

REPORT No. 26

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

18-19 June, Barcelona



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INTRODUCTION

On the occasion of the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference held in Barcelona on 18-19 June 2019, about 150 researchers and practitioners from the Euro-Mediterranean region gathered in order to explore a number of issues related to “Civil Society and Social Movements in the Euro-Mediterranean Region”. The following report offers an insight into the discussions and outcomes of the Conference. It provides an account of the presentations and discussions held in the context of the three plenary sessions, as well as in the three working sessions structured around presentations from experts that explored specific issues in view of the production of research papers. In addition to the thematic focus, EuroMeSCo annual conferences are traditionally a pivotal moment to take stock of research activities of the network. Accordingly, the report also includes a reference to the sessions in which the work of the three 2018-2019 joint research groups was presented and to the kick-off sessions of the research groups to be developed in 2019-2020.



WELCOME REMARKS

The Annual Conference was introduced by welcome remarks from **Josep Ollé**, Director at Palau Macaya (“La Caixa” Foundation); **Senén Florensa**, Chair of EuroMeSCo General Assembly and President of the Executive Committee of the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed); **Diego Escalona**, Regional Programmes Neighbourhood South, DG NEAR (European Commission); **Miguel García-Herraiz**, Deputy Secretary General at the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM); **Alfonso González**, Director General for European and Mediterranean Affairs (Government of Catalonia); and **David Llistar**, Director of Global Justice and International Cooperation (Barcelona City Council)

The participants highlighted the commitment of their respective institutions to civil society. They stressed the pivotal role of civil society in Euro-Mediterranean relations as a decisive actor in linking society’s needs and demands with public authorities. In this regard, they welcomed the role of EuroMeSCo as an interface between think tanks and policy makers.



PLENARY SESSIONS

Taking the Pulse of Civil Society and Social Movements in the Euromed Region

Aleksandra Chmielewska (Moderator), Project Manager, IEMed – European Institute of the Mediterranean; **Kholoud Al-Ajarma**, PhD Researcher, Groningen University and Coordinator, Mediterranean Youth for Water Network; **Francesca Caruso**, Junior Researcher, IAI – Istituto Affari Internazionali; **Loes Debuysere**, Researcher, CEPS – Centre for European Policy Studies; **Mariam Mecky**, Independent Researcher, NPF fellow, ACSS – Arab Council for the Social Sciences

From a historical perspective, civic activism has evolved from an NGO-based prototype, highly formalised and mainly depoliticised, towards the so-called new civic activism, characterised instead by bottom-up, more informal and more politicised approaches. Nonetheless, some of these features were already apparent in previous mobilisations, such as in women's movements in Tunisia in the late 70s whereby highly politicised grassroots groups emerged. The civil society landscape in the Euro-Mediterranean region is by and large shaped by the coexistence of the two models that fluctuate from country to country depending on the context.

New civic activism is characterised by bottom-up, more informal and more politicised approaches

The discussion touched upon some specific states. In Algeria, after Bouteflika announced that he would not run for another 5-year term, Algerians continued demonstrating peacefully and spontaneously to also call for economic and social improvements. As opposed to what happened



during 2011 when the regime managed to appease sectorial and group-organised protests asking for better working conditions with oil rents and raised the spectre of the civil war to trigger fear, youths, constituting the largest bulk of demonstrators, were now determined to defend their rights and push for a change of regime.

The Rif Movement in Morocco was presented in opposition to Algerian protests by reason of both its organisational and historical aspects. The Rif region has been protesting and revolting for long, especially during the 80s and 90s. Furthermore, the movement has Nasser Zefzafi as leader whereas the Algerian movement is a leaderless mobilisation. A panellist hinted at the challenges of civil society movements in Morocco, hampering their potential to provide solutions to societal problems.



In general terms, Northern and Southern Mediterranean civil movements in recent years indisputably displayed common features and it was argued that agendas could continue to converge, as some issues, such as climate change, had the potential to indistinctively mobilise civil societies and social movements in the entire Euro-Mediterranean region. With regards to climate issues (identified by the panellists and by the audience as the main issue that should mobilise civil society across the Mediterranean) as well as other pressing

Northern and Southern Mediterranean civil movements in recent years indisputably displayed common features

matters, civil society has indeed a prominent role, including in terms of awareness-raising. Civil society could also be instrumental in engineering solutions to deal with water scarcity for instance, a daunting challenge and a growing push factor for migration. The case of the Mediterranean Youth for Water Network (MedYWat) was presented as a model of a community that brings together young professionals, researchers and civil society members working in the water sector from around the Mediterranean to bring solutions on water management.

Gender issues was another transversal theme that came up during the debate. Mobilisation around gender issues in the Arab region has occurred since the early 20th century but it has imposed itself on top of the agenda only recently as a result of the 2011 uprisings. Gender

mobilisations have contributed to mainstreaming a discourse on a wide variety of matters that were previously unspoken, including sexual harassment and domestic violence. However, there have been some setbacks over the last few years and difficulties for these movements remain, such as access to funding, lack of public support in some cases and difficulties reaching out to rural communities.



More specifically, women's activism in Tunisia has undergone a major evolution since 2011, characterised mainly by the diversification of expressions and causes that blossomed under the women's movement umbrella. Despite some divisions, cooperation between women's groups has been fruitful and they have gained agency, with positive spill-over effects regarding the representation of other movements such as LGBTQ activism. Gender mobilisations in Egypt was also discussed. It was argued that, in this case, cooperation between international and local organisations was particularly instrumental in pushing the agenda forward.

Engaging with Civil Society in the Southern Mediterranean: Assessing Policy Responses to Civil Society and Social Movements

Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria (Moderator), Head of the Euro-Mediterranean Policies Department, IEMed – European Institute of the Mediterranean; **Galip Dalay**, Research Director, Al Sharq Forum; **Jessica Northey**, Research Fellow, CTPSR – Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University; **Tarik Nesh-Nash**, CEO, GovRight; **Sarah Anne Rennick**, Deputy Director, ARI – Arab Reform Initiative

This Plenary Session focused on the relationship of civil society organisations (CSOs) with political and policy actors in Southern Mediterranean countries as well as with the European Union (EU). First, panellists discussed the attitudes and policies of southern governments towards CSOs. After 2011, it seemed that a new period for activism and civic engagement in public life started. However, CSOs have been facing new problems and different scenarios in the region since then.

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was adopted in 2016 adding to previous laws constraining social activism approved in 2002 and 2010. The 2016 law introduced more barriers and controls, including the possibility for governmental authorities to intervene in internal NGOs' decisions and activities or hamper them. Furthermore, the law imposed strong penalties on NGO members that are not complying with the requirements. Some governments have used the terrorist threat to legitimate their restrictive policy vis-à-vis some CSOs, sometimes using the terrorist label to brand CSOs criticising the regime, thereby dragging the debate from political ground to security and defence. Constraints and pressures have in some cases obliged some CSOs to work from abroad, thereby creating, according to a panellist, a "CSO diaspora" that in its turn was not exempt from anomalies: CSOs operating from abroad are sometimes tempted to enter into political dynamics of the host country; they run the risk of losing track of the needs of their population and of losing legitimacy in front of origin country's authorities.

The second attitude identified in the debate was concession, as exemplified in negotiations between the Tunisian government and protesters in different cases. The third governmental attitude towards civil society is cooptation. The rationale of this policy is to generate a division within social movements. Through an inclusion / exclusion dynamic, the government allows some CSOs to operate in order to get the legitimacy needed to block other social movements.

In a more positive twist, panellists also discussed how online activism could contribute to reshaping the relations between CSOs and governments in the region for the better. In the case of Morocco, the constitutional change of 2011 created new dynamics in the relations between civil society and the government. CSOs started asking public authorities for information and clarifications more systematically and an unprecedented dialogue between government and civil society started. Nevertheless, some CSOs decided not to engage with the Moroccan government, out of fear of being manipulated. In Tunisia, CSOs had a significant role in the post-2011 transition and contributed to shaping the new political order. At the local level, progress

Through their interventions, the panellists identified different strategies deployed by governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region vis-à-vis CSOs. The first strategy consists of creating obstacles to CSOs' functioning and running of activities. In Egypt, a restrictive law against CSOs



towards decentralisation in both countries also opened new avenues for cooperation of CSOs with subnational authorities. However, CSOs are not always fully prepared and equipped to exploit these new opportunities. In order to fill this gap, Euro-Mediterranean cooperation at the level of CSOs is instrumental and good practices such as citizen participation centres in Madrid or Barcelona should be shared.

The third main aspect discussed by the panellists was the role of the EU in engaging Southern Mediterranean CSOs. Despite the consistent engagement of the EU through various funds and programmes, in particular in the wake of 2011 events, the EU's support to CSOs in MENA countries is often criticised. A panellist stressed the difficulty of evaluating the EU's success in helping CSOs to assume a stronger role in their respective countries. As a diplomatic actor, the EU is constrained by how and how much it can engage directly with CSOs without disrupting and damaging traditional and political channels with its governmental interlocutors. Engaging, for instance, with non-registered NGOs is very complicated. Being aware of these constraints does not mean that the EU cannot improve. It was argued for instance that the EU could further develop its locally-based activities, i.e. adjusting its programmes to local needs and realities.



In some cases, online tools can contribute to reshaping the relations between CSOs and governments in the region for the better

Civil Society as a Driving Force of Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation and Integration

Lurdes Vidal (Moderator), Editor-in-Chief of *afkar/ideas* and Director of the Arab World and Mediterranean Department, IEMed – European Institute of the Mediterranean; **Aida Ridanovich**, Mediterranean Forum Director, Anna Lindh Foundation; **Wadih Al-Asmar**, Secretary General, Lebanese Centre for Human Rights, President of EuroMed Rights; **Cengiz Gunay**, Senior Researcher and Deputy Director, OIIP – Austrian Institute for International Affairs; **Itxaso Domínguez**, Coordinator of Middle East and North Africa Programme, Fundación Alternativas

On both sides of the Mediterranean, civil society movements have arguably lost contact with grassroots dynamics and the gap between society and CSOs has arguably increased



Echoing discussions from the first Plenary Session, it was mentioned that a number of similar dynamics had been affecting civil society within the Euro-Mediterranean region over the last few years. On both sides of the Mediterranean, civil society movements have arguably lost contact with grassroots dynamics and the gap between society and CSOs has increased. The generational difference between the society at large and civil society representatives has widened this gap and added to the sense of distrust of traditional civil society actors. Against this background, new civil society actors have pressed for changes, and urged for reconnecting with the society through the use of new working and communication tools as well as the promotion of non-hierarchical structures. Recovering the transformative power of CSOs requires all social movements to evolve and adapt.

There is a wide range of platforms and instruments through which CSOs from both sides of the Mediterranean can cooperate and mitigate some of the problems they face. The existing Euro-Mediterranean civil society networks need to boost innovative ways of cooperation and the creation of new spaces, putting special emphasis on encompassing grassroots initiatives. While Euro-Mediterranean civil society networks cannot pretend to represent the whole civil society spectrum, some fora have been developed to promote more inclusive processes, such as the Majalat project, which creates a space of encounter and constructive dialogue between the civil society of the Southern Mediterranean and European interlocutors. Regaining credibility would also require an effort of adjusting a terminology that was not understood. A speaker claimed, for instance, that concepts such as “resilience”, “raising awareness”, “capacity-building” and “sustainability” were not understood in a large segment of civil society. As civil society from the two shores of the Mediterranean share common goals, global campaigns to support common agendas on pressing issues should be strengthened. Gender issues, climate change, anti-austerity and social justice were discussed in this context. However, the tools deployed to advance these goals had to be country-sensitive. Strategies driving civil society actions should take into account local specificities and the relevant social context in order to be adequate, relevant and proportionate to the demands of society.



Turning to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, the panellists highlighted two main ideas. First, the prevailing European secularist perspective and stereotypes have built up a normative barrier that does not leave much space for involving religious organisations from the Southern Mediterranean in cooperation mechanisms, which subsequently results in leaving aside a number of movements. EU donors' agenda when it comes to civil society is regularly blamed for being

mainly geared towards a certain type of organisation, mainly settled in large cities, involving educated workers who are abroad and able to operate in English or French. It was claimed that the EU cooperation with civil society will need to extend its scope to other types of organisations in order to embrace all concerns of the society. Both civil society actors themselves and donors needed to get out of their comfort zone and intimate circles to confront more diversity.

The securitisation of Euro-Mediterranean relations has eroded the spirit of the third basket

Second, the overall momentum for taking civil society as an important dimension of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation has vanished since 1995. A panellist argued that, while some reluctant countries had been somehow forced to accept the inclusion of the third basket in the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, those reluctant countries had now gained the upper hand, and the securitisation of Euro-Mediterranean relations had eroded the spirit of the third basket. Difficulties obtaining visas in the context of civil society cooperation mechanisms were a mirror of this. The “depolitisation” of some civil society actors in Southern Mediterranean countries and their pragmatic focus on certain thematics, such as climate change, also had to be understood as a “default” strategy, whereby organisations were engaging in those issues where there was room for manoeuvre rather than in politically sensitive human rights-related issues. In turn, in some European countries, populist trends have also narrowed down the scope of civil society actions and hindered access to funding.



WORKING SESSIONS

These sessions were structured around the presentation of initial research proposals that will be finalised and published as a follow-up to the Conference.

The Spatiality of Social Movements: Cities at the Frontline

Rabha Allam (Moderator), Senior Researcher, ACPSS – Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies; **Rana Hassan**, Researcher, Orient Institute of Beirut, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid; **Ghaliya Djelloul**, Researcher, UC Louvain; GERMAC – Groupe d'études et de recherches sur le Monde Arabe contemporain; **Hannah Abdullah**, Researcher, CIDOB – Barcelona Centre for International Affairs; **Rana Aytug**, PhD Candidate, CTPSR – Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations; **Ricard González**, Journalist and Political Scientist, Regular Contributor to El País



The session focused on the local and urban underpinnings of social movements around the Euro-Mediterranean region. Urban movements have had a significant role in Lebanon. The urban space is one of the clearest illustrations of polarisation, division and fragmentation that neoliberalism is creating within society. Urban social movements have been increasing as a result of this polarisation. Another reason is that anti-globalisation movements are fading, thereby leaving space to urban activism that can relate more directly to local struggles and everyday life concerns. However, despite the expansion of urban activism to new neighbourhoods and communities, some segments of society remain excluded and unable to

Urban social movements have been increasing as a result of growing division and polarisation within societies

voice their concerns. An interesting perspective is on the connection between urban social movements and urban planning. Against the background of underdeveloped urban planning policies in Lebanon and marginalised local authorities, there has been a growing tendency of encouraging private investments without any kind of consideration for urban rights. Inevitably, those policies amplified inequalities within cities. In this context, a number of Lebanese social movements have shifted their focus on urban issues, understanding their strategic dimension in the fight against inequalities. An analysis of the ecosystem of actors and movements that are mobilising around urban issues points to increasingly inclusive processes. Urban social movements acted in many different ways, lobbying for specific policies, claiming the rights of a specific community affected by laws advocating for bottom-up reconstruction. While urban social movements in Lebanon have faced important challenges, for instance sometimes failing to unite around common causes, they have also started to generate results and have contributed to changing attitudes of authorities and society at large and raise awareness regarding the importance of urban regulation.



The interlink between offline and online mobilisations is a key feature of the current Algerian movement

The Algerian mobilisations were the second case study that was discussed in this session. The interlink between offline and online mobilisations is a key feature of this movement. In between Friday actions, protesters have been highly connected online. This is when groups have conceptualised or adjusted their actions, trying for instance to circumvent obstacles imposed by the authorities. Authorities have used, for example, urban morphology to obstruct demonstrations, closing streets or provoking traffic congestion. Another feature of this

movement has been the appropriation of the public space by some subgroups to impose their agenda or the creation of subgroups on the occasion of these mobilisations. The example of a feminist group that was created during the protests was discussed.

Last, the discussion turned to the role of the EU as a supporter of urban cultural activism. It was argued that cultural activism, and specifically urban cultural activism, could be considered as a driver of democratic change. However, in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) 2015 review, culture is considered as a “stabilising force in the context of intercultural dialogue” rather than as an effective tool for a bottom-up change. The specific case of the SouthMedCV project, a component of the technical assistance programme Med Culture was discussed. The aim of Med Culture is to promote culture as an engine for sustainable human, social and economic development by supporting both governments and cultural actors of partner countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine and Libya). One of the goals of the SouthMedCV project is to support CSOs in their capacity to cooperate with local public authorities. The decision of focusing on local authorities was partly driven by practical considerations, i.e. the absence or weakness of national culture policies in some Southern Mediterranean countries, making local authorities de facto the main actors of this kind of cooperation. Projects such as Proposal for a Metropole in Tangiers (Morocco), Sustainable Local Planning in Thibar (Tunisia), and MED/DEMOS/PACE LAB in Kairouan (Tunisia) were mentioned.

Weak national cultural policies in some countries make local authorities de facto the main actors of cooperation



Civil Society and Online Connectivity

Ahmed Driss (Moderator), Director, CEMI – Centre des études méditerranéennes et internationales; **Amro Ali**, Assistant Professor, American University of Cairo; **Laurence Thieux**, Researcher, Complutense University Madrid; **Sihem Najar**, Researcher, Université Tunis el-Manar; **Ángela Suárez**, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Salamanca; **Rashed Jayoussi**, Project Officer, DCAF – The Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance



Social networks have allowed the emergence of new spaces of dialogue and interaction, leading to collective action driven by young actors committed to changing the rules of the game. New Information and Communication Technologies and social networks have thus brought a breath of fresh air for a society constrained in its action and expression by promoting citizen participation. Access to social networks strengthens the position of individuals as the sole judges and arbitrators of the information they receive, produce and share. The use of social media also allows ordinary citizens to claim leadership and break the chain of a legitimacy given and controlled by the state. In such a space, cyberactivists and pressure groups tend to influence decisions and counterbalance the power relations between antagonistic actors by making their voices heard by a wider population and by channelling messages to their target audiences. The interest of this virtual remote engagement lies, on the one hand, in the fact that it is rooted in social reality and, on the other, in its ability to constitute and mobilise transnational and decentralised pressure groups. These new forms of protest expression are far from being at odds with other traditional public and citizen forms of expression (press articles, graffiti,

caricatures, petitions, plays, poems, films, and so on). Indeed, the credibility, even the legitimacy, of online social movements, depends on their ability to relate to field initiatives and realities. Cyberactivism remains driven by the real strength of the activists who act on the ground.



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The specific cases of Egypt and Algeria were discussed during the session. In Algeria, the virtual space has not only helped to break the wall of fear, it has also ensured massive participation and also helped to secure the peaceful nature of the demonstrations (controlling the slogans, organising the marches including schedules, itineraries in order to avoid the confrontation with the security forces). The digital sphere and social media tools imposed themselves as powerful political tools during the 2011 Egyptian revolution, contributing to the toppling of the regime and to holding power accountable. As the counter-revolution became savvy, these same tools became conduits of repression and facilitated the crackdown against Egyptian civil society and activists. The increasing difficulty in bypassing repression and censorship, along with the desire to continue to invest the public sphere has pushed some to start imagining a “post-internet future”. Whether that will be addressed by the relevance of the street or newer technologies is an open question. There is a growing desire to blunt the tools of repression and digital fragmentation by moving the gravitational centre away from the internet to newer spaces and lines of thinking in the real world. Yet, paradoxically, large segments of civil society remain somehow captive to the digital realm and social networks dominated by mercantile interests, algorithms and echo chambers that contribute to diluting the sense of responsibility, the backbone of civil society and citizenship.

There is a growing desire to blunt the tools of repression and digital fragmentation by moving the gravitational centre away from the internet to newer spaces and lines of thinking in the real world

Civil Society's Role in Promoting Migrants' Rights and Inclusion

Zeynep Gülöz Bakir (Moderator), Project Manager, PODEM – Center for Public Policy and Democracy Studies; **Kathya Berrada**, Researcher, MIPA – Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis; **Marwa Nazeer**, Associated Researcher, ACPSS – Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies; **Gülşah Dark**, Project Officer, PODEM – Center for Public Policy and Democracy Studies; **Miriam Hatibi**, Activist and Spokesperson, Ibn Battuta Foundation



The approaches of Turkish CSOs and their perceptions of Syrian refugees are very diverse. These various perceptions – as guests or co-habitants for instance – have some impact on how those organisations engage refugees and ultimately on the success or failure of refugees' integration

The session looked into the situation of CSOs working with migrants in Morocco and with Syrian refugees in Turkey. It was argued that much work still needed to be done in order to break down stereotypes concerning migrant communities in Morocco. Moreover, only a limited number of Moroccan CSOs are capable of effectively advocating for migrants rights. The prevailing political apathy, especially among the youth, is mainly due to a mistrust of political parties, as a consequence of corruption scandals. Yet, there are important issues to address. One of the main challenges relates to the legal status of migrants in the region. In some cases the legal uncertainties affect their ability to access services and complicate their integration. In Turkey, citizenship is only accessible to “exceptional Syrians”. In the case of Morocco, access to citizenship remains very difficult, despite recent improvements.

In the case of Turkey, there have been two main periods of Syrian refugee flows. First, the period from 2011 to 2014, when Turkey had an open-border policy and considered Syrian refugees as guests. Second, from 2014 onwards – coinciding with the escalating conflict in Syria – the

open-border policy was reverted, and mobility into Turkey was restricted. In parallel, there was a shift in Turkish policies regarding refugees, moving from a short-term approach considering refugees as a temporary issue to a longer-term development plan. This change of paradigm has had some impact on the room for manoeuvre of CSOs. Since 2011 there has been an overall increase of 20% in terms of CSOs working with Syrian communities in Turkey. The approaches of Turkish CSOs and their perceptions of Syrian refugees are very diverse. These various perceptions – as guests or co-habitants for instance – have some impact on how those organisations engage refugees and ultimately on the success or failure of refugees' integration. The different approaches of the EU vis-à-vis Morocco and Turkey also came up in the discussion. It was argued that migration had a global impact, and that given the intertwined network of migration flows nowadays, no country should be dealt with as an independent case.



TAKING STOCK OF EUROMESCO RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Concluding the 2018-2019 research groups _____

The Annual Conference was the opportunity for research groups developed in 2018-2019 to present the results of their work. The groups on “The Role of Russia in the Middle East and North Africa. Strategy or Opportunism”, “Cooperation with Religious Institutions as a European Policy Tool”, and “Climate Security in the Sahel and the Mediterranean: Local and Regional Responses” explained the main findings of their research, brought together in the three corresponding Joint Policy Studies, all available on the EuroMeSCo website.

KICKING OFF NEW RESEARCH GROUPS

Working Package: Water Security in the Middle East _____

Liel Maghen, Co-director, IPCRI – Israel-Palestine Creative Regional Initiatives; **Shira Kronich**, Associate Director, Arava Institute; **Ali Oguz Dirioz**, Assistant Professor, TOBB University of Economics and Technology; **Tobias Von Lossow**, Research Fellow, Clingendael – Netherlands Institute of International Relations; **Mahmoud Shattat**, Senior Water and Sustainable Energy Specialist, Oxford Policy Management; **Desireé Quagliarotti**, Researcher, ISSM – Institute of Studies on Mediterranean Societies; **Giulia Giordano**, International Affairs Manager, Ecopeace Middle East; **Christiane Froehlich**, Research Fellow, GIGA – German Institute of Global and Area Studies; **Itay Fischhendler**, Associate Professor, Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations



Water scarcity affects millions of people in the world, and the Middle East is particularly exposed not only because of natural circumstances but also due to political factors that aggravate the situation. In the Middle East, 60% of the population live under the condition of high water stress. The Arabian Peninsula is very exposed to water stress but its financial situation allows the countries of the Peninsula to mitigate the problem, mainly through desalination efforts. Countries such as Lebanon and Iran have more water resources but, because of shortcomings of water policies, their population lack adequate water access in many areas. Water resources are unequally divided between Israel and Palestine. The situation is very critical in particular in the Gaza Strip, where the rise of population and the scarcity of water pushed the UN to declare that in 2020 Gaza would no longer be habitable. In Jordan, the limited water resources are aggravated by the refugee influxes from neighbouring countries. In Iraq, the historical dependency on the Euphrates and the Tigris remains, an important factor and the political instability does not allow the central government to implement effective water policies.

While water management is highly securitised and access to the resource is considered a national security issue, there is an urgency for ensuring water security for local communities while encouraging intra-regional cooperation and EU-Middle Eastern partnerships. Thus, the Joint Policy Study will analyse the potential role of water in shaping future Euro-Middle East dynamics. It will first explore the potentialities of water scarcity, i.e. how the necessity to tackle this situation can incentivise cooperation rather than dispute and conflict. In order to do so, the Joint Policy Study will review the precedents of institutions such as the Rhine Basin Commission or the Danube Commission and highlight the potential of such mechanisms.

In line with the UN definition of water security that includes not only the issue of access and the available resources but also water quality, human health and environmental concerns, the Joint Policy Study will also analyse the so-called Water-Energy Nexus (WEN) and the consequences that this nexus could have for environmental policies. Water scarcity can have a tremendous environmental impact. For example, the increased dependence on desalination in the Middle East, notably Israel, demands high usage of energy and is causing large amounts of highly-concentrated salt water to be dumped back into the Mediterranean Sea. Traditionally, water and energy sectors have been dealt with separately, but thinking about water and energy in an integrated manner is essential in order to find creative and innovative solutions at national and regional level, including the development of renewable energy and the production of non-conventional water resources. In order to better understand the interactions between water and energy systems in the Middle East, the Joint Policy Study will focus on the example of the Jordan

River basin that can be considered as a “WEN regional network”, able to increase the production and exchange of renewable energy and desalinated water between countries based on the principle of comparative advantages.

These aforementioned problems associated with scarcity make water access a national security issue, and cause water access to undergo

securitisation. The Joint Policy Study will produce policy-oriented research on water diplomacy and reflect in particular on the need to de-securitise the perspective on water cooperation, switching from a security to a political agenda. In MENA countries facing extreme water scarcity, water has been framed as an existential threat, leading governments to use and justify emergency measures at a highly concentrated governmental and military level. A change of paradigm would allow governments to “normalise” their water policies, move away from the “emergency approach” and privilege multilateral cooperation, which is crucial, for instance, for effective transboundary water management as mentioned in the November 2018 Council conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU on Water Diplomacy.

[The Role of China in the Middle East and North Africa. Beyond Economic Interests](#)

Katarzyna Sidlo, Political Economist, CASE – Center for Social and Economic Research; **Erzsébet Rozsa**, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of World Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; **Alexandr Lagazzi**, Communications Manager, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy; **Lars Andersen**, Senior Research Fellow, DIIS – Danish Institute for International Studies; **Camille Lons**, Programme Coordinator, ECFR – European Council on Foreign Relations; **Bichara Khader**, Founder, GERMAC

The MENA region has traditionally been rather peripheral to China's interests. However, under President Xi Jinping this has notably changed. This has mostly been due to the MENA countries' strategic position on the rekindled Silk Road trade route, connecting China with Europe via Asia and Africa. The already strong trade relations between China and the MENA states have been providing a stable foundation for growing cooperation in other fields as well. Indeed, China's 2016 official Arab Policy Paper focuses not only on investment and trade but also underlines the need for political, cultural and social, as well as peace and security-related cooperation. This approach has been reiterated by the Chinese officials during numerous recent official visits to



A change of paradigm would allow governments to “normalise” their water policies, move away from the “emergency approach” and privilege multilateral cooperation, which is crucial, for instance, for effective transboundary water management



the MENA region as well as Ministerial Meetings of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF), which annually take place in Beijing. As it appears, then, China is no longer interested purely in purchasing oil from and investing in the countries in the region but wishes to expand its sphere of influence to the MENA as well.

Against this background, the main aim of the Joint Policy Study will be to explore the present and potential future role of China in the MENA region. To the extent possible and whenever relevant, it will also touch upon the issue of the broader African dimension of Chinese engagement.

The Joint Policy Study will touch upon Chinese-MENA relations in the context of Chinese global strategy and economic engagement. The key vehicle of Chinese expansion has been the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Marrying China's economic and political interests, BRI is an umbrella development strategy encompassing a series of investments and policies implemented in the countries in Asia, Africa and Europe. The MENA region is strategically placed on this new Silk Road. The MENA region is China's main oil supplier (over 50% of Chinese oil imports come from there) and an important export market for its goods. Beijing invests in and trades with nearly all the countries in the region; it is Iran's top trading partner, with China-Iran trade exceeding USD 37 billion in 2017 (recording 19% year-on-year growth) and at the same time a major investor in Israel's ports and railways, as well as its developing high-tech sector. Investments are also on the rise in Jordan and in Egypt. In the latter, Chinese banks agreed to provide funds for the otherwise internationally-overlooked mega-projects of President Sisi (such as the new political centre, east of Cairo) and cooperate with Egypt over the new Suez Canal zone. Last but not least, China has recently (in 2017) strengthened its collaboration with Saudi Arabia, signing bilateral agreements in renewable energy, space and oil sectors with a cumulative worth of USD 65 billion.

China's relations with countries of the region have progressively expanded to aspects other than economic cooperation

China's relations with countries of the region have progressively expanded to aspects other than economic cooperation. Beijing has been increasingly if cautiously engaging in various regional conflicts, for instance by virtue of providing diplomatic support to the Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and hosting a Peace Symposium for Palestinians and Israelis in December last year. Beijing has been making efforts to ramp up its military engagement in the region: from demonstrating its presence in nearby strategic checkpoints, such as the Suez Canal and the



Strait of Hormuz, to conducting port calls in GCC countries, Israel, Egypt and Iran, and joint naval exercises with the latter. This is on top of serving as a source of military equipment, sold to almost every actor in the region (and outside of it) willing to pay. In its international relations, China is advocating the so-called Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence. One concrete consequence of those principles is that China is not keen on attaching strings and conditions to its investments, financial assistance or sale of weapons on a given country's respect for the rule of law, human rights or democratic processes. While China is a relative newcomer to the region, it has already managed to get engaged with most of the local players. It trades with everyone from Israel and Saudi Arabia to Iran and the Syrian Kurds. As long as these relationships were mainly of an economic nature, such a balancing act was possible to maintain. However, as China is increasingly building its political and military presence in the region this may prove difficult. Chinese support to any of the countries in the region may easily shift the balance of powers.

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Infrastructures and Power in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa. The Crossroads of Regional and Global Geopolitics

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Technological revolutions as well as changes in the balance and nature of power at the global and regional levels are modifying the way in which cooperation and competition dynamics take shape, including when it comes to the control of physical or virtual infrastructures including critical infrastructures, referred to in the EU Global Strategy. This Joint Policy Study will analyse regional dynamics through the lenses of infrastructure and power, which among other things will allow our understanding of regional geopolitics to be refined by integrating into the analysis the role of private companies and how they relate to “conventional” centres of power.

Airlines and airports as instruments of soft power will be one of the focus areas of the Joint Policy Study. Over the last decade, Turkish Airlines, Ettihad Airways, Emirates and Qatar Airways have all emerged not only as among the most successful national airlines globally from a commercial point of view but also as powerful soft power instruments in the hands of national authorities. At a different scale, Royal Air Maroc has also made a continuous investment to open routes to African cities, a move consistent with this country’s pivot to Africa. Morocco is not an exception as in the MENA region those strategic plans are often part and parcel of broader national strategies and foreign policy visions. For example, if a national airline can make its city of origin an aviation hub, this has important repercussions commercially and politically with ramifications for regional and global geopolitics. Tracing the expanding air routes to and from key MENA countries serves to show some players’ ability to project their commercial and political horizons, often in competition with one another. Finally, their ability to connect globally is also perceived as part of the countries’ public diplomacy strategies in which branding and connectivity are two sides of the same coin.

Pipelines are also shaping and shaped by geopolitical dynamics. The Eastern Mediterranean in particular has been a centre of attention as a potentially important natural gas provider in the making. However, so far progress in that direction has in general been rather slow. The impact of energy price volatility and turbulent economic and financial conditions globally, uncertainties in the countries'



energy, regulatory and fiscal policies, and, not least, the region's own geopolitical challenges constitute major obstacles. Still, the MENA is crisscrossed by several pipelines and grids that carry gas and electricity within the region itself and to its external destination markets, including the European countries. In this respect, improving the resilience of critical infrastructures has become a priority for the national authorities and private companies that have a stake in the regional energy market. Emerging threats, including unconventional and cyber attacks on critical infrastructures, as well as the aggressive posture by potential competitors globally, have heightened the sense of insecurity and have often exacerbated or created old and new geopolitical tensions.

Along these lines, ports and maritime choke points will also be analysed in the Joint Policy Study. The region includes five maritime straits that are crucial for global trade: Gibraltar, Bab-el-Mandeb, Tiran, Suez, Bosphorus, and Hormuz. The latter is the world's most important oil chokepoint, with a flow of 17 million barrels per day amounting to about 30% of all seaborne-traded oil, while the Suez Canal carries around 8% of total seaborne trade. Regional instability and the appearance of alternative routes from Europe to Asia (mainly through the Arctic) could affect geopolitical dynamics. Piracy also represents a major challenge. Somali piracy and a potential state collapse in Yemen are causing insecurity that is spilling over into the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. More recently, the Libyan coast has also become a safe haven for criminal networks operating in the Mediterranean and beyond. Finally, the acquisition of critical infrastructures reflects larger geopolitical ambitions by regional or global players.

The Joint Policy Study will also look into the geopolitics of virtual spaces. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are indeed another battlefield for geopolitical competition and intra-regional breakdown. The penetration of these technologies into the MENA region has increased dramatically in the past years, not only changing patterns of communication and information but also impacting heavily on state-society relations in the region. Stark differences exist across and within countries in terms of access to internet-related technologies (for example internet-based payment systems) and connectivity (for example, 5G technology) with a related impact on the penetration and use of social media by different categories of people for information and communication, leisure or control and propaganda. The ability to control this media and the messages that are circulated through it is highly valued by the elites (in different domains) and by the authorities, which are increasingly making use themselves of these technologies and platforms to exercise their power. Finally, cyber security has also become a crucial dimension of the geopolitics of virtual spaces, with the multiplication of cyber attacks on virtual and material infrastructures, and growing competition between antagonistic powers to become cyber leaders.





Founded in 1996 and comprising 105 institutes from 29 European and South Mediterranean countries, EuroMeSCo (the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) is a leading network of research centres in the Mediterranean, striving at building a community of research institutes and think tanks committed to strengthening Euro-Mediterranean relations.

The objectives of the network are to foster influential quality analysis and reflection on Euro-Mediterranean politics and policies; to serve as a platform for dialogue between the members of the network and key stakeholders to discuss the key trends and challenges on the region's agenda; to increase the impact of think tanks and research institutes and to actively contribute to policy-making through dissemination of research outputs of the network to experts and national, European and international institutions linked to Euro-Mediterranean relations.

The EuroMeSCo work plan includes a research programme with five publication lines (Joint Policy Studies, Papers, Briefs, Spot-Ons and reports), as well as numerous activities, including annual conferences, seminars, workshops, presentations, formal and informal meetings with policy makers on the key political and security dynamics. It also includes communication and dissemination related activities (website, newsletter and targeted institutional dissemination) to raise awareness and promote the work of the network and to stimulate debate on Euro-Mediterranean affairs.