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## **Chapter 27. The Mediterranean**

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### **Abstract**

Today more than ever, the Mediterranean is identified by scholars as the pivot around which many challenges revolve, affecting the security of states, societies and human beings. What occurs at sea is thus attracting new attention, requiring the shoring up of the concept of ‘maritime security’. Exploration of the term and its articulation are at the centre of this chapter: according to policymakers’ and scholars’ perceptions, some of the challenges ahead such as climate change are extremely thorny, with relevant implications on both environmental sustainability and human security. This acceptance has led to unprecedented agreement on the direction to go in and the tools to cope in certain fields. On others, though, such as irregular immigration, energy disputes or foreign powers’ increasing penetration of the sea, security uncertainties and efforts to tackle them have led to growing militarization in the Mediterranean, questioning the concept of security at/of the sea even further. Acknowledging the Mediterranean as a space of largely connected and long-term challenges but also of mutual opportunities for regional actors and beyond would tarnish the securitarian lens lately worn to look at the sea.

**Keywords: maritime security, Mediterranean Sea, European Union, sustainable development**

### **Introduction**

Reviewing the literature, one is puzzled by the paucity of books exploring maritime security in the Mediterranean compared to the ink spent on other sea spaces (see for example Bueger & al., 2019; Guan & Skogan, 2007; Percy, 2018). This is surprising given the importance this basin has played

for centuries in terms of trade and energy flows, transportation of goods and persons, and cultural connections (Gillespie & Volpi, 2019; Adler & al., 2006).

The Mediterranean is the theatre of multiple, synchronized and connected events, which urgently need fresh input and governance (see Introduction and Sperling in this book)The so-called ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015, for instance, is only one of many events that have attracted widespread attention, along with energy disputes in the eastern Mediterranean and the protracted political instability in the Middle East and North Africa region . Other challenges such as illicit trade in narcotics and weapons traffic in human beings, and severe environmental degradation, are further affecting the region. From an academic point of view, untangling this knot and investigating the role of maritime security requires shedding light into how the Mediterranean is understood, as often the region and the sea have overlapped in the public debate, with the former overpowering the latter . The distinction does not need to be neat though, if one recognizes that the sea and the region are inevitably connected.. However, so far, the scholarly debate has scarcely considered the role of the sea and ways , to cope with the challenges and capitalise on the opportunities of this water basin.

The aim of this chapter is to consider how maritime security in the Mediterranean has been recently framed and the related implications . If the Mediterranean has topped the agenda of the Euro-Atlantic community – of the European Union (EU) foremost - this has been mainly due to discernible and often overlapping securitization processes (see *Introduction* and Vuori in this handbook), which have often yielded to a geopolitical re-bordering of the area. Differently put, the sea has attracted increasing attention mostly because of its divisive, unruly, and difficult to govern nature (Biscop, 2017; Gentry, 2020); inevitably, this is the conception of ‘maritime security’ that has prevailed when discussing the Mediterranean. The interplay between a wide array of state and non-state actors (Taufers, 2015) portrays the Mediterranean as a distinct context of maritime security interactions. The increasing intrusion of non-Mediterranean actors with regional or global ambitions and the rising assertiveness of Mediterranean ones, have brought back debates about a revival of ‘naval realism’ as the essence of maritime security, reflecting past understandings of the term (Germond, 2015, p. 10;

36; McCabe & al. 2020). Less traditional challenges such as irregular immigration, criminal activities, and energy quarrels have also revealed escalating tensions related to maritime use and governance (Germond, 2015, p. 84). This, however, is only part of the story, for there is growing acknowledgment that the sea connects bordering areas and their future in an indivisible knot, forcing an understanding of maritime security that goes beyond short-term considerations and that requires deep and comprehensive coordination.

The first section briefly looks at how the sea has progressively gained space in conventional understandings of the Mediterranean region. The second section explores the relevance the Mediterranean has acquired for the security of the EU, while the third section discusses a series of sea-related challenges perceived as urgent by scholarly and policymaking circles. The fourth section introduces a different conception of maritime security, that extends beyond the immediate (Euro-centric) security concerns and relates to the sustainability and the ability to face more challenging global threats in the foreseeable future. The concluding section wraps up and suggests potential avenues for further research.

### **Re-drawing the Mediterranean: from land to sea**

In recent years, several authors have made clear how the Mediterranean basin has become a context to be studied *per se*, for its relevance as a ‘permissive’ environment or ‘milieu’ (Germond, 2015, p. 16), or as a quasi ‘political’ space or a ‘sea-region’ with its own dynamics, with critical implications for regional and international security. (Kuru, 2021).. Before this, scholars have examined the Mediterranean as a common space of interaction mirroring a regional security community (Korkmaz, 2008) while often neglecting its ‘blue’ aspects. The construction of the Mediterranean in different institutional settings, such as the 1995 Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the EU’s neighbourhood policy launched in 2003, was expected to achieve policy coherence for participating countries and provided the naïve image of a cohesive political space (Barbé & al., 2010; Taylor, 2019). The EU-

led efforts geared towards region-building, however, had already lost much substance with the launch of the Union for the Mediterranean (2008) and the progressive revision of the neighbourhood policy, with ambitions cut short and the cohesiveness of the Mediterranean region questioned in practice (Bicchi, 2011). A wide range of literature has also pointed to the ‘paternalistic’ construction of the Mediterranean and the lack of mutual understanding and co-ownership among partners in an extremely complex region (Joffe, 1997; Gillespie, 2013). Over time, a series of political, security and humanitarian issues produced a crisis-triggered interest in the Mediterranean (Kuru, 2021, p. 20). A number of tipping moments accelerated this process, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks which focused attention on potential security threats travelling via the Mediterranean, the Arab Springs of 2011, the Libyan quagmire, or the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 (MEDRESET, 2017; Ceccorulli, 2019). This shift had a two-fold implication. First, the adoption of a geopolitical approach resulted in an exercise of narrative ‘spatialisation’ of world politics (Germond, 2015, p. 11), which contributed to framing the Mediterranean as a fragmented and torn space. Rather than a connecting bridge, the Mediterranean kept apart continents, religions, cultures and political systems, demarcating spaces of security and insecurity (Cobarrubias, 2018; Huber & al., 2018; Korkmaz, 2008). Second, the framing of the sea as critical for security. The rising economic and military presence of major regional and global players and their differing approaches towards the Mediterranean further added to the securitization of the space, annulling the idea of a ‘single monolithic cartography’ (Ehteshami & Mohammadi, 2017). The Mediterranean was thus depicted as a space to be ‘secured’ rather than ‘protected’, which affected the prevailing understanding of maritime security in the area.

### **The EU and maritime security in the Mediterranean**

The EU’s first Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) was adopted in 2014 and explicitly added a maritime dimension to its security (European Council, 2014). The sea was described as key to the

EU's growth and prosperity, and thus had to remain 'open, protected and secure' (European Council, 2014, p. 2).

This understanding of maritime security extended beyond 'sea domination', including a wide range of topics and issues, from protecting European economic interests at sea, to maintaining the freedom of navigation, fighting organized crime, to countering risks associated with the harmful exploitation of marine resources, environmental disasters, and climate change (European Council, 2014; European Union, 2016). The securitization of the maritime domain, however, often took precedence over other priorities such as blue economic growth or marine health preservation, with the EU becoming a key security provider in the area (Germond, 2015, p. 124).. Consequently, maritime security became integrated within the wider Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) framework, accompanying development cooperation, political dialogue and capacity building. In this regard, scholars have recently focused on the maritime dimension of the Union's foreign and security policy as a new and substantial turn in the EU's external policies (Bosilca, 2017; Riddervold, 2018, 2021; Molnár, & Takács, 2021). The fact that the largest Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) military operations of the EU have been deployed at sea is a case in point..

**The EUMSS and subsequent implementation plan highlighted a wide range of maritime security threats and risks at sea** : the smuggling of migrants and trafficking activities and threats to free-trade flows were hence mentioned as the greatest challenges to be faced in adjacent waters (European Council, 2014b), together with lack of agreement on maritime zones (European Commission, 2014). The years to come would reveal the Mediterranean's centrality for such challenges. The escalation of insecurity in Libya coupled with a soaring number of irregular arrivals on European shores and migrants' deaths in the Mediterranean drew instantaneous attention to this theatre (see Ferreira in this handbook). Operation EUNAVFOR MEDSophia, launched in 2015 and unprecedented due to its military character in response to migration, marked a concrete contribution to maritime security (European Union, 2016) focusing on curbing migrant smuggling, , training and sharing information with the Libyan coastguard and navy, and supporting the implementation of the

UN weapons embargo on the high seas off Libya. In this sense, it aimed to complement different land-based strategies adopted to decrease insecurity, including the civilian mission assisting Libyan authorities in improving the country's border security (EUBAM Libya) as well as a number of bilateral cooperation programmes (Ceccorulli & Coticchia, 2020; Lehti, 2018). Coordination with FRONTEX, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, was also critical for enhancing maritime security, clearly linking the EU security with developments at sea

Beginning with 2015, a number of documents were released, which explicitly connected the internal and external EU security dimensions and thus turned the sea into a critical space for European security (Germond, 2015). These included, for instance, the Agenda on Migration and the European Agenda on Security, the EU Action plan against migrant smuggling, the revised Neighbourhood policy and the EU Global Strategy. . The 2017 report on the implementation of the EUMSS action plan further emphasized the risks and threats at and from the sea, while clearly linked them to the deteriorating situation in the neighbourhood (European Commission, 2017). It listed five priority areas (focus areas) within the 'EU's political priority' (European Commission, 2017, p. 5): the Central Mediterranean, with smuggling and irregular flows issues coupled with the situation of insecurity in Libya.

Maritime surveillance activities were prioritized accordingly and promoted through the Seahorse Mediterranean Network, engaging some EU Member States and some North African countries (European Council, 2017) and the FRONTEX 'Common patrols' projects (European Commission, 2017, p. 33). Permanent deployments in African states to support the fight against smuggling and trafficking were also urged, while reference was made to the Shared Awareness and De-confliction in the Mediterranean forum (SHADE MED) to discuss new coordinated efforts to crack down on irregular migration in the Mediterranean Sea (European Commission, 2017, p. 32; Bueger & Edmunds, 2017).

The revised 2018 EUMSS implementation plan not only insisted on such priorities but also highlighted maritime security as a requirement for the stability and 'resilience' of southern riparian



states and unstable neighbouring areas (European Council, 2018; Cusumano & Hofmaier, 2020). For example, the new mandate of operation EUBAM Libya, tasked to train the Libyan coast guard, also foresaw assisting Libyan authorities in drafting a maritime security strategy as well as a national strategy of border and security management (Nielsen, 2020).

This section has shown how the EU's understanding of maritime security has been largely moulded by what have been perceived as urgent security challenges. Alongside migration, other challenges have heated up the Mediterranean waters as discussed below.

## **Maritime security in the Mediterranean**

Whereas maritime security, as discussed at length in the second part of this chapter and as shown in this handbook, is much broader than 'good order at sea' (Taufers, 2015, p. 50), recent events have reinforced the security connotation of the term. Overall, this has produced concrete effects, resulting in a growing militarization of the sea.

### ***An overcrowded area: powers at play***

The literature on the Mediterranean has noted how the sea has turned into a political space, where not only local but also geographically distant countries are jockeying for position. The growing influence of states such as China and Russia, for instance, was largely seen as a disturbing factor, which could potentially affect Western control over the sea (Parsi, 2018; Siddi, 2020; Linden 2018).

China's abundant economic investments in key ports and infrastructure in countries including Italy, Spain, Greece, and Turkey have been interpreted as supporting the country's economic expansion plans, much like its increasing military presence in the region (Taylor, 2019). , For some

observers, Europe and China share a common interest in the Mediterranean's stability and hence accommodating one another is deemed as mutually beneficial, with Beijing propping up the EU's sluggish progress on infrastructure and making substantial investments in the region (Prodi, 2015). Additionally, the two actors have aligned interests related to various non-traditional challenges, as seen in the case of antipiracy efforts in the Indian Ocean (Dossi, 2015). Other views pointed instead at China's rising ambitions in the region as illustrated by its joint naval exercises with Russia in the eastern Mediterranean and the growing importance of the region for its Belt and Road Initiative (Paul, 2019). , Russia's re-emergence as a maritime power in the Mediterranean in 2015 and the reactivation of its naval base in the Syrian port of Tartu raised even more serious concerns. The country's central role in the protracted Syrian conflict has seen a significant military deployment at sea, consisting of submarines, ships, and air and sea bases along the Syrian coast. Russia has also intruded into the chaotic situation of Libya through private military contractors, conducting what seems like hybrid warfare and antagonizing western attempts to simmer down tensions (Cristiani, 2020). The Syrian and Libyan powder kegs have not only disrupted the geopolitical equilibria in the area, but have contributed to the securitization of the Mediterranean via an increased military presence.

### ***From Sophia to Irimi: human maritime insecurity neglected but not gone***

As seen above and at length in Ferreira (this handbook), migration has been increasingly seen as a security concern in the Mediterranean. Various initiatives geared towards 'the fight against human smuggling' were set up –to deflate the number of irregular crossings and save the lives of migrants(see *Introduction* in this book; Ceccorulli & Lucarelli, 2018). Paradoxically, human security at sea has declined and the migrants' death toll has increased following the intensified military presence at sea, (Cusumano, 2017). Even the more robust commitment to fight human smuggling that had initially prompted the EU military deployment gradually lost its edge; as a result, the EU-led maritime operation EUNAVFOR MED *Irimi*, taking over from *Sophia*, centred its entire efforts on the enforcement of the UN arms embargo at sea off Libya avoiding the question of saving migrants' lives

altogether. .By now it has become widely accepted that given the overall context of insecurity surrounding the Mediterranean and the lack of reform in the asylum system of the EU, , migration requires more a complex fix than patrolling and capacity-building exercises. Moreover, the very rationale of these activities has been questioned: most of the arms supplied to Libya do not transit by sea but rather on land (Megerisi, 2019).

### ***Overheating in the Eastern Mediterranean***

The Mediterranean represents a vital transit hub for oil and gas destined for the EU and the US markets from other seas (the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea) and states (Russia) via the Suez Canal, the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus Straits (Sartori 2015). Additionally, the production of oil and gas is also becoming increasingly relevant; the discovery of gas fields beginning with 2009 in the Eastern Mediterranean off the coasts of Israel, Cyprus and Egypt prompted a number of scholars to develop the concept of the ‘East Med’ as a sub-region –(Sartori & Bianchi, 2019).

These developments were crucial in many ways, due to the recent emphasis on decarbonization policies, new shipping possibilities of liquified gas, and decreasing dependence on foreign supplies, among others. This surging interest in energy resources triggered widespread debates on whether these discoveries, their connecting infrastructures and long-term contracts could engender prospects for cooperation between regional actors, cushioning against possible disruptions (Taylor, 2019; Colombo & Dentice, 2020; Sotirious, 2020; Rubin & Eiran, 2019). This type of argument seems to be confirmed by the establishment in 2019 of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) between Italy, Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, Greece and the Palestinian Authority, with the ambition of creating a regional gas market. From a western point of view, increasing opportunities for cooperation were a way to decrease dependence on Russia, with the the Eastmed pipeline project between Greece, Cyprus and Israel connecting the EU and the Eastern Mediterranean being warmly greeted by the EU and the US alike (Colombo & Dentice, 2020).

By contrast, some maintain that energy concerns would not only add fuel to already present tensions in the Mediterranean, but also cripple western cohesion (Grigoriadis, 2014). At play are not only considerations regarding energy security, but also the diplomatic use of energy by some actors, notably Turkey. In the case under analysis the issue concerns territorial disputes over exclusive economic zones and sea-border delimitation. On the one hand, Turkey has denied recognition of contracts signed by Cyprus with international energy companies, alluding to the sovereign rights of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. On the other hand, the country has started drilling off the coast of Cyprus, infringing on its economic zone. Adding to Turkey's manoeuvres in the east is the recent 2019 agreement with Tripoli's government to delimit Turkey's and Libya's reciprocal exclusive economic zones. Turkey's claimed rights (hydrocarbon drilling included) are an impediment to any gas activity in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean which aims at excluding the Anatolian state, while the expected control over zones considered by Greece can ignite new tensions at any moment.

Turkey's actions are not only troubling for European countries but also for other Mediterranean states such as Egypt and Israel, with which confrontation is manifest both on energy issues in the Eastern Mediterranean and the civil conflict in Libya (Scazzieri, 2020). As a by-product of the generalised malaise, military deployments at sea have frequently alluded to by states alongside arms purchases (quite a salient point given years of cuts in defence budgets, Euractive, 2020), while widespread militarization of the Mediterranean has proceeded, endangering the fear of possible accidents. At the end of August 2020 Greece, Italy, France and Cyprus engaged in joint drills codenamed Eunomia in the Eastern Mediterranean as a clear sign of commitment to keeping the rule of law in that part of the sea (Ansaldo, 2020). Escalation is perceived as a concrete likelihood, in view of provocative exercises such as Turkey's recent deployment of warships in Greek waters (Karakasis, 2019, Axt, 2021).

As an alternative to the risk of being embroiled in the spiral of insecurity in southern Mediterranean countries, offshore production has started to be taken into consideration; however, this option too could soon be affected by security tensions in the area (Sartori 2015).

### ***Terrorism and organized crime***

Terrorism is similarly entangled with perceptions of maritime security in the Mediterranean

The sea has been considered a vehicle for terrorist infiltration, for instance along migration corridors that lead from North Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans into the EU. Consequently, sea patrolling has become one of the chief activities undertaken to enhance security. The maritime operation *Active Endeavour* launched by NATO under article 5 in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and superseded by operation *Sea Guardian* in 2016 are cases in point, with the latter having wider mandate including situational awareness and capacity building. The sea could also offer a base from which to run counter-terrorism operations in riparian states south of the Mediterranean and in closer regions, where terrorist formations have their stronghold (Isaac & Kares, 2017).

Illegal activities such as drug trafficking and human smuggling at sea potentially being used to finance terrorist networks is another matter of concern (Cornell, 2012; Achilli & Tinti, 2019). Moreover, direct attacks on ports, pipelines or shipping in the Mediterranean are another key threat for maritime security (Taylor, 2019; Taufer, 2015), albeit potentially less likely (Lesser, 2016).

### **Maritime security in the Mediterranean updated**

All the challenges discussed above depict the Mediterranean as a dangerous and unstable place. Yet this picture is only partial for two related reasons. First, the concept of maritime security acquires new nuances when less publicly debated challenges are considered. The less vocal discussions about sustainability and blue growth in the region, for instance, offer an image of a less divided geographical area, where no space is available for zero-sum calculations and instead, the need for deep

coordination is widely recognized. Second, many of the threats that rank high on the Mediterranean political agenda are caused and magnified by the neglect of a comprehensive understanding of maritime security.

As maritime security is being conceptually broadened to include a wider array of challenges scholarly and policy literature has started to pay increasing attention to how Mediterranean countries perform against the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including in the maritime dimension (Riccaboni & al., 2020).

Environmental challenges in this geographical spot are considered significant and the acknowledgment is widely shared that broad transnational partnerships of governments, businesses, stakeholders and citizens are to be offered as a recipe to cope.

Of all the environmental challenges, climate change is a particularly worrisome indicator. Global warming as a facet of climate change is underlined as a severe challenge for the Mediterranean region, with an impact second only to the Arctic region. Without additional mitigation efforts, the temperature of the region is expected to increase by 2.2°C by 2040 (MedECC, 2019). Many factors are simultaneously related to this challenge and need in-depth consideration as potential amplifiers, such as water (and also seawater) and agriculture management and energy sustainability, dubbed in the specialized literature as the ‘water- energy- food nexus’ (Saladini & al., 2018). The Mediterranean, and in particular the Middle East and North Africa, are visibly affected by these developments (Schilling & al., 2020). The challenge is not only related to inland areas, but also to the sea and coastal regions. Climate change is expected to reduce available water resources, increase the likelihood of extreme events and, just as important, result in rises in the general level of the sea triggering land movements and saline intrusion into fertile lands, thus increasing food insecurity. For

some highly populated geographical spots such as the Nile delta, this means a massive security disruption.

Water quality (also of the sea) is another issue of relevance, and here again the assessment is not particularly encouraging for the MENA region. Contributing to the bleak scenario are massive tourism, population growth, new industries and rapid urbanization coupled with poor results in terms of adaptation (Riccaboni & al., 2019). Heavily populated coastal areas, already subject to resource stress and rapid alterations in habitat, are particularly affected (MedECC, 2019, p. 17). According to the MedECC report, around 150 million people live close to the sea; events related to climate change, first and foremost rising sea levels, are anticipated to have devastating impacts on these areas, such as the likely risk of flooding for at least 15 ports in various countries (MedECC, 2019, p. 19). Furthermore, many cultural world heritage sites identified by UNESCO are currently at risk (MedECC, 2019).

Shifting back to the sea and its sustainability, untenable methods can be traced largely to fisheries, with overfishing figuring prominently: by 2050 current fish stocks are expected to be reduced by half (Riccaboni & al., 2020). This would not only affect coastal economies engaged in fishing, aquaculture and related activities, but would also increase the likelihood of quarrels over legitimate fishing rights among states, as already shown by multiple events in the Mediterranean (D'Ignoti, 2020). Sea populations are also likely to change as cold-water species move towards cooler waters and warm-water ones start to inhabit the Mediterranean, often with devastating consequences in the case of 'invasive species' disturbing the ecosystem (MedECC, 2019, p. 10). Sea warming, together with water acidification, is also expected to lead to the extinction of many species in the Mediterranean, and affect the entire marine ecosystem (ibid).

Environmental considerations are crucial when attached to prospects for stability in the Mediterranean region. Adverse climate effects are projected to impact already fragile countries, where resource scarcity is often exploited by competing factions to alter conflict dynamics, and where demographic figures act as amplifiers (Mastrojeni & Pasini, 2020; Scheffran & Battaglini, 2011;

Daoudy, 2020). The displacement of people within and across borders is one of the most problematic outcomes of these developments (UNHCR 2020). The scarcity of and conflict over resources are further worsening the situation of the most vulnerable displaced in the Sahel region and the Middle East. Moreover, environmental challenges make the prospect of refugees and displaced persons returning to their home territories an even more remote possibility, having important implications for the flux of sea crossings in the Mediterranean.

Institutional frameworks such as the Mediterranean Action Plan, working on marine and coastal degradation within the United Nations Environmental Programme, have been specifically set up to advance political dialogue and promote instruments and policies to deal with the potential challenges facing this geography, with a view to increasing its sustainability.

That specific framework led to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) and added Protocols (UNEP, 2019), emphasizing the need for cooperation to preserve the sea, the coasts and their richness. For example, recent work has been done to encourage cleaner shipping<sup>1</sup>. With a particular focus on promoting the sustainable development goals (SDGs), the contracting parties of the Barcelona Convention adopted the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD 2016-2025) (UNEP/MAP 2016). Moulded around 6 objectives (including the promotion of sustainable development in marine and coastal areas; management of sustainable cities and shipping, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and transition toward a green and blue economy), the strategy calls for common objectives, stakeholder involvement, and solidarity and equity among others, and proposes strategic directions accordingly.

The Union for the Mediterranean also aims to foster regional dialogue among countries of the European Union and other Mediterranean countries to the east and south. Efforts are focused on mitigating climate-related effects using various tools - such as offshore renewable energies, green

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rempec.org/en/news-media/rempec-news/regional-expert-meeting-on-the-possible-designation-of-the-mediterranean-sea-as-a-whole-as-an-emission-control-area-for-sulphur-oxides-med-sox-eca-pursuant-to-marpol-annex-vi-press-release>



shipping and transport, smart ports, and sustainable value chains - for a sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean, including the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Union for the Mediterranean, 2021). For its side, the EU has recently released a communication on new approach for a sustainable blue economy, which outlines a holistic view that integrates ocean policy into its broader economic policies within the context of the European Green Deal and the Recovery Plan for Europe (European Commission, 2021). This approach aims to protect the EU's natural capital while reducing net greenhouse gas emissions so as to sustain a modern, competitive, and resource-efficient economy. The objective to drastically reduce pollution in the Mediterranean is clearly stated, an effort which entails coping with the decarbonization and depollution of maritime transport, ports and energy production (European Commission, 2021, p. 4). Significant attention is devoted to the proper management of fisheries, which requires an inclusive approach bringing together all stakeholders. Regional cooperation is thus emphasized as vital for facing the common challenges that affect states sharing the same sea basin.

Guidance and support for regional states on fisheries and ecosystem conservation, shipping, transportation and trade, sustainable energy, environmental sustainability climate change and coastal infrastructure is also at the centre of the 2019 Africa Blue Economy Strategy (African Union, 2019). Harnessing the potential of water resources for 'socio-economic emancipation and industrialization' in Africa in a sustainable way is clearly reiterated as a way to overcome challenges related to poor governance and climate and environmental change (African Union, 2019, p. ix).

As seen above, maritime security has recently been framed beyond traditional understandings to include challenges that can be tackled only through a regional or global approach; rather than being a divisive, zero-sum concern, securing the sea and coastal areas entails close cooperation and coordination among a broad range of stakeholders at all levels.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored different yet interrelated understandings of maritime security in the Mediterranean.

The analysis above has revealed two key aspects. First, for both the policy and scholarly community at large, the understanding of maritime security has mostly translated into the idea of the Mediterranean as a space to be 'secured'. According to this interpretation, the sea is both a battleground where different actors (and related interests) clash and a shield to guard against potential challenges coming from unstable spaces. The focus on this understanding and the perception of imminent challenges to be faced have led to the profound militarization of this maritime arena, which risks diverting attention away from impending problems such as climate change and environmental issues, as well as the opportunities that the sea could offer. The geopolitical approach mentioned in this chapter has placed the sea back in a central position in perceptions of the Mediterranean region but has seemingly clouded the fact that the EU's security and that of the Mediterranean region at large depend on acknowledging the complexity, diversity and magnitude of the challenges ahead. However, and here comes the second aspect, a still minoritarian but increasingly vocal field of interdisciplinary research is drawing attention to how the safety of the Mediterranean is of key value for all actors engaged in the region and beyond. In this case the known scenario of tensions, insecurity and disputes underlining the potential for generalised instability is replaced by a scenario where challenges acknowledgment invites to more cooperation. The sustainability of the Mediterranean Sea as a space where not only security but also development and prosperity are preserved and magnified requires coordinated action as well a convergent understanding of the challenges that tie together the fate of Mediterranean communities. While experts, practitioners and policymakers are part of this slow but growing realization, the scholarly community seems to be lagging behind with poor interdisciplinary work in the field. As a matter of fact, the literature seems much more disposed to describe fragmentation than attempts at coordination and fails, hence, to make sense of and provide advice to cope with a fast changing reality.; A much more robust effort in this direction is thus strongly needed,

taking stock of and further exploring the growing scientific literature on the matter and global attempts at broadening the understanding of urgent security challenges..

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