

# THE EU'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN: CHALLENGES TO COHESION AND DEMOCRACY





# The EU's Partnership with the Southern Mediterranean:

## Challenges to Cohesion and Democracy

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## Executive Abstract

What are nature and origins/causes of the major political, economic, and social challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean region today (e.g. security, migration, democracy, development)? What role can the EU play in the Southern Neighbourhood to meet those challenges? This report addresses these two central questions. Because there can be no stability, democracy or shared prosperity so long as people's priorities and expectations are left frustrated, the report begins by identifying the challenges for EU policy: survey research shows protesters demanded both political and economic inclusion, and that the Arab Uprisings were driven by governments' failures to meet people's needs *and* expectations across the board.

While experts' opinions tend to portray the EU's efforts – if not results – generously, survey research shows people distrust the EU and that contrary to its own self-image, they do not perceive it as pursuing fundamental values of democracy and human rights. The report also shows that an increasingly complex geopolitical environment paired with reduced EU capacity makes local tensions and conflicts more globally entangled and thus harder to address. EU policy should therefore manage expectations and focus on areas in which the EU, due to experience, leverage, and means at hand, is best placed to make a difference. However, the report also shows there is space for external leverage providing the EU addresses people's needs: to do this, the EU must revise its promotion of policies which increase inequality in the MENA, and which acquiesce to supporting autocrats in the name of the short-term pursuit of security.

This does not mean sacrificing European interests, but rather acknowledging that in the long term current policies contribute to destabilising both the economies and political systems in the MENA. Planning economic and security strategy for the long term also affords opportunities: addressing social justice, environmental degradation, territorial inequalities, youth and women's empowerment, economic diversification and inclusiveness. Reconstruction and reconciliation is not easy, but these can also be the ingredients of a forward-lo Euro-Mediterranean agenda. The EU must finally catch up and implement the lessons from the ongoing Arab Uprisings, returning to focusing on human rights and democracy, providing practical solutions for migration (e.g. circular labour migration schemes), and living up to its fundamental values by routinely speaking out about human rights abuses. It should heavily invest in ties with civil society and democratic forces and ensure economic policies fit the socio-economic needs of Arab populations.

While this is no easy task, the risk in not doing so is that brittle, unstable MENA regimes will remain sinkholes of insecurity, destabilising both the MENA itself and Europe.

The Arab Transformations Project ([www.arabtrans.eu](http://www.arabtrans.eu)) was an international research project operating within the European Commission's FP7 framework (2013-2016). The project conducted comparative analyses of people's attitudes and behaviours in seven Middle Eastern countries – Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq – in the context of the social, political and economic transformations taking place across the Middle East and North Africa in the run-up to and in the wake of the Arab Uprisings of 2010-11. The project received funding from the EU's Seventh Framework Programme under grant agreement n. 320214.

The MEDRESET Project (<http://www.medreset.eu>) is a consortium of research and academic institutions focusing on different disciplines from the Mediterranean region to develop alternative visions for a new Mediterranean partnership and corresponding EU policies. It aims at designing an inclusive, flexible, and responsive future role for the EU in the region based on the multiple perspectives of local and bottom-up actors. MEDRESET received funding from the EU's Horizon 2020 Programme for Research and Innovation under grant agreement n. 693055.

The MENARA Project (<http://www.menaraproject.eu>) sheds light on the historical, political, economic and social dynamics affecting the Middle East and North Africa. Particular attention is devoted to the peculiar features of the new regional order as well as to the actors and processes that influence its development. The project outlines potential scenarios related to the course of the region in the medium (2025) and long (2050) term, and analyses elements of continuity and break with the past. MENARA received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement n. 693244.

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# 1

# **Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation: Forging the Path Ahead**

The Mediterranean is our history, geography and civilization and we have a responsibility to preserve it and build an enduring future. Barcelona has always been one of the motors driving Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Almost a quarter of a century ago, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) was launched here, laying the foundations for a regional integration process through which the EU and its Southern Partners hoped to pursue democracy and shared prosperity.

The ‘Barcelona Process’ (EMP) gave rise to the EU’s current ‘two pillars’ of action in the Mediterranean: the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) which focuses on bilateral processes, aiming to address region-wide concerns such as security, development, and supporting civil society; and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) which is a multilateral but governmental-driven forum.

The record of these initiatives has been mixed, and over a decade since the UfM’s inception, and nearly the same time since the ‘Arab Spring’, it is a good moment to look back, assess our accomplishments, and learn from our shortcomings. The Mediterranean as a whole, and the Middle East and North Africa in particular have gone through turmoil and upheaval in the last ten years and significant challenges to achieving economically and politically inclusive societies remain ahead. Nationwide protests in Algeria remind us that while the road ahead might be rocky, these challenges remain vital for the region’s future. This study draws on data and analysis from three EU-funded projects, ARABTRANS, ME-DRESET, and MENARA to analyze the genesis, successes and limitations of EU’s exter-



nal relations initiatives, identify key regional challenges and trends, and outline concrete measures which would help achieve the shared goal of economic and political inclusion.

The study begins by using ARABTRANS public opinion data to outline what ‘the people’ (ash-sha‘b) want, what populations believe are the challenges facing their countries today. From stability to prosperity, from religion, to peace to democracy, their answers challenge many received ideas about constraints to domestic and EU policy. People’s desire for a politically and economically inclusive future provide the EU with challenges, but also with opportunities to achieve the regional stability, democracy and shared prosperity which have always been its aim. MEDRESET and MENARA then draw on experts, civil society and policymakers to flesh out possible strategies, difficulties and opportunities facing the attempt to turn popular demands into political reality. The final contribution highlights the complex interrelation of domestic, regional and global geopolitical contexts – including within Europe –, which any sustainable policy strategy for the MENA must navigate. The study ends with recommendations on EU’s role in meeting such challenges.

The EU’s self-interest, people’s demands, and the Mediterranean region’s stability and prosperity all depend on successfully addressing these challenges. The EU must not shy away from recognising that its global influence is inextricable from its ‘fundamental values’ and from the socially and politically inclusive model which has been the open secret of its success: the EU must continue engaging its regional partners, but needs to revisit its approach if it wants to achieve these goals.

**Jordi Solé**

Member of the European Parliament

# 2

## What The People Want: Understanding the EU's Mediter- ranean Challenges<sup>1</sup>

*Andrea Teti (University of Aberdeen), Pamela Abbott (University of Aberdeen) and Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria (IEMed)*

The EU's external relations with Mediterranean partners have faced broadly similar challenges since the 1990s: creating an area of democracy and shared prosperity requires reforms which produce both political and economic inclusion. These are the ingredients of long-term stability, prosperity and peace.

In 2010-11, protesters across the Arab world famously chanted 'the people want the downfall of the regime' (ash-sha'b yureed isqaat an-nizaam). This chapter outlines what people across several Arab countries want from policymakers: what their priorities are, what motivates them to protest, why governments lose legitimacy, and how they perceive the EU. Understanding these priorities is crucial to the long-term success of any EU Mediterranean policy.

### 2.1 Genesis and Evolution of EU External Relations initiatives

In the wake of the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the USSR and the perceived triumph of liberal democracy, the 1995 Barcelona Conference launched the **Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)**. The 'Barcelona Process' aimed to promote economic and political liberalisation in the belief that these would facilitate democratization in Me-

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<sup>1</sup> The ARABTRANS project received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme under grant agreement n. 320214.

diterranean Partner Countries (MPCs) by engaging both at the state level and directly with CSOs. In addition, the combination of Arab states' high level of unemployment and large youth populations generated concerns of increasing immigration pressures. Political and economic reform were supposed to absorb these pressures. To achieve its objectives, the EMP was structured around political, economic, and cultural 'baskets' and adopted parallel pathways to integration: vertical integration between the EU and MPCs, and horizontal integration between MPCs. However, while the EMP's bilateral Association Agreements liberalised trade and markets to stimulate growth, privatization- and trade liberalization-driven development increased GDP growth but mostly benefited the EU and increased inequality in MENA countries. While in principle Association Agreements' 'democratic conditionality' allowed the EU to adopt punitive measures – from suspending aid to cutting off relations to freezing the Agreement itself – if partners violated human rights, in practice the EU never implemented conditionality. Instead, the EU prioritized short-term stability over long-term security, de facto propping up autocrats distrusted by their populations, while MENA governments opposed direct EU engagement with civil society and rejected pressure for democratization. Finally, EMP funding – and thus spending decisions – were located within the EU, belying the notion of equal partnership between partners, nor did MENA partner countries have prospects of EU Membership and its advantages to drive reform.

These limitations have beset EU Mediterranean policy ever since.

The 2004 **European Neighbourhood Policy** (ENP) adopted a broader, more ambitious focus, mirroring the EU Enlargement model, offering access to EU markets and aiming to 'share everything but institutions.' Contrary to EMP multilateralism, the ENP engaged governments individually, preventing UfM-style deadlock. The ENP contained positive features: a funding framework to which Arab civil society groups could apply to directly, it reintroduced the goals of democratization and defence of human rights, and adopted both negative and positive conditionality. However, in practice, the ENP had no 'teeth' having failed to formulate and apply conditionality criteria. It also prioritized short-term stability over democratization, which de facto meant supporting regional dictatorships, and it relied on privatizations and trade liberalization to pursue development, tools which while producing GDP growth, also increased inequality and reduced job quality. The limits of these choices were thrown into stark relief by the Arab Uprisings, as acknowledged by the EU itself in early 2011 (Teti 2012). The effectiveness of counter-revolutionary opposition to those Uprisings and the internal impact of the refugee crisis and of migration has convinced many within the EU that policy

should once again prioritize short-term stability and security. This path, however, will not resolve the underlying causes of instability and insecurity in the Mediterranean.

In 2008, **the Union for the Mediterranean** (UfM) was conceived to be more pragmatic and multilateral than the EMP, focusing on a narrow political remit and on government-level relations. This supposedly more pragmatic and achievable approach was intended to depoliticise and thereby re-invigorate EU-Arab relations. As a forum for garnering and focusing political will, and inasmuch as it provides a forum to address regional issues through Euro-Mediterranean projects and discussion fora, it still has the potential to do so in future. However, the UfM was swiftly marginalised: its intergovernmental structure required unanimity and was deadlocked by tit-for-tat vetoes, especially blocking political reform.

The UfM was also limited by lack of funding, and it dropped the EMP's democratization agenda – it too was unable to develop into an effective and sustained forum for action addressing the underlying causes of instability and inequality in the region.

To effectively diagnose and address these causes, it is crucial to understand what MENA populations actually want from their governments and from the EU, what their priorities are, what drove/drives dissatisfaction and protest, and how they conceive democracy. Understanding peoples' priorities allows us to clearly identify the challenges but also the opportunities available to the EU – and to partner governments – in designing policy.

## 2.2 Challenges for Political, Social and Economic Inclusion in the Middle East

Nationwide polls provide a picture of the causes of the Arab Uprisings (2010-11), and of the dissatisfaction people still feel in their wake<sup>2</sup>. Survey data illustrates the challenges to resilience, stability and security which local governments and international partners still face, and the priorities which must be addressed.

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2 Data for 2014 is taken from the Arab Transformations Survey. For 2011 and 2013 data, the Authors gratefully acknowledge the use of data from the Arab Barometer surveys II and III. Both ARABTRANS and ArabBarometer are probability surveys: findings can be generalised to all adult citizens in each country.

## 2.2.1 POLITICS AND THE ECONOMY: TALES OF EXCLUSION FORETOLD

**National Challenges, Priorities, and Conceptions of Democracy:** In 2010-11, the economy (poverty, unemployment, inflation) was seen as the most important challenge by far, nominated by just over three quarters of citizens in Egypt and Jordan and just over two thirds in Tunisia. It was also seen as the single most important challenge in Jordan (47%) and Tunisia (43%) and equal with security (34%) in Egypt. Second was corruption, nominated by 21% of people in Egypt, 50% in Tunisia and Iraq, 60% in Libya and Morocco, and 71% in Jordan. Economic inclusion and dealing with corruption were also central to people's perceptions of democracy, alongside political exclusion. Asked to choose from a list of factors, people's choices reflected a rounded conception of democracy: civil-political rights are certainly important, but so are socio-economic rights, and corruption – which has both economic and political dimensions (Teti and Abbott 2016).

**Causes of the Uprisings:** The 2014 Arab Transformations Survey found three major problems sparked the Uprisings: economic exclusion, political exclusion, and corruption. Asked to choose two factors from a broad list, people focused on:

Economic marginalisation: Economic factors (e.g. unemployment, inequality) were the most frequently mentioned in Egypt (63%) and Jordan (71%), followed by Tunisia (51%), Morocco (44%), Iraq (31%), and Libya (19%). Highlighting an ongoing problem, previous surveys already identified poor job creation and narrowing inequalities as crucial complaints by Arab populations (ArabBarometer II, 2011).

Political repression: Encroachment of political rights, authoritarianism and other restrictions were most mentioned in Iraq (48%) and Libya (59%), with other countries between 22% (Jordan) and 43% (Tunisia). In Egypt and Jordan, political rights were more frequently nominated than ending autocracy, by 13.8% compared to 7.7% in Egypt and 14.7% compared to 9.1% in Jordan. In Tunisia 20.6% mentioned political rights compared to 24.8% demanding an end to authoritarian rule. This was certainly not because people thought their governments were already democratic: only a fifth of Egyptians, a quarter of Jordanians, and less than a tenth of Tunisians thought so.

Corruption: In most cases, corruption was the **most frequently mentioned reason to support the Uprisings:** it was least mentioned in Jordan (50%) and most frequently mentioned in Libya (69%), and always in the top two for all countries. Even more

worrying is that while in 2011 people were optimistic that governments were making some effort to tackle corruption – especially in Egypt (75%) and Tunisia (65%) – by 2014 that hope had faded. People were asked whether government was corrupt, and whether it was cracking down on corruption: 61% of Egyptians believed government was ‘very corrupt’ but only 30% that a concerted effort was being made to deal with it – a **‘disenchantment differential’** that only increases: from Libya (56% vs. 19%), through Morocco (60% vs. 14%) and Jordan (65% vs. 16%), reaching peaks in Iraq (62% vs. 10%) and Tunisia (62% vs. 6%) (Sapsford et al. 2019).

**Broad Support for the Uprisings:** In 2014 7% of Egyptians, 3% of Iraqis, 4.3% of Jordanians, 12% of Moroccans and a massive 24% of Tunisians and 55% of Libyans said they had actively participated in demonstrations in 2010-11. Including those who did not take part in protest, support rose to 14% in Jordan, 16% in Iraq, 29% in Egypt, 30% in Morocco, and a massive 57% in Tunisia and 82% in Libya. Even greater than these figures are those who, in 2011, opposed pre-Uprisings regimes: 77.6% of citizens in Egypt and 82.5% in Tunisia saw themselves as closer to the opposition than to their government. Moreover, contrary to popular perception, **the Uprisings were not ‘youth revolutions’**: both ‘armchair’ supporters and protesters came from across the demographic spectrum – not just all ages, but income and education levels, gender and across the country (Abbott, Teti, and Sapsford 2018). In brief, pre-Uprisings regimes had managed to alienate a high portion of the population regardless of their background.

**Trust:** It is also clear that citizens do not trust their governments to deliver these priorities in the wake of the Uprisings. Between 2011 and 2014 **trust in governments** fell drastically, as these failed to live up to the demands people expressed through the Uprisings: from 77% to 54% in Egypt, from 72% to 28% in Jordan, and from 62% to 15% in Tunisia (Teti, Abbott, and Cavatorta 2018, 107). By 2014, **satisfaction** with government services and economic performance was also very low. For the former, only in Jordan were more than 50% of people satisfied with basic services (social security, education, healthcare), whereas Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia scored well below 50%, mostly 30% or lower. Scores for satisfaction with the economy were also worryingly low, reaching a ‘peak’ of 51% in Egypt at the height of Sisi’s post-coup popularity. While basic utilities scored relatively better (between 40% and 66%), governments’ performance in key economic areas like creating employment, narrowing inequalities and controlling inflation was dire: in no case did any score reach 40%, mostly hovering under 20%.

**Religion and Politics:** Here, data reveals a complex, unexpected relationship. While most people identified as at least partly religious and many wanted more 'piety' in public life, they opposed giving religious leaders control over elections, government or legislation, and distrusted them as much as governments. Popular opinion is clear: **religious leaders should not influence either voters or governments** (Egypt: 85% and 65% respectively; Tunisia: 84%, 82%; Libya: 80%, 56%; Morocco: 56%, 58%; Iraq: 78%, 37%; Jordan: 79%, 40%). In fact, support for such views increased between 2011 and 2014 – most noticeably in Tunisia, but also elsewhere.

### **2.2.2 VIOLENCE, LEGITIMACY DEFICITS, AND SECURITY SINKHOLES**

Perceptions of internal security risks have heightened since 2011. In Libya, Iraq, and to some extent Jordan this perception derives from conflict and genuine risk. In Egypt and Tunisia, however, there is little evidence of genuine security threats to justify this perception, despite some high-profile incidents. Indeed, in Egypt, the major cause of threats to individuals has been the wave of repression ongoing still today after the 2013 coup. Estimates place political prisoners around 70,000, with a steady stream of high-profile cases of detention and torture. Regional regimes also suffer from a legitimacy deficit evident, among other things, in the difference between levels of generalised, abstract trust in government and levels of satisfaction with what governments actually do – health, education, basic services, jobs, fighting corruption – which are significantly lower. This gap suggests that the causes of the Uprisings are still present, and may radicalise populations again, albeit not necessarily in the same way as the 2010-11 Uprisings. Until these structural problems are addressed, Arab regimes are best understood not as resilient or stable, but as **sinkholes of insecurity**: apparently stable, but brittle and vulnerable in ways not apparent until it is too late (Teti and Abbott 2018).

### **2.2.3 PERCEPTIONS OF THE EU: FLAWED STRATEGY, PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS**

Expert and stakeholder surveys are sometimes rather more optimistic about the EU's intentions and scope for action – if not perhaps its results – than surveys of the general population. Experts consulted in the 2018 EuroMed Survey, for example, do not perceive the EU as having a negative effect on the stability of the Mediterranean region compared to other countries, and view democracy assistance education, cultural and scientific cooperation as positive.

The general population, on the other hand, have a rather different perspective. People

generally believe the EU should prioritise **economic development**, while ‘promoting democracy’ and ‘not getting involved’ at all are relatively distant second choices (Teti and Abbott 2017). The exception is Egypt, where non-involvement (34%) is slightly preferred even to development (31%).

Asked to pick freely from a list of specific areas of **development assistance** the EU should support in 2014, respondents overwhelmingly chose **basic services** (25%-60%) and jobs (20%-55%) over options including security (6%-36%), migration (4%-20%), women’s rights (up to 10%), and even – contrary to the rhetoric of some MENA governments – resolving the Palestinian/Israeli question (8%-20%). People’s assessment of EU development assistance is generally good among those who know about it (Tunisia 83%, Morocco 75%, Jordan 74%, Egypt 50%). But their assessment of **EU programmes responding to the Uprisings** is much less positive (Tunisia and Libya 52%, Iraq 30%, Morocco 25%, Jordan 20%, Egypt 19%). Many had not heard of them or had no opinion – from 28% in Jordan to a massive 82% in Egypt – but given the mismatch between people’s priorities and the EU’s policy focus, it would be a mistake to believe this poor reputation was a mere case of ‘poor branding’. Finally, in 2014, the EU’s **democracy assistance** was perceived most positively in Tunisia (41%), Morocco (36%) and Jordan (26%), with Egypt trailing at 6%. By 2016, this perception remained largely unchanged save a slight improvement in Egypt (17%).

Partly more heartening news is that between a quarter and half of citizens in 2013 believed **international demands for reform are acceptable** or acceptable with conditions, and between 20% and 40% object where such demands harm national interest. **In short:** while the EU has not fared well in the eyes of Arab citizens, if it focused on social justice – which is dear to people’s hearts, and which brought about the Uprisings – the EU could be viewed as exercising welcome influence in the region: it could actually become the ‘normative power’ it aspires to be.

## 2.3 Conclusion: Social Justice, Self-Interest and Stability

**What do ‘The People’ Want?** The EU interpreted the Uprisings as a demand for liberal democracy, but **alongside civil and political rights**, protesters want(ed) social justice, **socio-economic rights**, the **reduction of inequality**, and **fighting corruption** as key ingredients of a more social, holistic conception of democracy. Data shows the region’s



'adaptable autocrats' failed their societies across the board – not just in specific sectors or alienating particular groups – while for decades they painted authoritarianism with a democratic façade. So long as they continue to do this, they undermine not only their own reputation, but potentially the reputation of democracy itself. This democratic 'theatre' probably drove people to focus on substantive change beyond well-rehearsed electoral rhetoric. Today, people are generally sceptical of the EU because of its track record – including its support for autocrats posing as democratic reformers – but populations may welcome its interventions if it addressed the Uprisings' root causes. Such intervention would ameliorate the causes of the region's instability, it might fulfil the EU's promise to act as a 'normative power', and is in the EU's own self-interests. The EU, however, must recognise that its existing approach of 'market democratization' has no realistic prospect of working and must rethink its strategy for achieving democracy, development and security in the region (e.g. Arampatzi et al. 2015). The continuing **failure to achieve these goals**, the lack of **resilience and cohesion** this produces turns MENA autocracies into **sinkholes of insecurity**, and an ongoing source of instability and migration across the region.

# 3

## Resetting Euro-Med Relations: Taking Local Needs Seriously<sup>3</sup>

*Daniela Huber and Maria Cristina Paciello (Istituto Affari Internazionali)*

As the previous contribution of this report concludes, people in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) generally see the EU sceptically, which has also been the overwhelming finding of the MEDRESET project, inquiring into the EU's construction of the Mediterranean on one hand, and its perception by local stakeholders, on the other, through more than 700 stakeholder consultations on all shores of the Mediterranean<sup>4</sup>.

### 3.1 Securitizing the Mediterranean: the EU and other powers

One of MEDRESET's key findings has been that in its discursive practices the EU constructs the Mediterranean as a diverse geopolitical space, a dangerous space, and a space crucial for European security and economic interests, in opposition to the self, represented as peaceful and united (Cebeci and Schumacher 2016). Such a portrayal not only gives a misleading picture of what is currently happening within the EU, but detaches the EU and its Member States (MS) from their responsibilities in the MENA, for example through the substantial transfer of weapons from MSs to the region, their/the EU's neglect of a responsibility to protect refugees of war and occupation in Europe (Panebianco

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3 MEDRESET ([www.medreset.eu](http://www.medreset.eu)) received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Programme for Research and Innovation under grant agreement n. 693055.

4 For the methodology of these interviews, see MEDRESET methodology and concept papers series: <http://www.medreset.eu/category/publications/methodology-and-concept-papers/>

and Fontana 2018), and perhaps most importantly, its crucial role in the skewed economic development of a region in which the EU as a bloc is one of the most dominant economic powers. Indeed, the representation of the EU as a promoter of peace is contested on the Southern side of the Mediterranean. In systematic interviews with local stakeholders, MEDRESET found that they perceive the Mediterranean as a space of separation and disparity, where Northern and Southern shores are driven ever further apart (Huber, Noura, and Paciello 2018).

To stop this course of separation, this chapter argues that the EU needs to stop its securitizing approach to the Mediterranean. In that way, it would also make a difference to all other powers in the Mediterranean – USA, Russia, China, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Turkey – which are also securitizing this space. Conventional approaches to ‘hard’ security drive their policy, but their definitions of security are incompatible, leading to “dramatic divergences in their approaches and priority areas” which fragment the Mediterranean (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017).

Thus, if the EU continues its securitizing approach, it becomes indistinguishable from them; in other words, as the EU does not have a different vision for the Mediterranean, it allows other powers to determine the geopolitical space of which it is part. To imagine a new role for the EU, make it more relevant in the Mediterranean, and set out policies which can reverse separation and division, the EU needs to become more responsive to the needs of people on all shores of the Mediterranean.

## 3.2 Local Perceptions and Needs

It should be noted that issues of democracy, social justice, and human rights cut across the areas of politics, economics, and security. At the same time, what was rejected in this respect is a “civilizing” rhetoric which presents democracy and human rights as European and the EU as an exporter of these ‘fundamental values’. Such a rhetoric was seen as denying local actors their agency. As one of MEDRESET’s Moroccan interviewees pointed out:

*(I)t is thought that we are not fit for the human rights culture under the pretext that Islam is [an] impediment. [...] Europeans think that we are establishing human rights institutions because they force us to do so. It does not occur to them that the human rights issue is our fight because it is we who have suffered and been put in jail. It is both founded on a superiority point of view and contempt towards what we are trying to achieve (Mouna 2018, 17).*

Similarly cross-cutting were gender issues. The violation of women's rights was addressed as part of the broader violation of human rights across all shores of the Mediterranean, that is the denial of refugee rights in Europe, of socio-economic rights of women exploited in labour markets, or women living under occupation (Huber, Noura, and Paciello 2018). As one Lebanese interviewee has pointed out, "(y)ou have to tackle not only exploitation or gender, but everything. You cannot fight exploitation without given women's rights, you cannot fight to give the right of the women without fighting sectarianism" (Goulordava 2018, 11).

### **3.2.1 SUPPORTING AUTOCRATS, DROPPING THE BURDEN ON LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY**

The EU and its Member States' relationship with autocratic regimes remains an issue of deep concern. Stakeholders perceive that not much has changed over the decades – including after the Arab Uprisings – and that the EU continues to consider “the stability of these regimes as more important than democracy” (Huber, Noura, and Paciello 2018). As one interviewee in Morocco pointed out,

*Just by looking at what happened in Morocco at the time of the Hirak in the Rif. It is a problem due to the lack of democracy, a true democracy rooted in politics, economy, and culture at the same time. [...] We saw that Europe did not budge. Europe supports our oppressive regimes because it wants to protect its interests; it considers the stability of these regimes as more important than democracy (Mouna 2018, 8).*

Instead of exerting real pressure on autocratic regimes to change laws which breach human rights, the EU is seen as having a tendency to drop this burden on civil society which does not have the same political weight. While EU civil society aid is principally seen as more positively than aid by other actors (e.g. Gulf states), the EU is perceived as focusing only on established – and often establishment – organisations. As one interviewee in Egypt pointed out:

*Generally, I believe that the EU had a negative effect on the civil society in Egypt as it only focused on the political cases, that would cause problems and direct confrontations with the state; and did not focus on the human rights side overall, such as prisons, torturing and these thorny issues. However, human rights includes other issues like development and others, this was not considered by the EU. They only focused on the big political figures and specific organizations to which they gave out money (ASI-REM Staff Researchers 2019).*

Furthermore, rather than responding to local needs, the EU is perceived as designing

programs in Brussels to which local organisations respond rather than vice versa. As one interviewee in Lebanon pointed out, the EU

*does not take into consideration what people want but what EU leaders think they want. [...] There are policy trends or programme trends that, for example, once was livelihood, and then it is capacity building. This pumps money in a certain direction but it does not take nuance of a situation or possible harm. [...] EU policy becomes imposed on local NGOs. Some embassies have told us what they are working on and we have to design our response on their approach or we don't get the money. The money becomes self-filtered (Goulordava 2018, 8).*

### **3.2.2 POLITICS AND THE ECONOMY**

Directly connected to politics is economics. This linkage, pursued by many stakeholders in the South, becomes clear in the following interview excerpt from Morocco:

*The economic factor remains crucial, because countries of the north control the economies and wealth of countries of the south. This dependence of southern economies on northern economies has a direct impact on the distribution of wealth. The peoples of the southern side of the Mediterranean are not consulted; no one asks them for their opinion on economic choices; political will is censored. The solution resides in democracy; it is the only way to give people the possibility to choose their fate (Mouna 2018, 13).*

Development came across as a key term in our interviews, and as in the case of civil society, here too the urgency to meet the concrete needs and development models favoured by local actors, and not in Brussels, emerged systematically. Interviews in Morocco and Tunisia revealed a perception that DCFTAs “are imposing EU norms and standards together with local elites, offering little room for manoeuvre during the negotiations” and that key “socio-economic challenges in these countries – such as informal economy, social polarization, youth unemployment as well as regional disparities and lack of good governance – were not given adequate attention in the economic instruments that the EU is devising for its southern neighbourhood” (Dark 2018, 5).

Furthermore, the perception persists that

*Euro-Mediterranean relations continue to rely heavily on trade liberalization of industrial products, largely excluding agriculture (where SMCs have a revealed comparative advantage) and services. Additionally, the EU does not have one comprehensive framework for cooperation with the region in the field of FDI, one of the major motors of growth in the industrial sector (Aboushady 2018, 7).*

Industrial development, however, would contribute to job creation. In terms of energy policy, the EU was expected to upscale its involvement in a very fragmented area, while

when it comes to agriculture, the issue of sustainable agricultural practices [and] land rights is crucial, specifically for women: “Female farmers face a series of restrictions such as limited access to land, funding, technological and managerial know-how and market opportunities” (Chaaban, Chalak, and Woertz 2018, 4).

### **3.2.3 SECURITIZING THE MEDITERRANEAN**

While following the Arab Uprisings, there was a short moment where the EU might have changed course, the EU is seen to have reverted back to its securitized approach to the region in response to the migration ‘crisis’ and its own security concerns. As one interviewee in Egypt pointed out,

*The first response of the EU to the Arab Spring was very positive, but it got tuned down because Europe felt it is affecting its social integrity and security with the influx of migrants and the instability in those countries of the Arab Spring that resulted in the rise of Islamic terrorism. The priorities for the EU were supporting the democratic transition, and people’s aspiration to freedom and a better life, then those priorities got changed to security and anti-radicalization and preventing illegal migration (ASI-REM Staff Researchers 2019, 106).*

This perception was also confirmed by European institutional stakeholders who argued that the EU has interests in the stability of its neighbourhood in “view of a protection of the EU itself” (Huber and Paciello 2018, 13). This approach conflates stability and security, and neglects the human security of non-Europeans. As Harrami and Mouna point out, in “expressing their views, migrants challenge migratory policies, as such policies focusing on border security rather than on migrants themselves” (2018, 10). They quote an interviewee according to whom:

*The large projects related to migration are security projects. Building walls and fences and also borders. This is the major issue for Europe regarding the South. Currently, we notice that the majority of European countries turn again towards self-isolation. The effects of these policies are fighting against foreigners, for spatial segregation and rejection of others (2018, 14).*

Furthermore, European policies in the area of migration have “produced a multiplicity of ‘bilateral Mediterraneans’” and are seen as “hav[ing] a negative impact on human security and rights protection, and affect both the EU’s credibility as a human rights champion and the development of a sound rights-based approach to migration and asylum in SEM countries” (Roman 2018, 3).

### 3.3 REFLECTIONS ON FUTURE POLICIES

MEDRESET's<sup>5</sup> stakeholder consultations confirm the EU is seen in a sceptical light; it should become more responsive, inclusive and flexible. Greater responsiveness means the EU needs to thoroughly re-think its development model in line with calls for social justice. Indeed, as various stakeholders interviewed on the Northern shores of the Mediterranean pointed out, this applies to the EU itself: the EU "is adopting an economic model [...] which does not take care of social issues, and is worsening the situation of European populations"; the EU can no longer "claim to transfer its development model to the South of the Mediterranean, as its model is in crisis, and does not succeed to respond to problems of work, of education"; or that it is

*necessary to change this model first of all in Europe, but unfortunately in this moment no clear proposal on how such a new model could look like is emerging. [...] The EU could turn to the South of the Mediterranean saying that it is rethinking a new model [and] to try to understand together which model we could adopt, always tailored to the local context (Huber and Paciello 2018, 9).*

Furthermore, strategies, initiatives, and projects should be as inclusive and integrated as possible. To boost inclusiveness, the main areas of action as well as call for projects should be defined by local stakeholders and not in Brussels or by Western experts seconded to Mediterranean countries.

In addition, policies should not be compartmentalized as policy fields impact on each other. For example, in agriculture, because climate change impacts on agriculture and water sectors, issues related to land ownership inequality, to small farmers who are uncompetitive but important for the local economy and ecology, or to quotas and funds for women's cooperatives must be substantial components of all initiatives (Chaaban, Chalak, and Woertz 2018). In the energy sector, policies should consider local needs and energy transition should be bottom-up and participative, including the development of more decentralized peer-to-peer energy models (Aboushady 2018).

Furthermore, the EU and its Member States specifically, need to re-think their relationship with autocratic, human rights-violating and occupation regimes. If the EU really wants to build 'resilience', it has to genuinely support the democratic resistance in the region, which found expression in the ongoing Arab Uprisings and which has been met with a harsh wave of revisionism. Not only has the EU not resisted this wave, some Member

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5 For a more detailed analysis of the issues raised in this section, please consult the MEDRESET policy reports and briefs series: <http://www.medreset.eu/category/publications/policy-papers/>

States continue to arm regimes which have clamped down on democratic forces. This is all the more concerning as such nationalist populist revisionism is on the rise within Europe itself.

Finally, the EU also needs a larger and new macro-regional vision which is able to contest the securitization of the area and which, rather than making it “an arena for control and risk-reduction policies” (Roman 2018, 2), sees it a space of shared prosperity. Such a shift implies a deep re-think within Europe regarding its past, present, and future in the region. One idea that came across in MEDRESET’s interviews was that the EU could initiate a reconciliation process on the regional level, whereby it would begin to acknowledge Europe’s problematic colonial past in the region, but also foster reconciliation within countries and areas. Such an approach could serve as a starting point for a more equal dialogue of the EU with all actors to start reshaping Mediterranean relations from the perspective of redressing the profound inequalities – the division, disparity, and separation – between the two shores of the Mediterranean.



# 4

# **Euro- Mediterranean Relations: Preparing for the Next 25 Years<sup>6</sup>**

*Eduard Soler i Lecha (CIDOB)*

From April 2016 until March 2019, fourteen research institutions in Europe and in the Middle East and North Africa participated in MENARA, a major project studying the MENA region's geopolitical shifts. The project used face-to-face interviews with almost 300 key actors, a Delphi survey of 71 experts, 3 focus groups, and 2 stakeholder meetings to provide a bottom-up assessment of key domestic, regional and global dynamics and actors, and projects these into the future. These findings are particularly relevant for any policy endeavour aiming at reviewing Euro-Mediterranean cooperation schemes as they point to the main concerns and priorities in and for the region.

In a highly fluid geopolitical ecosystem, it is still possible to identify a series of 'megatrends' that will inevitably shape the region's future, including how it will relate to the rest of the world. Megatrends are high-impact developments that are unlikely to be reversed, for at least a generation. These include: climate change, digitalization, religiosity, urbanization, decarbonization, the role of the state, the effects of today's conflicts, China's consolidation as a global power, the intense connections between the MENA region and Europe, and the growing role of Africa.

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6 MENARA received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement n. 693244

While we know that these issues will significantly shape Euro-Mediterranean relations, how they will play out depends crucially on actors' political choices. By highlighting game-changing challenges and key drivers of change, this report suggests decision-makers and stakeholders should embrace the idea that change is possible: actions taken now could steer Euro-Mediterranean cooperation towards one or another future.

## 4.1 Risks and Opportunities: Perceptions from the Region and Perceptions in the Region

Key actors interviewed during the project's fact-finding missions, including pro-governmental and opposition politicians, diplomats, members of security forces, political and social activists or members of the private sector, or participants in the focus groups and stakeholders meetings quickly identified a list of risks. The dominant vision was that Southern Mediterranean countries risk incurring high levels of violence: conflicts were by far the most frequently mentioned risk, with terrorism next, as well as authoritarianism, political instability and a fragile economic situation. This picture can be complemented by the assessment of experts' inputs to the MENARA Delphi survey. Asked to select the elements that could foster social unrest across the MENA region by 2025, based on their impact and probability, experts identified youth unemployment, bad governance, corruption, political repression and environmental degradation as most salient. Arguably, it is the combination of these elements that significantly increases the risk of conflict and its destructive effects.

When asked about opportunities, responses were far more diverse. While risks are often associated with political and security dynamics, societal and economic elements are seen as more promising. However, a more granular analysis shows that besides youth (which tops the even more so among non-young respondents), dialogue and peace are also perceived as opportunities for future development. A codification of responses identifies different levels of hope: respondents in the Maghreb are the most optimistic while Egypt is most pessimist. Female respondents and members of the private sector are also more optimistic, while threat perception is particularly acute among particularly politicians and public officials.

One of the MENARA project's main conclusions is that the region will undergo a process of increased fragmentation: this ranks seventh in the top risks identified and is mainly associated to the effects of today's conflicts, domestic and regional sectarianism and the strategies of regional powers. In that vein, the Delphi survey asked experts about the cleavages that could be more salient in the future. Inequality - the gap between the haves and have-nots – and the fracture between religious and secular groups are seen as the most significant divides. In contrast, sectarianism and pro-/anti-US cleavages are perceived as declining in the long term.

Finally, the project also inquired about the **perceptions of the EU**. Respondents were asked whether they envisaged a more or a less active European Union in the MENA region in the years to come, and what they would expect from it. On this particular issue, perspectives are very diverse depending on respondents' different locations. In general, the Maghreb seems to expect more from the EU than the rest of the region. When it comes to the most frequently mentioned issues, security crises and migration are mainly seen as factors that drive EU interests in the region, while political conditions – be it neighbour's authoritarianism or the EU's internal problems – are identified as obstacles to cooperation. The aspects that are more often mentioned when referring to the EU are those related with economic support but also civil society, human rights and democracy. In several interviews, one of the key ideas that came to the fore is that the EU, despite its many problems, is one of the few actors committed to multilateralism and regionalism and that, when it comes to the Middle East, is more constructive than most regional and global powers. This issue was confirmed in the MENARA focus groups in the region. In the Maghreb, the role of the EU was evaluated positively as a tool to balance the Gulf's political and societal agendas. In the Mashreq, participants argued that the rise of Russia and China is not good news for the defence of human rights and independent civil society in the region. Thus, according to the findings of the MENARA project, the EU has not yet lost all of its normative appeal.

## 4.2 Megatrends: it is not about whether this will happen but about how to manage the effects

The main difference between a trend and a megatrend is that the latter cannot be reversed in the space of a generation. Another characteristic is that a megatrend is expected to have a strong and long-lasting impact. Some megatrends may have a global scope,

while others may be particularly relevant to single region or specific countries or territories. More importantly, a correct appreciation of which those megatrends is useful to anticipate which are the issues on which more efforts will or should be invested. Anticipating and prioritising is the twofold goal of this exercise. Among many others, the following seven megatrends will define the scope and nature of Euro-Mediterranean at least for two decades:

**Demographic growth:** While population in the Northern Mediterranean is getting older, most countries from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean will still be rather young with high percentage of the population in working age. Moreover, by 2045, the population in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries will be the same than that of the EU27. This will put additional pressure on South-North migration and job-creation.

**Urbanization:** Cities have always played a major role in the Mediterranean and the current urbanization process, while being a global phenomenon, is particularly fast. Southern and Eastern Mediterranean cities' rapid growth, along with environmental degradation, is becoming a major policy challenge. Moreover, with few exceptions, local authorities lack administrative and financial autonomy. Cities can become a laboratory of solutions or a container of problems. Sharing experiences and strategies among governments and civil societies – North-South and South-South – is crucial.

**Climate change:** The Mediterranean is among the spaces most vulnerable to climate change. Although the intensity may vary depending on policies undertaken in the coming years, the region will certainly suffer from extreme weather phenomena, heat waves and droughts, desertification, severe water shortages and a rise in sea level. One of the most vulnerable areas will be the Nile Delta. Environmental degradation will amplify economic and social challenges, particularly as this will coincide in many countries with a significant population growth and thus an increased pressure on natural resources. And yet, fighting against climate change and its effects can be a fertile ground to explore trust-building measures.

**Decarbonisation:** The gradual replacement of fossil fuels by renewable energies represents a major tectonic shift. The main driver of decarbonisation will be the gigantic step forward in production and storage capacities, a process in which China and India will play a leading role. Clean energies will not only be affordable but popular too due to global awareness vis-à-vis climate change. While this represents an opportunity for countries like Morocco, Turkey and most of Southern Europe that are energy importers, this transformation will made rentier regimes – Algeria is the case in point – unsustainable.

Automation and digitalisation: Technological revolution will change economic, social and cultural models and innovation will be the key to successful competition on the global market. In this particular region the most critical effects are to be felt in the job markets due to the already high (and seemingly persistent) unemployment and underemployment rates, particularly among young people. Those trends, particularly under certain regulatory conditions, could increase disparities among people, territories and countries. Fractured societies: MENARA findings point at the persistence of two societal cleavages: between rich and poor, on the one hand, and between religious and secular, on the other. The project also concluded that even if existing regional conflicts started to be resolved, the post-conflict trauma would still mark one or more generations. Global trends related to a large extent to communication and information technologies, which also contribute to socio-political tribalism.

**Regional power shifts:** One of the major transformations of the last decade is the growing ambition of several Arab Gulf countries and the projection of their rivalry throughout the Mediterranean. Similarly, Turkey began to act as a fully-fledged regional power, projecting influence beyond its immediate vicinity. The acute competition among regional powers, with overlapping cleavages and intersecting conflicts, is an element infusing instability to Euro-Mediterranean relations.

**Global power shifts:** The US is no longer the hegemonic global power and this also has major effects in the Mediterranean. Russia's comeback and China's long-term investments are closely monitored in this region. Europe's leverage is more stable and in proximity (not only geographical but intensifying social bonds too) explains why Europe cannot afford to disengage. Finally, in future, both Europe and its Mediterranean neighbours are expected to pivot towards Africa, both in terms of opportunities and risks.

### 4.3 Game-Changers and Key Drivers

These megatrends will condition the scope of Euro-Mediterranean relations. Yet, it would be misleading to conclude that there is only one way they could impact the region-future. Policies can make a difference. Decisions taken today can mitigate risks and increase opportunities. It is crucial to realise that change is possible. The following is a list of elements that could push Euro-Mediterranean relations one way or another:

- **New waves of socio-political unrest:** The persistent inequalities, environmental degradation and the lack of responses by governmental actors are likely to drive new episodes of local or region-wide protests. This could further paralyse the Euro-Mediterranean framework and securitise the agenda but it could also push Europeans to invest more in this region and for all the members to pay more attention to the population grievances and the demand for social justice.
- **Women's empowerment and generational change:** There is ample room to increase the participation of women in the workforce and in politics. Similarly, youth is overwhelmingly perceived as a force for change. However, some of the programs or policies addressing gender and generational gaps are window-dressing exercises and do not steer a structural change.
- **Modernisation and diversification of economies:** Technological revolutions will push countries in the region to put in place more favourable ecosystems for innovation and entrepreneurship. Euro-Mediterranean relations could be one among the many platforms where strategies and initiatives could be shared or designed together.
- **Reconstruction and reconciliation:** The devastation of parts of the region after prolonged conflicts will require major reconstruction effort. Europe is already being asked to become involved. But reconstruction without reconciliation may simply exacerbate grievances. Euro-Mediterranean cooperation at large could be a platform to incubate initiatives to foster or support reconciliation efforts.
- **Regional cooperation:** The Mediterranean could be a stage for renewed global or regional rivalries, but it could also become a laboratory of regional solutions to the many challenges the region faces. Among these, environmental degradation appears to be one of the most critical issues on which the positions of key players are not too far from one another.
- **(Dis)integration dynamics in the EU:** The EU's capacity to overcome its current crises is one of the most salient driver of change in Euro-Mediterranean relations. A more ambitious, generous and integrated EU can be a decisive force for transformation with positive spillovers beyond Europe itself. In contrast, any further move towards re-nationalisation and disintegration negatively affects the prospects of re-vamping the Euro-Mediterranean framework.

## 4.4 Conclusion: Working on Long-term Challenges to Bypass Short-term Obstacles

Euro-Mediterranean relations have a long history behind and this naturally leads to institutional inertia. It is commonplace to argue that the goals of the Barcelona Declaration are still valid – and to a certain extent, it is true. However, in light of the tensions the region has been facing in the last decade and the nature of the long-term challenges exposed in this report, it may be useful to review the agenda of cooperation. While short-term problems may be perceived as a source of tension and potentially spoil any attempt to revamp Euro-Mediterranean relations, a long-term vision of the region's challenge could be conducive for dialogue and cooperation. Social justice, environmental degradation, territorial inequalities, youth and women empowerment, economic diversification, reconstruction and reconciliation are the ingredients of a forward-looking Euro-Mediterranean agenda that could better frame the priorities of this region. In light of these renewed agenda, additional policy and social entrepreneurs should be engaged. Finally, the framework will need to take into consideration regional and global geopolitical shifts. While Euro-Mediterranean cooperation could buffer the effects of acute regional and global rivalries, it could also be the incubator of a renewed partnership between Europe and Africa.

# 5

## Europe's Capacity Gap in the Mediterranean

*Kristina Kausch (German Marshall Fund of the United States)*

Europe's strategic environment has changed. The much-touted US withdrawal from the Middle East and the increasing unpredictability of US foreign policy more broadly have exacerbated insecurity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), leading to a complex mix of diverse actors and positions. Russia's grasp for the role of the new Middle Eastern spin doctor, China's silently emerging presence, and the regional split across the Saudi-Iranian divide that conditions most other conflicts in the MENA, are among the most distinctive features of its current geopolitics.

All this occurs in the transit zone from a two-decade post-Soviet period, at the time prematurely perceived as an 'End of History', to a new, yet undefined global geopolitical era. This transit zone, marked by a vertical and horizontal diversification of power, a resurgence of authoritarianism, and renewed great power competition, has heightened the influence of trans-regional and global tensions on the MENA region.

In this highly complex environment, the EU has struggled to carve out a meaningful role for itself. While other actors have been trying to seize the opportunity of the regional reshuffle to raise their profiles, the EU has not – with the exceptions of Libya and Iran – sought to play the big geopolitical game. Instead, it has acted conservatively, sticking largely to its ways as a predominantly economic, humanitarian, and self-proclaimed normative, soft power actor (Vimont 2018).

But a dynamic environment requires dynamic adaptation. In the MENA, the EU faces a capacity dilemma: while challenges become increasingly complex, the EU's capacity to address them has weakened.



## 5.1 The Vertical Entanglement of Crises

Local security challenges – e.g. local conflicts in Libya, Syria or Yemen – are increasingly immersed in regional and global power dynamics – such as the relationship between Russia and the West – that have little or no direct stakes the original source of tensions yet significantly influence its development. As local, regional and global dynamics become increasingly entangled, the MENA's polarized geopolitical landscape further enhances the complexities of local conflicts and other pressing challenges such as migration.

A three-layer model highlights the interconnections between local, regional and global political/security challenges. The local layer is essentially about governance, who rules countries such as Egypt, Algeria, or Libya, under what system, and how well they are able to provide for their citizens. At this domestic level, as found by numerous independent studies and surveys for two decades, and as shown by the recurring popular unrest in Arab countries in recent years, most of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa are, to varying degrees, a socio-economic time-bomb<sup>7</sup>. The explosive merger of a youth bulge with unemployment, lack of effective service provision, lack of meaningful reforms, bad governance, repression, and the fading age of hydrocarbons on which many authoritarian regimes rely, makes for an dangerously precarious and unsustainable mix. To these ingredients, add the long-term cost of the bloodshed in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya, and it becomes clear that the next popular uprising – see the recent mass protests in Algeria over President Bouteflika's fifth term candidacy – is only a matter of time.

The regional layer is about who is able to gain and entrench the biggest influence in the conflict country and its regional surroundings in the Levant/Maghreb/Gulf in the longer term. At the core of this level is not an interest, for example, in Syria or its people per se, but a quest for political and economic access to a key regional anchor and transit state. The main pillars of current Middle Eastern geopolitics condition the game at this level, including the growing weight of ambitious non-Arab regional powers such as Iran and Turkey; the polarization between Iran and an emerging Saudi-Israeli front and their respective allies; and the controversies over the big policy issues that divide the region such as the Iranian nuclear file and Palestine/Israel. In this arena, the blurring of boundaries between state and transnationally operating non-state actors – best illustrated in hybrid actors such as Hezbollah – as geopolitical players further complicate the picture (Kamel 2017).

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7 For example, the UNDP's 2004 Arab Human Development Report identified the lack of good governance as the number one impediment of a new political, social and economic renaissance in the Arab region. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/arab-human-development-report-2004>

The global layer is about how global politics with little or nothing to do with a given local context plays out in the domestic arena. This level is about leverage as the currency of power in a changing world order. In the ongoing renegotiation of the rules of global governance and the weight of each player therein, global powers such as Russia or the USA play the Syria card to pressure their competitors in other geopolitical arenas. At this level, in the quest for a new Middle Eastern order under the creeping security vacuum following the fading U.S. leadership in the region, the key Middle Eastern security dossiers become a microcosm for a regional and global power contest.

Although the three-layer structure to conflict is not unique to the Middle East, it may be especially pronounced here due to the especially intense divergence between regional and global powers' interests. The increasing cross-fertilization of Middle Eastern conflicts with other geopolitical arenas is worrying, as it is further linking the prospect of regional stability –complicated enough– to the complexities of global geopolitics. It is notable that the only MENA country in which the 2011 popular uprisings have resulted in a reasonably stable democratic transition is Tunisia, a country of low regional and global geopolitical significance to international actors (Kausch 2014).

## 5.2 Domestic Determinants of EU Foreign Policy

The challenge for policy-makers is that the three layers are intrinsically linked. Any successful policy must grapple with the interconnection of different geographical and geopolitical spaces. This reduces the odds of resolving conflicts and other pressing challenges to a striking degree of complexity. Of course, addressing conflicts such as those in Syria, Yemen or Libya cannot wait for Iran and Saudi Arabia overcome their confrontation, or Western powers to sort out their relationship to Russia. But when devising EU MENA policy, the increasing complexity inherent to the layered nature of regional challenges inevitably moderates expectations of what the EU can achieve. Europe's bilateral relations with MENA countries are strong and both the bloc and its Member States retain significant leverage, particularly in the Maghreb. Scholars have long debated to which degree the EU deserves the infamous label of an "economic giant, a political dwarf and a military worm", or whether this conception fails to do justice to the bloc's soft power (Bossuyt 2007).

Of course, EU Mediterranean policies being neutralised by regional roadblocks is not new. The EU never had the clout to solve the big geopolitical impediments that stalled the Barcelona Process, which remained dysfunctional in large part due to the Arab-Israeli conflict. To a lesser extent, the lack of Maghrebi integration has been hampered by the longstanding standoff between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara. The technical and governmental focus of the Union for the Mediterranean – a timid and swiftly deadlocked attempt to bypass the region's contentious political issues – also saw its efficiency hampered by these roadblocks. But compared to the comparatively orderly, predictable world of the Barcelona Process era Mediterranean, contemporary geopolitical roadblocks are manifold, multidimensional, and deeply intertwined, transcending the geographical Mediterranean space.

A much neglected element in this equation, however, has been that some of the greatest challenges to a sound Euro-Mediterranean cooperation lie within Europe. The EU's decreasing capacity to respond to the heightened complexity of MENA geopolitics is partially conditioned by the crisis in its internal cohesion, which compounds the structural flaws in EU foreign policy.

The Arab Uprisings underscored the unsustainability of the EU's approach of hoping to lure authoritarian rulers into reforms that would hurt their personal interests merely by means of financial and political incentives. Unfortunately, the EU failed to learn the lessons from the Uprisings. The aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis had already diverted European attention and resources. Inside Europe, the 2015/16 migration crisis helped consolidate populist, right-wing narratives of an encircled Europe exacerbated by a steep rise in terrorist attacks on European soil. The inability to oppose such narratives turned migration and security into decisive electoral factors. This directly affected EU internal cohesion, and drove policymakers to focus on MENA regimes' short-term stability above long-term cohesion. The ensuing internal instability triggered an institutional crisis within the EU that eliminated the democracy agenda abroad in favour of a focus on short-term securitization. While this might 'play well' electorally, it leaves the MENA region's structural problems – and thus causes of instability and political mobilization – to fester.

Alongside this unfavourable sequence of events, structural incoherences inherent to a lack of a shared understanding regarding the division of labour between the EU and its Member States has often produced an EU foreign policy in permanent conflict with Member States' vested interests, impeding the implementation of theoretically sound

Mediterranean policies. Few calls have been repeated as much by European analysts as the urge for unity among Member States as a precondition for an EU foreign policy worthy of the name. Member States' visions of the EU's shape at home and of its role abroad are drifting apart. Without a shared understanding of the EU's role in the world, the goals and means of EU foreign policy, unequivocal subsidiarity arrangements that oblige Member States to stick to the common line, and autonomous means and responsibilities that would enable the EU to fulfil such a role, there will be no coherent EU foreign policy, be it in the MENA or elsewhere (Vimont 2018).

What do we do with this dilemma? The clash between challenges evident in the Mediterranean and the EU's lower ability to confront them generates a capacity gap leaving the EU few pragmatic options: lower expectations, raise capacities, or both.

### 5.3 A Circular Framing of Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation

Beyond the challenge-capacity gap, there is also a qualitative element in which EU Mediterranean policy must adapt to a new era. The structural challenges to the MENA region have been long known. NGOs' and IOs' recommendations have remained the same for at least two decades, and EU policies such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) have undergone several reviews without meaningfully questioning its fundamental framing, objectives and methods. In response to the fundamental societal shifts which the Arab Uprisings signal, the EU timidly re-packaged old tools and concepts. Trade offers have been based on the same Euro-centred free trade approach at a time when the Maghreb increasingly looks to widen its commercial relations with Africa. Relying on its long-standing toolbox of 'deep and comprehensive free trade' offers, mobility partnerships, and preferential loans, – none of which responded to Southern partners' immediate needs and preferences – successive policy reviews have sold old wine in new bottles.

The imbalances of successive frameworks of Euro-Mediterranean relations have contributed in perpetuating the perception of a top-down, North-South, patron-client relationship that – as reflected in MEDRESET project interviews – leads Southern stakeholders to view the Mediterranean as a dividing line rather than a shared space<sup>8</sup>. The call

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8 MEDRESET Project Summary.

for a more balanced relationship in both tone and substance is among the oldest from Southern partners, yet it never meaningfully found its way into EU policies, even after the forceful show of societal agency that were the Arab Uprisings.

Importantly, both shores have approached Euro-Mediterranean relations asymmetrically, with Europe in the role of a patron who feels a moral duty to help Southern Mediterranean societies to develop into societies similar to itself. But as much as Europeans must start conceiving their partnership with the Southern Mediterranean on a more equal footing, they cannot replace the role of MENA governments in providing participatory governance and accountable services to their citizens. The imbalanced conception of Euro-Mediterranean relations must change into a balanced, reciprocal one, based on the agency and responsibility of every actor around the Mediterranean. To establish such a relationship and uproot persistent Southern perceptions of European post-colonial arrogance, a show of humility – such as a public acknowledgement of Europe’s colonial past in the Maghreb, as suggested by Daniela Huber in this report – might be a good place to start. Naturally, for such a change of attitude to come across, MENA populations – and civil society – must be the EU’s direct interlocutors, not just MENA governments.

## 5.4 Conclusion: Focusing on the EU’s Comparative Advantages

In the face of complex geopolitical entanglements among MENA actors, and the EU’s capacity gap, there is no momentum for a comprehensive Euro-Mediterranean regionalism. Neither is there a minimum consensus for a shared agenda between Northern and Southern shores, nor a consensus in Europe on what goals to pursue. The European Parliament election and national elections in Member States in 2019 are likely to enhance polarization, including on foreign policy (Balfour et al. 2016).

Considering the EU’s capacity gap, and the unlikelihood of its structural roots being uprooted anytime soon, its Mediterranean policy should manage expectations and focus on a few areas in which the EU, due to experience, leverage, and means at hand, is best placed to make a difference.

The EU must finally catch up and implement the lessons from the Arab Uprisings, first and foremost by returning to an explicit human rights and democratic governance agen-

da, including on migration, long-term institution-building, and remaining a moral voice of reason by routinely speaking out in public. It should systematically cultivate, and heavily invest in, ties with and among civil society, and pluralistic media. It should take care to make its support a better fit to the socio-economic needs of Arab populations, dropping the euro-centric DCFTA approach designed to worsen inequalities rather than reducing them; enabling circular migration schemes across the Mediterranean including channels of legal South-North labour migration; and using its economic clout by tailoring cooperation in trade, industrial development and the creation of employment to the more immediate needs of Arab societies.

Hotspot crisis management is not the EU's strong point, and under present conditions the EU is unfit to compete in that geopolitical league. But it can take the long view on security, using its strong bilateral relations to work towards negotiating a step-by-step formula of structured security cooperation. Such a process could start from a modular, issue-based approach, using existing structures and channels such as the '5 plus 5'<sup>9</sup> framework and recently upgraded ties with the Arab League, with the ultimate aim of slowly moving towards a Helsinki-style process<sup>10</sup>. Although such a road would be rocky and lengthy, the EU could put its traditional strengths to good use here. In doing so, it should not bedevil the trend toward bilateralism, but allow the like-minded to advance on certain dossiers via variable geometry even if they fundamentally disagree on others, and as in the European project, a larger convergence, born out of trust, may slowly emerge over time.

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9 The Western Mediterranean Forum, commonly known as "5+5 Dialogue", is an informal political and security dialogue to enhance cooperation between five EU Member States and five Arab Maghreb countries: Algeria, Spain, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal and Tunisia.

10 The Helsinki process was a series of events following the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe in 1972 that culminated in the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975. Seeking to reduce tension between the Soviet and Western blocs, the Helsinki process initiated discussions of human rights and fundamental freedoms and fostered economic, scientific, and humanitarian cooperation between East and West.

# 6

## Recommendations: Social Justice and Stability

The Arab Uprisings were caused by the failure to meet demands for both economic and political rights: the EU, MENA governments, and religious leaders all lost people's trust because they **underestimated the importance of social justice** to political cohesion, resilience and to democracy, accepting instead a system which produces economic and political marginalisation on both shores of the Mediterranean. To meet the challenges the Uprisings represent and to navigate the complex geopolitical environment they take place in, EU policy should become more responsive, inclusive and flexible. Both survey data and expert opinion consistently identify social justice, inequalities, environmental degradation, youth and women's empowerment, economic diversification, reconstruction and reconciliation as necessary ingredients of a forward-looking Euro-Mediterranean agenda that could better frame the priorities of this region. Focusing policy on social justice, and on both civil-political and socio-economic rights is undoubtedly difficult, but without this focus political stability, democracy and shared prosperity across the Mediterranean will be exceedingly difficult to achieve and even harder to sustain.

- **Learning from the Uprisings:** The EU responded to the Uprisings as demands for liberal democracy and neoliberal development, simply intensifying existing policies. While there is a MENA 'demand for democracy', people conceive of it as including social justice, and economic rights alongside civil-political ones.
- **Rebuilding the EU's Normative Power:** The EU has a poor reputation because many of its policies increased inequality, supported autocratic regimes, and focused less on people's needs and more on the 'stability' of autocracies. This reputational failure undermines the EU's potential to act as a 'normative power'.

- **A Convergence of Interests and Values:** To achieve 'deep democracy', the truly inclusive development it requires, and the stabilisation of security, politics and migration which are in its geopolitical interests, the EU must support populations' demands for political and economic inclusion, and make social justice and socio-economic rights central to political and economic reform.
- **Speaking Up:** Support for populations' social and political dignity must also be public and forceful, cultivating, and heavily investing in ties with and among civil society, unions, and pluralistic media.
- **Inclusive Policy-making:** The EU should enhance the bottom-up elements of its policy design, enhancing dialogue not just with states but prioritise engaging with local partners and with their international counterparts.
- **Economic Inclusion:** The EU should focus trade, industrial and investment policy to create sustainable, decent jobs meeting the immediate needs of Arab societies, and drop its DCFTA-centred approach which has worsened inequalities, not reduced them. On migration, it should enable legal circular migration schemes, particularly South-North labour migration.
- **Corruption epitomises the EU's failures:** It embodies a system of both economic and political exclusion, it drove many to protest, it remains endemic, and over 90% of those supporting the Uprisings still believe governments are not tackling it. Corruption is worth vastly more than development aid: effective action here is likely to have 'multiplier effects' on both political and economic reform.
- **Roots of Resilience:** Policy design should be driven by long-term objectives and rationales: inequality drives protest and instability, so the EU must address structural/root causes of people's dissatisfaction, prioritising long-term interests over short-term issue 'flares'. What is important is at times not what seems urgent.
- **Geopolitical discipline & the 'capacity gap':** While local problems are increasingly entangled in regional and global geopolitics, the EU's ability to act has reduced: its Mediterranean policy should manage expectations and focus on areas in which EU experience, leverage, and means maximise opportunities to make a difference. This context also offers opportunities: Europe's connecti-



ons with the MENA region, Africa's growing importance and the opportunities for cross-Mediterranean cooperation could buffer the effects of acute regional and global rivalries, and be the incubator of a renewed Euro-African partnership.

- **Multi-vector Diplomacy:** The EU must refocus on long-term security, using step-by-step, modular, issue-based approach to working with its counterparts. But it must not restrict itself to government-to-government cooperation, which has constrained it into supporting autocratic regimes: EU programmes are most effective when focusing on social justice and directly or indirectly engaging civil society. Government-level processes, while potentially useful, are no substitute.
- **Risks:** Failure to adapt EU policy in these ways will leave untouched the causes of instability which lead to the Uprisings. This provides fertile terrain for radicalisation, e.g. sectarianism. Regional regimes' ability to repress dissent conveys a false sense of stability, where these regimes are in fact **sinkholes of insecurity** – brittle and vulnerable in ways not evident until it is too late.

These challenges to achieving real democracy in the MENA resonate with those Europe itself faces. Both in the Arab region and within Europe itself, avoiding populist radicalisations of all political stripes will rest on achieving true, 'deep' and effective democracy. This requires guaranteeing the indivisibility human rights, both civil-political and socio-economic. Giving populations an effective political voice, reducing inequalities and ensuring social justice alongside civil and political rights will stabilise the politics and security on both shores of the Mediterranean.

# 7

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