

EMEA Commentaries offer concise, policy-oriented insights into topical issues in Euro-Mediterranean affairs. The views expressed are attributable only to the author in a personal capacity and not to any institution with which he is associated.

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What Scenarios for the Euro-Mediterranean in 2030?

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The Southern Mediterranean region is at a historical turning point following the unprecedented uprisings that ended many decades of repressive authoritarian regimes. Before 2010, and the start of the Arab uprisings, the 'business as usual' scenario prevailed in a blend of un-sustainability and partial Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Un-sustainability, coupled with phoney stability, was thought to be the long-term future for southern Mediterranean countries, as no credible prospects for radical democratic political changes were envisaged. On the contrary, the deterioration of political freedoms and the rule of law appeared to be the norm. The European Union's policies towards the region were equally unsatisfactory as they failed to drive the region towards a sustainable future. Following the Arab revolts, radical domestic changes are now being prepared and external actors' policies towards the region are being rethought. While ruling out business as usual, other scenarios may emerge in a 2030 perspective, depending on the interaction of relevant signals that could lead to one or another plausible future.

Starting with the worst possible scenario: this would simply translate as the "Euro-Mediterranean Area under threat" with heavy losses; where the Mediterranean Sea would divide conflicting civilisations. Sporadic conflicts would become long drawn out and spread from one country to another, leading to political uncertainty and mounting economic and social difficulty. The non-resolution of the Middle East and the Western Sahara conflicts would exacerbate tensions in the Mashreq and in the Maghreb. The uncertainties and tensions would offer new opportunities for terrorist organisations and radical movements to take power, and the absence of cooperating authorities would undermine the EU's and other geopolitical actors to achieve necessary cooperation on immigration, security and energy. As a result, in 2030, the Mediterranean would border a conflict zone that, if left uncontained, would spread to the northern frontiers, leading to the repetition of a sad history: war and collapse.



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This scenario must not be underestimated. Averting it is crucial if we are to avoid the worst for the Euro-Mediterranean generations to come. Two futures of sustainability, with different paths of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, could become reality if there is sufficient political and economic will, and if the Arab revolts are taken as an opportunity.

In the perspective of a 'Euro-Mediterranean Union', recognising their common past and believing in their common future, the European and the southern Mediterranean countries would form an integrated region with a common market. This integration scheme could follow the European Economic Community model, to which Norway and Switzerland belong. This would result in the adoption of the EU 'acquis' and lead to more convergence. Under such a hypothetical scenario, the current tensions and conflicts in the Euro-Mediterranean region could be resolved. As not all countries are at the same level of political and economic development, the differentiated approach of the EU under the renewed neighbourhood policy might give rise to a number of countries fulfilling the requirements to become member of the EU economic bloc sooner than others. The Union for the Mediterranean could play a key role in fostering regional cooperation; thus deepening the economic integration between all countries of the region. However, the importance of UfM would diminish over time when all southern Mediterranean countries become members of the EEA. The successful achievement of a larger and more powerful Euro-Mediterranean community would influence the global world scenario up to the year 2030, with the emergence of a new tri-polar world: the US, China and Euro-Med, where the whole Euro-Mediterranean Union really matters on the global stage.

Another perspective worth looking at is the 'Euro-Mediterranean Alliance', which keeps the two regions separate: the EU on the northern side (which may or may not be enlarged to include the Balkan States and Turkey) and the southern Mediterranean countries to the south (which may or may not include other African and Middle Eastern countries). Under such a scenario, there is no perspective (or need) for membership of the European Economic Area. As a result, the European Neighbourhood Policy would become obsolete if it were not rethought to integrate this vision.



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After the Arab revolts, the southern Mediterranean could become more organised and integrated, capitalise on a stronger role for the Arab League and other institutions such the Arab Maghreb Union. Other players might play a greater role in the region, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The EU and the southern Mediterranean could then establish a Euro-Mediterranean Alliance Treaty, which would cover a number of common key interest areas such as peace and security, co-development, shared citizens' rights, youth, education, research, innovation and intercultural dialogue. A renewed framework for the UfM would help to achieve the common objectives stated in the Treaty. Such a vision is coherent with a global multi-polar world scenario for the year 2030, without a unique dominant leader. Both the European Union and the southern region would assume their separate roles on the global stage, maintaining preferential relationships of co-development on some key areas of common interest.

Today, it seems that the signals corroborate the scenario of a polarised Mediterranean. Two years since the Arab revolts, countries are still beset by uncertainty, with opposing forces interacting without clear targets or direction; shifting between the pressure of continued unsustainability and hopes of achieving sustainability, while coping with new realities and dynamics. The EU response remains timid, short-term and with no coherent vision. Hence, moving to a successful and sustainable future, be it under the Euro-Med Union or the Euro-Med Alliance scenario does not seem very plausible today, unless serious action towards one or the other path is taken without delay.

Disclaimer

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