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It is unquestionable that the Covid-19 pandemic has created profound economic and social issues. The OECD Employment Outlook 2021 shows that, in 2020, because of Covid-19, 114 million jobs were lost worldwide in the first phase of the pandemic, but with major differences and disparities in the various countries. The pandemic has exacerbated inequalities, widening social and economic gaps at global level, and creating millions of new poor.

Decisions on how to tackle both the pandemic and, above all, the post-pandemic economic recovery required governments to take responsibility for choices that are having and will continue to have a crucial impact on our near future. The European Union managed to respond to the challenge that was implicit in the pandemic through a profound change of course, by launching its Next Generation EU. The Union thus moved away from the then dominant austerity policy to become more united, stronger, and based on solidarity, by allocating its budget for common debt issuance to support the member countries most hit by the crisis, like Italy.

Despite difficulties and contradictions, the EU succeeded in making choices that were not only unprecedented but also unthinkable until that time. It intervened directly, through public spending funded by common debt, to help the countries most affected by the pandemic, absorbing the shock that it had created in its first phase and averting its most catastrophic effects. A European social model was put in place; this model, consisting of national systems of protection of welfare, labour, and especially health, has been supported and enhanced by the EU.

Now, the post-pandemic growth opens great opportunities for a genuinely sustainable development for Mediterranean countries. Nonetheless, sustainable development will only be possible if we place economic well-being and social well-

being on an equal footing, repudiating any development model that deepens inequalities. The pandemic has made clear to national governments that the Covid-19 virus has no geographic boundaries and that acting alone is no longer a viable option.

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine further accentuated the need to move beyond individual national approaches towards a European supranational governance, especially in the field of common foreign and security policy, that restores the EU's real political role. In particular, the war has highlighted the strong dependence of the old continent and the southern shore of the Mediterranean on Russian energy and food supplies respectively. In the Euro-Mediterranean context, the crises generated can serve as a new impetus for transnational cooperation and new reforms in specific sectors: from the energy point of view, the Union aims at achieving its own strategic autonomy, through strengthening the existing partnership with the Mediterranean countries and investment in renewable and sustainable energy sources for the green and technological transition. Enhancing cooperation is urgent now that the war and its consequences, including the blockade of Black Sea ports, are exacerbating the dramatic situation of food insecurity and rising prices of agricultural commodities in Africa that, according to the World Food Programme (WFP), could bring to "the global hunger crisis". Accordingly, there is an urgent need to keep food and fertiliser markets accessible (as also advocated by the Food and Agricultural Organization, FAO) and greater attention needs to be paid to the negative outcomes that sanctions could have on the lives of individuals. It is precisely this scenario that could provide an opportunity for a more solid relationship between Europe and the Mediterranean, redrawing the geopolitical axes with a view to greater solidarity and reciprocity and averting the spread of a 'world war in pieces'.

For over two decades, globalisation has made our lives and our economies interdependent, making it impossible to go back to national autarchies. However, this globalisation has no actual "global governance". In a deeply torn world, the only solution is dialogue: we need cooperation between all countries, including transference of knowledge, resources, and skills, keeping in mind that now almost all problems can only be solved at a global level. For instance, we ought to make Covid-19 vaccines available to all countries.

We have to formulate increasingly shared responses to the challenges of contemporary circumstances. Nevertheless, to turn the pandemic into an opportunity for taking a sustainable growth path, we must have clear ideas. The objective of the

post-pandemic future is not to restore the previous situation, but to create a new path, without relying on one-off measures, but by redressing all the structural deficits, in terms of inequality and injustice, that have always afflicted our countries.

Historically, the destinies of North- and South-Mediterranean countries, despite their cultural, linguistic, and political differences, have been linked profoundly. We must work together, establishing a dialogue with all the parties, organisations, and associations of our social fabric, to create a more just society in which, through an equal relationship between states, common challenges can become shared opportunities. In a world of opposing and very different realities, there is no model of coexistence and integration other than that founded on solidarity and dialogue. Even freedom, democracy, science, the market, and solidarity itself can no longer be taken for granted and are no longer unanimously acquired once and for all: they must be continually re-acquired. Those who have something to say to the world, people, social partners, institutions, or governments must now first experience it at first-hand.

The Euro-Mediterranean area can represent a great resource to build, through cooperation and an increasingly close link between our countries, the future of Africa and Europe. They, together with the other neighboring countries of the Asian region, will be, as the Italian President Sergio Mattarella recently said in Algeria, necessarily shared.