

Time to Reflect

Professor Stephen Calleya

On the occasion of the celebration of our Festa it is important that we reflect upon the many blessings that we have in Mellieħa and throughout Malta and thank Our Bambina for watching over us and safeguarding us against the multitude of security challenges that our Mediterranean is experiencing. This is especially the case when one considers that the Mediterranean we live in is going through a tremendous moment of insecurity and instability.

The ever increasing list of security challenges includes ongoing conflicts such as those in Syria, Libya and between Israel and Palestine, terrorism, illegal migration, organised crime, energy security and climate change. During this time of turbulence and transition across the Euro-Mediterranean region, where humanitarian suffering is being witnessed on an unprecedented scale in modern times, it is essential that the European Union and all international actors with a capacity to influence regional relations in the Mediterranean seek to foster more cooperative relations and steer clear of clashes within countries and between them.

The time has come to propose and champion a holistic security agenda that is necessary to attract a collective Mediterranean approach to security risks and threats where diplomacy is given a priority. The absence of robust and assertive diplomatic initiatives that are supported by credible political and economic resources has resulted in the Mediterranean becoming a geo-strategic fault line between a prosperous Europe towards the north and an impoverished North Africa and Middle East towards the south. The arc of instability that has emerged in the Mediterranean since 2011 demands a strategic rethink that addresses the immediate and long term causes of such instability.

Today the Mediterranean is the least integrated region in the world. In order for a functioning Euro-Mediterranean region to emerge, all of the countries in the basin must perceive and believe that they share a common strategic future. Such essential characteristics remain absent or too weak to be able to build a coherent regional arrangement. Without such a regional security forum it will remain almost impossible to advance security measures that can mitigate in an effective manner the numerous sources of insecurity in our midst, which range from outright conflict, to smuggling of drugs and fuel to trafficking of human beings and environmental degradation.

The emergence of a ring of failed states across the Mediterranean as is already the case in Syria, Libya and Yemen and the escalation of dormant conflicts in the Middle East or North Africa will further severely undermine the stability we so often take for granted here in Malta. An increase in the proliferation of weapons which is necessary to sustain conflicts and the continuation of humanitarian catastrophes such as those in Syria and those experienced daily by migrants being trafficked across the Mediterranean will eventually undermine stability everywhere in the Mediterranean and impinge upon the political and economic outlook of every country.

Thus our Festa is a good time to reflect upon and celebrate the peace and prosperity that we have in our country in the Mediterranean. Yet it is also a time to reflect on the suffering that so many others in our Mediterranean are experiencing and to champion policy actions that will start addressing their plight.