



## The State of our Mediterranean

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Everyone is aware that we are living in tumultuous times. Planning ahead has become a speculative exercise like never before with so many factors influencing decision making in contemporary international relations.

Major challenges that have resulted in a completely different structure to our lifestyles in the Mediterranean include COVID-19, climate change and on-going conflicts. While these challenges are not exclusive to our Mediterranean, they are having a more severe impact in our region given the proximity of so many countries in one area and the fact that they are all unfolding simultaneously.

It is thus imperative to not only take stock of developments across the Mediterranean region but also to promote a multitude of multilateral initiatives to try and mitigate the long list of challenges we are facing. To date there have not been enough multilateral initiatives launched and implemented to try and manage more effectively the sources of instability that are unfolding continuously. The time has come to invest both the international political will and economic resources necessary to turn the page from endless conflicts and poverty towards an era characterised by peace and development.

It is very clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed significantly the parameters of global interaction, especially when it comes to travelling. In fact, one of the hardest hit sectors worldwide is tourism which is a principle industry in several parts of the world including the Mediterranean. An immediate clear lesson of the pandemic is the importance to diversify economic activity in order to be able to ride unexpected crises that are certain to emerge from time to time.

Another major challenge that has been with us for a lengthy period of time but is now becoming more acute is climate change. The increase in temperatures and resulting stifling heat is putting more pressure on energy grids as people seek to cope with air conditioning and other types of wellness facilities. A rising




sea level will impact negatively millions of people across the Mediterranean who today live along the sea shoreline. The unbearable living conditions will not only force changes in lifestyle from outdoor to a more indoor activity based situation but also make it much more expensive to live. While advocates of sustainable development are correct in their prescription, they must also ensure that the necessary resources to implement and enforce such an agenda are available.

The Mediterranean is also host to some of the longest on-going conflicts since the end of the Second World War. Three conflicts have dominated regional and international relations, namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Cyprus conflict and the Sahara conflict. Numerous diplomatic initiatives have taken place in an attempt to broker a peaceful resolution to each of these international interstate disputes but to date there has been no successful outcome in any of these cases.

In actual fact, the geo-strategic situation across the Mediterranean has today become even more volatile because decades long hostilities have now been supplemented by a series of new conflicts that have emerged in Libya, Syria and Yemen. Only a renewed multilateral approach to mediation in the Mediterranean will provide possible avenues of cooperation that prevent inter-state and sub-regional divisions from becoming permanent features of our twenty-first century Mediterranean.

We are living in a new world disorder where constant uncertainty and insecurity are a daily occurrence. It is thus essential that we plan contingencies in order to be able to adapt to the ever changing situation. If current trends continue unabated, then the quality of life in the Mediterranean will deteriorate rapidly resulting in political instability and economic recession. Such an outcome will result in making life more complicated and constrained as constant challenges require more resources to mitigate the consequences of crisis situations.



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