterranean, Asia)... This process brings us to the Mediterranean, which is also affected by this phenomenon...”<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, no Mediterranean port has ever been closed, even if quarantine measures have been adopted for crews, cruise passengers or migrants<sup>2</sup>.

This confirms that freedom of navigation, being the precondition of the free flow of the trade, is still a fundamental principle for the Mediterranean economy which largely depends on the sea. But the unimpeded use of the sea lane of communication (SLOC) requires Navies to ensure the legality of the maritime domain. We must remember, on the matter, that our Navies are State organs entitled to policing the high seas in peace-

time on the basis of customary international law accepted worldwide<sup>3</sup>, consolidated alongside the history and codified by UNCLOS. As a matter of fact, Navies exercise Maritime Law Enforcement (MLE) functions *proprio jure* under international law, in particular according to UNCLOS (Art. 110,<sup>4</sup>) even though their constabulary powers are carried out under domestic law. EU recognizes also this non-military functions, included in the category of the “Coast Guard Functions”, giving them a relevant role in the framework of its Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS)<sup>5</sup>.

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EUNAVFOR MED IRINI Operation demonstrates that the European maritime vision is effective and adequate to guarantee the stability of the Mediterranean which is threatened by various illegal activities including the trafficking of human being, smuggling of migrants and in particular those ones that put Libya’s territorial integrity at risk. As it is well known, all

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1 “Il baricentro dei traffici marittimi si sta spostando verso l’Italia”, 12.10.2020, <https://www.shippingitaly.it/>.

2 On the closure of Italian ports adopted in 2019 see N. Ronzitti, “Migranti: chiusura dei porti, respingimenti e arrivi illegali”, *Affarinternazionali*, 11 luglio 2019 in <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/2019/07/migranti-chiusura-porti-respingimenti/>

3 “Policing the High Sea: An Italian Navy Non-Paper on the Identification of the Current Legal Gaps Preventing the Most Effective Use of Maritime Forces in Maritime Law Enforcement (MLE), in the Framework of Maritime Security Operations (MSO)”, in <https://www.marina.difesa.it/>

4 UNCLOS Article 110, Right of visit

1. Except where acts of interference derive from powers conferred by treaty, a warship which encounters on the high seas a foreign ship, other than a ship entitled to complete immunity in accordance with articles 95 and 96, is not justified in boarding it unless there is reasonable ground for suspecting that:

(a) the ship is engaged in piracy;

(b) the ship is engaged in the slave trade;

(c) the ship is engaged in unauthorized broadcasting and the flag State of the warship has jurisdiction under article 109;

(d) the ship is without nationality; or

(e) though flying a foreign flag or refusing to show its flag, the ship is, in reality, of the same nationality as the warship.

5 [http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST\\_11205\\_2014\\_INIT](http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST_11205_2014_INIT)

the UN Security Council resolution authorizing maritime embargo measures on the high seas off the coast of Libya<sup>6</sup> in line with resolution 1970 (2011), take in account the importance of the sovereignty and independence of Libya.

Not secondary is also, as the EUMSS itself highlights, the EU commitment in the “*protection of economic interests, including the safeguarding of maritime energy resources, the sustainable exploitation of natural and marine resources ... and the delimitation of maritime zones, such as the exclusive economic zone, which presents a potential for growth and jobs*”. Concerning the same zones, the certainty of maritime boundaries is a precondition for the growth of the *blue economy*. Thus, in case of disputes related to the maritime boundary delimitation, the external action of the EU is focused on “*Promoting the dispute settlement mechanisms according to the UNCLOS, including the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, in the political dialogues of the EU with third countries and regional organizations*”.

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As an effect of the application of the now thirty-years-old UNCLOS, the high seas areas now seem to be disappearing in the Mediterranean, because reduced to about one third of the entire basin surface<sup>7</sup>. Many States, driven by the necessity to contrast il-

legal fishing and to protect their coasts from pollution, have already instituted, beyond their territorial waters, jurisdiction areas where they can exercise the EEZ rights.

This was already done by many European Countries such as France (2012) and Spain (2013). Italy on its side created, in 2011, a *sui generis* Ecological Protection Zone (EPZ) in the Mar Ligure and Tirreno. The Italian initiative was aimed, at that time, to preserve the Fleets Mobility, applying a policy<sup>8</sup> focused on maintaining the *status quo* of the high seas area of the Mediterranean<sup>9</sup>. The risk was a sort of *territorialization*<sup>10</sup> of the basin since there was the danger that some States could inappropriately exercise a form of creeping jurisdiction on matters not established by UNCLOS, such as the preventive notification of naval activities in the Eez.

Worthy of mention is the fact that Italy, during the cold war was actively engaged in defending the *naval mobility of the fleets* in the framework of NATO Alliance. Accordingly Italy issued the following declaration when signing and ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)<sup>11</sup>: “*According to the Convention, the coastal state does not enjoy residual rights in the Exclusive Economic Zone. In particular, the rights and jurisdiction of the coastal state in such zones do not include the right to obtain notification on mili-*

6 The last one is the UNSCR 2526 (2020).

7 The peculiarity of the Mediterranean, characterized by the distance between opposite coasts being always below 400NM, will lead to the division of preexisting zones of high seas whenever other States decide to implement Eez. This implies also that no Eez can be created unilaterally, without establishing any boundary not agreed with opposite or adjacent States.

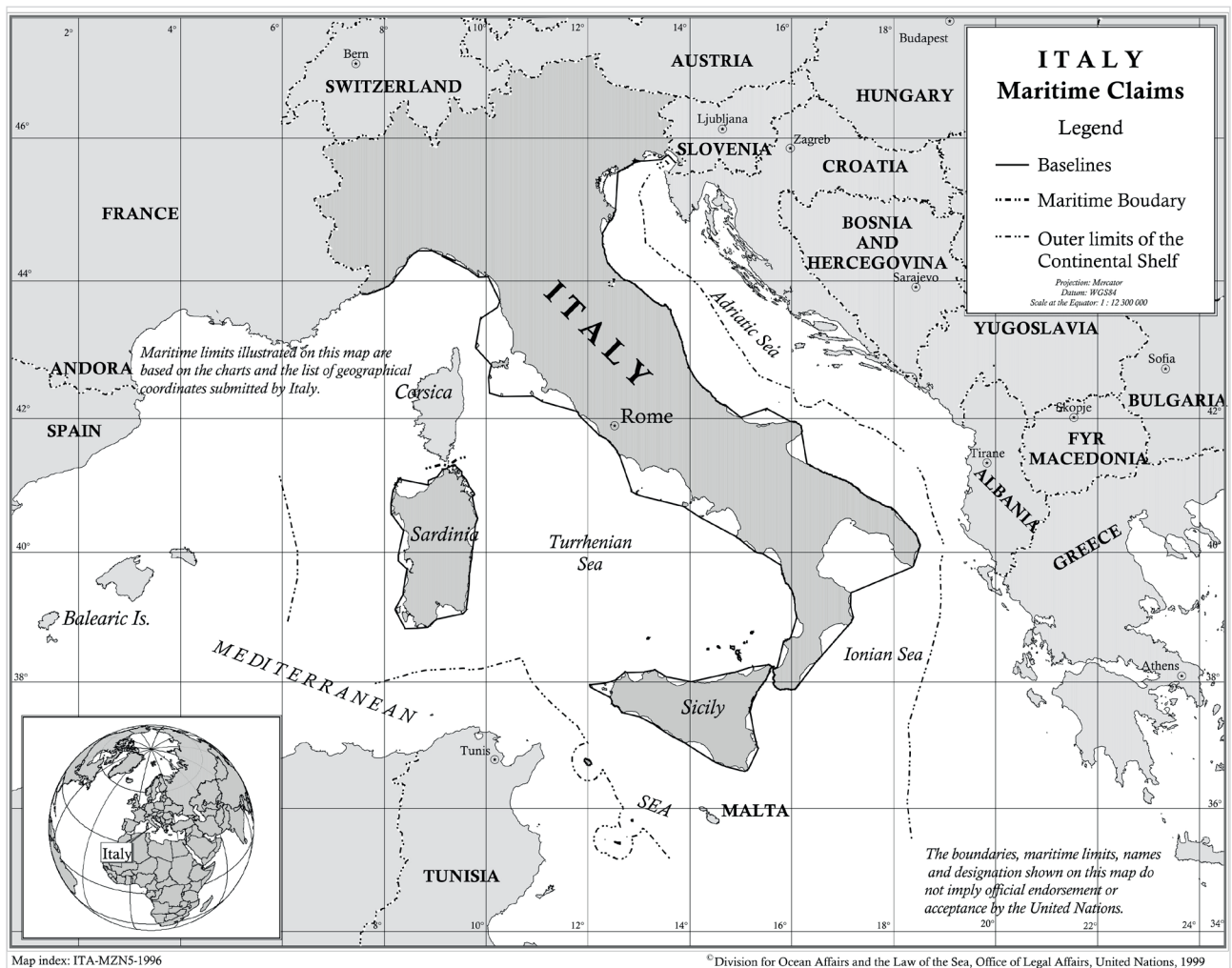
8 Cfr. B. Vukas, “The extension of jurisdiction of the coastal State in the Adriatic Sea” in Natalino Ronzitti (ed), *I rapporti di vicinato dell'Italia con Croazia, Serbia-Montenegro e Slovenia* (Luiss University Press 2005) 251.

9 The existence of area of high seas, in case in which the is not an Eez, naturally regards the water column and does not affect the regime of the submerged continental shelf belonging to a coast State.

10 See S. Kopela, “The “territorialisation” of the Exclusive Economic Zone: Implications for maritime jurisdiction’ (IBRU Durham 2009) in [https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/ibru/conferences/sos/s\\_kopela\\_paper.pdf](https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/ibru/conferences/sos/s_kopela_paper.pdf); F. Caffio, “Mediterraneo: verso una territorializzazione sempre più spinta?”. *Rivista marittima*, 8, 2014, 100.

11 In [http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/convention\\_declarations.htm#Italy](http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_declarations.htm#Italy) Declarations made upon signature (7 December 1984) and confirmed upon ratification. A similar declarations were deposited also by Germany and Netherlands.





Map index: ITA-MZN5-1996

© Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs, United Nations, 1999

## 1. Italy Maritime Claims (Source: UN DOALOS)

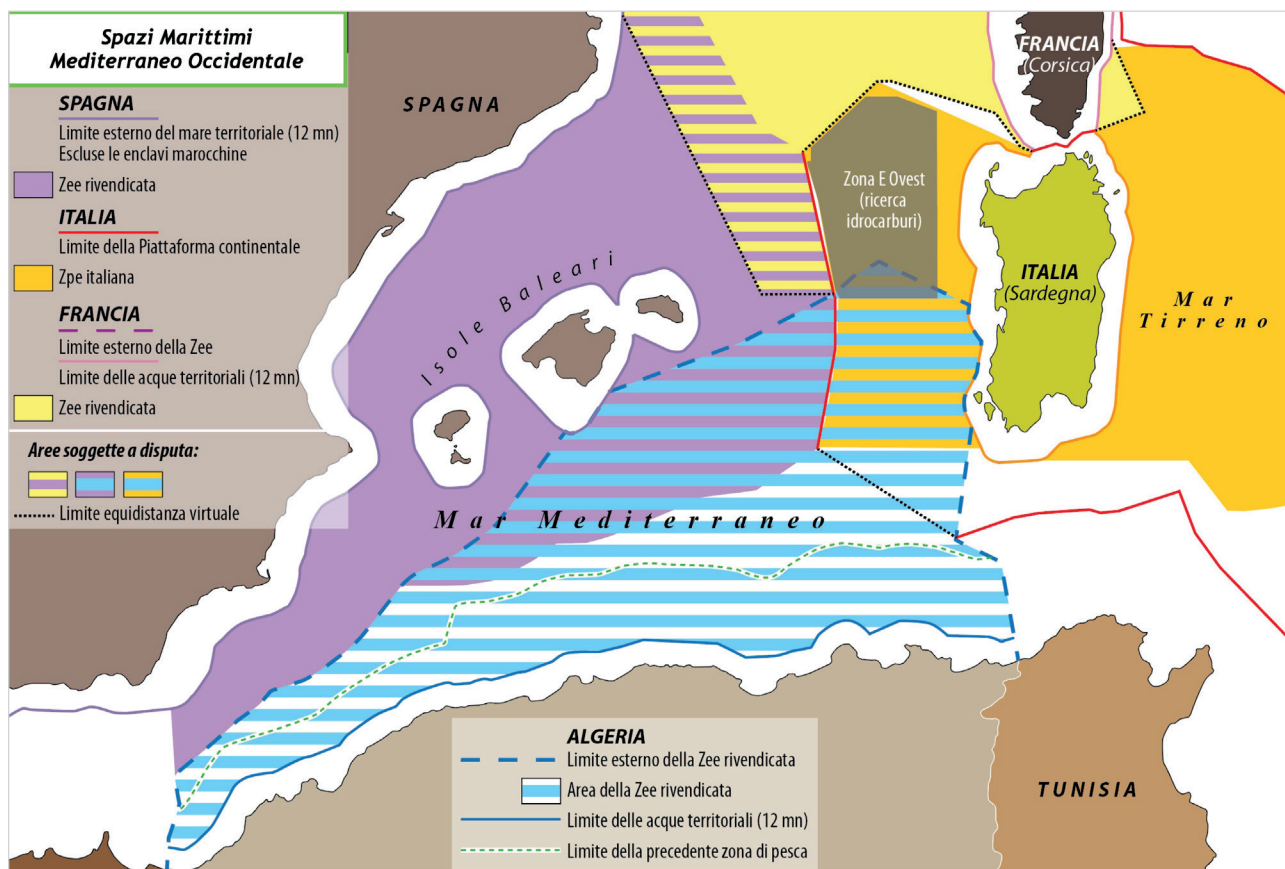
tary exercises or manoeuvres or to authorize them... None of the provisions of the Convention, which corresponds on this matter to customary international law, can be regarded as entitling the coastal state to make innocent passage of particular categories of foreign ships dependent on prior consent or notification". According with this

position, the recent agreement signed on 9 June 2020 by Italy and Greece<sup>12</sup> provides for the application, in the respective Eez, of the principle established by UNCLOS (Art. 58, 1) under which all States, whether coastal or land-locked, enjoy the freedoms referred to navigation and overflight<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> See S. Sideris, "Greece-Italy sign agreement on demarcation of EEZ", 9.6.2020, in <https://balkaneye.com/greece-italy-sign-demarcation-of-eez/>

<sup>13</sup> Article 58, Rights and duties of other States in the exclusive economic zone

1. In the exclusive economic zone, all States, whether coastal or land-locked, enjoy, subject to the relevant provisions of this Convention, the freedoms referred to in article 87 of navigation and overflight and of the laying of submarine cables and pipelines, and other internationally lawful uses of the sea related to these freedoms, such as those associated with the operation of ships, aircraft and submarine cables and pipelines, and compatible with the other provisions of this Convention.



2. EEZ/EPZ in the Western Mediterranean (Source: Limes, 10, 2020)

Thus, there is no doubt that limiting the freedom of navigation in the Mediterranean would be inconsistent with the International Law, as affirmed many times by the Countries members of the G7 with specific regard of the situation of the South China<sup>14</sup> and as declared by the EU in the EUMSS where it has said that is a strategic maritime interest “*The preservation of freedom of navigation, the protection of the global EU supply chain and of maritime trade, the right of innocent and transit*

*passage of ships and the security of their crew and passengers*”. On the other hand, we must not forget that the regime of the UN Security Council naval embargo off the coast of Libya applied by the Operation IRINI, is certainly coercive but, at the same time, is focused on the consent of the flag State of the merchant ships to be boarded, in compliance with UNCLOS Art. 110, 1 and in accordance with an aspect of the freedom of navigation<sup>15</sup>.

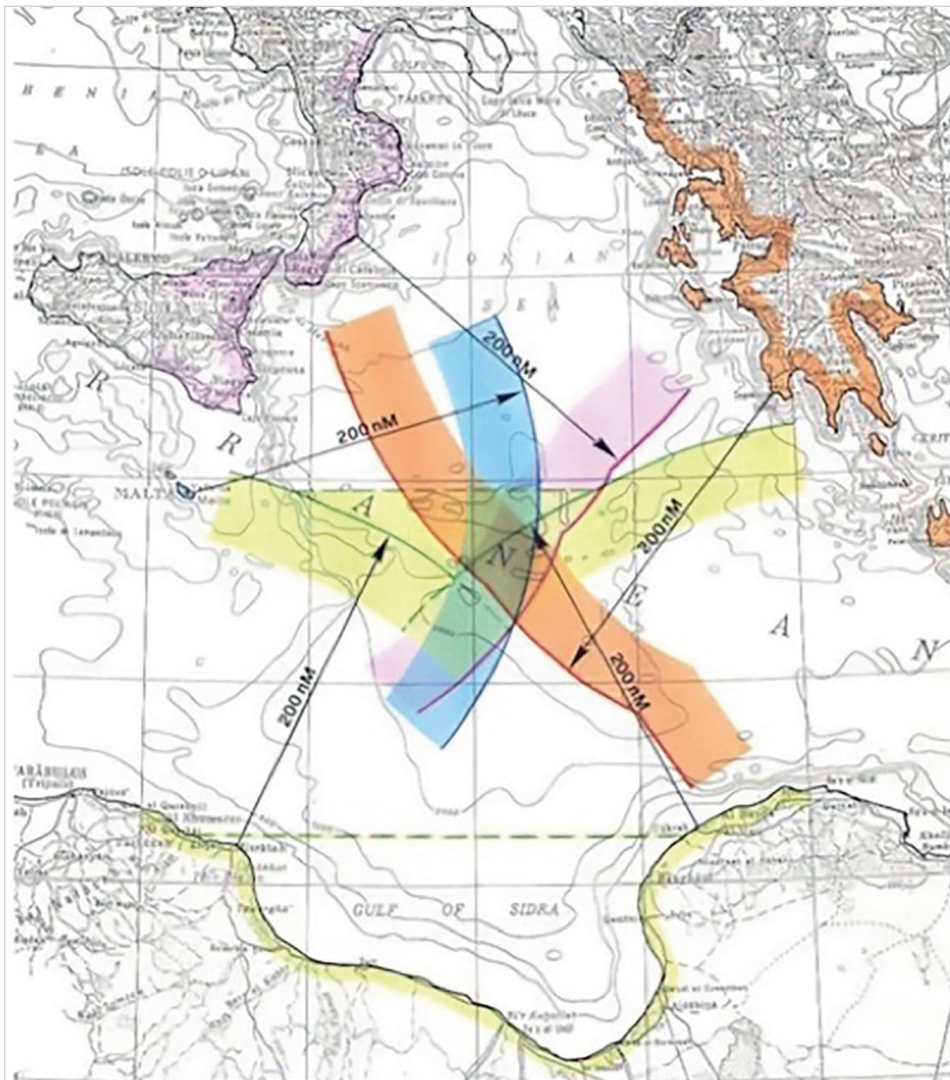
14 See, among others, the *G7 Foreign Ministers’ Declaration on Maritime Security in Lübeck*, 15 April 2015, in <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/> where it is affirmed that “...*The Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the High Representative of the European Union... reiterate our commitment to the freedoms of navigation and overflight and other internationally lawful uses of the high seas and the exclusive economic zones as well as to the related rights and freedoms in other maritime zones, including the rights of innocent passage, transit passage and archipelagic sea lanes passage consistent with international law. We further reiterate our commitment to unimpeded lawful commerce, the safety and security of seafarers and passengers, and the conservation and sustainable use of natural and marine resources including marine biodiversity*”.

15 On the issue of the flag State consent and on the position expressed in the UNSC by Russia and China see “Vote on a reso-

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Mediterranean is an “unicum”, which needs to be seen in its relations with adjacent basins through the international waterways, the main straits and the Suez Canal. So, the geopolitical valence of the Mediterranean is conditioned -as we already said- by the respect

of freedom of navigation principle, vital for the commercial relations<sup>16</sup>. We can also define the Mediterranean Sea as an “ancient sea” referring to its peculiarity<sup>17</sup>: formerly *mare clausum* during the Roman Empire (the Latin expression *mare nostrum*, which translates to ‘our seas’, refers to the Roman Empire’s control of



3. Overlapping area of EEZ in the Central Mediterranean in case of unilateral proclamation (Source, Francalanci, IIM)

lution on maritime interdiction to implement the arms embargo on Libya” in <https://www.whatsinblue.org>.

16 Although the Mediterranean covers only 0.8% of the surface of oceans and seas, about 30% of world marine trade and 20% of the global volume of fuel transport passes through it.

17 See T. Scovazzi (ed.), *Marine Specially Protected Area: The General Aspects and the Mediterranean Regional System*, 1999, 118; Id. “Harlequin and the Mediterranean”, in *Contemporary Developments in International Law Essays in Honour of Budislav Vukas* (Edited by R. Wolfrum and. oths.), 2016, 291.



the basin) and later partially controlled by the Byzantine Empire, the Republic of Genova, the *Serenissima* Republic of Venice, the Ottoman Empire, the Spanish Kingdom and the North Africa Coastal States<sup>18</sup>.

Under the regime of UNCLOS, the Mediterranean Sea, being restricted inside the Gibraltar Straits, Suez Canal, Dardanelli Straits, is undoubtedly a “semi-enclosed sea”<sup>19</sup>. Given that in the Mediterranean all States are linked by close correlation, the exercise of sovereign rights under the UNCLOS (Art. 123) requires the application of a special regime, based on regional cooperation. As a consequence, the same UNCLOS (art. 123<sup>20</sup>) establishes, for this kind of seas, the principle of cooperation among the riparian States in the exercise of their rights and in the performance of their duties. This is a vital condition facing, in a common vision, the problems around the basin,

such as the threats to maritime security, as well as the maritime boundary disputes. The principle of cooperation, is therefore the paradigm of the Mediterranean Sea applied by the EUNAVFOR MED IRINI mandate<sup>21</sup> too: a cooperation involving not only the EU member States and the Libyan GNA, but also all the Nations interested to the peace and good order in the Mediterranean.

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**ITN Fabio Caffio** (1947), after graduating in Law from Rome University, joined the Navy serving in the legal branch. As a specialist of maritime issues such as maritime boundaries delimitations, maritime security, SAR, Law of armed conflicts at sea, he participated to several international meetings. He is the author of *Glossario di Diritto del Mare, Rivista Marittima*, 2017.

18 See D. Abulafia, *The great sea: a human history of the Mediterranean*, OUP, 2011; the historical cultural heritage of the Mediterranean is the leitmotiv of P. Matvejevic, *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*, Berkeley, 1999.

19 UNCLOS, art. 122 *For the purposes of this Convention, “enclosed or semi-enclosed sea” means a gulf, basin or sea surrounded by two or more States and connected to another sea or the ocean by a narrow outlet or consisting entirely or primarily of the territorial seas and exclusive economic zones of two or more coastal States.*

20 UNCLOS, Article 123, *Cooperation of States bordering enclosed or semi-enclosed seas States bordering an enclosed or semi-enclosed sea should cooperate with each other in the exercise of their rights and in the performance of their duties under this Convention. To this end they shall endeavour, directly or through an appropriate regional organization...*

21 <https://www.operationirini.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/200401-CD-IRINI-in-OJ.pdf>

# The role of contemporary naval diplomacy: Operation IRINI

*Paolo Casardi*

**C**an the role of naval diplomacy still be considered of primary importance?

Our reply is absolutely affirmative! Notwithstanding the new instruments of communication, which, over time, have enabled heads of governments and leaders to establish direct contacts with the remotest interlocutors, naval diplomacy has not lost its traditional importance. On the contrary, it has evolved, adding new relevant activities to its role. Even the actors of naval diplomacy have changed; in fact their number has increased over time, including the so called “non-state parties” as the International Organizations. Some of these Organizations, on their own initiative, have proposed to member States some issues of naval diplomacy, or topics related to the sea for discussion. For example, in 2013, the High Representative of the E.U. for Foreign Affairs and Security policy, Federica Mogherini, introduced the “European Maritime Security Strategy” (EUMSS) for discussion with member States. This initiative was then approved and adopted by the European Council in 2014. The EUMSS aims at safeguarding the maritime security of the European Union and to protect its maritime strategic interests, including: peace and security in general, rule of law and freedom of navigation, control of external borders and maritime infrastructures as ports, protection of the coasts, commercial facilities, submarine cables, offshore platforms, scientific equipment, health of environment and common natural resources. In a word, EUMSS aims at improving EU effectiveness in response to the above mentioned challenges.

In 2016, even NATO updated its “maritime Strategy”. In fact, all International Organizations,

partially or totally “sea-oriented”, may propose to member States issues or topics related to naval diplomacy.

Furthermore, over time, the impact of naval and maritime issues on foreign policy has become greater. In the Mediterranean area, the dramatic events of emigration and the “appetites” raised by resources existing on the sea bed, especially in the energy sector, impacted violently into the foreign policy of some relevant EU members.

In this framework, a typical case that shows how naval diplomacy has now become a daily subject of the political debate within EU, is the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFORMED), named Operation IRINI, under the command of Rear Admiral Fabio Agostini. The same happened with the previous EUNAVFORMED, called Operation SOPHIA, under the command of Vice Admiral Enrico Credendino.

The area called “Wider Mediterranean” is in the throes of profound conflictual agitation. Its situation can be defined as the most dramatic never occurred in this vast part of the globe, once considered the center of our planet, garden of the known world.

In Libya, in particular, we can easily discover the existence of many of the problems that shattered the southern coast of the “Mare Nostrum” and the neighboring areas: the Libyan people still respect a rigid tribalism which is now reflected in the many existing “militias”; the Libyan sense of the State is rather weak, particularly in Cyrenaica, where a considerable part of the population has a sense of autonomy, if not of independence; an intense and deadly “proxy war” has going on for some years, as it is unfortunately happening in



1. FGS Hamburg and LPD San Giorgio

Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Nagorno Karabakh. The war in Libya, between the Government of the National Agreement (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) has shown the involvement not only of the direct opponents, but also, in a way or another, of the principal powers of the Mediterranean and Middle East area and one of the “global powers”. And to complete this gloomy picture, we must also remember that Libya has become, for many years now, the easiest passage for migratory flows between two opposite coasts of the Mediterranean. Last, but not least, Libya and Turkey signed an agreement on the respective maritime exclusive zones, which has been immediately

contested by Greece, Cyprus, Egypt and France.

In this context, we noted the efforts of some European countries - as Italy, France and Germany - to restore peace in the country, but the EU, as such, cannot be indicated as one of the main protagonists of the military and diplomatic game in progress, confirming its traditional attitude towards exerting an active political role in this area, with the “exception” of operation IRINI. Through this military operation of crisis management, the European Union is stepping up its efforts to enforce the UN arms embargo on Libya, thereby contributing to the peace process in the country. In addition to the fight against the smuggling





of weapons and oil, IRINI is actively contributing to the elimination of the trafficking in human beings and also provides training to the Libyan Coast Guard.

A considerable flexibility has been given to the mission, which, under specific conditions, can raise its intensity, scope and area of its action, including into the Libyan waters and territory, with a previous agreement with the local Government and the Security Council. The existing close cooperation with the competent EU Agencies is also appreciable. But IRINI is above all a good example of successful integration of military and civilian components: armed and police forces, judiciary, representatives of EU Institutions, International

Organizations and NGOs, together with the possibility for IRINI to negotiate also with third States any form of cooperation useful to the fulfillment of its tasks.

We believe that the objectives and means given to IRINI show a special competence and attitude acquired by the European Union in dealing with the maritime dimension of crises. Another good example is EU naval operation ATALANTA, which deters, prevents and represses, with success, acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast and neighboring areas in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. In addition to IRINI, SOPHIA and ATALANTA, we should also include, in the same list, the two successive operations TRITON and THEMIS, of the “European border and coast guard Agency” (FRONTEX).

Is it possible to argue that operation IRINI and the previous operation SOPHIA constitute a real naval diplomacy operations? The answer is yes, because the goal of these missions is to achieve peace in the Mediterranean, i.e. the ideal situation to “cultivate” the national interests of the European Union and its member States. These missions include constabulary operations at sea, training exercises with the Libyan Coast Guard, continuous contacts with EU authorities and member States and, finally, diplomatic contacts with third parties. In facts, even third States can be invited to participate in the operation, after negotiation on the terms of their contribution. Last but not least, IRINI and competent authorities in Brussels, have an active and vital relationship with the UN Security Council in New York.

The fact that the operations IRINI, SOPHIA, ATALANTA, TRITON and THEMIS had been conceived, at least formally, by the European Union as a whole and not by a single member State, is a good example of the new kind of naval diplomacy, analyzed in this article.

Coming back to the Libyan crisis, we look attentively to the progress recently emerged during the

talks between GNA and LNA, in the framework of the Berlin Conference follow up. In our view, the EU could have another good chance to develop its role in favor of Libya stabilization and we are sure that the present EU High Representative, Joseph Borrell, will try very hard to give to the European Union a higher political profile in the peace process. During recent years, we understood the political importance of an effective surveillance of the borders the country has with its neighbors. We already said how essential is to control the sea off the coast of Libya, taking into account that practically all Mediterranean Countries share the same “liquid borders”, and this is why, among other reasons, the EU gave impulse to operation IRINI.

Even in the past, the need to take borders - in particular the southern border - under strict surveillance has been tackled by the EU through the EUBAM mission. The southern frontiers have been a constant concern, owing to the frequent illegal passage of armed groups, including terrorists, fleeing the respective authorities from the Sahel Countries. These borders have also been for many years the main access route for the illegal emigrants who wanted to reach Europe at any cost. But, talking about borders, we must underline that in recent times the eastern frontier of Libya with Egypt, took an outstanding importance. A few months ago, the Egyptian reaction to the GNA threatening the town of Sirte has been the strongest within the coalition supporting the LNA. This underlines the fundamental need, for the border between Libya and Egypt, to be impartially monitored, especially if the result of the ongoing talks, goes towards the confirmation of a single State for all Libyans.

In fact, most weapons smuggling occurred through clandestine flights and land transport, while IRINI was developing its action at sea. The moment has come for EU, we believe, to complete the work started by IRINI, by conceiving a further European peace-keeping force under UN mandate, to ensure efficient control of all the Libyan frontiers, west, south and east, in close cooperation with IRINI in the north and maybe partially sharing with the latter personnel and equipment. The new mission would have a similar organization and could even be under IRINI's Operation Commander coordination, to ensure the uniqueness of intent. This peace force should not limit its tasks to capacity building activities but should take direct responsibility of the borders. The same operation should also address the problem of migrants in transit, in close cooperation with the UN.

“Vaste programme”, as General De Gaulle would have said! But we think that the time is mature, for the EU, to assume the responsibility that the moment demands. We also believe that no one else, outside EU, could efficiently take charge of such a complex, ambitious, and indispensable project.

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### **Paolo Casardi**

Ambassador Paolo Casardi, Co-President of the Circle of Diplomatic Studies, Scientific Advisor of the Italian Navy, member of the Scientific Committee of the “Rivista Marittima”, former Inspector General of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and offices abroad.

# The impact of Covid-19 on maritime transport: economic and security issues

*Luca Sisto*

In his speech to the Confitarma Public Assembly in 2019, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte defined the Mediterranean Sea as “*a liquid heritage, a fundamental ecosystem to be monitored and protected*”. Indeed, the Mediterranean is the sea where our country has a geopolitical condition of national interest and where our fleet and our shipping industry generate our economy. The ship, in fact, is a mobile industry that generates economy, creating jobs both at sea and ashore.

The strategic position of our peninsula certainly represents a strength for Italy, but looking at the other side of the coin, this position also exposes our country to high risks within the perimeter of the “enlarged Mediterranean”. Making the “*mare nostrum*” safe, secure and more competitive is therefore essential to protect our national interests, especially in this delicate period of global pandemic.

The serious epidemiological crisis from Covid-19 is in fact putting a strain not only on national economies but also created significant ramifications on the entire world trade system based on globalization. The Italian shipping industry and the maritime domain have not been isolated from these challenges. Together with other industrial sectors, the Italian shipping industry - cruises, transport of goods and passengers, port services - is experiencing with great concern the evolution of the pandemic, particularly with regard to the socio-economic drivers triggered by the health emergency.

Maritime transport is a strategic sector for the country, contributing to ensure the essential supplies to the

population, starting with food, energy and raw materials, but also medical and health supplies and many products sold in supermarkets. About 90% of world trade is carried by sea, with the ship being the first fundamental link in the supply chain. The Mediterranean, while representing 1% of the global ocean surface, as we all know accounts for 20% of the maritime traffic. In Italy, 57% of imports and 44% of exports are carried by sea with 480 million tons of goods handled in national ports (in bulk - dry and liquid- in containers or on-board ferries)<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore clear that the Covid-19 pandemic is putting a considerable pressure on the Italian shipping industry.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, some Italian shipping companies were even forced to a temporary or definitive stop of their vessels, with a consequent immediate reduction in turnover, in addition to the costs of mooring and laying-up. The first half of 2020 - the one characterized by the impact of the lockdown - saw an average contraction of -12% in terms of tonnage of goods transited by Italian ports with data ranging from -9% of RoRo traffic to -23% of solid bulk<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the shipping industry has never stopped. Indeed, since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Italian Government has expressly recognized that maritime transport is an “essential service” for the country.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also had significant impacts on seafarers. Travel restrictions imposed by governments around the world have created major hurdles to

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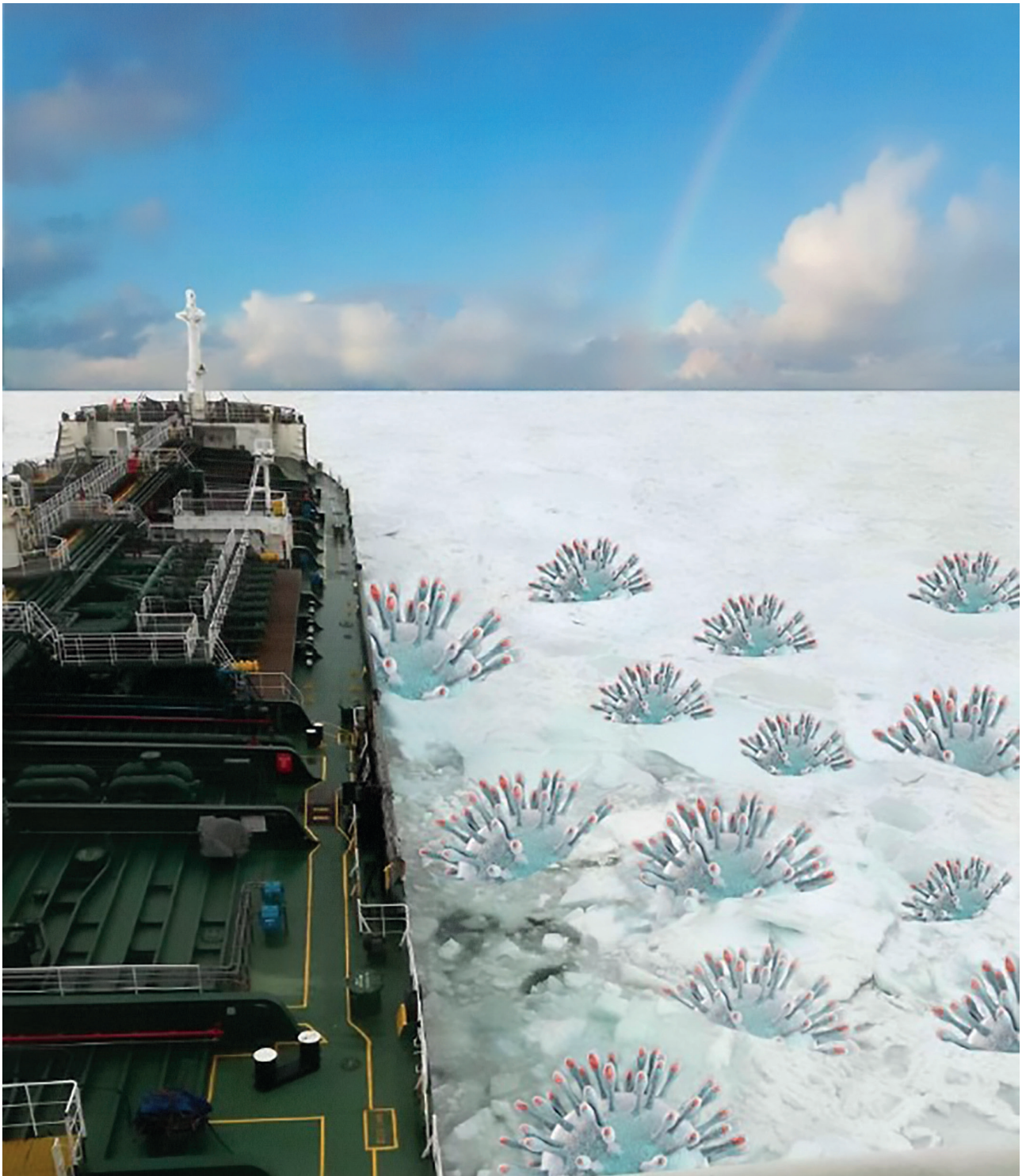
1 Confitarma Annual Report, 30th June 2020,

<https://www.confitarma.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Confitarma-2020-OK-27-6-2020.pdf>

2 Massimo Deandreis, “Porti 6.0: l'Italia che ancora non c'è”, 9th October 2020,

<https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/porti-60-litalia-che-ancora-non-ce-27785>





1. The impact of Covid-19 on maritime transport (Confitarma Annual Report 2020)



crew changes and repatriation of seafarers, which has led to a growing humanitarian crisis. Crew members had to remain on ships beyond their contract period and others have been unable to join their ships with significant concerns for the safety of seafarers and shipping.

The feeling is that nothing will be as it was before, but shipping is and will remain a vital global link for the development of the sustainable international trade: the circulation of raw materials, energy and manufactured goods and products between continents would not be possible without shipping. The country's recovery and sustainable growth will therefore also depend on the importance we give to the "blue economy", also through an enhanced maritime security strategy.

Indeed, maritime security and blue economy are intertwined, the nexus at the heart of both concepts being the maintenance of good order at sea<sup>3</sup>. And even if, so far, according to recent analysis<sup>4</sup> the impact of Covid-19 has been extremely limited when it comes to security threats in the maritime environment, the economic impact of containment measures is likely to further increase poverty rates and income inequality triggering violence and disorder.

In the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, where our shipping industry has important commercial interests, the main drivers for insecurity at sea continue to be onshore conditions in Somalia and Yemen. But piracy remains an elevated threat, with the presence of armed skiffs approaching vessels continuing to be reported. Therefore, last July ECSA and Confitarma strongly recommended the extension of the existing mandate of EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta considered vital for maritime security in the region. Besides, Covid-19 does not seem to have translated into specific threats to maritime security but movement restrictions have affected

Italian private maritime security companies providing armed guard services for vessels in transit.

Therefore, the synergy and exchange of information between public and private maritime stakeholders remains crucial to guarantee the protection of national interests in the area.

The migration crisis also called into question geopolitical and commercial balances in the Mediterranean, thus making it less secure. And the spread of the pandemic in the region has made the situation even more difficult. As a matter of fact, in 2020 the number of migrants reaching Italy by sea from Tunisia shot up from the previous 12-month period. It is likely that the crisis will be exacerbated in the coming months by the economic consequences of Covid-19 in Northern African countries, where many migrants have lost their jobs and could become more desperate for transits to Europe. And with fewer rescue vessels active due to Covid-19 restrictions and ports closed to avoid the spread of infection, more migrants in distress will rely on civilian vessels for rescue<sup>5</sup>.

An area of particular concern for the Italian shipping industry is Libya, that has in recent years seen high levels of migration, with more than 84.000 people rescued by Italian flagged vessels from 2014. As is well known, the Italian shipping industry has never pulled back and will continue to honor the duty to rescue human life at sea. However, there is an urgent need for clarity on the application of the sometimes conflicting international and national regulation on this delicate subject. Being aware of the extraordinary complexity of the migration crisis in the Mediterranean scenario, we cannot fail to notice how the recent cases of involvement of commercial vessels in Search and Rescue operations aroused great concern. Firstly,

3 WAPSN, "Maritime Security and the Blue Economy: Understanding the Link", 17<sup>th</sup> March 2026, <http://www.westafricasecuritynetwork.org/?p=575>

4 RiskIntelligence, "Maritime security and Covid-19:Impacts and Implications", Whitepaper, September 2020, [https://riskintelligence.eu/sites/default/files/2020-09/Whitepaper%20Maritime%20Security%20Post%20Covid%20Sep%202020\\_sml\\_0.pdf](https://riskintelligence.eu/sites/default/files/2020-09/Whitepaper%20Maritime%20Security%20Post%20Covid%20Sep%202020_sml_0.pdf)

5 Ibid.



2. Anti-piracy naval exercise





crews of commercial vessels do not have the necessary equipment on board, nor are they trained to carry out rescue operations at sea of this magnitude. Secondly, we are witnessing once again the exclusion of the Italian flag from international tenders in the Mediterranean. This is because, in recent years, the Italian-flagged merchant fleet - leader in commercial traffic in the central Mediterranean - has been (and presumably will continue to be) the most involved in rescue activities. For these reasons, in February 2019 Confitarma submitted some questions to the Italian Administration to receive operational guidelines for our masters when called to intervene in SAR operations, especially in the “Libyan SAR area”. As of now, we have not received any feedback yet, but the shipping industry will continue to cooperate with all the institutions involved to build a common path which ensures the safety and security of shipping, thus enabling Italy to pursue its maritime interests.

As a matter of fact, the cooperation and exchange of information between military and civilian stakeholders in order to increase the level of maritime security awareness is the key to ensure the freedom of the seas and safeguard the free flow of maritime traffic.

It is undeniable that the Covid-19 pandemic represents the defining threat trend of the year, shaping commercial and security trends within the shipping industry and the maritime domain. And given the international nature of maritime traffic, the sector will likely bear the effects of the current emergency for a long time to come, with probable negative repercussions on the economy and employment even beyond, as in case of tourism.

But piracy, cyber security, supply of energy resources and climate change are just some of the many other common challenges that Navies and Merchant Marines will have to confront together, within their respective areas of competence, in the “blue century”.

To face them, we should move forward together to

improve mutual understanding and collaboration at sea. As Confitarma’s President Mario Mattioli often says: *“going alone may be quicker but, when you join forces, you certainly go further”*.

Well, we will overcome the current crisis and the many challenges that await us only if - united - we will be able to protect *“our liquid heritage”* enhancing its great potential through a common and increasingly sea-oriented strategy. Only in this way will we be able to avoid the risk of “sea blindness” for the next generations.

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### **Luca Sisto – Confitarma’s Director General**

Graduated “cum laude” in Political Science at the University of Rome “La Sapienza”, he joined Confitarma in 1989, where he currently holds the position of Director General. Since 2001 he has also been Head of the Transport Policy Department, which brings together the works of the Short Sea Navigation Commission, the Deep Sea Navigation Commission and the “Ship Operations” Working Group dedicated to maritime security issues. He was Confitarma’s Deputy Director General from 2016-2018.

Promoter of the “Seamaster”, he has relaunched the Italian Navigation Institute of which he is currently Vice President with responsibility for the sea.

Among the positions presently held, he is a member of the CISM - Interministerial Committee for the Security of Maritime Transport and Ports.

In the university field, among other positions, he teaches at the Master in “Transport, Logistics and Infrastructures” at the Bocconi University and at the Master in “Economic Security, Geopolitics and Intelligence” at SIOI-Italian Society for International Organizations”. He is also professor of “Raw materials and energy resources” at the University of Tuscia.



# The impact of COVID-19 on energy: an Eastern Mediterranean perspective

*George N. Tzogopoulos*

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has led to the loss of numerous lives across the globe.

It has also forced governments to take unprecedented measures in order to protect public health, guarantee functionality of supply chains and support their national economies as well as to develop innovative strategies making them better equipped for the future. The Eastern Mediterranean region could not escape from the coronavirus consequences in all fields including on oil, gas and infrastructure deals. A remarkable example was monitored in April 2020 when American company Exxon Mobile announced that it would push its drilling in Block 10 of Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone back to September 2021.<sup>1</sup> The decision was attributed to the pandemic uncertainty and the new state of play in international markets. One month later, in May 2020, ENI and Total also notified the government of Cyprus that they would

postpone their scheduled gas drilling operations in block 6.<sup>2</sup>

Energy discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean, more natural gas than oil, had been already a source of tensions among some countries before the outbreak of COVID-19. In January 2020, Greece, Israel and Cyprus joined forces and agreed to construct the so-called East Med pipeline – a project supported by the EU – to transport hydrocarbons from Levantine reservoirs to Europe.<sup>3</sup> Italy, which had initially supported the project, appeared then more skeptical due to its high cost and feasibility complexity.<sup>4</sup> However, it is taking part in the East Med Gas Forum (EMGF) along with six other partners, namely: Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. The Forum was established in January 2019 in Cairo.<sup>5</sup> Egypt, from its part, seeks to become a regional energy hub.<sup>6</sup> While it has started to import natural gas by

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1 *Ekathimerini* website, 'ExxonMobil Puts Cyprus Drilling Plans on Hold', available at: <https://www.ekathimerini.com/251647/article/ekathimerini/news/exxonmobil-puts-cyprus-drilling-plans-on-hold>, 13 April 2020.

2 *Cyprus-Mail* website, 'ENI and Total Drillings Officially on Hold for One Year', available at: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/05/04/eni-and-total-drillings-officially-on-hold-for-one-year/>, 4 May 2020.

3 Greece's Prime Minister website, 'Signing Ceremony of the Interstate Agreement for the Construction of the EastMed Gas Pipeline', available at: <https://primeminister.gr/en/2020/01/02/23049>, 2 January 2020.

4 *The Times of Israel* website, 'Italy's Foreign Minister Expresses Doubts over Feasibility of EastMed Pipeline', available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/italys-foreign-minister-expresses-doubts-over-feasibility-of-eastmed-pipeline/>, 18 January 2020.

5 Euromesco website, 'The Energy Ministers of 7 countries Created the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum', available at: <https://www.euromesco.net/news/the-energy-ministers-of-7-countries-created-the-eastern-mediterranean-gas-forum/>, 19 January 2019.

6 Michael Tanchum, 'Egypt's Prospects as an Energy Export Hub across Three Continents', ISPI Commentary, available at: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/egypts-prospects-energy-export-hub-across-three-continents-27408>, 24 September 2020.

Israel since mid-January 2020, the finding of the Zohr field in 2015 by ENI has empowered its potential. Israel also began its exports to Jordan on the same month.<sup>7</sup>

The EMGF became officially an intergovernmental organization in September 2020.<sup>8</sup> Lebanon and Turkey have not joined. To start with, Lebanon and Israel disagree on their maritime border but agreed to resolve their long-running dispute in October 2020.<sup>9</sup> Two rounds of talks were organized by the end of the month.<sup>10</sup> The case of Turkey is more complicated though. The Turkish government believes it had been isolated by initiatives of other countries in the Eastern Mediterranean. It thus employed a muscular approach to boost its regional presence driven by energy demands and geopolitical calculations.<sup>11</sup> Possessing its own research and drilling ships it does not need to rely on contracts with international energy companies and this can be arguably considered a comparative advantage.

From 2018 onwards it is continuously carrying out drillings in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus. The EU regularly condemns this illegal activity of Turkey<sup>12</sup> but the latter has not changed course. It acts, in its view, to protect the interests of the Turkish Cypriot community which lives in the Northern part of Cyprus. No other country in the world recognizes this part of Cyprus as a sovereign state after the military invasion of 1974 apart from Turkey itself.

Turkish foreign policy has also impacted on other regions of the Eastern Mediterranean. In November 2019, Turkey and the Government of National Accord (GNA) of Libya signed an agreement to delimit their maritime zones.<sup>13</sup> The deal completely ignored the rights of islands to a continental shelf and caused the strong reaction of Greece, Cyprus and some other European countries such as France.<sup>14</sup> The EU believes that the Turkish-Libyan accord produced no legal consequences for third states,<sup>15</sup> and the US

7 Suleiman Al-Khalidi, 'Jordan Gets First Natural Gas Supplies from Israel', available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/jordan-israel-gas-idUSL8N2960Q9>, 1 January 2020. Reuters website,

8 Reuters website, 'East Mediterranean States Formally Establish Egypt-based Gas Forum', available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-energy-idUSKCN26D14D>, 22 September 2020.

9 UN website, 'Talks Begin to Resolve Disputed Lebanon-Israel Maritime Border', available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/10/1075392>, 14 October 2020.

10 *The Times of Israel* website, 'Israel, Lebanon End Second Round of Productive Maritime Border Talks', available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-lebanon-end-second-round-of-productive-maritime-border-talks/>, 29 October 2020.

11 George N. Tzogopoulos, 'Turkey and the Future of the Eastern Mediterranean', BESA Perspective Paper, available at: <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/turkey-eastern-mediterranean/>, 29 July 2020.

12 EU website, 'Turkey's Illegal Drilling Activities in the Eastern Mediterranean: Council Adopts Framework for Sanctions', available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/11/11/turkey-s-illegal-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-council-adopts-framework-for-sanctions/>, 11 November 2019.

13 Daren Butler and Tuvan Gumrukcu, 'Turkey Signs Maritime Boundaries Deal with Libya amid Exploration Row', available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-libya-idUSKBN1Y213I>, 28 November 2019.

14 *France 24* website, 'Turkey-Libya Deals Void: Egypt, France, Greece, Cyprus', available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20200108-turkey-libya-deals-void-egypt-france-greece-cyprus>, 8 January 2020.

15 See Conclusions of the European Council, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41768/12-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf>, 12 December 2019.

Department of State illustrates it as ‘provocative’ and ‘unhelpful’.<sup>16</sup> In June 2020, after Greece had successfully managed the first wave of COVID-19, it inked a relative memorandum of understanding with Italy in Ionian Sea.<sup>17</sup> In August 2020, it went further and came to an agreement with Egypt that partially delimited the maritime zones of the two countries.<sup>18</sup> And in October 2020, Greece and Albania agreed to jointly submit this issue of delimiting their maritime zones to international justice.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of common challenges posed by the pandemic, the current Eastern Mediterranean environment looks more toxic than ever. Some zones covered in the Turkish-Libyan and the Greek-Egyptian memoranda of understanding do overlap requiring compromises which do not look easy. In August and October 2020, Turkey announced the discovery of gas fields in the Black Sea.<sup>20</sup> Hoping to replicate this success in the Eastern Mediterranean it sent its ‘Oruc Reis’ vessel – accompanied by military ships – for research activities close to the Greek island of Kastelorizo. Although mari-

time zones have not yet been delimited between Athens and Ankara, the Turkish behavior alerted the Greek navy because it challenges the rights of islands to a continental shelf that exists *ipso facto* and *ab initio*. Theoretically, the two sides will need to relaunch their exploratory talks on the theme of maritime zones which were interrupted in 2016. But the level of mutual trust has been the lowest since the Imia crisis of 1996.<sup>21</sup> NATO has attempted to prevent the scenario of a military incident by announcing the establishment of a de-confliction mechanism.<sup>22</sup> The role of the Alliance remains balanced and rather distant.

The EU has a strategic interest in a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey. The European Council of 1 and 2 October 2020 expressed its full solidarity with Greece and Cyprus, called on Turkey to abstain from unilateral actions in the future – in breach of international law – and agreed to launch a positive political EU-Turkey agenda provided

16 *Ekathimerini* website, ‘State Department Calls Turkey-Libya Maritime Deal Provocative and Unhelpful’, available at: <https://www.ekathimerini.com/253443/article/ekathimerini/news/state-department-calls-turkey-libya-maritime-deal-provocative-and-unhelpful>, 5 June 2020.

17 *Reuters* website, ‘Greece, Italy Sign Accord on Maritime Zones in Ionian Sea’, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-italy-foreign-idUSKBN23G0X5>, 9 June 2020.

18 *Reuters* website, ‘Egypt and Greece Sign Agreement on Exclusive Economic Zone’, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-greece-idUSKCN252216>, 6 August 2020.

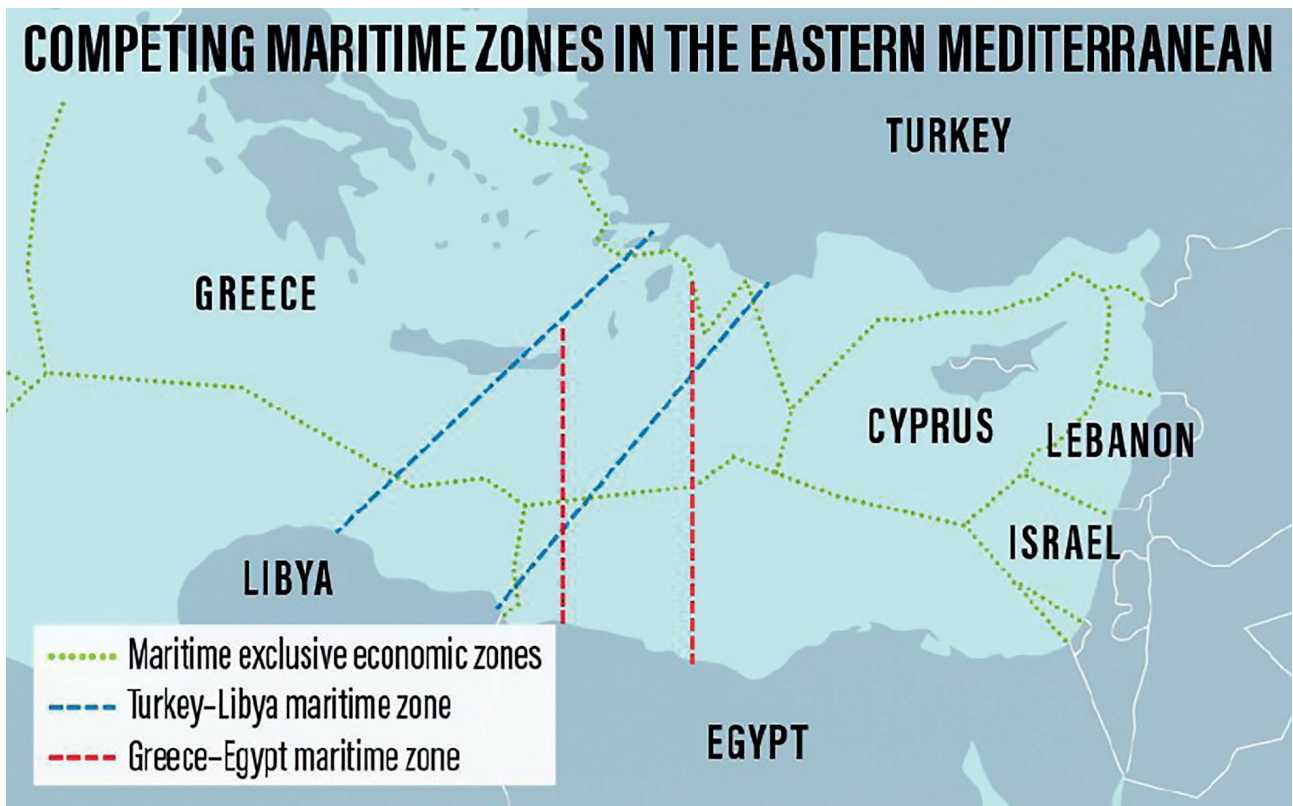
19 Greece’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, Statement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikos Dendias, following his meeting with the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, available at: <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/top-story/state-statement-of-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-nikos-dendias-following-his-meeting-with-the-prime-minister-of-albania-edi-rama-tirana-20-october-2020.html>, 20 October 2020.

20 Sena Guler, ‘Erdogan Announces More Gas Reserves Find in Black Sea’, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/erdogan-announces-more-gas-reserves-find-in-black-sea/2009938>, 17 October 2020.

21 George N. Tzogopoulos, ‘The Greek-Turkish Standoff: A New Source of Instability in the Eastern Mediterranean’, RIAC Comment, available at: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/columns/european-policy/the-greek-turkish-standoff-a-new-source-of-instability-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/>, 23 September 2020.

22 NATO website, ‘Military De-confliction Mechanism between Greece and Turkey Established at NATO’, available at: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_178523.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_178523.htm), 1 October 2020.





constructive efforts to stop illegal activities vis-à-vis Greece and Cyprus were sustained. It also called for a Multilateral Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean and invited the High Representative to engage in talks about its organization. According to conclusion no. 22 of that Summit, the Conference could address issues on which multilateral solutions are needed, including maritime delimitation, security, energy, migration and economic cooperation. Modalities such as participation, scope and timeline would need to be agreed with all involved parties.<sup>23</sup>

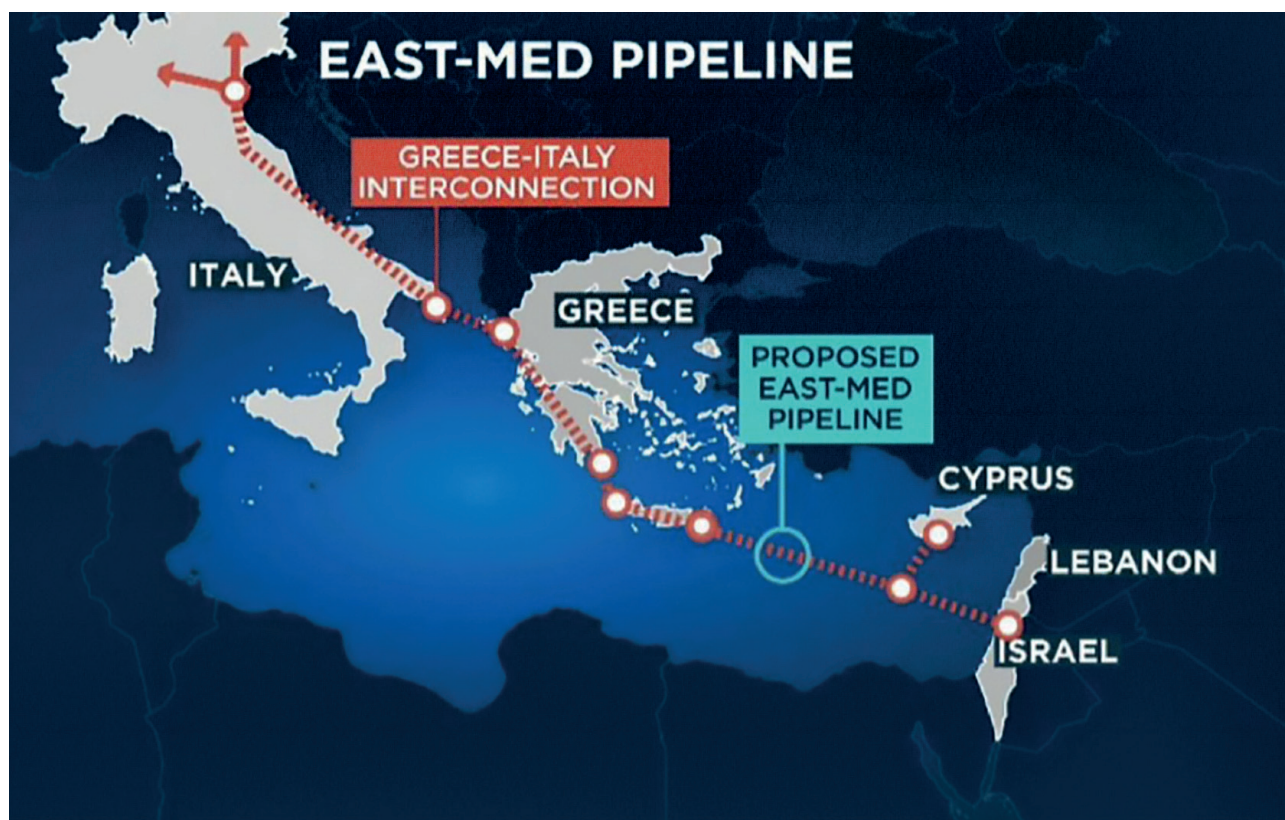
Rising tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean do not allow much optimism for breakthroughs.

Following the election of Ersin Tatar in the Turkish-occupied north of Cyprus on 18 October 2020, for instance, President Tayyip Erdogan talked about a realistic proposal for a 'two-state solution' on the divided island.<sup>24</sup> Obviously, this is not in line with the UN position. On 17 September 2020, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had said that he intended to convene an informal meeting of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders as well as Cyprus guarantor powers, namely Greece, Turkey and Britain, soon after the Turkish Cypriot leadership vote.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, in October 2020, the UN Security Council expressed concern over Tur-

<sup>23</sup> See Conclusions of the European Council available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45910/021020-euco-final-conclusions.pdf>, 2 October 2020.

<sup>24</sup> *Reuters* website, 'Turkey's Erdogan Says It's Time for Two-state Solution in Cyprus', available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-cyprus-erdogan-idUSKBN27B286>, 26 October 2020.

<sup>25</sup> *AP* website, 'Cyprus: UN Call to Revive Peace Talks Gets Edgy Welcome', available at: <https://apnews.com/article/turkey-peace-process-antonio-guterres-united-nations-greece-856af23336d4c89253fe26c0b54368bd>, 17 September 2020.



key's plan to open the coastline of Varosha, a city on the eastern edge of Cyprus. It then reaffirmed the status of Varosha set out in previous Council resolutions, including 550 (1984) and 789 (1992).<sup>26</sup>

Politics and foreign policy seem to have acquired the upper hand in the post-COVID 19 Eastern Mediterranean landscape. Theoretically, coronavirus should have rendered – at least to some extent – research for natural gas and oil rather uneconomical. Having said that, energy interests alone do not satisfactorily explain spats in a region suffering by civil wars, maritime disputes, the Cyprus Question, power projection by countries such as Turkey and the

American-Russian rivalry. Within this framework, some other infrastructure works, principally aiming at reducing energy dependency from Russia, have not been seriously affected by the pandemic. The Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) was substantially completed in October 2020.<sup>27</sup> The pipeline has been filled with natural gas from the Greek-Turkish border up to the receiving terminal in Southern Italy. Further to TAP, the Greece-Bulgaria Gas Interconnector (IGB) that will enable natural gas supplies from the Southern Corridor and Greek liquefied natural gas (LNG) to reach Bulgaria and travel north to the rest of south-eastern Europe is on track.<sup>28</sup>

26 UN website, 'Concerned by Turkey's Plan to Reopen Varosha Coast, Security Council Presidential Statement Calls for Reversal of Decision, Urging Adherence to Resolutions', available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14322.doc.htm>, 9 October 2020.

27 TAP website, 'The Trans Adriatic Pipeline is Complete', available at: <https://www.tap-ag.com/news/news-stories/trans-adriatic-pipeline-is-complete>, 12 October 2020.

28 Greece's Prime Minister website: Brief on the Speech of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis during the Signing Ceremony

There are also other energy connectivity projects which have been discussed – in some cases for years – but their realization does not necessarily depend on the course of the pandemic. They encompass the potential connection of the electricity grids of Israel, Cyprus and Greece through a 1208 km subsea high-voltage direct current (HVDC) cable and that among Egypt, Cyprus and Greece via a 1396km subsea HVDC cable.<sup>29</sup> Other examples of projects are the proposed pipeline that will link Cyprus and Egypt that will see natural gas from the offshore Aphrodite gas field in Cyprus piped to liquefaction plants in Egypt for re-export to European countries<sup>30</sup> and the construction of LNG installations in Cyprus at Vasilikos Energy Park on the south shores of Cyprus. The joint venture comprises China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering, a subsidiary of China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), and Greece's METRON S.A.<sup>31</sup> As far as Libya is concerned, oil production was about to re-normalize in October 2020 following the ceasefire announcement – in spite of concerns about prices due to anemic demand.<sup>32</sup>

If there is one sector where all countries of the

Eastern Mediterranean agree, this will be their commitment to energy transition. For EU member-states of the region such as Greece and Italy, this strategy might also secure additional funds from the Recovery Fund in support of their national economies, while for others like Egypt, Israel and Turkey it could reinforce already existing priorities. Energy security goes together with environmental sensitivities and de-carbonization plans. COVID-19 has certainly demonstrated the value of human life. This observation itself does not solve problems though. The adaptation to new realities should be a gift for policymakers, especially in a period of crisis requiring smart and wise public investments. Synergies, especially on green energy projects in the post-pandemic era, seem a safe way forward.

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31 *Xinhua* website, 'LNG Terminal Constructed by Chinese Company Biggest Ever Energy Project in Cyprus: President', available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/10/c\\_139201233.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/10/c_139201233.htm), 10 July 2020.

32 Natasha Turak, 'Libya's Ramped-up Oil Output Throws Another Wrench at Prices and OPEC's Plans', available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/10/26/libyas-ramped-up-oil-output-throws-another-wrench-at-opec-and-oil-prices.html>, 26 October 2020.



# The MENA energy sector, re-engineering itself before and through the Pandemic

*Vincenzo Palmieri*

During the Cold War, the *West's jugular vein* had been identified in Arab and Persian oil, produced around the Gulf and flowing through the Hormuz Strait. This very powerful image has shaped policy and energy chronicles for decades. We shall find new ones for the next years.

## ***Prominent political events at the MENA regional level***

We are now in a post Western World, where interactions are played outside old centres of powers. The US are caught between *retreating or not retreating*; each identifies an internal component and no final word has been declared on this trend. Sanctions are no substitute for foreign policy, although they help identify foes and the risk associated with doing businesses with these.

Regional cronies such as Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE compete meanwhile for regional predominance, sparked by Arab Springs and by 2010-2015 gas

finds in the Levantine Basin. Absent Europe, Russia is a partner to many, but not yet an ally though OPEC+ is a platform for conveying converging interests.

Engagement with China, India, Japan or South Korea is on the increase. This is truer for Morocco and Algeria in the Maghreb, and for GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries as far as infrastructure and trade is concerned. In political terms this assessment is still fluid. The relation with China is also growing in Libya.

The deal between US companies Chevron and Noble in July 2020 counters this dynamic. By entering Israel, the former – an American supermajor – put an end to an unwritten rule preventing IOCs (international Oil Companies) from dealing directly with the country. Exxon had already been exploring Cyprus' offshore. Their planned investments in gas production in the Levantine Basin (Chevron will also manage assets in Cyprus and Egypt) have been delayed by the pandemic but should



1. Oil and gas fields (red/green) and operating or planned pipelines (purple/yellow) in the Mediterranean (IHS, 2020)

prompt future additional attention in Washington.

The EMGF (Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum) is the arena where this dynamic can emerge more fully. It is a significant exercise trying to combine political and industrial actors and public and private sectors. A limit of the Forum is that it has probably been too successful in marginalising Turkey, whose links with Western Mediterranean counterparts are growing.

This trend goes together with the Abraham Accords between Israel, the EAU and Bahrain. The agreements bring to the surface pre-existing political and security links, also aimed at countering Turkey. The partnerships could extend to the energy sector. There is an already strong cooperation on renewables and high tech, and hypotheses have been put forward of new routes to ship oil, gas and refined products from the Gulf to Eilat and on to Europe, bypassing the Egyptian SUMED pipeline and using the EAPC (Europe-Asia Pipeline) instead. This is an option on paper now; if implemented, it would elicit an Egyptian response in the future. Other North African actors reject such a rapprochement.

***Traditional paradigms were evolving,  
then the pandemic struck***

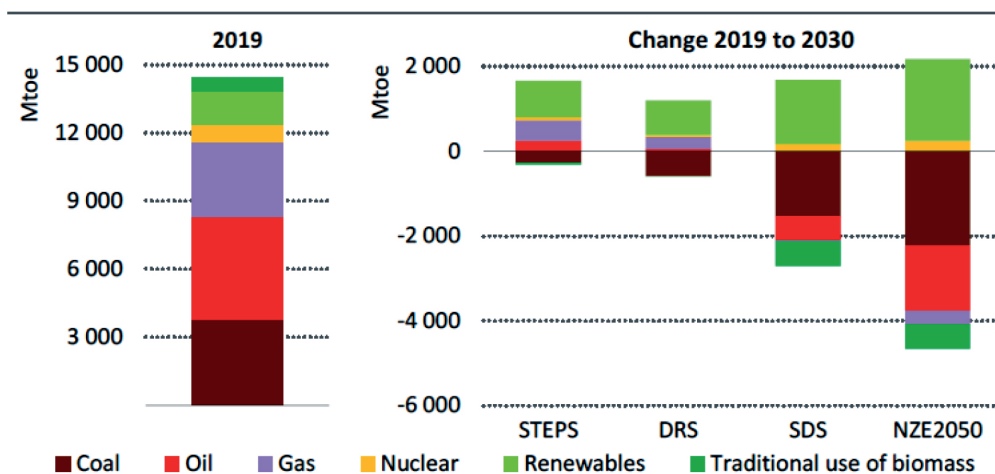
All of this was in place and decided *before* the pandemic, seeking the benefits of having more gas assets in the

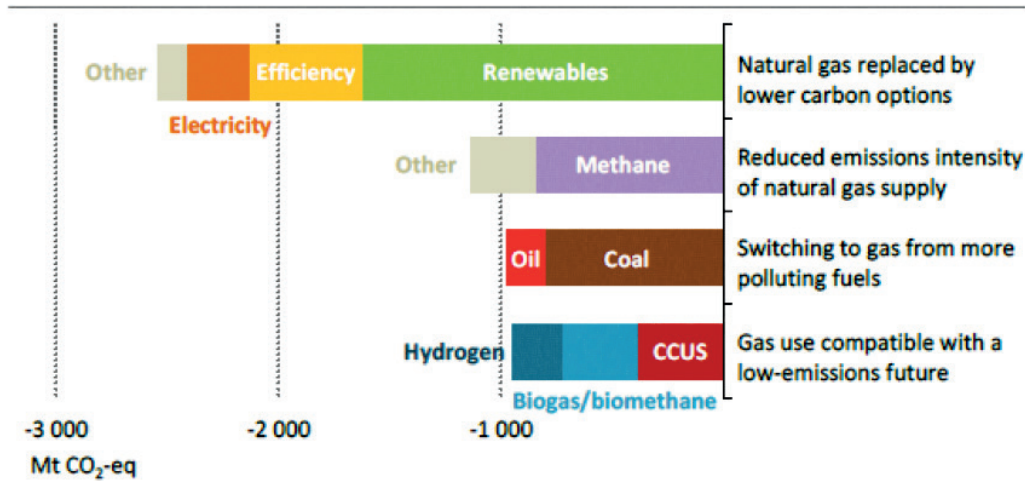
portfolio and adhere to decarbonisation and energy transition imperatives.

Planning ahead, the disruptive dynamic for the area is arguably exactly this transition. MENA actors were still intent at adapting their production structure, when the pandemic started affecting them both directly and indirectly. Each has chosen different paths trying to leverage own competitive advantages.

Oil and gas producing countries maintain the lead, trying to supplement the traditional role of cheap sources with a wide array of new ones, ranging from nuclear (the EAU, and Egypt) to edge-cutting renewables, to CCS/CCUS (Carbon capture, “utilisation” and storage) plants. The many different “Vision” Plans and projected megacities were already the clearest example of this early trend and a tool to project national prominence while remaining abreast of new trends.

The Emirates continue to invest the most in diversification, though O&G will continue to be the main source of revenues – probably for a long time. With Saudi Arabia, the EAU are also focusing on refining, aiming at a growing Asian market although China has a rising role in this sector as in petrochemicals. Qatar invested instead on gas production and LNG “scare” capacity, though seemingly less than anticipated.





### 3. Reduction in greenhouse gasses emissions attributable to changes in natural gas supply (IEA WEO, 2020)

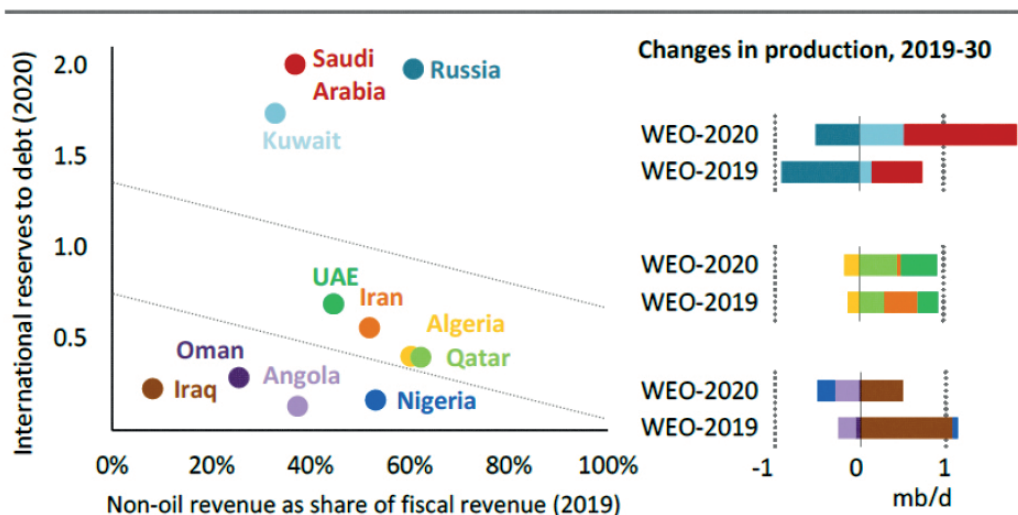
Doha does so to catch up on new demand and provide a needed flexible solution on the path towards decarbonisation set at the international level.

During late 2019-2020 COVID-19 has added pressure on the demand side, also emphasising digital and virtual aspect of daily life that are perceived to be in contrast with O&G as a source of energy. The *Zoom-isation* of the economy is the theme of the future in energy, alas of *green* energy tout-court for many consumers and regulators alike – in the EU and the US in particular.

Fast forward end of 2020, the need to create sectors

and regulation anew is hence clearer for MENA actors. Top-down fiscal and social reforms have to parallel the industrial process, no easy task in rentier states where the social contract does not – and *will* not in the near term – assume taxation as the basis for representation. This is an additional obstacle in the way to transformation.

Countries outside the Gulf had been even more wary of going down this path. Insecurity had been preventing investment in new technologies (Libya), or the culprit was bureaucracy or consensus constraints (Tunisia, Algeria). There are two notable exceptions: Egypt has



### 4. Indicators of financial resilience and changes in production for selected producer economies (IEA WEO 2020)



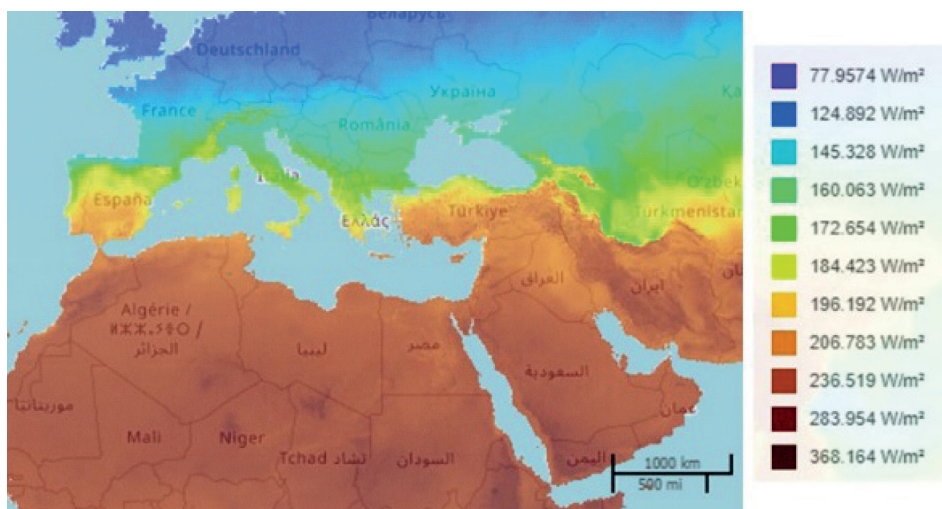
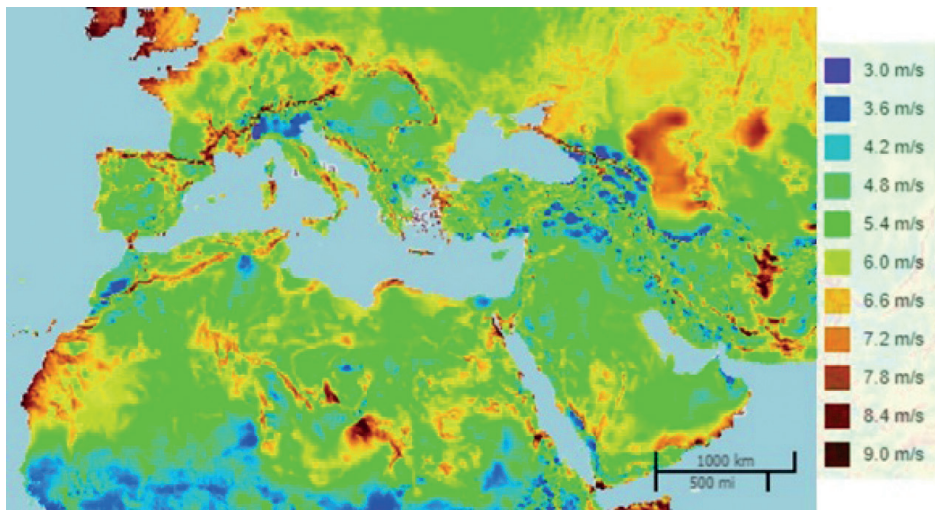
its own mega-projects around the Suez Canal, trying to transform a national pride symbol into a bridge to high tech and logistics; Cairo *also* invests in electricity generation and grid amelioration. Morocco is the other one: an energy importing country that sought to improve its energy balance, it has invested heavily in renewables and is now the only country that could stand COP26 standard, were they to be adopted.

### *What next*

COVID-19 and lockdowns have challenged long-held business assumptions and classic rules of operation.

Industrial activity has slowed down and daily activities of producers, service providers or contractors, storage and transportation companies, fleet operators and traders and marketers were affected. Gaps along the extended O&G supply chain had to be dealt with, ranging from storages edging full capacity, to regulatory constraints limiting workforce availability, to effects on equipment supply along the global, integrated business model.

With all the damage done, COVID-19 could also bring about a *better* alternative for companies and MENA countries decarbonisation strategies, forcing them on making the sector more resilient. A new imperative is to

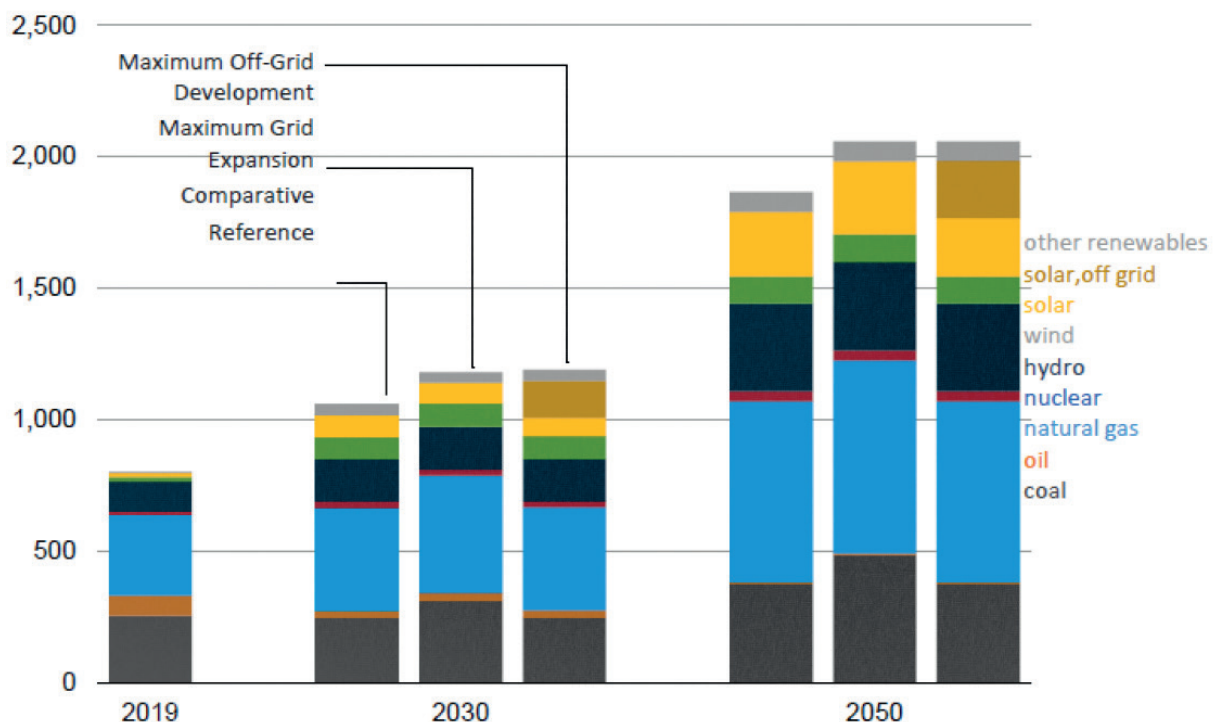


stem past ambitious but probably too far-fetched plans. New technologies for decarbonisation come in handy and may be developed in GCC countries – and in Libya, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq – complementing solar and new grids. Governments and energy companies may pursue more affordable, smaller emissions reduction technology that can be applied across the system. Investments could be more cost-effective and thus reduce risks. Supply chains may be made more local, thus more resilient.

While energy demand keeps growing at a global level, different energy sources will follow in the end different paths. No energy transition was meant to be so fast in the first place, and new technology usually had taken decades to be adopted. Competition on prices becomes the greatest driver; swathes of traditional resources will probably supply growing local demand, while elsewhere in Europe, in India and in the Asia-Pacific competing producers' supply will largely win over former security of supply concerns.

The region, in particular in its Gulf component, will remain a heavy exporter of oil up until 2040. Gas exports, including via LNG, will grow accordingly. Across North Africa emphasis on costs draws more attention to renewables – where less investment and maintenance is needed – and on more effective grid management. The pandemic is thus accelerating here as well the pace of the change to more integrated solutions. It is hence a chance to bridge the gap and regain time lost, in Libya in particular.

On a 2030-2050 timeframe, North Africa will head towards more gas-fired plants for electric generation. In the short term, investment shall involve amelioration of existing assets and of grids, to ensure better access to electricity. Renewables – that had been absent from the scenario until 2009 and that have gained traction since 2016 – will be key especially in Egypt. Where applicable, as in Israel, this will be coupled with additional use of national natural gas reserves for reduction of greenhouse gasses and transportation.



6. Power generation across Africa, billion Kilowatt-hours (EIA, International Energy Outlook 2020)

***In conclusion***

Further waves of the pandemic will continue to stress the resilience of the region. In this scenario an important point for a successful energy transition and a better capacity to resist external shocks could possibly lie in the introduction of a carbon pricing mechanism. It would help governments and companies work together toward more efficient systems.

This would also help overcome the greatest strain COVID-19 has imposed: transformed perceptions, that affect funding of traditional energy-related projects and of more promising technology alike. In the area, only Turkey is considering such measures.

Actors in the sector maintain a crucial role in global value and supply chains; while shareholders ponder their choices, it is up to societies as a whole to move forward in times of crisis, taking up opportunities as they come across. While the industry conceptualizes future different ways and re-engineers processes, it also helps developing

an ecosystem that encompasses many stakeholders, from investors to regulators, from employees to customers, from public authorities to communities: a chain where all are dynamically linked.

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# Irregular Migrants and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Irregular migration trends in the Mediterranean

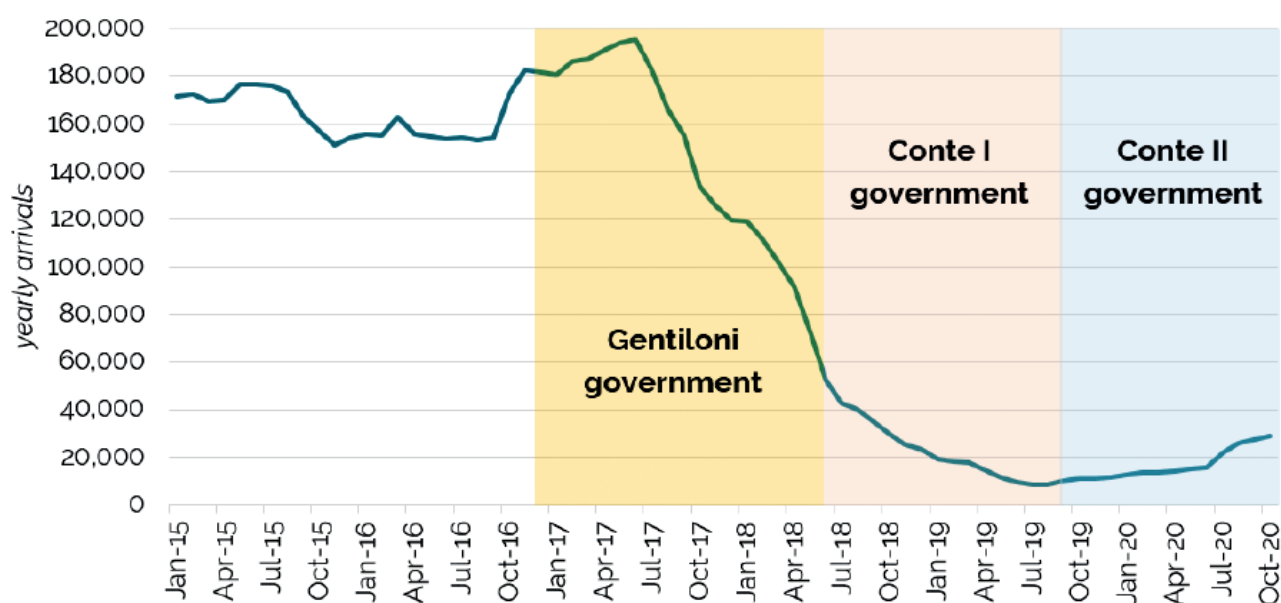
*Matteo Villa*

**I**rregular sea arrivals to Italy are up this year. By November 2nd, Italy had recorded at least 27,834 migrant arrivals at its shores: higher than for the whole 2018 (23,370), and almost twice as high as last year. Wasn't the COVID-19 pandemic supposed to deter irregular migration, as well as the regular kind? Think again. Along the Central Mediterranean route, two forces appear to have been at work, acting as an incentive for migrants to depart from both Libya and Tunisia. And the pandemic has had an effect, but not the one many expected.

First of all, we should frame the perceived surge in irregular sea arrivals within a larger context. Using forecast models, at ISPI we expect irregular sea arrivals to Italy to slightly exceed 30,000 by year end. Such figure would be largely in line (around 50% higher) than the 19,000 arrivals recorded between 2002 and 2010,

just before the popular revolts in Tunisia and Libya in 2011 brought close to 65,000 migrants to the country's shores. But 30,000 arrivals in a year is also more than 80% lower than the around 170,000 persons that reached Italy irregularly by sea each year on average between 2014 and 2016 (see Figure 1). The bottom line is that the period of high irregular arrivals to Italy has ended more than three years ago, and that we are trying to explain an increase from very small numbers which still leads to much smaller numbers. We might call it a "mini-surge" in irregular arrivals along the Central Mediterranean route.

The decline in sea arrivals has one single explanation at its core: lower migrant departures from Libya. This can be explained by the two-pronged action by the European Union and Italy in order to deter irregular migration from other African countries towards Libya,

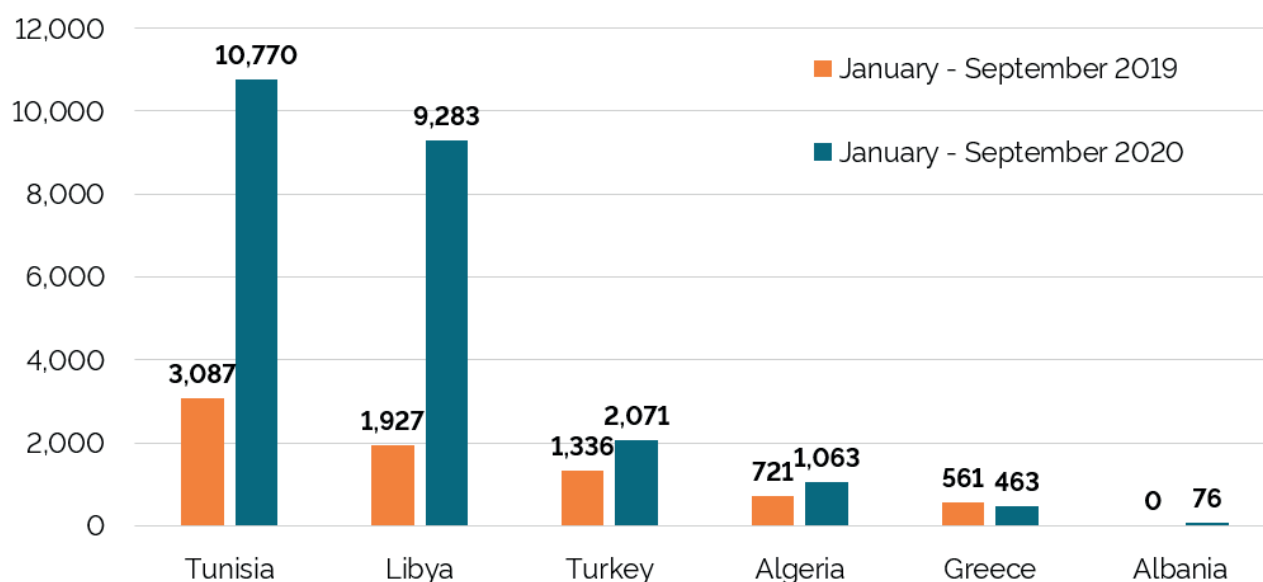


1. Irregular sea arrivals to Italy (Source: ISPI calculations on Italian Ministry of the Interior data)

and then from Libya onwards towards Italy and Malta through the dangerous sea route. The launch in 2015 of the European Agenda on Migration was coupled by the Trust Fund for Africa, and by the attempt to make EU aid and cooperation more and more conditional on African origin and transit countries compliance on their part of migration governance needs. African countries were asked to accept more of their citizens that were supposed to be returned there, an attempt which largely failed: in 2019, European countries returned 26,535 persons to African countries, just 6% more than the 25,045 persons they returned in 2014, the year before the approval of the European Agenda on Migration. However, a few “priority” African origin and transit countries, among which Niger figured prominently, were asked to help deter irregular migrants transiting throughout their territory, and they did. The Displacement Tracking Matrix of the International Organization for Migration recorded 333,000 migrants moving from Niger towards Libya or (much less frequently) to Algeria in 2016, but just 69,000 in 2017, a decrease of almost 80%. The second part of the strategy was more straightforward, and involved cooperation between the

EU and Libyan authorities, in particular empowering the Libyan Coast Guard and convincing smugglers to detain migrants for longer periods, rather than sending them at sea. This brought about the largest change in irregular sea arrivals to Italy ever to be recorded: starting from mid-July 2017, in the span of a few months irregular sea arrivals dropped by almost 75%, from a yearly average of 195,000 in June 2017 to around 52,000 in June next year.

In 2020, the two forces that supported the mini-surge in irregular arrivals concern refugees and “economic” migrants alike. The first was there right from the start, and it dates back from much before this year’s pandemic: dire living conditions in Libya, both in or near detention centres, or in dilapidated urban dwellings. Given this, it is no surprise that last March, at the height of the pandemic in Italy, many migrants and asylum seekers in Libya still preferred to try crossing the Mediterranean than to remain put. As Italy went into lockdown and sea arrivals dropped to a trickle (just 241 migrants landed on Italian shores in March – an 80% decline compared to February), almost 1,300 migrants departed from Libya over a 31-day period. And while



2. Irregular sea arrivals to Italy, by country of embarkation (Source: ISPI calculations on UNHCR data)



3. Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Libya

most of those who left Libya were brought back by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, the fact that attempted arrivals continued almost unabated despite the novel coronavirus hitting Italy hard and deterring departures from all other sea routes speaks volumes about the conditions for migrants and asylum seekers in the country. This year, therefore, in the first nine months sea arrivals to Italy from Libya were almost 5 times larger than in 2019 (see Figure 2).

The second force has to do with the economic and mobility effects of the pandemic in Tunisia. For years, Tunisia has been plagued by chronic unemployment and an unstable social and political environment. For a country supported by tourism – that accounts for around 8% of the country's GDP and employs 400,000 workers, or 10% of the total workforce – the closure of borders has dealt a terrible blow, jeopardizing the

slow recovery after terrorist attacks on popular tourist localities of 2015. Indeed, according to the latest official statistics, tourist arrivals in Tunisia recorded a drop of close to 100% in the months of April through June. At the same time as this was happening, tens of thousands of Tunisian seasonal migrant workers found themselves stuck in the country, unable to reach Europe to make a living.

While likely more short-term than migrant conditions in Libya, developments in Tunisia have been the main driver contributing to this summer's mini-surge in sea crossings. In July and August, irregular sea arrivals from Tunisia made up around two thirds of total arrivals to Italy. This is a stark reversal if compared with the period of high sea arrivals to Italy (2014-2016), when around 90% of those who reached Italy's shores had departed from Libya, while Tunisia made up just 5% of



the total. And whereas irregular sea arrivals from Tunisia have always been fairly composite in terms of nationalities, this year Tunisian citizens made up over 92% of boat passengers.

In conclusion, the mini-surge of irregular sea arrivals to Italy is a great case study to highlight the complexities of the pandemic shock on migrants' decisions to attempt to reach Europe irregularly. For one, it shows that in countries that are sufficiently close to Europe expectations of "involuntary immobility" have been largely exaggerated. While this appears to be a crucial issue for those living further away from developed countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, in many instances migrants in countries sufficiently close to Europe have not only the incentives, but also the means to cross the Mediterranean. Second, the mini-surge shows how hard it continues to be to predict trends in irregular arrivals, as sudden variations remain able to reverse previous trends in a matter of months or even weeks. Just consider the fact that, had arrivals from Tunisia followed the same seasonal trend as in 2019, we could have expected around 15,000 irregular arrivals to Italy by year end – i.e., 50% less than the 30,000 that

we are expecting now. Third, and most importantly, the mini-surge shows that the COVID-19 pandemic can have differentiated, if not unexpected, effects on short-term migration movements that should be further investigated. But long-term drivers of migration such as demography, economic opportunities, family and social networks abroad will continue to shape the willingness to migrate in the future, whether regularly or not. Even in the post-pandemic world.

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Dr. Villa specialises in European politics, with a specific focus on migration, macroeconomics, and energy issues.

# Overview of the impact of Covid on Women in the MENA region

*Erika Monticone*

## **Introduction**

The year 2020 marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption by the UN Security Council of Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security. This resolution established a legal framework that reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction as well as stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

The UN Secretary-General Antonio Gutierrez stated already in April 2020 that “*COVID-19 could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women’s rights.*”

Latest news and some recent studies suggest that COVID-19 has exacerbated inequality, economic crises and gender-based violence, showing disproportionate impacts on women.

## **Discussion**

While the effects of COVID-19 have been significant on the leading economies, across the Middle East and North Africa regions (MENA) the spread of the virus is having a devastating impact on already vulnerable economies, increasing the existing inequalities, worsening structural gaps and threatening the existing political status quo in some countries.

Moreover, it is also worth considering that regional conflicts have not only strangled economic growth in vast tracts of MENA but has led to an overall increase in the number of women-led families which could prove to be particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. Iraq, Syria,

Libya and Yemen are examples of armed conflicts challenging and weakening lives of the people, provoking the collapse of infrastructures and a high number of Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs). Other countries, such as Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia are suffering an important refugee crisis.

In conflict areas, women also face additional problems such as lack of access to education, gender-based violence (GBV), forced and under-age arranged marriage, and displacement. In the context of the pandemic the long-term negative consequences could be even worse for vulnerable women.

Almost everywhere in the world, Covid-19 has caused women to pay a high price in terms of loss of jobs and economic capacity. In the particular case of the MENA region women comprise more than 75 percent of the healthcare and social services workforce, in both public and private sectors. They are more likely to be on the frontline of a health crisis e.g. Egypt where women encompass around 42.4% of doctors and 91.1% of the Ministry of Health nursing staff. In addition to this, in many MENA countries, the social dynamics and even regulations in many cases assign women and girls to domestic responsibilities and nursing the elderly in the family. In this unprecedented pandemic situation the bulk of caregiving of

children and elderly is shouldered by women, particularly those who work with flexible schedules in family obligations, or with less experience. To carry out these mostly unpaid activities many women are fired from their jobs. This context exposes women to a double risk: the health risk of being more exposed to infection and the economic risk of being unpaid for their domestic chores thus becoming “invisible workers”.



### 1. Afghan women

A study conducted by the Institut Arabe des Chefs d'Entreprises has found that 96% of Small, Micro and Medium enterprises in Tunisia foresee a negative impact on their business from the pandemic. Most of them are run by women while the majority of large enterprises are run by men, and for several reasons, these small enterprises are less resilient to the current crisis. Moreover, women's employment is also more likely to be at risk in an economic downturn. Certain categories of informal workers such as short-term and part-time workers (mainly domestic workers and agricultural workers) have precarious employment contracts and consequently lower pensions, social

insurance and salaries. Generally speaking almost 62% of women in the region are "informally employed", often in poorly paid jobs, unregulated working hours and usually worse paid than men having similar jobs.

Additionally, in imposed quarantine many reports reflect increase in domestic abuses. In this regard the most vulnerable women, including refugees, domestic workers, women who work in rural areas, due to a weak financial status are more exposed to sexual exploitation. In this context of increasing violence against women school lockdowns have created additional tension for women and girls.





Finally, with less girls attending schools and lower family incomes, early forced marriages increase. Some young girls affected by this situation are forced into accepting early marriage to those who offer bride price to impoverished families.

### *Way ahead & Conclusions*

The pandemic, in its multifaceted security and social dimensions, has emphasized the roles that women play in society such as in care and health sectors.

However in the MENA region, the pandemic has widened the already existing gap in opportunities between men and women. It has also emphasized the roles

played by men and women in societies, advancing the perception that, in times of crises men's jobs take priority over those of women.

On the other hand, the crisis has highlighted the relevance in terms of number of informal jobs and "invisible workers" underpaid and not covered by any kind of social protection. Some governments have been now forced to put in place specific mechanisms to protect this vulnerable part of the society. With a long-term perspective this should become an opportunity to promote social reforms.

From the social perspective the pandemic represents an opportunity for MENA countries to put measures in place to support micro economies in the long-term and to tackle the precarious situation of many women and girls in the region.

According to the World Bank, in the long-term the involvement of an increasing number of women in the decision making could represent an important step not only in the improvement of the economic empowerment of women but also in providing great benefits to the regional economy. In this regard, some decisions have been taken to integrate a gender perspective into the elaboration of the response to Covid 19, involving more women in the decision-making programs and including gender oriented organizations in the discussions.

Gender aspects of the pandemic have received much attention by the media and experts all around the globe. Perhaps the most positive aspect of this shocking crisis is that some governments have increased their gender awareness after realizing that having the women and girls at the center will drive a more sustainable, inclusive and equal development of societies.

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# Covid 19 and freedom of the press in the Middle East and Northern Africa

*Ettore Guastalla*

**T**he Middle East and Northern Africa are the most dangerous hotspots for journalists and for press freedom. It is a statement everybody agrees with, from The European Parliament to Amnesty International, from the International Federation of Journalists to Reporters without Borders. SARS-CoV2 Pandemic has worsened an already difficult situation. A lot of authoritarian regimes reacted to the emergency by eliminating every possible public opinion interference limiting, when not directly suppressing, press freedom. In Jordan, at the beginning of the pandemic, the government put a ban on newspapers publication, holding them “responsible for accelerating the spreading of the virus”. Similar decisions were taken, with the purpose of repressing information on the pandemic and the rate at which it was spreading, by Oman, UAE, Morocco, Yemen and Iran.

As weeks went by and with the soaring number of people who tested Covid positive, some governments decided that bans and threats were not enough and went even further.

In Iraq Reuters was accused of misreporting the spreading of the virus last April. The authorities suspended the press agency for three months, revoking its licence. The news agency was also fined 20,000 dollars.

In Egypt The Guardian journalist, Ruth Michaelson got herself into trouble for revealing the real figures of Covid positive people: they seized her press pass and expelled her from the country.

In Jordan two Roja Tv journalists were arrested for interviewing in the streets people who criticized the limitations to citizens imposed by the government.

Algeria had its share of arrests: Kaled Drareni, of Reporters without Borders, tweeted on the social

network the demonstrations that took place against corruption and unemployment. He was accused of attacking the national integrity and jailed.

SARS-CoV 2 has certainly hit dramatically Iran but nobody knows exactly how many people died from it. The press was tamed and silenced by the regime.

Who dared to protest and report the passive attitude of the media was immediately blocked, as in the case of the veteran of the Iran-Iraq war Hadi Maharani, arrested by the police. The same happened to the popular tv presenter Mahmoud Shahariari accused of having diffused a video in which he accused the Iranian authorities of hiding the real scale of the pandemic and releasing, as evidence, a video with images of graveyards built overnight to bury the corpses. Also Masoud Heydari director of the Iranian Labor News Agency and Hamid Haghjoo of the agency Telegram Channel were arrested for misreporting: they had posted a cartoon where the Iranian authorities were criticized.

Arrests on the spot, tortures and violation of human rights are unfortunately common practice in Egypt. Amid this first wave of the pandemic Kholoud Said and Marwa Arafa vanished for weeks and weeks before their families and the humanitarian associations were able to track them...in jail. They had posted on social media critical remarks on the way the government had managed the Covid 19 emergency.

Criticizing the government has always been dangerous in Egypt. The photographer and filmmaker Shady Habash died in a super-maximum security jail in Tora, after having being kept in custody for two years. Shady had been arrested for the music video “Balaha” in which the Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was mocked.





1. Peul refugees on the border between Chad and Central African Republic

No trial, no judgment, but only generic accusations and renewed custody detention, over and over again.

Not to speak of Patrick Zaki, the Egyptian student from the University of Bologna who is still held in custody in Cairo. He has been in jail since February, when he went back to his country to meet his parents. Here too accusations against him are generic and range from fomenting antigovernmental demonstrations to terrorism. This is because he criticized the regime on social media.

SARS CoV 2 pandemic hasn't worsened the freedom of press in Egypt simply because it couldn't be any worse.

Upon the World day of Press freedom, the General Secretary of the European Council Marija Pejčinović Burić asked states not to introduce "any restrictions on media freedom".

«During this health crisis - she wrote - some governments have detained journalists for critical reporting, vastly expanded surveillance and passed new laws to punish "fake news"».

Among the other issues highlighted by the Council of Europe there are also measures threatening journalists' ability to protect their sources and continuous threats to the independence of public television channels.

«Covid 19 pandemic underlines and amplifies the multiple crises which threaten the right to free, independent, varied and reliable information» according to the 2020 World Press Freedom Index published by Doctors Without Borders, which also points out that «the next ten years will be crucial for press freedom» as this pandemic highlights and worsens issues and critical situations which are often not freely denounced, due to governments pressures.

A good example of how serious the concerns expressed by RSF are, is Jordan: a moderate country with strong bonds with the west. The Hashemite Kingdom has committed itself since long to a difficult process of modernization of the country which implies boosting investments, curbing the state deficit (which has



## 2. Iraq -Kurdistan Khanke Refugee Camp

surpassed 100%) and fighting unemployment.

The pandemic interrupted this process and the situation deteriorated. The measures to contain the coronavirus have in this country, as in the rest of the world, put a halt to the national economy impacting dramatically on the thriving touristic sector.

As a result, all plans to fight unemployment and to guarantee a good salary rise to the country's public servants vanished. Not so for the international agreements the country had signed with the IMF, though. This led to price increases and new taxes.

The unavoidable demonstrations with people marching in protest were bitterly repressed and covered up. First, as we saw before, with a ban on newspapers. Secondly by arresting undesirable tv journalists. Finally by issuing an ad hoc law that put under governmental control all Jordanian media through a preventive control of all newspapers, printed media, and all means of expression, propaganda and publicity before being printed out and published or released

with the ultimate purpose of, when deemed necessary, seizing, disabling and closing down the places where they were produced, printed, issued, released.

The overall picture of the whole area is a serious cause of concern. It is not only well-known journalists to be targeted by the repression. Thousands of bloggers, influencers, freelancers have been harassed and intimidated. The goal was not only to hide, maybe for national pride, the real figures of the pandemic but above all to cover up the effects that the pandemic is producing on the economy and the consequent exasperation of the population.

To stop information spreading around freely, it is paramount for autocratic regimes to keep everything under control as much as possible. Covid 19 is making the world poorer and poorer and it is dramatically increasing inequalities. In the Middle East and in Northern Africa there are millions of refugees fleeing from wars, famine and economic depression. They arrived and are still arriving on the





### 3. Afghanistan Shewan Farah Province

coasts of North Africa and in the Middle East. They arrive from Afghanistan, from Syria, from the Horn of Africa from Sahel and not only. They are invisible, imprisoned in their refugee camps, endless and dusty compounds, until they make an attempt and try to reach Europe where Covid 19 is hitting hard and jeopardizing the economic systems of the wealthiest countries, such as ours.

Burying your head in the sand, stopping journalists and communicators from showing the reality of things is not exactly the solution.

«During the current crisis, we need good, free journalism that serves all people, especially those who do not have a voice: journalism that is dedicated to the search for truth and which opens paths toward

communion and peace», said Pope Francis in a tweet on the World Day of Press Freedom. Words which are forward looking and full of wisdom.

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### Ettore Guastalla

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In summer 2019 he was the Minister of Defense spokesperson.



# The Mediterranean: weaponised narratives, disinformation and strategic communication

*Filippo Tansini*

## ***Weaponised Narratives, Propaganda and Strategic Communications***

According to a psychosocial perspective, the dynamics that describe the interactions between actors or communicative agents arise from a condition of tension, asymmetry or conflict between the parties. Numerous cases can be described starting from these three basic dynamics: a group could try to ignite the conflict in the opposing camp through propaganda actions; tensions within a community may require actions to consolidate a common horizon; reactions to a critical situation could be a response to an asymmetry in the information landscape between citizens and institutions. During 2020, the Mediterranean region has been a key international stage onto which crisis and conflicts were acted, represented and narrated by the interested parties. In short, tension, asymmetry and conflict have been general, permanent and widespread dynamics observed in this area in relation to key strategic themes such as the presence of conflicts, energy sources, humanitarian crisis, COVID-19 pandemic responses. Therefore, these communicative tensions have expressed multiple strategies and narratives that, in a different way, addressed the issues of information superiority in a digitised global information environment.

We have gathered and analysed the content published online during the first six month of the 2020 citing the Mediterranean region in relation to any events related to policies, conflicts, public crisis, humanitarian issues. The Mediterranean emerged as a dense field of

different meanings: a crossroad for common users, official and rogue actors, a weaponised concept in conflicting narratives, an objective of international policies and the horizon for the life of millions of people across different countries.

## ***Disinformation in the Social and New Media Landscape***

Disinformation is a multifaceted and complex threat. It goes well beyond every simplistic reduction to information misuse or false stories (i.e. «fake news»). Instead, it is a complex and pervasive phenomenon: a proper malicious communication strategy. Its fundamental objectives are rooted in information manipulation, whatever goals it may be pursued (political, ideological, economical, tactical). Disinformation is defined by the European Commission as a “verifiably false or misleading information created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public.”<sup>1</sup>

The same study on the matter observe that “disinformation erodes trust in institutions and in digital and traditional media and harms our democracies by hampering the ability of citizens to take informed decisions.”<sup>2</sup>

It can be said that, ultimately, disinformation seeks to become your local *vox populi*: a story or a perspective on a certain issue shared by single citizens or spread amongst a social group or even seamlessly intertwined within the public debates of a targeted country influencing the perception of key issues.

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1 Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach, COM(2018) 236, p.3.

2 Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach, COM(2018) 236.p.1.

### *Conflict, Crisis and an 'Informational Fog Of War'*

Conflict, crisis and tensions create online new temporary information fields. They are immediately populated by stakeholders in search of news while at the same time producing or sharing themselves items of content. These fields have to be considered conflict zones, on a par as the theatres of physical operations. Furthermore, it should be noted these digital information fields not only are made up of a heterogeneous and unpredictable system of contents and communication channels. Information organises a shared arena in which numerous agents are acting: citizens, information professionals, state actors, antagonistic agents and irregular forces. These fields are constantly crossed by a plurality of actors, whose real abilities, identities and motivations to intervene in the discussions are to be classified, almost constitutively, as an opaque element. This 'informational fog of war' is all the denser the more frequently the digital arenas of

citizens are transformed into battlefields from deliberate actions.

### *Semantic Analysis of the Mediterranean concept in Online Media content*

We have gathered more than 725k piece of contents related to the Mediterranean and published worldwide (with no language restriction) by web site, blogs, online news between January and the end of June 2020. The obtained dataset has been further sampled, translated and cleaned down to 98,391 items of content (e.g. articles, titles, phrases, users comments). The obtained dataset has been analysed with a *latent semantic analysis* (LSA). In brief, the analysis strategy had a twofold aim: 1) detecting word co-occurrence patterns across different parts of conversations sharing semantic similarity; 2) grouping various similar parts of conversations in equivalence classes to produce a semantic map of the information landscape.

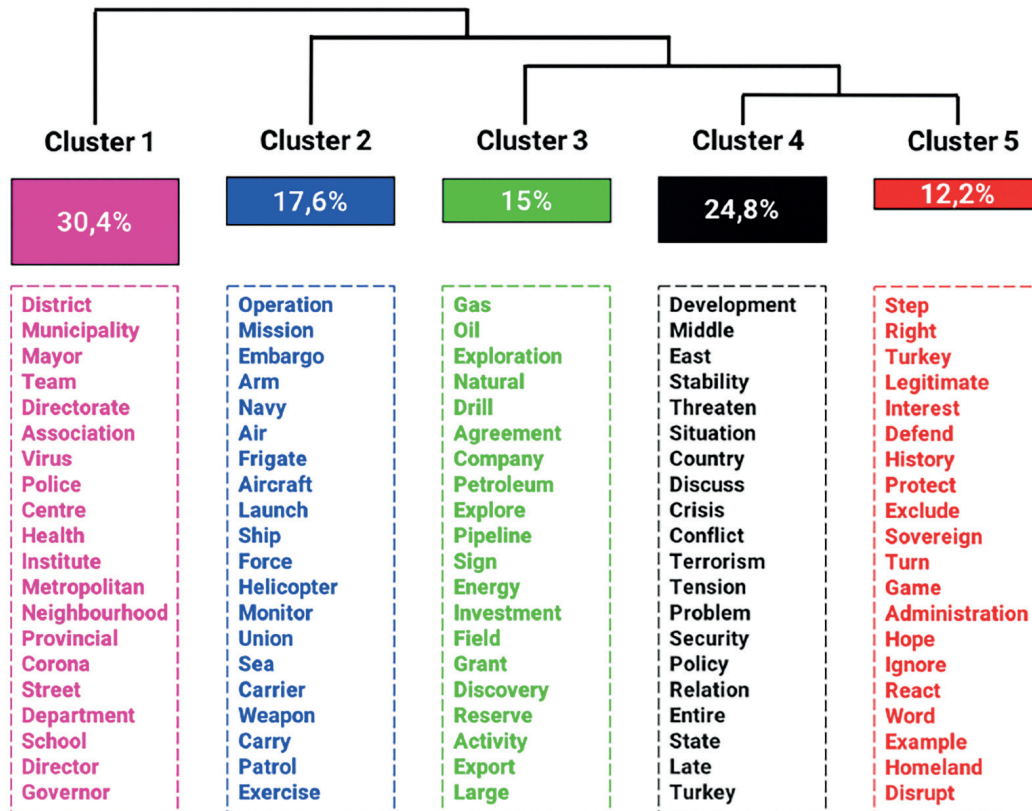


FIG. 1. Dendrogram representing different cluster groups and their top-20 related words

Eventually, the results of this analysis have provided a clear map of the collected content by organising single words into different thematic classes. This map identifies underlining strategic narratives, key themes and their reciprocal relation in the analysed digital information landscape.

### Key Thematic Clusters Analysis

Five major thematic clusters emerged by the semantic analysis of the database concerning the Mediterranean region online discourses (98,391 entries; 1,123,534 occurrences; 28,811 forms). These groups are identified on a statistical basis and show internal thematic consistency.

A visual representation of the family tree illustrating the relationship between the resulting clusters, along with the 20 most relevant words, is provided in Fig.1. Five different clusters are separated into two main groups: the first one is composed by Cluster 1 (30.4% of analysed words); the second comprises Cluster 2 (17.6%), Cluster 3 (15%) and Cluster 4 (24.8%) together with Cluster 5 (12.2%). Each cluster will be now discussed in greater detail.

*Cluster 1: COVID-19 pandemic and its effect amongst civilians and local communities*

- *Cluster 1* represents 30.4% of the entire dataset and is the largest semantic group detected.
- It focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic crisis with a strong accent on the local aspects and policies affecting local community (i.e. keywords: district, municipality).
- The most relevant keywords represent the role of authorities in dealing with the emergency from a normative point of view. The emerged keywords express public offices (mayor, directorate, department, director, governor, institute) and geographical administrative areas (district, municipality). The effects of the pandemic emerges in the word-cloud on the left: it impacts citizens and their social contacts (child, neighbourhood) together with essential services and activities (school, food, work, fishery).



FIG. 2

Rank	Word	X <sup>2</sup>
1	District	6245
2	Municipality	4048
3	Mayor	2930
4	Team	2855
5	Directorate	1583
6	Association	1538
7	Virus	1505
8	Police	1484
9	Centre	1353
10	Health	1316
11	Institute	1300
12	Metropolitan	1283
13	Neighbourhood	1222
14	Provincial	1106
15	Corona	1082
16	Street	944
17	Department	929
18	School	920
19	Director	913
20	Governor	907



### *Cluster 3: Oil and Gas, exploration and production*

[illegible]

FIG. 3

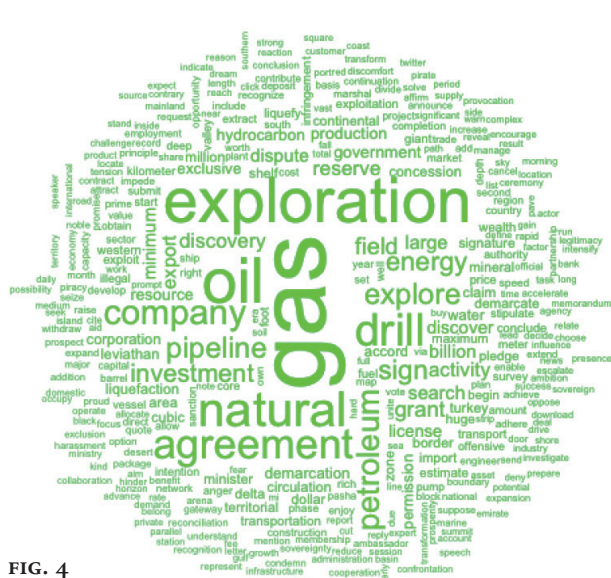


FIG. 4

Rank	Word	X <sup>2</sup>
1	Operation	7617
2	Mission	6547
3	Embargo	5954
4	Arm	5484
5	Navy	3962
6	Air	3840
7	Frigate	2933
8	Aircraft	2861
9	Launch	2858
10	Ship	2844
11	Force	2735
12	Helicopter	2683
13	Monitor	2361
14	Union	2209
15	Sea	2110
16	Carrier	2030
17	Weapon	1939
18	Carry	1669
19	Patrol	1514
20	Exercise	1332

Rank	Word	X <sup>2</sup>
1	Gas	10081
2	Oil	6227
3	Exploration	6198
4	Natural	4512
5	Drill	4144
6	Agreement	3746
7	Company	2962
8	Petroleum	2593
9	Explore	2304
10	Pipeline	2276
11	Sign	2058
12	Energy	1994
13	Investment	1842
14	Field	1646
15	Grant	1461
16	Discovery	1270
17	Reserve	1257
18	Activity	1222
19	Export	1130
20	Large	1128

- *Cluster 3* (15%) identifies the oil and gas resources as one of the key theme discussed online in relation to the Mediterranean Area.
- The cluster refers both to the topic of «exploration and production» (i.e. gas, oil, exploration, natural, drill, petroleum, explore, pipeline, discovery, reserve, activity, large) and the commercial agreements (agreement, company, sign, investment, grant, investment, license).

#### *Cluster 4: Conflicts and instability in the region*

- *Cluster 4* (24.8%) concerns discourses involving security, conflicts and stability issues in the Mediterranean region, and more broadly across the Middle East.
- It should be noted that the cluster is mostly associated with the narration of threats (threaten, crisis, conflict, terrorism, tension, problem, security) and less with solution and policies initiatives (development, stability, discuss, policy, relation, entire, state, late).
- Turkey is the only explicitly cited nation in the top 20 keywords (France with «Macron» and Morocco are cited in the word-cloud).

Rank	Word	X <sup>2</sup>
1	Development	1457
2	Middle	1448
3	East	1187
4	Stability	1030
5	Threaten	1002
6	Situation	989
7	Country	945
8	Discuss	906
9	Crisis	874
10	Conflict	811
11	Terrorism	798
12	Tension	795
13	Problem	769
14	Security	763
15	Policy	741
16	Relation	736
17	Entire	677
18	State	653
19	Late	615
20	Turkey	605

### *Cluster 5: Implicit narratives and content drivers*

- *Cluster 5* (12.2%) isolates a unique group underlying themes and master messages about conflict and instability in the region.
- The top 20 keywords describe conflictual dynamics and implicit narrative drivers in the semantic field of sovereignty (interest, defend, history, sovereign, administration, homeland) and power expression (right, legitimate, protect, exclude, react).



FIG. 5



FIG. 6

Rank	Word	X <sup>2</sup>
1	Step	4367
2	Right	4205
3	Turkey	2112
4	Legitimate	1789
5	Interest	1698
6	Defend	1004
7	History	887
8	Protect	884
9	Exclude	820
10	Sovereign	786
11	Turn	784
12	Game	779
13	Administration	746
14	Hope	676
15	Ignore	621
16	React	603
17	Word	598
18	Example	567
19	Homeland	563
20	Disrupt	554

## A Map to Navigate the Digital Information Environment: Implicit Content Drivers and Thematic Relationship

In fig. 7 the five clusters and their respective illustrative variables are represented within a Cartesian plane. This graph represents the distribution of the emerged clusters in the space and helps to understand their reciprocal relationship. In fact, the spatial opposition or contiguity of each group expresses a communicative dynamic of similarity or opposition implicit in the discourses analysed. *Cluster 1*, centred around the COVID-19 epidemic is isolated on the right (in green): it strongly relates to Turkey, Spain, France and to contents published on February and March (as emerging in the illustrative variables). This cluster is isolated from the others: the discourses about the pandemic crisis and its management are disjointed from those regarding instability and crisis in the Region. Two different planes have emerged in the online ecosystem: one regarding «civilians lives» and other one concerned with the conduct of security and conflicts.

On the left side of the plane, *Clusters 2, 3, 4* and *5* are distributed in two groups. In the lower left of the graphs, we find *Cluster 2* (in yellow), thematically built around EUNAVFOR MED IRINI. As observed, we registered a coherent alignment between the semantic field expressed online and the European Mission's mandate. Juxtaposed to this area, *Cluster 3* (Oil and Gas - pink) and *4* (conflicts and instability in the region - light grey) are intertwined with *Cluster 5* (content drivers - light blue), sharing the same area in the graph opposed to *Cluster 2*. We can now put in perspective and deepen the comprehension of the detected clusters thanks to their internal correspondences and oppositions.

The latter group discourses exploit local instability (i.e. exploration rights in the Eastern Mediterranean), frame conflicts (i.e. the Libyan crisis) and produce public discourses of ongoing crisis (i.e. human smuggling). *Cluster 5* (implicit narratives) should be considered as a



by-product of the prior two groups, featuring underlying themes and master messages around sovereignty and power. Overall, this coherent group of clusters (3, 4 and 5) produced almost 50% of the content. This means that in almost half of the content analysed here the digital information environment of the Mediterranean Region emerges as a battlefield for weaponized narratives leveraging basic values of sovereignty and legitimacy to engage and mobilise both national and international audiences.

## *A way ahead*

As stated by the High Level Group analysis on disinformation produced on the behalf of the European Commission: «the evolving nature of disinformation,

dissemination patterns and techniques requires a regularly updated and evidence-based understanding of the scale, scope and impact of the problem in order to calibrate appropriate responses». A communication strategy (both from an insurgent, nation state or rogue group perspective) aims to involve users, to facilitate the dissemination of messages within a social community and eventually to favour the production of personal contents consistent with the broader favourable narrative. With this in mind, proactive social and media intelligence analysis appear to be an essential tool for three order of reasons. It permits the identification of existing weaponised narratives, the early discovery of latent themes and drivers in the Information Environment, and finally it enables the construction of

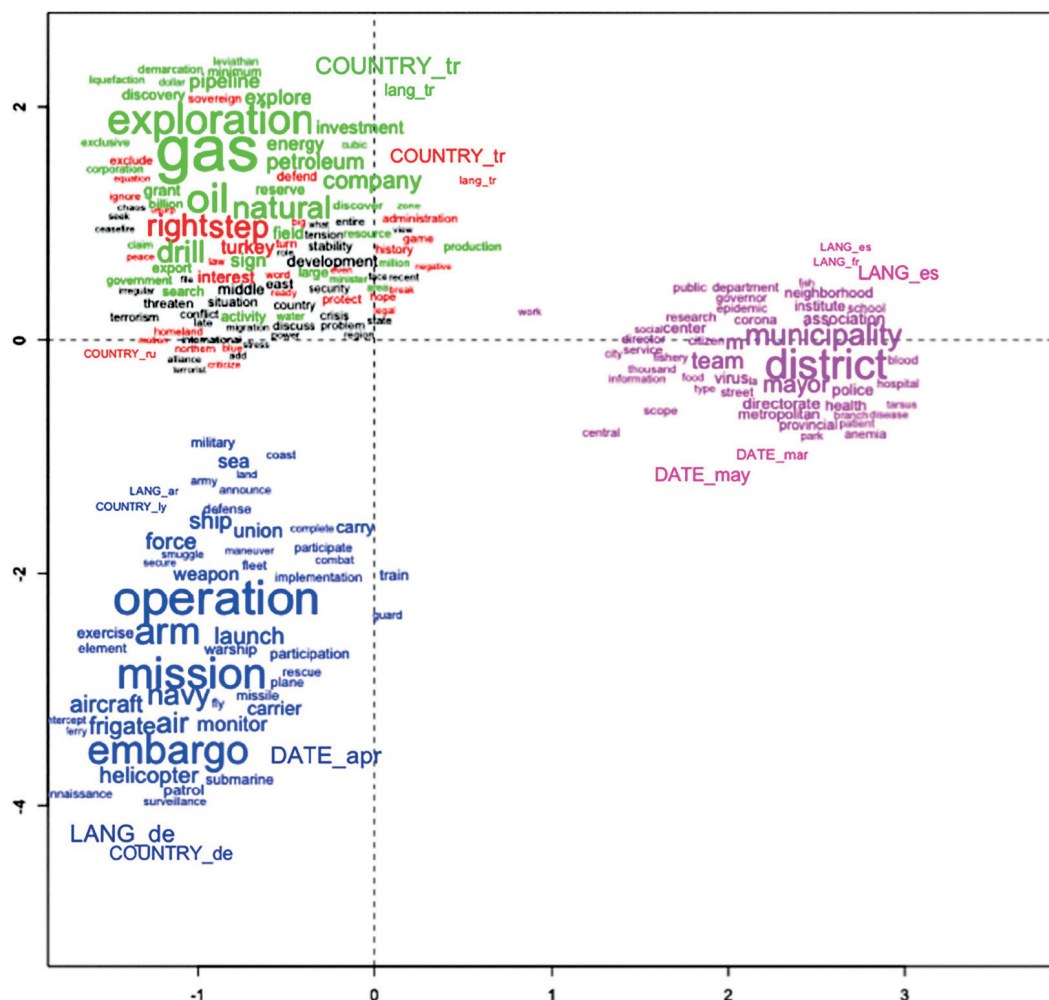


FIG. 7

effective counter-narratives or alternative stories capable of contrasting, challenging or replacing adversarial information operations.

The last point is quite pivotal: in critical situations or conflicts, authorities' activities in the information environment are called to a double task. The first one concerns citizens: the management of communications in times of crisis is essential for organizing an orderly response in civil society, limiting the risks of those who are still exposed to danger, and collecting valuable information on the ground. The second task is to proactively aim at the threats of declared antagonists and opportunists ready to capitalize the new communicative space of the crisis to their advantage (i.e. contrasting propaganda, effect amplification, weakening local authorities or fostering instability).

In the analysis performed, tensions, asymmetries and conflicts shape the information environment

of social and new media as regard to the idea of the Mediterranean, intended as an operational area and an inspiring value-driven narrative. In this context, an integrated communication strategy should be considered as the key asset in manoeuvring across the digital domain of information warfare.

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The Mediterranean is home to multiple humanitarian, security and developmental challenges, affecting populations made even more vulnerable by the health crisis brought about by the Covid-19 pandemics and its economic consequences. To inspire a real debate on how to address such challenges, this volume collects 10 independent authors' contributions as "*food for thought*" to be developed at the 9th edition of SHADE MED.





