

THE MEDITERRANEAN: AN UNSUSTAINABLE WALL TOWARDS EUROPE¹

Antonio Golini, Elena Grimaccia, Tommaso Rondinella, Daria Squillante

1. Introduction

When we think at the past greatness of the Mediterranean we recollect images of the Magna Graecia or of the Maritime Republics of Italy. The merging of Roman and Greek cultures in ancient times led to the flourishing of a sublime culture: Greek idealism, a civilization of music and philosophy, and the Roman pragmatism, made of law and rationality, blended to form a new culture which forms the basis of Western civilization. During the modern age, the control over the sea of the Maritime Republics made possible to build world jewels like Venice, Pisa and dozens of other magnificent coastal cities throughout the whole sea.

Therefore, the Mediterranean Sea was an element of wealth and cultural and economic exchange, while the Alps, in the Italian perspective, were associated with closure and backwardness.

Then, in the last centuries, great tunnels were built through the mountains, the European Union has been created and, more recently, the Iron Curtain has fallen. This led the Alps to become a region of fruitful exchanges while the Mediterranean became a closure element, a natural border, especially to people flows.

Today, in the news and in our geo-political idea, the Mediterranean Sea is much more associated to the tragic migration events: the deaths of thousands of migrants full of hope shipwrecked south of Lampedusa. The Mediterranean sea is the new wall protecting the “fortress Europe”, the old iron curtain which today divides well-being from malaise, full democracy from partial democracy. On both its sides, this novel wall projects worrying shades: human, political, economic. On the side facing the African shore it appears pitiless with the deaths of the migrants pushed to travel by violence, political fragmentation and poverty. On its northern side facing southern European countries – Spain, Italy and Greece in particular-it shows

¹ The themes presented in this paper are part of a long term reflection by the authors and have thus been already presented in other previous conferences. This contribution is an extended version of a paper presented at the Conference "Sustainable management of the Mediterranean", held at the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in Rome on March 21st 2014.

a dramatic economic crises which does not show its final ending. Alike people from Eastern Europe who tried to jump over the wall, now migrants try to “jump over” the sea, yet leaving thousands of dead on the ground. A horizontal wall, insatiable of human lives much more than that old “vertical wall” challenged by who longed for a better future in Western Europe. This carnage, happening every other day in the our seas, should be our first concern.

A renewed flourishing of the Mediterranean basin must represent an Italian and European policy priority, looking for stronger cooperation, better economic conditions and the containing of migratory phenomena

2. Demographic trends

The impact on economy, society and geopolitics of demography is crucial: the amount and composition of the world population is one of the major driving force to draw the future, both at national and international level.

World population reached 7 Billion on October 31st, 2011, according to the United Nations Population Division², while the US Census Bureau made a lower estimate, for which the 7 billion mark was only reached on March 2012.

Projections carried out by the UN show that, in 2050, the world population will exceed 9 billion, under the pressure of intermediate developed countries. African population will double from the current one billion to two billion. Population in Asia will show a peak of 5 Billion people in 2050, but will then invert the trend and have a decrease.

Projections for Europe instead foresee a slight decrease from 2010 to 2050, and a further reduction before 2100 (100 thousand people less).

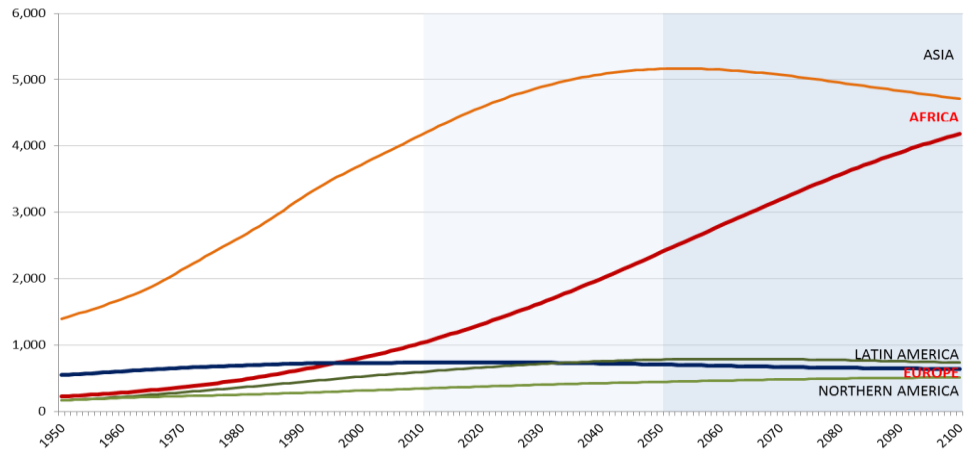
The global demographic centre of gravity is thus moving toward the South of the World.

The Mediterranean area is one – and probably the most important - of the frontiers of this transformation. In the Fifties, the population of Southern Europe represented twice that of North Africa. Today North Africa is the most populous, and in 2050 it is forecasted that it will exceed two-thirds of the population of the entire area, reversing the proportion.

Population growth in sub-Saharan Africa will be in the next forty to fifty years one of the strongest ever recorded in the history of mankind

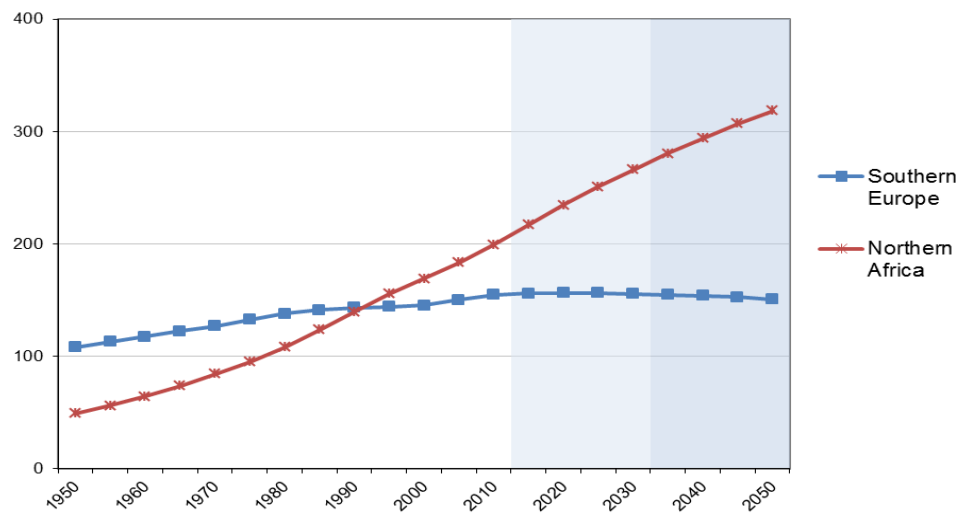
² Considering the average fertility scenario.

Figure 1 – World Demographic trends and forecasts (population in millions)



Source: UN Population Division

Figure 2 – Demographic trends and forecasts in the Mediterranean area (population in millions)

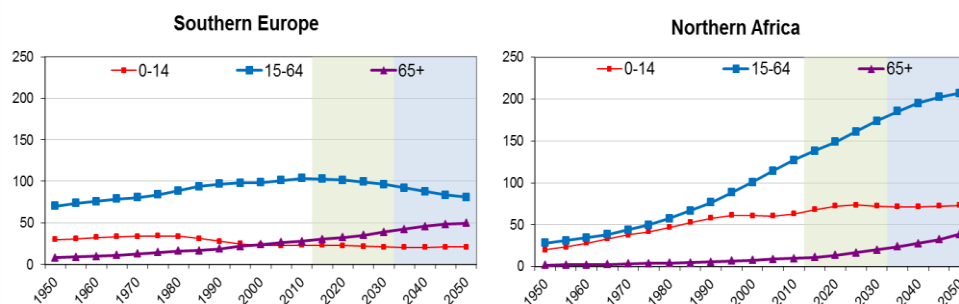


Source: UN Population Division

In particular, by 2060 - that is to say in the space of little more than a generation - it is expected that Africa's population will grow to 1.6 billion people and at the same time that Europe's population decline by 40 million.

In Northern Africa, it will not only be observed a huge population growth, but also a structural transformation: the median age will increase from the current 25.5 to nearly 33.6 years. Total fertility rate, that in the region used to be of more than 6 children per women until the 1980s, is today of 3 and is expected to decrease until 2.16, very close to the 1.8 foreseen in Southern Europe. In 2100, the two rates could be equal. The foreseen demographic structural change will lead to an increase of people aged 65 or older, whose share on the total population will move from current 5 per cent to over 12 per cent in 2050. In the same period, people younger than 14 years old, will remain stable in absolute values, while reducing their share in the population from 31.2 to 22.9 per cent.

Figure 3 – Population in the Mediterranean area by age class (millions)



Source: UN Population Division

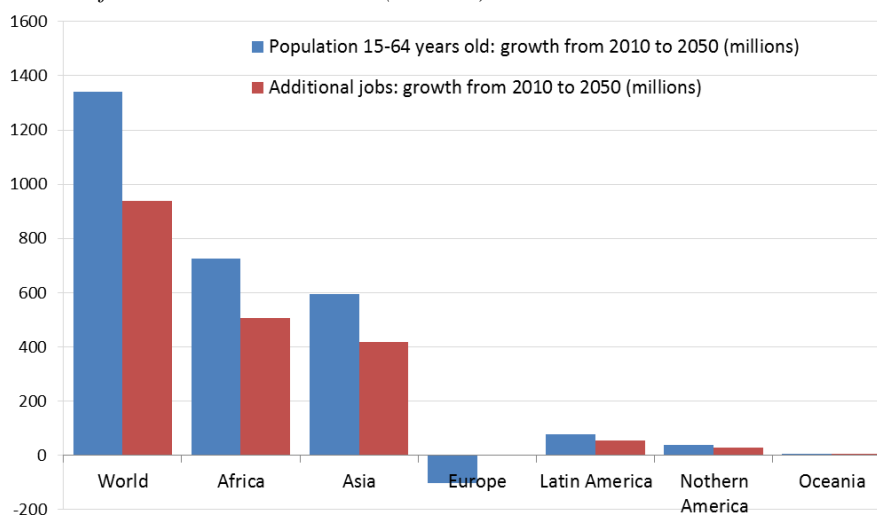
Coming to Italy, demographic trends foresee a country of elderly people (Golini 2009). About a third of the Italian population is projected to be 60 or over in 2050, up from 20 per cent nowadays, and the percentage of people living to their 80s and 90s will increase from the current 5.8 per cent to 13.6. The total population is foreseen to slightly decrease because the low fertility rate, and consequent negative natural growth rate which will not be completely compensated by the arrival of new migrants and by their relatively higher fertility rate. This dynamic is common to most Southern Europe countries, that will show an increase of the median age of the population from the current 43.1 to 50 years³.

Of course, at global level, along with the population, also the amount of the workforce is expected to explode. In Africa, it will be necessary to create about 725 million new jobs in the next 40 years, only in order to absorb the increase of labour supply due to demographic factors. These deep changes in the amount and

³ According to the UN population forecasts (medium fertility scenario).

structure of the population should have very relevant effects on the relationship between the two areas.

Figure 4 – *Expected growth of working age population and number of jobs required to face it – Years 2010-2050 (millions)*



Source: UN Population Division

Africa is in between of two oceans, but above it has only a small sea: the Mediterranean. Therefore, migrations flows from Africa can only go towards North, towards Europe.

Therefore, policies that enhance the economic and social development of the entire Mediterranean area will benefit not only Southern Europe but also Northern Africa. In particular, the North African migration system entered a migration transition. The most salient features of this have been, besides sustained out-migration, increasing immigration from sub-Saharan countries, as well as the new role of North Africa as a transit zone for sub-Saharan and even Asian migrants who want to reach Europe. North Africa now constitutes a filter to a sub-Saharan migration pressure that would be otherwise beyond control.

3. Migrations

Demographic imbalances and the different speed in the economic progress of countries have tended historically to be rebalanced through migratory flows. In 2010, over 160 million people were involved in migrations. The majority of

migrants live in the North of the world (128 million), but come from the South (147 million). However, it is worth noticing that movements take place mostly within the same Regions of the world (45 million migrants within Asia and 38 within Africa in 2010).

The current perspective suggests that migrations, although necessary, may not be sufficient to resolve all the miseries of the world, as they were in the 1800s and the 1900s. The pressure from the southern shores of the Mediterranean- the natural border of Europe - to give vent to the population explosion in Africa, will only continue to increase. The imbalance between the ability of the North of the world to absorb new workers (2-3 million people per year) and the potential number of migrant labour force (20-30 million per years – according to different forecasts) is huge. And there are no “new worlds” to populate. Moreover, the recent financial and economic crisis has burned millions of jobs in Europe, causing an unwanted competition for jobs. On this matter, it is worth to remind that migrations in developed countries are needed also in downturns because they help rebalance not only quantitative labour market disequilibria, but also the qualitative ones.

According to the data on “residence permits” in Italy, Africans account for 30 per cent of non-EU citizens legally residing in Italy in 2013. More than two-thirds of African migrants come from North Africa, and one-quarter from Western Africa. The flows from the Horn of Africa, although doubled in absolute value over the past 20 years, have lost much of their weight on the total of African residents.

The *Mezzogiorno* of Italy (which, as well known, includes the southern regions and the Islands) should have a key role on the Mediterranean area: it constitutes the natural landing place of migrant flows from Africa and the natural Southern border of Europe. But, very few immigrants settle down in the Southern Italy. In the North and in the Centre of Italy on the 1st of January 2013, were registered 10 foreigners every 100 residents, while in the *Mezzogiorno* there were only 3 (7 percent being the national average). The *Mezzogiorno* is currently living a deep demographical crisis, with the lowest values of fertility rate in Italy, and with strong flows of internal migrations towards North, determining a heavy loss of human capital. Therefore, it is losing the opportunity to ensure a demographic rebalance, increasing the numerosness of the younger generation living in the area, through migrants’ inflows.

4. Southern Europe countries: the new “horizontal wall” and the economic crisis

After the period 2008-2013, the southern countries of the European side of the Mediterranean not only have not yet retrieved the previous – and albeit insufficient

– values achieved in the socioeconomic development sector's indicators, but are still crossing a slowdown in the economic activity. During the economic crisis, across the European Union, 5.9 million jobs have been destroyed. Over the same period, Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal have lost 6 million and 122 thousand jobs, with a shocking decline four times greater than the average decline observed in Europe (-11.5% and -2.6 % respectively).

The European Union has always indicated the employment as a key factor not only for the well-functioning and competitiveness of national States and the European Union, but also for the achievement of an inclusive society. High levels of employment not only reduce inequality and poverty between regions and social groups but play also a wider role in people's lives in identity, participation and inclusion. Large unemployment, on the contrary, not providing opportunities for a meaningful engagement in society and a sense of self-worth, leads to social exclusion, degradation of individual skills and poverty.

Germany, the country of the "fallen wall", realized the best European performance, with an increase of 1 million 909 thousand workers between 2008 and 2013, and a positive trend of its employment rate, which closed the considered period at 73.3% (+3.2 percentage points more than in 2008). In Italy, on the contrary, one of the countries closer to the invisible but firm "horizontal wall" in the Mediterranean, over the same period, the employment rate declined to 55.6% (-3.1 percentage points).

Italy, Portugal, Cyprus, Spain, Croatia and Greece show a combination of a very low current employment rate and a negative trend experimented over the last five years, both for the employment rate and the number of employed people. On the contrary, Germany, Austria, Luxembourg and Sweden not only highlight a current employment rate above the EU-28 average (64,1% in 2013), but also experienced a positive variation (2008-2013) of the employment rate.

Italy, moreover, highlights worrying internal differences, with a *Mezzogiorno* more and more far from the national and continental path of economic growth.

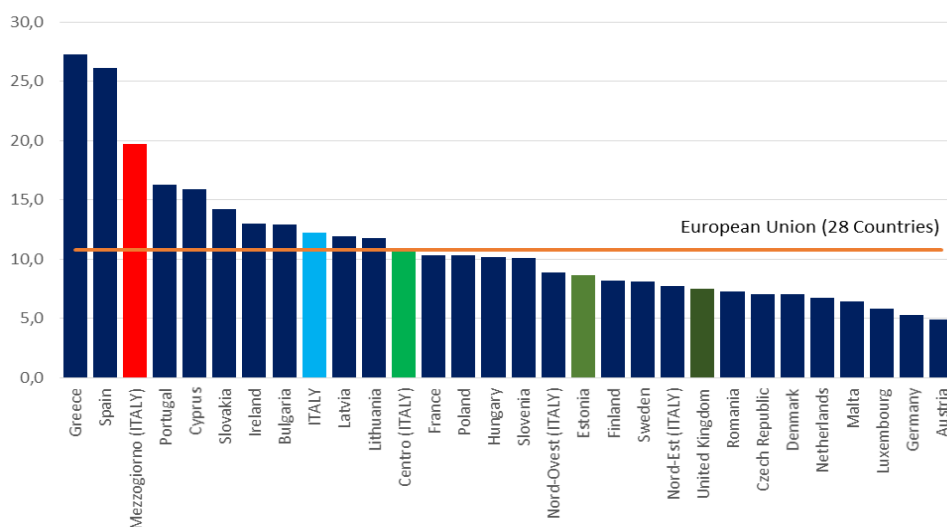
Looking at unemployment, it can be observed that a general negative trend crossed and characterized European Countries over the last five years: in 2013, the European Union reached the unsustainable figure of 26 million and 200 thousand unemployed people, due to an increase of 9 million and 460 thousand from the beginning of the crisis.

But, while in Germany, between 2008 and 2013 unemployed diminished by 866 thousand, the Mediterranean European Countries were at the same time undermined by an unemployment rate significantly higher than the Eu-28 average (10.8%), with percentages that in Greece and Spain even exceed 25%.

In Italy, in 2013 the observed unemployment rate reached 12.2% (+5.4 percentage points more compared with 2008), with an increasing that particularly

involved the *Mezzogiorno* (+7.7 percentage points), where the indicator reached a value of 19.7%, the worst value observed in EU-28 after Greece and Spain.

Figure 5 – Unemployment rate (%) in the European Union and Italia geographical macro-areas (2013)



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

The economic crisis particularly damaged the youngest generations. The average EU-28 employment rate of the age group 15-34, which in 2013 reached a value of 54.5%, decreased by 4.3 percentage points between 2008 and 2013. One more time, three European southern countries registered the worst decreasing trends: Spain (-17.4 percentage points), Greece (-16.8 percentage points) and Italy (-10.2 percentage points). Indeed, the economic and financial crisis led to a meaningful workforce reshaping by age, the more and more excluding the younger generations from the participation to the productive system.

The lack of a serious Euro-Mediterranean cohesion to find strategic synergies with the “other side of the wall”, which should on the contrary be a natural economic partner and outlet, doesn’t facilitate the healing of this complicated and multidimensional asymmetry between European Countries.

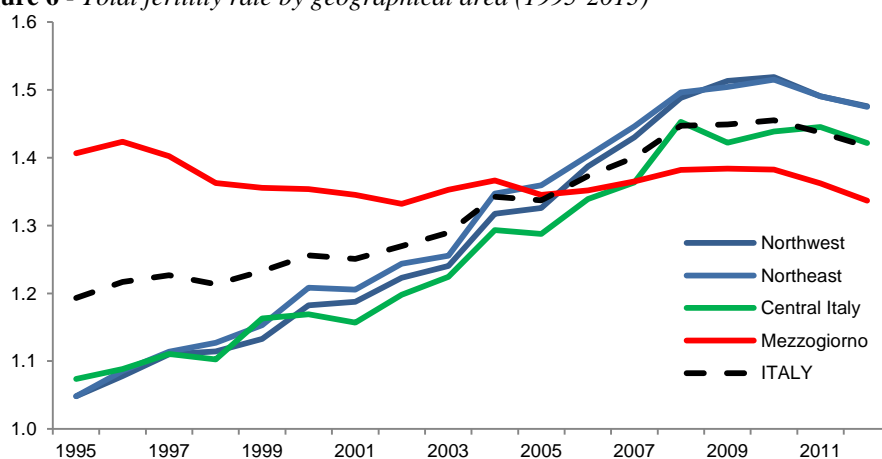
5. Italy outstretched into the Mediterranean: the case of Mezzogiorno

This economic framework, which affects the entire Italian territory, stands out with an exponential intensity and pervasiveness in the *Mezzogiorno* of Italy. The

“southern question” (“la questione meridionale”) has dramatically accompanied the history of Italy since its foundation as a nation-state, and has not been resolved over the decades.

Moreover, over the last decade, the socio-economic imbalance between the northern and the southern regions has been particularly exacerbated by the economic crisis. Consequently, the *Mezzogiorno* region seems to be the more and more a detached socio-economic iceberg both from Italy and from Europe.

Figure 6 - Total fertility rate by geographical area (1995-2013)



Source: ISTAT

In the South of Italy, where started the progressive and widespread loss of jobs, the economic crisis started earlier (in 2009 the male employment rate decreased by 2 percentage points, in comparison with -1.6 at a national level) and has been more serious (-4.2 percentage points compared with a decrease by -3.1 at national level). For the employment rate in the *Mezzogiorno*, the Italian Labour Force Survey registered a decrease by 4.1 percentage points over the last five years, exasperating already persistent inequalities among regions. The employment rate of *Mezzogiorno* was 42.0% in 2013, which is a very low level both in absolute terms and compared with the percentages of the other macro-areas: the 2013 employment rate was 59.9% in the Centre, 63.8% in the North-West and 64.9% in the North-East. Labour market difficulties determine a tragic level of absolute and relative poverty and material deprivation. In 2013, the relative poverty incidence was 12.6% among Italian households but it reached the 26% in the *Mezzogiorno*. Over the last year, the incidence of absolute poverty registered in *Mezzogiorno* was 12.6%, compared to the levels registered in the Centre (6.0%) and especially in the North part of Italy (5.7%), further separating the “two Italies”.

Another factor condemning the South of Italy to dangerously becoming more an “iceberg” detached from Europe is the emerging and abiding demographic crisis, which is weakening the already economically and financially exhausted *Mezzogiorno*, and pushing the southern part of Italy into a very quick and intensive ageing process.

The Italian *Mezzogiorno* is passing through a deep demographic revolution. The demographic transition has been also determined by a deep reorganization - individual and collective- of the life cycle. These changes of demo-social and economic-cultural structures strictly interacts with reproductive choices, impacting on possibility and calendar of life transitions. Consequently, the phenomenon of the postponement of childbearing has been reshaping our country's fertility patterns.

Mezzogiorno, which was the geographic area with the highest fertility rate in Italy still in the 90's, nowadays is characterized by the lowest fertility rate, strongly below the level of substitution, also for a lack of births from foreign women.

Combining the contraction of fertility rates and the increase in life expectancy, “population ageing” is becoming for the *Mezzogiorno* a serious “demographic shock” to cope with. In the following years, challenges tied with the “greying” of the population are expected to more and more impact on the economic, social and cultural sustainability.

6. A renewed governance for the Mediterranean Area

The world is changing deeply in all its fundamental components and in the relationship between states and macro-regions. We are in front of an historical change that seems to remind the glaciation or historical revolutions such as the industrial or the agriculture revolution, also due to the climate changes that with high degree of probability will have devastating effect.

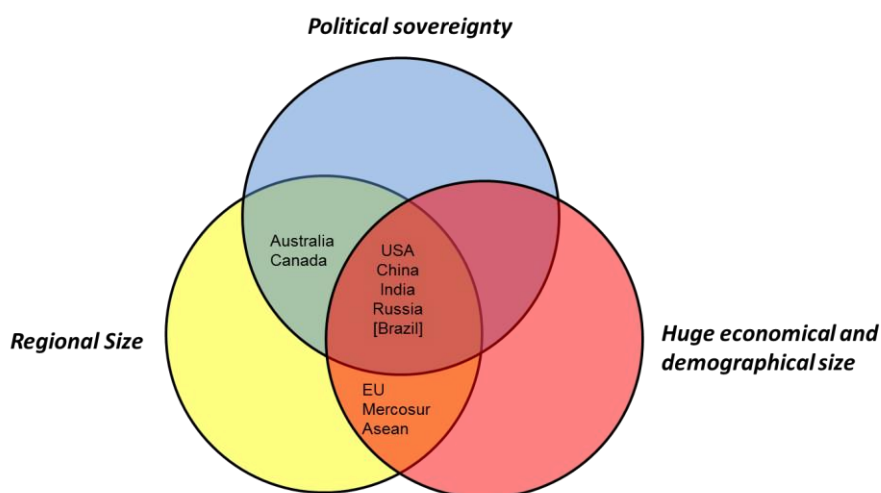
There is a significant difference versus the past: in a global ranking, the world population shows very broad gradients as never occurred in human history. Gradients which can now be known and perceived by individuals and peoples. Flexibility and adaptability will therefore become critical: change will be the driving force of human survival on earth.

All the processes described so far involve new demographic, economic, social, and therefore political relationships in the world. Yet, despite of these very deep changes, we are facing the huge and almost paralyzing problems of global governance. The multilateral model of the United Nations is more than ever in crisis, both at the level of the General Assembly and, even more, at the level of the Security Council, structured in a dated and anachronistic way.

At global level, the world government goes towards a regionalization to be institutionalized through different forms of representation in the international fora.

In the globalization era nation-states alone are no more adequate to define and manage the key political and economic phenomena. As suggested by Daniel Bell (1987), “the nation-state has become too small for the big problems of life and too big for the small problems”, not being able to influence global dynamics nor to address people’s daily life difficulties.

Figure 7 - Spheres of global governance



Source: Golini (2004)

The demographic and economic dimensions are gaining increasing relevance for the political vision and the operative management of international disputes. The absence of a long term global vision and in absence of international agreement on plenty of issues –e.g. financial markets, climate change, ecosystem protection, international migrations- threatens accumulate and risk to become unmanageable. Then too often the will and action of large and powerful corporations prevail both in domestic and global issues.

The process of globalization implies that only countries, or unions of countries, that possess simultaneously full political sovereignty, economic and demographic relevance, and regional influence, may aspire to any weigh and importance the international arena. Two major actions seem to be needed at global and local level. At global level, we are moving towards a regionalization that needs to be institutionalized in international context through new forms of representation within the UN system. At local level, in our area, the Mediterranean Union (i.e. the

Union of the 47 Euro- Mediterranean countries) would be important. Unfortunately, in the short terms, the implementation appears to be stuck.

Within the need for an urgent redefinition of the global governance stands the issue of a new governance of the Mediterranean basin.

For historical, geographical, political reasons, during decades the politics of the Union has looked eastward, leading to the desired enlargement in that area. Yet it is through the Mediterranean sea that many present and future very relevant and often global issues pass, with respect to peace, socio-economic development, peoples' relationships: issues like the enlargement to Turkey, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the ones in Syria, Lebanon and Libya, the stabilization and development of Northern Africa and the management of the African demographic explosion. Urgent and unavoidable are the attention and the action of the European Union towards the Mediterranean frontier, alike it has been towards the Eastern frontier before. With regard to the Mediterranean perspective, at least three major open questions remain:

- How will it be possible to sustain the European welfare now threatened on the one hand by the fast population ageing and on the other hand by the reduction of the number of jobs and workers due to both the rest of the world competition and the adoption of new technologies?
- How will it be possible to absorb the huge labour supply proceeding from Sub-Saharan Africa?
- How Northern Africa will face its population aging?

The complex governance of the Mediterranean issue cannot be managed with the modalities and procedures of borders' surveillance of "frontex" or "mare nostrum" (however saving lives in the sea remains a priority).

Instead, the Mediterranean Union may represent a possible answer to these questions.

In this sense few years ago French president Sarkozy re-launched the opportunity for a quick realization of a Mediterranean Union able to put major attention and start an adequate opening towards the basin.

The organization was instituted in 2008 and initially was supposed to include only Mediterranean countries. But after the expression of interest by many neighbouring countries, the Mediterranean Union was approved by 47 countries. Nevertheless the activities of the Union has been abandoned, firstly by the European countries. The economic and financial crisis which hit Southern European countries and the turmoil following the Arab spring contributed to slow the political answer to this wall.

Yet, its strong development would help accelerating the economic growth of Southern European countries and even more the Northern African ones. The latter will be essential to revitalize the whole Mediterranean basin and to at least partially

absorb the demographic pressure from Sub-Saharan Africa. The economic, political and demographic weight of the whole Mediterranean Union would guarantee to the region a role as a main character in the international arena. Last, but not least, a newly flourishing Mediterranean would also help the Middle East peace processes.

In order to develop the Mediterranean Union, a synergic action would be needed by southern EU Member States at international and EU levels. Moreover, at Italian level, southern regions (the natural Southern border of Europe, as highlighted by Alberto Quadrio Curzio in a recent article), should take the lead in order to make the *Mezzogiorno* a real bridge towards the rest of the basin.

This articulated and complex picture should represent the overall framework to set the Italian action for the semester of Presidency of the European Union started in July 2014. The semester should be used in two major directions. Firstly, the revision of the European governance rules, pushing for the European Union to become a real political union with a further overcoming of the nation states. Secondly, the shifting of the axis of attention from the problems of the Baltic and Eastern area to the problems of the Mediterranean through the rediscovery and focusing of its politics, economy and culture.

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SUMMARY

The Mediterranean: an unsustainable wall towards Europe

The merging of Roman and Greek cultures in ancient times led to the flourishing of a sublime culture: Greek idealism, a civilization of music and philosophy, and the Roman pragmatism, made of law and rationality, blended to form a new culture which forms the basis of Western civilization. During the modern age, the control over the sea of the Maritime Republics made possible to build world jewels like Venice, Pisa and dozens of other magnificent coastal cities throughout the whole sea. Today, in the news and in our geo-political idea, the Mediterranean Sea is much more associated to the tragic migration events: the deaths of thousands of migrants full of hope shipwrecked south of Lampedusa.

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Antonio GOLINI, Italian National Institute of Statistics.

Elena GRIMACCIA, Italian National Institute of Statistics, elgrimac@istat.it

Tomaso RONDINELLA, Italian National Institute of Statistics, rondinella@istat.it

Daria SQUILLANTE, Italian National Institute of Statistics, squillante@istat.it