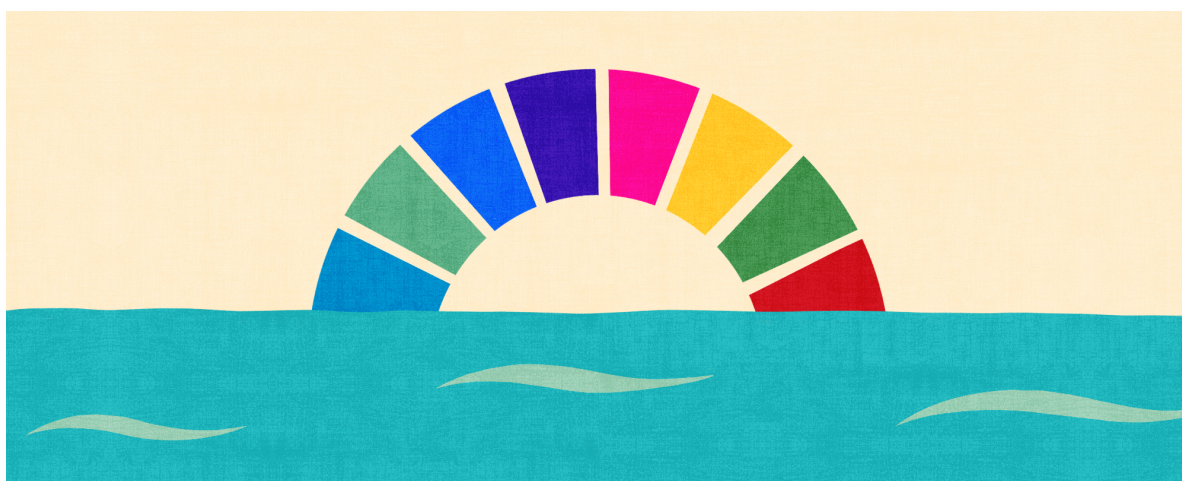


Strategies, Policies and Practices for achieving the 2030 Agenda in the Mediterranean region

Jérémie Fosse



Picture by Carole Hénaff

The Mediterranean basin is a unique natural ecosystem with exceptional cultural richness and large human diversity. It is a place of constant change, shaped by economic and social activities for thousands of years. However, exponential urbanisation, hyper-mobility patterns and demographic expansion are heavily impacting its equilibrium at an unprecedented pace. The Mediterranean region is also experiencing uncontrolled economic growth (at least until COVID-19 appears) with unsustainable consumption and production value chains based on high-carbon lifestyles and globalised commodities. It is also naturally exposed to floods, fires and droughts, extreme events which are projected to increase drastically as the climate and biodiversity crisis unfolds.

The Mediterranean is suffering a systemic crisis

The combination of the current environmental emergency and socio-economic crisis —with sensitive political situations within and between countries— poses a major challenge for the Mediterranean community as a whole. In order to address these interrelated crises putting in danger our common future, the Mediterranean countries, as part of the global UN communities, approved in 2015 the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) with 169 targets covering all major environmental, social and economic challenges. Additionally, the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2025 (MSSD), endorsed in the framework of the Barcelona Convention, highlighted 5 strategic objectives to leverage the pathway towards a more inclusive, environmentally-friendly and prosperous Mediterranean region. However, with only 10 years to go and the current urgent need to rebuild the economy drastically impacted by COVID-19, it is now time to accelerate the socio-ecological transformation based on the empowerment of civil society, the commitment of key stakeholders and the launch of sound policies, practices and strategies related to Sustainable Energy, Economy and Communities in the Mediterranean.

SDGs are unachievable at current pace

The last report [1] on the State of SDGs in the Mediterranean countries shows clearly that, as of today, none of the Mediterranean countries is on track to reach those goals.

SDGs Trend Dashboard for Mediterranean countries

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Albania	↑	→	↗	↑	↗	↑	↑	→	↗	..	↗	..	↑	↗	↗	↗	..
Algeria	↑	→	↗	→	↗	↗	↗	→	↑	..	→	..	→	→	→	→	..
Bosnia and Herzegovina	↑	↗	↗	..	→	↗	↗	→	→	..	↗	..	→	..	→	→	..
Croatia	↑	↗	↑	→	↗	↑	↗	↑	↗	..	↗	..	↗	↗	↗	↗	..
Cyprus	↑	→	↑	..	↗	↑	↗	↗	↗	..	↗	..	↗	→	..	↗	↓
Egypt, Arab Rep.	↑	↗	↗	→	↗	↗	↑	↗	↗	..	→	..	↑	↗	→	..	..
France	↑	↗	↑	↑	↗	↗	↗	↗	↑	↑	↗	..	→	↗	↗	↗	→
Greece	↗	↗	↗	↗	↗	↗	↑	↗	↑	→	↗	..	↗	↗	↗	↗	↓
Israel	↗	↗	↑	↗	→	↑	↗	↑	↑	→	→	..	→	→	↓	↗	↗
Italy	↗	↗	↑	↗	↗	↑	↑	↗	↗	→	↗	..	↗	→	↑	↑	↗
Jordan	→	→	↗	..	→	↑	↗	→	↗	..	→	..	↑	..	..	→	..
Lebanon	↑	→	↗	↓	↓	↑	..	→	↗	..	..	..	↑	..	→	→	..
Libya	..	↓	↗	..	→	↗	..	..	..	..	..	..	↓	→	..	→	..
Malta	↑	↗	↗	→	↗	↑	↗	↑	↗	..	↗	..	→	↗	..	→	→
Morocco	↑	↗	↗	↗	↗	↗	↗	..	↗	..	→	..	↑	→	→	↗	..
Montenegro	↑	→	↗	↗	↗	↑	↗	↗	↗	..	→	..	→	↓	↓	→	..
North Macedonia	↗	↗	↗	..	→	→	↗	↑	↗	..	↗	..	↑	..	↗	↗	..
Portugal	↗	↗	↑	→	↗	↗	↑	↑	↗	→	↑	..	↓	→	↗	↗	→
Slovenia	↑	↗	↑	↗	↗	↗	↑	↗	↗	↑	↗	..	↗	..	↑	↑	→
Spain	↗	↗	↑	↑	↗	↑	↑	↑	↗	→	↗	..	→	↗	→	↗	→
Syrian Arab Republic	..	↓	→	..	→	→	↗	..	→	..	..	..	↑	→	→	..	..
Tunisia	↑	→	↗	..	→	↑	↗	..	↗	..	→	..	↑	→	↗	..	..
Turkey	↗	→	↗	↑	→	..	→	↗	↗	→	→	..	↓	→	→	↓	..

Source: Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2019)

One of the most alarming performances concern the state of the environment: SDG 14 –

Life below Water and SDG 15 – Life on Land. The huge rate of biodiversity losses in a critical hotspot such as the Mediterranean is putting in danger the livelihood of local communities that depend heavily on natural resources such as fisheries or agriculture. The region also faces major challenges related to social integration, as measured by SDG 5 – Gender Equality and SDG 10 – Reduced Inequality. Social and economic gaps between and within countries remain unacceptable and is a major impediment towards regional integration. Another critical issue concerns agriculture and diets as represented by SDG 2 – Zero Hunger, with a need to increase agricultural performance and to recover healthy Mediterranean diets based on sustainable lifestyles.

Large public and private investment in R&D, education, green infrastructures, sustainable value chains, healthy cities and low-carbon industries is also strongly needed to improve SDG 9 – Industry Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production and SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities. These SDGs call for more effective strategies of design and the implementation of transformative policies in order to decouple economic growth from environmental destruction and move towards more circular, blue and green economies.

Looking at the level of achievement of the SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, it becomes clear that the strengthening of labour rights and standards, whilst tackling negative spillovers, is another important challenge. The same could be said for freedom of speech, corruption, conflicts and political instability, covered by the SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Access to basic services and infrastructure is also generally good and improving, as represented mainly by the scores for SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation. However, constant monitoring and action are needed, especially due to the expected effects of climate change in the region: drought, desertification and floods.

The Mediterranean performs considerably better in socio-economic outcomes, monitored in SDG 1 – No Poverty, SDG 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing, and SDG 4 – Quality Education. Compared to the rest of the world, they are also doing —relatively— better on climate mitigation monitored by SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy and SDG 13 – Climate Action. Nevertheless, it has to be kept in mind that despite relatively high scores, SDG 4 and 13 achievement is decreasing. Related to this, it is hard to determine how government efforts can be monitored and evaluated. For instance, only one Mediterranean country, Morocco (with the size of a small Mediterranean city), is on track for holding warming below 2°C, the goal set at the 2015 Paris Agreement.

On the issue of regional cooperation and multi-stakeholders partnerships promoted by SDG 17, the Mediterranean is clearly behind. Although regional Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) such as the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea, or regional inter-governmental institutions such as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) are valuable and necessary political initiatives for multilateral governance, the size and complexity of the challenges described previously are beyond their current technical, financial and political capacity. In the past years, the European Union (EU) has launched several relevant thematic regional and sub-regional cooperation programmes (WestMed, PRIMA) and financial mechanisms (ENI, Interreg) to improve the

regulatory, business and political environment between and among Northern and Southern countries. Yet, an ambitious, integrated and high-level vision that can efficiently and quickly shift the current negative development patterns and impact positively and structurally the region is currently missing.

The last report on the State of Sustainable Development Goals in the Mediterranean countries shows clearly that, as of today, none of the Mediterranean countries is on track to reach them

The high interconnection between SDGs also allows the emergence of the so called spillover effects [2]. These are positive or negative effects that one country's actions can have on other countries, affecting their ability to achieve the SDGs, such as environmental spillovers related to the use of natural resources and pollution, unfair tax competition, banking secrecy, international labour standards, fatal accidents at work, trade in arms and organised international crime. In the Mediterranean, those negative feedbacks are unfortunately very present due to the large socio-economic differences between countries and the lack of regional integration and collaboration.

Weak stakeholders engagement and commitments

In order to be achievable, the SDGs should be actively promoted and supported by all actors in the society. Transformative and inclusive action is needed by governments, businesses and citizens alike, as gradual progress and superficial policy changes will not be enough. The SDSN Report puts strong emphasis on participatory practices to involving stakeholders in cooperative decision processes. Achieving the SDGs requires deep changes to policies, investments and technologies, but success will not be possible without mobilising stakeholders and changing norms to enable the SDG transformations. These deep transformations to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement are becoming urgent as time is running. In this context, traditional players often lack the capacity to respond appropriately, be it in terms of knowledge of the matter or the ability and motivation for swift action.

Local and national governments often have the necessary mid-long term vision and generally act in the public interest. They are however typically slow in reacting to changes and often more interested in national or local issues than cross-border challenges. Governments can also be found to have silo mentalities, restricting the flow of information to the top-down direction. Businesses on the other hand are usually more dynamic and well-organised in nature and often have the necessary technical and financial capacity to implement changes. However, they usually have a narrow focus and short-term thinking, with risk of potential conflicts between the general public benefits and their own private interests. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are often alluded to when talking about global changes, due to their long-term visions, field knowledge, organisational adaptiveness

and non-profit idealism. However, in the Mediterranean region the sector is very fragmented, suffers from a pervasive lack of funding and often finds itself over-specialised or poorly skilled.

Gaps between Science, Policy & Society

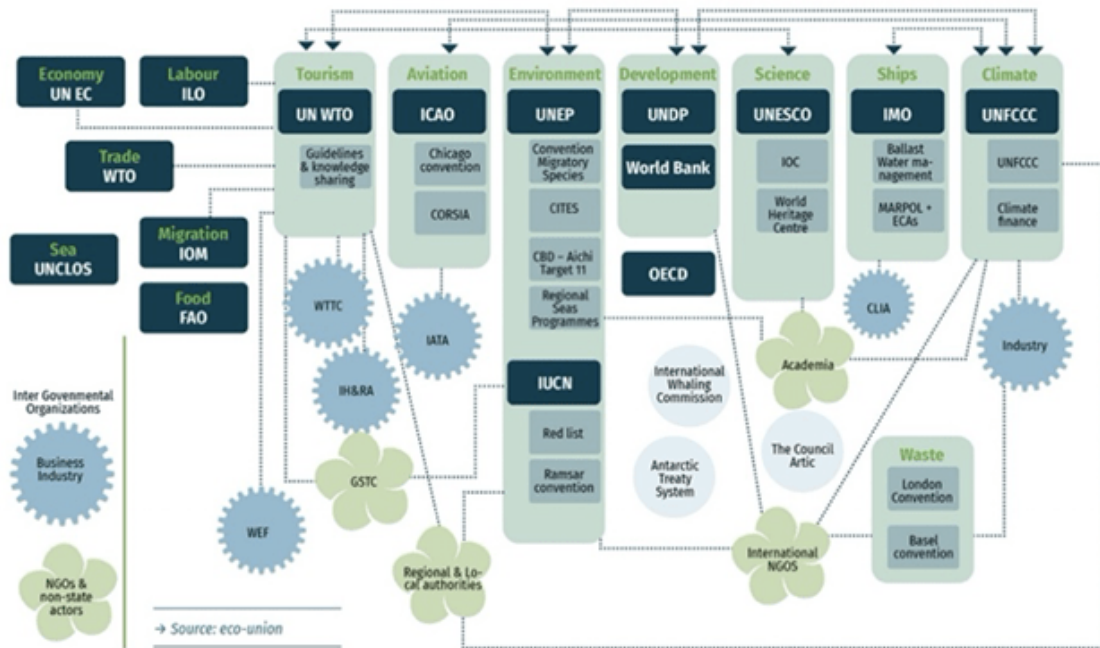
A major challenge when it comes to achieving the SDGs in the Mediterranean region is the distance between what science is telling us, what policies governments are promoting and what we collectively do as citizens. In other words, the increasing environmental issues the world is facing are exacerbated by an absence of coordination among different actors from the scientific community, policy-making and civil society. Policy-makers often do not use or understand scientific evidence, giving rise to a growing disconnection where opportunities for collaboration are dismissed or excluded. To combat this, there is a need to improve the science-policy interface, that is, the process that aims to identify, formulate and evaluate policies to improve the effectiveness of governance. In order to fulfill these tasks, the interface depends on fruitful interrelations between the scientific community, the world of policy-making and the field practitioners.

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However, the problem extends beyond a lack of knowledge transfer and coordination, given that other gaps also contribute to the partial failure of the science-policy interface. Whilst there may be an overabundance of data for some issues, there are compelling gaps for others. In addition, the scientific information often lacks interoperability and is rarely available together in one place. These hinder effective communication of results to policy and decision-makers, impeding the development and implementation of sound and timely policies.

The interface between science and policy also needs an effective and robust governance structure which promotes better interaction and implementation mechanisms. A dynamic science-policy-society interface is a core instrument to support well-informed environmental decision-making while also engaging the right actors in achieving the SDGs. In the current context of rising carbon emissions and insufficient climate mitigation efforts, one may conclude, as does the UNEP Report [3], that incremental changes would miss the mark and that rapid and transformational action is needed. Achieving the SDGs will therefore require the cooperation of a multitude of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines with differing priorities and interests. This demands a thorough understanding of interactions between diverse set of cultures, visions and objectives.

Example of complex international governance mechanisms



Source: eco-union

A systemic vision to catalyse transformation

Based on this premise, any systemic change needs to go hand in hand with a strong focus on achieving the SDGs, both as a normative vision and to guide concrete action. The six transformations identified in the SDSN Report provide an important tool for understanding the interconnectedness of the goals in the era of the Anthropocene. Similarly, a view connecting all the SDGs is proposed, based on the planetary boundaries to human activity. This puts the environment and biosphere in the centre due to its essential role in order for a sustainable human society to flourish. A third but nevertheless vital component is an economy that helps us in achieving this, that is, an economy that unquestionably needs to serve society as a whole. Conceptualising as three interdependent and interconnected groups of goals also helps us identify potential synergies between goals, and give more structure and direction to our efforts towards sustainability, always keeping in mind the ecological foundations on which human society and the economy rests.

Transformative vision of SDGs



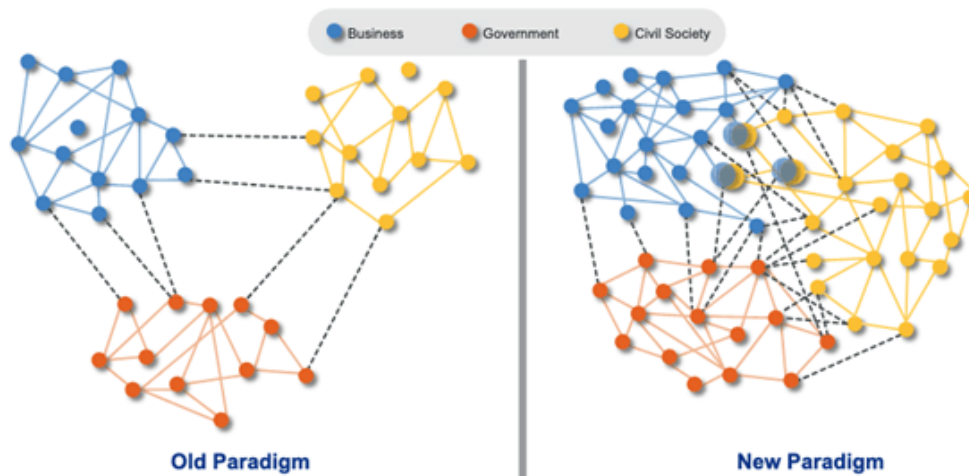
Source: Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University

Stronger civil society actors to empower changes

Mediterranean civil society needs to play an indispensable new role in order to achieve this realignment of the SDGs. The success of the sustainability transformation in the Mediterranean depends on social activism that mobilises stakeholders and changes norms. A vibrant range of organised and unorganised groups, NGOs, social movements, grassroots, advocacy groups and the like see their role widen and blur the boundaries between sectors as they take new forms. Their role will include that of facilitators, conveners and innovators as well as service providers and advocates. Importantly, they are also affected by the changing economic, geopolitical and technological context of our times. As a result, social engagement is changing and traditional funding models are disrupted.

These diverse and evolving networks are increasingly innovative in their attempts to solve societal challenges and support local, national and global governance. However, in light of their new contexts, characterised by ever-increasing uncertainty, civil society actors cannot achieve the necessary impact in isolation. Therefore, new ways of tackling societal challenges need to transcend traditional boundaries, as civil society engages more closely with government, businesses and international organisations. In this way, the power and influence of civil society can be optimised to enable maximum impact. As illustrated below, civil society could be viewed as the glue that connects public and private activity in order to strengthen their common positive influence, contributing to stronger and more frequent interaction between sectors. This said, it is vital that the civil society actors maintain their integrity and purpose ahead of this new function. Only this way civil society can hold stakeholders accountable and act as watchdogs and advocates for the marginalised [4].

A new role for civil society



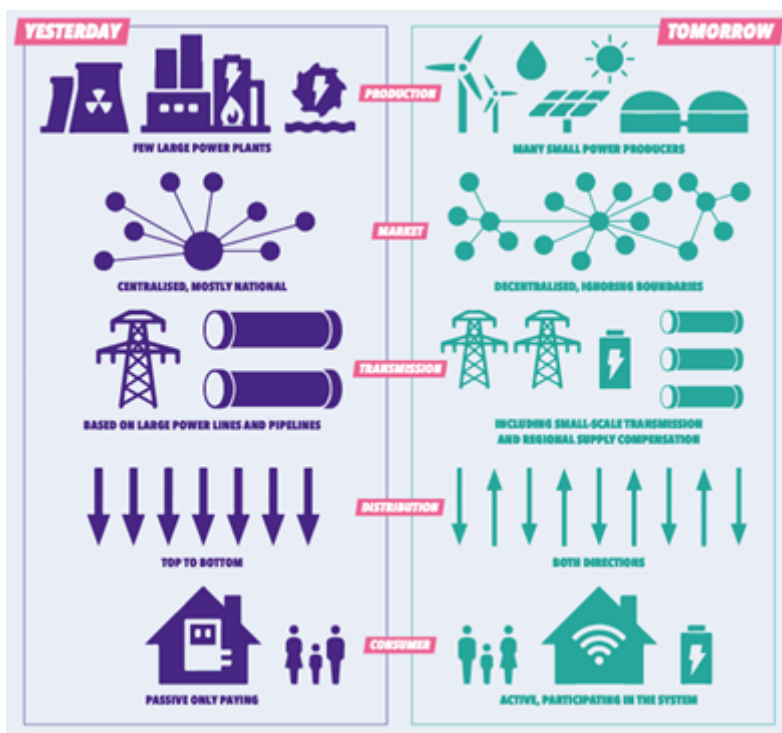
Source: World Economic Forum

Promoting renewable, decentralized and democratized Energy system

In our research, we foresee three strategic drivers to leverage the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and accelerate the socio-ecological transformation of the Mediterranean region. First, clean, renewable, decentralised and affordable energy for all is an essential basis for the sustainable transition. Today the region is heavily dependent on fossil fuels, as these make up 58% of its energy mix, with renewables accounting for only 11% and a 44% energy import dependence ratio [5]. Development of renewable energy can be promoted through the decentralisation of the energy system to meet increased demand, expected to triple in the next two decades in the Southern Mediterranean countries. This is leading to greater interconnectedness between countries and at the same time to more resilient energy networks.

In the context of these deep transformations in the energy landscape, it is important not to lose sight of fairness and social justice. Putting renewable energy into the hands of communities is a way of taking power from the polluters at the same time as incentivising democratic and decentralised renewable generation [6]. When it comes to equity implications, the renewable energy transition will improve access to modern energy services for all, as per capita energy demand increases in the Southern Mediterranean countries. Energy efficiency gains will reduce energy consumption while also improving industrial competitiveness, increase spending on upgrades and hence not impede GDP growth. Similarly, households and businesses can reinvest their savings on energy back into the local economies. This all translates into job creation and wellbeing in the whole region.

The Energy transition framework



Source: Friends of the Earth Europe

Towards circular, inclusive, green & blue economy in the Mediterranean

Secondly, supporting an economy that provides environmentally-friendly goods and services, while creating fair jobs and promoting social equality is one of the biggest challenges for the sustainable transition. An important part of achieving a greener economy is through more sustainable production and consumption patterns [7]. The concept of “circular” or “spiral” economy aiming at reducing waste and increase recycling to make a better use of natural resources should also be integrated in the economic policies and strategies at regional, national and local level. ‘Blue economy’, which encourages better stewardship of our seas and marine resources in the tourism, fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, biotechnology and marine energy sectors, is of particular importance to the Mediterranean [8].

Related to this, an innovative way to conserve ecosystems whilst providing the economy with growth potential is nature-based solutions (NBS) [9]. These are actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore ecosystems that at the same time address societal challenges. In this way environmental and biodiversity benefits go hand in hand with improving human wellbeing. This sustainable management and use of nature for tackling a wide range of socio-environmental challenges is dearly needed in the Mediterranean region.

The Circular Economy framework



Source: European Commission

Green, productive and inclusive cities, territories and communities

The third essential driver for the transition is to promote local communities acting as agents for change and leading by example [10]. Sustainable communities can meet the diverse needs of residents, families and other users, contributing to high quality of life and shared prosperity. This includes the effective use of natural resources, enhancing the environment, promoting social cohesion and inclusion and strengthening well-being [11].

The sustainable Communities framework



Source: The Egan Review Skills for Sustainable Communities

Cities and local territories are also thought to be important protagonists in the transition, due to their role as hubs for innovation and experimentation, connecting people and ideas [12]. The productive city, both generating energy and through urban agriculture is a new

idea that has been gaining much ground and interest during the last years, in both academic and practitioner circles. This local production needs to be implemented as a nature-based solution, to avoid social divisions and excluding vulnerable groups.

Conclusions

From previous analysis, it remains clear that, at current pace, the Mediterranean region will miss the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and will remain highly vulnerable to the current systemic crisis. With 10 years to go until 2030, this is now the last opportunity for the region to drastically change the current *statu quo* and implement ambitious strategies and policies driving the shift towards a more inclusive, environmentally friendly and fair development. In a way, the COVID-19 pandemic amplifies the space and need for quick, efficient and comprehensive response and involvement from all sectors of the society. The empowerment of the civil society, the commitment of key stakeholders and the right Science-Policy-Practice framework are the necessary conditions for moving towards sustainability in the region. By focusing particularly on the strategic drivers of Energy, Economy and Communities, we believe that the Mediterranean can recover a sustainable path and become again a place where citizens live in harmony, peace and shared prosperity.

Note: This article is based on a working document on the State of Sustainability in the Mediterranean, co-written by Jérémie Fosse and Nora Hannisdal, and to be published by the end of 2020.

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