

MAGHREB: THE WEAK AND VULNERABLE WALL OF EUROPE

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1.- Introduction

The Maghreb region, which includes Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, has become one of the most unstable geopolitical borders of the European Union in the last decade. A vast area inhabited by some 95 million people - eighty percent of them in Algeria and Morocco -, enclosed between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara desert, and separating southern Europe from the Sahel, one of the most conflictive areas on the planet, with which it shares a wide range of structural problems: from poverty to corruption, unemployment, economic and social inequalities, the technological deficit, educational and infrastructure underdevelopment, food insecurity and water stress which will be one of the largest in the world by 2040.

Added to this are elements of security that make it one of the main centers of world instability for the next two decades: population growth, which is particularly worrying in a country with an excessive degree of political, economic and security uncertainty such as Algeria; the strengthening of jihadist movements, particularly in Libya, but also in southern Tunisia and in Algeria itself, the scene in the last decade of the last century of an unfinished war between the state and radical groups of Wahhabi ideology that left more than 300.000 dead, thousands of people disappeared and many accounts pending in a collective memory that is still very much alive; and the proliferation of armed militias and transnational mafias, even connected with similar groups in southern Europe, which engage in all kinds of smuggling, from arms to people and food, but above all fuel, and which have turned the illicit trade and the parallel economy into a source of wealth and work for millions of citizens in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Libya.

In addition to the rampant criminality and the constant threat of terrorism, there is also political fragility in a region predisposed to the neo-caesarean trend that is sweeping the Arab world due to the forced failure of the so-called "Arab springs". In January 2011, tens of thousands of Tunisians - mostly young - took to the streets crying out "freedom, rights, and social justice". A protest movement that in just two weeks ended the exhausted dictatorship of the sick Zinedin el Abedin Ben Ali - abandoned by an important part of his regime- and that immediately spread to the rest of the nations of the MENA

region for different reasons; In some of them, such as Egypt, the result of the same disenchantment and the same weakness of the system; In others, such as Libya, driven by a foreign agenda.

Almost a time later, the libertarian movement only survives in Tunisia, the scene of a democratic transition as exemplary as it is weak, supported by very precarious pillars and full of chiaroscuro. The political reform - which concluded with the municipal elections of 2018 - is considered a success. However, none of the three demands that articulated the revolution have been accomplished: the freedoms achieved after the revolts are in clear decline; the rule of law has progressed, but is still far from the standards of the most developed countries in this area. And social justice is still a yearning that is not likely to be fulfilled: obsolete, dependent on foreign aid and supported by the European powers, the Tunisian economy suffers from the same structural problems as in the times of the dictatorship - unemployment, corruption, governmental management errors and lack of horizons-, and is immersed in an acute crisis, similar to the one that triggered the uproar.

Late in the first quarter of 2019, the concern and threats that had been hanging over Tunisia since a chain of jihadist attacks in 2015 reaped the lives of 72 people - 60 of them foreign visitors - and ruined tourism, one of the pillars of its fragile economy, have become more acute. Harassed by creditors and the lack of liquidity, which even endangered the payment of salaries to the

administration, the government then led by Prime Minister Yousef Chahed, accepted a credit of some \$2.8 billion granted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in exchange for a series of structural changes and austerity policies. In the terms of reference, both organizations demanded a reduction in the massive volume of the Tunisian administration, changes in fiscal policy, opening of markets, monetary stability, efficient fight against corruption and other measures including reductions. Requirements that the Tunisian government did not dare to implement - fearful of social conflict - and which forced the IMF and the World Bank to turn off the tap of the promised credit. Cornered, Tunisia then turned to Arab money, lent on apparently better terms. Saudi Arabia through the ties established with the royal family Al Saud by the late President Beji Caïd Essebsi, and Qatar through the relations between the monarchy in Doha and the Islamist movement Ennahda, the first political force in the country. Even so, at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, the economy - which remains in the same parameters as before the revolution - is still too fragile a link that threatens the stability of a political transition that has been successful. So do -to a lesser extent- the social advances, promoted and applauded during the revolution, and today in clear regression

One of the keys to the success of this political transition is the ideological and structural transformation carried out by the "Ennahda" Islamist movement, the main force in a country that boasts a high degree of secularism. Caught in the dilemma

that shakes all the groups emanating from the "Nahda" - the Islamic revival movement of the 19th century - and its main representative, the Muslim Brothers, forced to choose and maintain the balance between the trends that pull towards radical Salafism and those that opt for pragmatism, the movement founded in Tunisia by Rachid Ghannouchi and Abdel Fatah Mouro chose the second one. In May 2015, after two years of violence in which the most backward forces in the group came close to breaking up the transition, it separated preaching from political action and became a conservative party with an Islamist leaning towards like of the right in Europe. It did not abandon the Islamist agenda; it simply chose to defend it and impose it from a more modern context, adapted to the new reality that Tunisian society was experiencing. Although he has lost the thrust of the most radicals, who have shifted to other parties, the gamble has brought him positive results. In 2014 it became the second force in Parliament - which was presided over by Mouro himself - and the fundamental pillar of the government led by the secular platform "Nidaa Tounis". Three years later, he won the municipal elections - the first in the country's democracy - and the legislative elections in 2019, accumulating more power despite losing the presidency of the Republic and failing to form and lead the new government.

Ten years after the rebellion that overthrew Muammar al-Qadhafi's dictatorship, Libya is still a failed

state, a victim of chaos and civil war in which two governments - both without democratic legitimacy - fight for control of territory and economic resources supported by dozens of local militias and foreign private military security companies (PSMCs) that profit from the first privatized war in history. One, supported by the UN in Tripoli, and the other under the tutelage of Marshal Jalifa Hafter, a former CIA-trained opposition exile, who from Tobruk dominates nearly eighty percent of the territory and the exploitation of most of the oil resources. Tripoli also has the political, economic and military support of Qatar and, by extension, of Italy and Turkey, the latter being the main defender of the city-state of Misrata, with which it has maintained commercial and ethnic ties since the times of the Ottoman Empire. Hafter, for his part, receives the same support from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which provide him with weapons and air superiority despite the arms embargo that has weighed on the country since the rebellion in 2011. It also receives support from France, which has given it political stature, and from Russia through PSMC as the Wagner Group, owned by Yeugnei Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch closely linked to President Vladimir Putin. The marshal, who has become the country's real strongman, has lifted a siege on Tripoli in April 2019 with two clear objectives: to corner Misrata, his fiercest enemy; and to snatch from the UN-supported government its last center of power and resistance: control of the National Oil Company (NOC). From this division, from the anarchy and a war turned into a

multinational pulse, diverse militias and mafias take advantage, which have turned Libya into the nucleus of the great hypermarket of the contraband that articulates the north of Africa, from the lands of the Sahel to the waters of the Mediterranean; and in the bastion of heterogeneous jihadist groups, as much rooted historically in the own Sahel as arrived from the Middle East, that have turned the country into one of their main centers of businesses and operations.

The solidity of the monarchy prevented Mohammed VI of Morocco from suffering a similar fate to that of Ben Ali or Muammar al-Gaddafi, although the economic and social situation shared features with that of Tunisia. In Algeria, it was a series of populist measures, combined with the repression of the regime that bought social peace and numbed the unrest, which broke out again in February 2019. A similar situation was experienced in Mauritania, where the protests were quickly and harshly put down by General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, in power since the triumph of the military uprising in 2008.

The failure of the "Arab springs", especially in Libya, has had two direct consequences for Europe. One of the most visible is the increase in illegal immigration to the Mediterranean. According to figures from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), around one million people have crossed the Mediterranean and arrived in Europe since records began in 2014, and around 20,000 more have officially died in the attempt, the majority due

to the shipwreck of precarious boats leaving from North Africa. Thousands more perished in the years following Muammar's fall to Qadhafi. In 2019 a total of 110,669 people managed to reach the beaches of Spain, Italy and Greece from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya on an irregular basis and 1,283 disappeared at sea. Most of them came from sub-Saharan African countries, but also from the final boarding nations themselves. Tens of thousands more are detained in reception centers along the North African coast and thousands more are in transit or in the hands of the mafia in the Sahel and Maghreb nations waiting to attempt the suicide jump to Europe. An unknown number, estimated in the thousands, have lost their lives in the Mediterranean or in the deserts of the Sahel without a trace.

The absence of border controls, both on the coast and in the southern regions, especially those bordering Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Senegal, also facilitates the free movement of jihadists in the region and their journey to Europe, Egypt and Turkey, where they pass through to Syria and Iraq. According to the last report of the foundation of studies and intelligence services "The Soufan Group", Tunisia is the fourth country in the world in number of foreign fighters that has joined the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, after Russia, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The Tunisian Ministry of Interior assures that about a thousand of them have returned to national territory in the last two years. Many of them have found refuge in Libya, a nation transformed into one of the bastions

of world jihadist. Regional groups such as Ansar al-Sharia, the Al Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Jama'a al Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin, a new platform that brings together former groups from the Sahel, are reported to be operating on its territory. There has also been a return of Islamic fighters to Algeria, the scene of a sustained upsurge in radical armed activity. The return and active presence of jihadists is also fluid and concerns Morocco and Mauritania.

Another of the most visible and worrying consequences is the consolidation of the informal economy linked to smuggling, which in countries such as Libya, southern Tunisia, has become the core of its economic system. According to research by the think tank Crisis Group, illegal trafficking of immigrants generates about 1.5 billion Euros per year in Libya, that of fuel 2 billion per year. Both, along with arms and militia enlistment, are the main economic activity in most towns and the only job outlet for young Libyans. In 2017, the Atlantic Council presented a report, led by researcher Ian Ralby and entitled Downstream Oil Thief, in which it stated that "the theft of refined products, such as gasoline and diesel, is a significant threat to the global economy and to the stability of the states and regions in which it is essential", and warned that it is an increasingly sophisticated activity "in which the border between the legal and the illegal is becoming blurred". That same year, the Catania Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation to clarify the links between Libyan fuel smugglers,

Maltese businessmen and the St. Helena Ercolano mafia, which brought gasoline to Europe.

In the Sahel, this corsair economy is also the labour base of the rural areas, most of which have become detached from central government control. Especially in the northern provinces of Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, and in southern Libya and Algeria, where multiple hetararchies have been created, a novel concept that refers to territories managed by warlords, smuggling bosses or jihadist leaders, sustained in the informal economy, where the authority of the state has practically vanished.

2. - Evolution

In the short and medium term (2030)

The development of the Maghreb will be linked to that of the Sahel, a region with which it is increasingly linked economically and in terms of security. And it points to a chronification and increase of the current challenges. The European Union's commitment to militarization in the Sahel over and above the economic and social development of those countries suggests that demographic pressure, regular and irregular immigration, the strengthening of terrorism and dependence on illegal trade will continue and expand over the next decade, especially in the rural and desert areas bordering the North African states. A perfect storm that will undoubtedly have a negative impact on the exposed populations of the Maghreb, where the social, political and economic problems that triggered the Arab springs persist; and consequently also on the European Union, which will see its current threats multiply. The situation in Algeria is particularly volatile and dangerous, and could become a powder keg with serious repercussions for the whole of Europe and especially for Spain, a country that depends on Algerian gas. Controlled by the army, political legitimacy has been in the air since 22 February 2019 when several thousand people took to the streets to oppose the announcement by the circle that protected President Abdelaziz Bouteflika that he would run for a fifth term despite being ill and having diminished faculties since he suffered a severe stroke in 2013.

The protest, permitted by the army in a country where until then any street meeting, however small, was suppressed, definitively exposed the struggle for the clans in power and ended with a bloodless coup d'état disguised as a popular protest movement. At the end of March of that year, when the president returned from his umpteenth trip to Europe for medical reasons, the then head of the army, General Ahmed Gaïd Salah, joined the demonstrators and asked for the application of the article of the Constitution allowing for disqualification. The so-called "Bouteflika clan" gave in. The interim head of state was transferred to the president of the Senate, Abdelkader Bensalah - appointed in 2004 by the president himself along with Gaïd Salah - and the general became the country's strongman. From his new position, he launched a so-called "clean hands" campaign against corruption that actually turned into a witch-hunt that led to the imprisonment of dozens of high-ranking officials, politicians, businessmen and journalists considered to be members of the "Bouteflika clan. Among them were his brother Said, who was considered the real power in the shadows, and General Mohamad Mediène, alias "Tawfik", who for the past 25 years was head of Algeria's influential intelligence services (DRS) and one of the country's most powerful men. Both were sentenced to more than ten years in prison along with the secretary general of the opposition Workers' Party, Louise Hanoun, on charges of conspiring with a foreign power, an expression which in Algeria always alludes to France. The two

former prime ministers of Bouteflika, Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal, were also sentenced to more than ten years in prison. Another former head of government, Abdelamejid Tebboun, a man of the system who led the executive briefly in the summer of 2017, won the controversial elections held in December 2019 after Bensalah and Gaïd Salah twisted the constitution to suit the claims of the new ruling clan. The turnout was the lowest in Algeria's contemporary history and Tebboun was elected among the protests of the citizens' movement "Hirak", which was born to end Bouteflika's mandate and which more than a year later is still on the streets vigorously every Tuesday and Thursday, now to demand the end of the military regime that has dominated Algeria since independence from France in 1962. On 21 February 2020, the streets across the country once again erupted to announce that the protest would continue despite increasing repression. And they demanded the departure of Tebboun and the government, which they consider to be part of "the same mafia" that enriched itself and exhaust the country under Bouteflika.

Two more weaknesses create doubts about the future stability of Algeria, a country with more than 40 million citizens, most of them young people who are looking for a future and who, like the rest of the inhabitants of the region, look to Europe as a way of escape and progress in the face of the scarcity of opportunities. One of them is economic. Algeria is in a severe economic crisis since 2014, as a result of the abrupt collapse of gas

and oil prices, the only wealth exploited by a country that is absolutely dependent on the volatile market of hydrocarbons and fossil energies. The sale of oil and gas accounts the 96 percent of the exports of the North African nation, which is tied to an economic system of socialist tint, in which the state is the first employer and all the basic products, from flour to gasoline, are subsidized. In an attempt to maintain social peace and prevent a revolt like the one that ended the dictatorships of its eastern neighbors, the Algerian regime has spent half of its national currency reserves, then estimated at some 178 billion Euros, between 2015 and 2017, in order to preserve this paternalistic system in the mistaken belief that the oil crisis would be temporary. The policy has begun to reverse itself in 2017 with the suspension of part of the subsidies, a decision that has unleashed inflation, exacerbated the depreciation of the national currency and spurred social unrest, which has been on the up since 2011.

Despite the energy reform designed by the regime and its commitment to the development of alternative energies such as solar energy, the outlook is that Algeria, a country with hardly any industrial fabric, will continue to depend on the oil and hydrocarbon market over the next decade, as well as on the help of its two main partners: China, whose companies enjoy the largest infrastructure contracts in the country, like the construction of the new airport in Algiers or the new multi-million dollar deep water port on the outskirts of the capital, and Russia, which has a significant arms trade with the

country. The lack of investment and industrialisation will keep the Algerian regime at the top of the list of states with the highest import rate in the world for the next ten years. With few job opportunities, the informal economy - estimated to account for 40 percent of GDP - and immigration will continue to be the main future options for young people. In 2017, the number of Algerians who decided to venture out to sea to reach the coasts of Sardinia and Spain in an irregular manner doubled. Less than 200 kilometers separate the city of Oran, one of Algeria's economic capitals, from Almeria in Spain. The deterioration of the economy, affected by the impossibility of maintaining the old system of subsidies and the unstoppable consolidation of the market economy in a socialist framework, is leading the country to a deeper social crisis, and violence cannot be ruled out. Not even a flood of irregular immigrants like the one taking place in Libya.

Internal and border security are the second weakness. Within the last five years, international jihadism and internal terrorism with radical Islamic roots have grown slowly but continuously, especially in the north of the country. According to the magazine "Al Yeish", the propaganda organ of the Algerian Ministry of Defence, in 2017, 91 alleged jihadists were killed within the military units of the fight against terrorism and around 70 were arrested, almost all of them in the peripheral provinces of Algiers. Many of them were under the radar of the army and their record showed that they had joined radical Islamist movements in the 90s and the

beginning of the 21st century. In addition, there were at least two serious attacks in the north of the country, assumed by a local faction linked to the transnational organization "Islamic State". And even though large-scale terrorist actions such as the bloody assault on the In Amenas site (2013) have not been repeated in the southern regions, on the eastern border, the situation remains unstable as a result of the impossibility for the Algerian authorities to monitor the longest border in North Africa. As in the Sahel regions, the Algiers regime controls security in the large urban areas, but has a minor and decreasing presence - both military and political and social - in the rural areas, especially the border areas, which are gradually being occupied by jihadist groups and mafias engaged in all kinds of smuggling. Several incidents demonstrated the progressive transit of radical Islamic fighters on the border with Niger and Mali, but also from Tunisia, where there is close collaboration with local Tunisian groups housed since 2011 in the mountains of Kasserine. The illegal trade in arms, people and fuel across the borders with Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Libya, the heart of smuggling in the Sahel, is also expected to grow and become more prevalent. In 2016, the now Algerian Prime Minister, Ahmed Ouyahia, admitted that the illegal trade in gasoline, only across the border with Morocco, costs Algeria more than 2 billion Euros a year. Part of the gasoline, subsidized by the government of Algiers, enters the business of contraband across the border with Libya, where it

contributes to financing the activity of jihadist groups and mafias dedicated to the trafficking of food and illegal immigrants. Algeria's lack of cooperation, which promotes its own security policy in the region and has disassociated itself from military initiatives, such as the French Operation Barhane, and policies - such as the G5, which are promoted by the countries of the Sahel and the European Union - add a further factor of insecurity and make it predictable that Algeria's southern border will continue to be one of the main dangers and points of concern for the Maghreb and the European Union in the coming decade.

A comparable situation is found in southern Libya, an area inhabited by nomadic tribes from ancient times with blood ties all the way through the Sahel, Chad and Sudan. To the west of the so-called "Savior's Pass" - which leads to Niger - are the Tuareg tribes, who have always maintained a weak alliance with Al Gaddafi. When the dictator fell, some of the Tuareg militias fled to Mali, where they joined the National Movement for the Independence of the Azawad (MNLA). Some of them still remain within the transnational jihadist group Jama'a al Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin while others have developed their own ways in the Libyan oasis of Sebha, where they have given birth to a neo-Gaddafi current. They control the illegal trade through the town of Ghat, on the border with Algeria, and have a feeble relationship with the UN-supported government in Tripoli. To the east of the El Salvador pass, control of the territory is held by the Tebu tribes, which Al Qaddafi used as mercenaries in the Chad war and which he later

betrayed. The Tebu maintain close relations with opposition groups in Darfur (Sudan), some already established in Libyan territory, and with clans in Chad, where the activity of the Nigerians of Boko Haram has been permanent for years. The Tebu are involved in the clandestine trade in fuel and food, but also with the mafia that smuggles immigrants from Sudan and the Horn of Africa, who must cross their territory. Jihadists from Niger and Nigeria, mainly from Boko Haram, must also cross their lands. Their presence is proven in the south of Libya and in northern cities such as Sirte and Derna.

The political instability in Libya suggests that this situation will continue and eventually deteriorate over the next decade, making the problem of illegal immigration to Europe chronic and even greater, since control of the beaches in the north of the country - now held by mafias allied with Europe, and mainly Italy - is a fragile patch that does not remove the source of the problem. Without a firm political solution at the horizon, the power vacuum that characterizes the border areas between the southern Maghreb and the northern Sahel will persist, leaving a space free for the development of mafias and jihadist groups. In Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Chad, Niger and Mali, the central governments control the urban areas but not entirely the rural ones. The Nigerian army never goes beyond the city of Dirkou, and the forces of General Jalifa Haftar, a strongman from the east and part of southern Libya, do not move beyond the oasis of Sebha, leaving a large area of territory uncontrolled. The same happens between Gao and the

Algerian border and the north of Burkina Faso, on the route to Mauritania and Morocco.

Tunisia, for its part, will be inclined to remain stable over the next decade, as long as the democratic process in place is respected. The trend is for the Ennahda party to gain power and influence over the next decade, which will carry out a pragmatic and silent Islamisation of Tunisian society, particularly through the education and social welfare systems. Tunisian society will become more conservative but will remain the most advanced in the region. The economic fragility will have to continue to be compensated for by the European Union, as it has done until now, so that the small country does not derail. The security challenges and the parallel economy will remain constant as long as the instability in Libya continues. An eventual revolt in Algeria is the biggest threat, as in the rest of the region.

In Morocco, the main factor of instability is the health of the King, Mohammad VI. An eventual and premature death of the monarch, in a context where the Crown Prince is still too young, and where the Islamist parties are increasing, could be a very hard shock for a country that also shares social and economic problems with its neighbors, and a large border with the Sahel and Algeria, the two biggest destabilizing factors in North Africa. The ongoing conflict with the Western Sahara is another cause for concern, in which Algeria, the main supporter of the Saharan people in the region, is also involved. The obstacles to dialogue progress, placed mainly by Rabat - but also by Algiers -

entail the risk of an abrupt deterioration of the situation and a resurgence of armed conflict. After forty years of exile, the refugee camps of Tindouf are a powder keg where the malaise and the wish of many young people to take up arms again is growing, tired of waiting for a political solution through dialogue which is not being reached. Added to this are the hard living conditions in the desert and the economic inequalities, as well as the recent change in the direction of the Polisario Front. After the death of President Mohammad Abdul-Aziz, the accession to power of Brahim Ghali, a man with a more radical and military profile, adds a war factor. Mauritania and Algeria would be equally affected by a possible military conflict.

The heptarchies will also have a negative impact, surviving despite Europe's militaristic approach. Whether through the deployment of their own soldiers - such as the failed French-led Operation Barhane'; or the US-built drone airbase next to Agadez airport in Niger; or also through the financing and sale of arms to local armies within the framework of international cooperation in the fight against global terrorism. In this regard, Europe will be confronted in the coming years to a cyclopean security problem in the Sahel, on its fearsome and disquieting southern border. Inspired by the example of groups such as the Danish Home Guard, which originated in the resistance movement to the German occupation during the Second World War, some experts have suggested a choice of transforming militias and paramilitary groups into security and combat units that do not respond to

the authority of governments, but to the Will and legitimacy of the people represented in Parliament. An experiment that was successful as much in the United States, after the fratricidal conflict, as in the United Kingdom, overcoming Nazi paranoia, but which has proved to be harmful in states with precarious power structures and institutions. The proposal presented by the UN in 2012 to create a "Libyan Territorial Army" not only meant another shipwreck, but also exacerbated the emerging tribal confrontation and contributed to accentuate the turmoil that defines the country today. Empowered and heavily armed, without a defined hierarchy, these supposed "plural security areas" were quickly transformed into a group of small autonomous heptarchies where the presence of the State was marginal and its authority vanished; particularly in the areas most distant from the capital and in the border regions. While Europe reinforces and secures its borders, the artificial borders designed by colonialism in the Middle East and Africa are blurring due to the effects of war, capitalist ambition, foreign interference, smuggling, migration, demographic growth, poverty and the climate crisis, all of which facilitate the consolidation of these new entities. The first one to begin to be blurred was the line that separates Iraq from Syria, victim of an ethnic, political, economic and religious pulse with the scent of the Cold War between the four regional powers and their respective international partners: Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iran, with Qatar as the investment magnate. The second is blurred in the

wide strip of sand and dunes that separates the wild green of the Atlas from the African savannah.

For evidence we need only to observe the map to understand the vast area of the uneven heptarchy that is beginning to develop in the Sahel. In most rural areas of northern Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Chad, the presence of the government and the national army is no longer even symbolic. A vast extension of key arenas in the traditional trans-Saharan trade routes now dominated by armed militias of all sorts: mainly radical Wahhabi-Saudi inspired takfiri groups linked to global jihadism. But also gangs and tribes dedicated to the matute with all kinds of products: weapons and fuel, above all, but also drugs, food and people, in a hypermarket of smuggling that extends thousands of kilometers and replaces non-existent state economic systems. The subsidized petrol refined in northern Libya is sold on the black market in Tunisia, Algeria, Niger, Mali, even Mauritania and Senegal. While the fuel consumed by Libyan citizens, which is five times more expensive, is produced in Algeria or Nigeria itself.

The weapons and the migrants follow similar circuits, turned into one more tragic and millionaire business. Without realistic development plans - the aid at source proposed as an alternative by European politicians clashes with the absence of reliable partners in countries where the state's fragility is compensated and exploited by the militias, - with demographic predictions that the Sahelian population will be doubled to 600 million by 2040 - nearly 50 per

cent of them under the age of 30 - and an extreme climate crisis that will turn the region in two decades into the driest on the planet, the heptarchy being consolidated on Europe's new southern border appearing like a time bomb. So far, the EU, led by France in this area, has opted for a sustained security and militarisation policy by the limited deployment of troops and in recruiting potential partners among the militias, which has already proved to be a failure and risky on other occasions. And for the transformation of the North African states into well-paid gendarmes to serve as a parapet and stop the irregular migration that in such circumstances will not cease to grow in the coming years. A flow that they are unable to absorb, will transform the core of their fragile societies, with the subsequent risk of balkanisation and instability not only for these countries, but also for the entire Mediterranean basin.

possible that the migratory flows to Europe could change their trend, as everything suggests the negative population growth in Europe as well as the economic difficulties that are expected in the old continent will reduce the weight of the EU and its member countries. Europe will be faced to look for workforce in the neighbouring countries, mostly in the Maghreb, which also will see their development reduced.

Long term (2040)

In the long term, the water stress in the region, which is expected to be one of the largest in the world, is the greatest danger, according to the World Resources Institute. Both water and land will be scarce, and feeding the North African population and providing them with a future will be a challenge, even with the decelerating population growth. Added to this will be the problems previously mentioned, such as migration pressure from the Sahel and the insecurity in this area, which, however, will be less affected by the absence of water. In this regard, it is

3-Influence on regional and European security

The unstable borders between the southern Maghreb and the Sahel, the strengthening of jihadist groups, the weakness of the Maghreb governments and the extension of networks trafficking in people, arms and fuel, which have already established links with sister organisations in southern Spain, France and Italy, represent a challenge for regional and European security, and will continue over the next twenty years. So far, European powers have opted for mainly security-oriented policies to counter this situation, increasing their military presence in the area and counter-terrorism operations. However, there are few possibilities for a solution without admitting that poverty, underdevelopment, the exodus from rural areas, immigration to the cities and the rapid and large population growth without access to education and work are the root of the problem, and that this cannot be eradicated only with the thunder of guns.

Europe's security will continue to be compromised in the Maghreb unless it opts for constructive policies in support of legitimate governments, educational development and absolute respect for human rights. The old

strategies of cohabitation with authoritarian regimes, which are tolerated only in exchange for maintaining security, must be dismantled and the political role that non-violent Islamist movements acquire must be accepted, avoiding labeling them or placing them in another category for spurious political, economic and military interests. Over the next two decades, the Maghreb will continue to be one of Europe's most unstable geopolitical frontiers, and in order to reverse this trend, good governance and sustainable development must be encouraged. To promote fully-fledged societies, with robust institutions, and an active and powerful civil society. And strong and democratic economic development, which reaches all layers of society, will help to calm the revolutionary airs and graces still blowing in the Maghreb, will help to lessen the seduction produced by immigration and radical movements, and will reduce the spaces in which the various mafias operate. THE END

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