

Chatham House

“Crises across the Mediterranean: Confronting the Common Challenge” (London: 14 September 2015)

- Over the last fifteen years, a wide and veritable **arc of crisis** has shown up. It now includes the Persian Gulf States and the strip of land running from Western Africa through Sahel, the Horn of Africa up to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Peninsula.
- In this enlarged reality **the Mediterranean has become the epicenter of global disorder**. The region is now synonym with conflicts, political instability, jihadist extremism, and territorial fragmentation. The general impression is that most of the area – from Syria to Iraq, from Yemen to Libya – has reverted to the classical definition of “**state of nature**”. Where chaos, statelessness and the law of the strongest dominate.
- Today, the many crises across the Mediterranean pose difficult and **unprecedented challenges to our European identity and our values**. These crises call into question our ability to act together, to defend what we are, and to affirm the right of others to a peaceful, prosperous life, free of fear.
- The political upheaval across the Southern Mediterranean and the wider Middle East has put **Europe’s borders** - all of them, from the Central Mediterranean Sea to the English Channel; from the Western Balkans to our Eastern borders - under increasing pressure.

- In this respect, **migration is a dramatic** issue. But we should not call it an emergency; it is rather a long-term challenge.
- Not since the fall of the **Berlin Wall** had Europe seen a comparable wave of migrants. The very reason for that exodus - the crumbling of repressive regimes in Central and Eastern Europe - contained in itself the seeds of its healing. It gave space to democracies that found their way to stability and growth.
- Today's **ongoing mass migration into Europe** is different and more complicated. Let's have a reality check.
- **First.** Migration flows will be on the agenda of Mediterranean politics for a long time, given the **demographic imbalance** between ageing European countries, the young Southern shore and Africa. In 2050, the population in Europe should decrease from 730 to 700 million people, while in Africa it will reach 2.4 billion inhabitants.
- **Second.** The current crises in **Libya, Syria and Iraq** won't be settled shortly. A workable arrangement for those countries, leading to functioning States, is still difficult to predict in the foreseeable future. As it is difficult to imagine a rapid social and institutional improvement in **Sub-Saharan Africa**.

- The historian **Fernand Braudel** saw the Mediterranean as a “crossroad of civilizations”. A cultural *koiné*. A system in which all things merge together and together recreate an original unity.
- But this *koiné* comes from a sea of diversity. **David Abulafia** tells us that the Mediterranean has historically had several names: Mare Nostrum for the Romans, the White Sea for the Turks, the Great Sea for the Jews, the Middle Sea for the Germans, the Great Green for the Ancient Egyptians. This tells us how complex and plural is the history where Europe, Africa and Asia meet.
- Today that system is at risk of becoming a **symbol of conflicts and divisions**. A permanent battlefield. A place where conflicts and contrasts prevail.
- Are we **doomed to surrender to chaos**, and just be bystanders in the making of history in the Mediterranean? Certainly not. We must act rapidly. We have the political responsibility and the moral duty to draft **a long-term, comprehensive strategy** that will contribute to stabilizing the Mediterranean.
- In order to define the contents of this vision, the European Member States have to deal with **five matters of contention** within the public debate, which are often exploited for internal political purposes.

- **Well-being versus solidarity.** Some political leaders, in Italy as elsewhere, respond to the fluxes of migrants and refugees and to the threat posed by jihadist terrorism, manipulating emotions, fear and illusions. In the age of social media and global markets, they theorize a regress into self-sufficient societies, intolerant of diversity. They build walls and close borders, resurrecting the ghost of a nationalistic Europe. They fabricate a contrast between our well-being and the need to be sympathetic to those who escape wars and famine. They forget that rich and advanced societies should be consistent with the principles of what Jürgen Habermas has called the “cosmopolitan democratic culture”. That’s why Europe must be able to oversee the complexity of the world without giving up its well-being, or its values.
- **North-South divide.** In the recent past, Northern Europe believed that it was sheltered from the threats of our time, mainly coming from the South. Likewise, following the Russo-Ukrainian crisis, Central Europe believed Moscow to be the only possible threat to its security. But as facts have shown, these were just misconceptions. Migration fluxes and Daesh’s terrorism are global issues that concern the whole of Europe. Therefore, they must be tackled collectively, and everyone must contribute to a solution. To ignore such a demand, and keep Europe divided into North, East and South, in a process of endless bargain, is a political and historical mistake. Such self-representation weakens our standing in the world.

- **Interventionism or isolationism?** The challenges presented by critical areas in the Mediterranean are particularly complex today, as one of their main causes is the collapse of national States and their institutions. This is the case with Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. This undeniable hurdle combines with the American and European reluctance to engage in areas of crisis, because of lessons learned in Iraq and Libya. Nonetheless, the international community's moral duty should be to stay engaged in managing major international crisis and in protecting human rights. Governments and public opinion must refrain from a fatalistic attitude that would amplify the "globalization of indifference", which Pope Francis has so powerfully denounced.
- The first goal, for Italy, was to increase the awareness of the importance of such a challenge. This does not mean to underestimate tensions with Russia. Rather, our objective was to point out that we are facing new challenges, towards which both NATO and the EU seem less equipped. The threat does not come from traditional inter-state conflicts. It is a hybrid. It mixes up internal and external dimensions. It does not set apart social, political or religious motivations. It is a threat that comes even from our fellow citizens.
- It is good news that in the last months this awareness is growing. But still not enough. We are still **paying the price of a season – from**

the second intervention in Iraq to the one in Libya – where military actions not accompanied by a political strategic plan, created a void filled in by chaos and Daesh.

- However, the Mediterranean can't be the core of Western reluctance. What the Romans called **Mare Nostrum**, cannot become **Mare Nullius**, nobody's sea.
- **Security and democracy.** In the past, some countries postulated that democracy could be exported to Mediterranean populations. Or that it would be the unavoidable outcome of the so-called "Arab springs". Reality proved otherwise. The Governments of Tunisia and Egypt are practicing a very different balance between the urgency to ensure the security of their citizens against terrorism, and the need to do so while respecting democratic principles. It is a complex process. It is our duty to support the Mediterranean countries and offer economic and political cooperation, without imposing ready-made development models. But let us emphasize that **there is no real security without the rule of law, enforced by a functioning State, and the respect of minorities**, which are a key feature of our liberal democracies.
- **The West and Islam.** First the tragedy of September 11, then al-Qaida and Daesh have fostered a hostile perception of the relationship between the West and Islam. Negative stereotypes, distorted impressions, mistrust and fear prevail. But we should

spare no efforts in trying to retrieve a positive interaction with Islam. The real clash is not between different beliefs and cultures, but between those who favor interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and those who fuel hatred and violence.

- Both of them must be fought and persecuted. Firstly, regarding **extremist fundamentalism**, by the very same Islamic communities. “We have to defeat our renegades” – **King Abdullah** of Jordan told me three months ago – “you can help us”. And then, hatred and violence must be fought within our countries.
- The **protection of religious minorities** must remain a priority for the international community. We must act to stop the exodus of **Christians** from the Middle East, the birthplace of Christianity, and the place of historical and precious coexistence of the three monotheistic religions.
- Working out these five issues is not a wish list. It should become **Europe’s new historic mission**. The integration process has allowed Europe to heal the wounds of World War II. The European enlargement has bridged the gaps caused by the Cold War. Today the EU is again called upon to fix the flaws of history, and redirect its priorities towards the Mediterranean, in terms of strategies, policies and financial resources.

- Let us be frank. The recent history of EU's engagement in the Mediterranean is a history of failure.
- Something is changing in Europe right now. Italy has played a trailblazer role. Now, the **European Commission, Germany, France and other EU member states** are showing a long-term outlook in managing thousands of refugees. It is now more clear to everyone what is really at stake in the Mediterranean for us: we have heard and experienced a "wake up calls" all throughout the continent, all throughout 2015.
- In the upcoming months the European Union and the International Community will have **to work in three different directions.**
- **The first one is managing migration flows.** Italy expects the EU to adopt a permanent and mandatory mechanism to relocate refugees among its member states. It anticipates that the EU will define both a common European asylum (exceeding the provisions of Dublin) and a common European repatriation system. A closer cooperation with the migrants' countries of origin and transit must be developed as well: Italy is working hard on this issue. Likewise, the EU-Africa Conference, to be held at La Valletta in November, will be an opportunity not to be missed. Finally, the legitimate use of force is required to dismantle the criminal network of human traffickers. The EUNAVFORMED operation, that we expect to enter soon its second stage, is designed towards this end.

- We want and we must share such engagement with the **United Kingdom**. For this reason, I wish that the political dynamics towards the referendum will not deprive Europe of the British contribution on such strategic issue.
- **The second direction concerns security and political strategy.** While working to hinder Daesh and the destabilizing forces in the region, we should extensively invest in diplomacy. The Vienna agreement on the Iranian nuclear program has shown that dialogue and diplomacy can bear fruit even in the Middle East. Besides ensuring that the nuclear agreement be properly implemented, and that Teheran plays a constructive role in the Middle East, we should give diplomacy a chance in Syria, to favour political transition.
- Such transition appears today to be still far, but not impossible. In fact, opposite prejudicial positions of those who proposed to chase away Assad by bombing him before any negotiations, and those who defended him no matter what and forever, have gradually softened. Today, perhaps also as a consequence of the Iran deal, a narrow **window of opportunity just opened for a political transition, leading** to the Assad's exit, without creating a void filled by terrorism. I also wish that the strengthening of the Russian presence aims at protecting its long-standing bases in Syria, and at showing its role in the region, rather than to shift military power in

favour of Assad. If it had to be the latter, this would bring an additional complication to an already dramatic frame.

- In **Libya** we have to support the formation of a Government of National Unity. **Israelis and Palestinians** should be encouraged to resume the Peace Process, with a stronger role to play by Europe. And **Egypt, Tunisia and Lebanon** should be supported in their efforts to stabilize their countries.
- **The third task concerns the economic front.** Our ambitious goal is to integrate the Mediterranean in the global economy, by launching a sort of **“Marshall Plan” for the region**. Towards this end, we will need to involve the most important international financial institutions, and combine the logics of aid with that of investments. We should foster a better integration of the Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean. We should as well involve regional partners like the Gulf States and global actors like China, whose initiative “One belt, one road” embraces the Mediterranean. We should exploit Africa’s potential, whose economic growth has reached an average rate of 4-5%, and presents major investment opportunities in energy and infrastructure. Finally, we should involve the private sector, and national promotion banks could act as multipliers of private investment as in the Juncker Plan. It is clear that the development of a sound Mediterranean market is a key interest for Europe as a trade power.

- In order to achieve these results, Europe needs **fresh ideas** and new perspectives. That is why Italy has started an independent and high-level initiative called “**MED-Rome Mediterranean Dialogues**”. It aims at stimulating new ideas on the transformations afoot in the extended Mediterranean region by questioning traditional approaches and old policies. The initiative will be officially launched in December in Rome.
- **Italy is at the forefront in the Mediterranean.** It is worthwhile to recall that only in 2015 we have saved more than 100.000 migrants in the Strait of Sicily. Poet T. S. Eliot’s line, “*Fear death by water*” in *The Waste Land* implies the cruelty of drowning. It powerfully resonates in the Mediterranean today. When we save lives, we are always on the right side of the history.
- Moreover, we are among the most active participants in the international coalition against **Daesh** (especially in the training and counter-financing sectors). With regard to **Libya**, we are ready to play a leading role towards its stabilization, following the formation of a Government of National Unity. In crucial moments for the official talks, let me remind that the development and perpetuation of Libya’s institutions are key for every long-term relationship with Africa and are key for Italian interest in the area.
- While contributing to the Mediterranean security, Italy is engaged in drafting a “**positive agenda**” for the region. Being the fourth

trade partner of the region after the USA, Germany and China, our aim is to seize all opportunities the region offers. The Mediterranean is not just crisis, danger and instability. For instance, the Mediterranean is still an unexploited market. Suffice it to mention the discovery of a **gas deposit near the Egyptian coast, recently made by ENI**, which will contribute to the stability in the area.

- Despite the complex regional context, Italy will be herald of the need of a “positive agenda” for the Mediterranean. The hope is that the area will be again **a place where different cultures acknowledge, respect and influence each other**. The hope is that we shall all acknowledge that the Mediterranean is the place where Europe’s future happens. I firmly believe that this hope is in our hands and I look forward to hearing your questions.

Thank you.