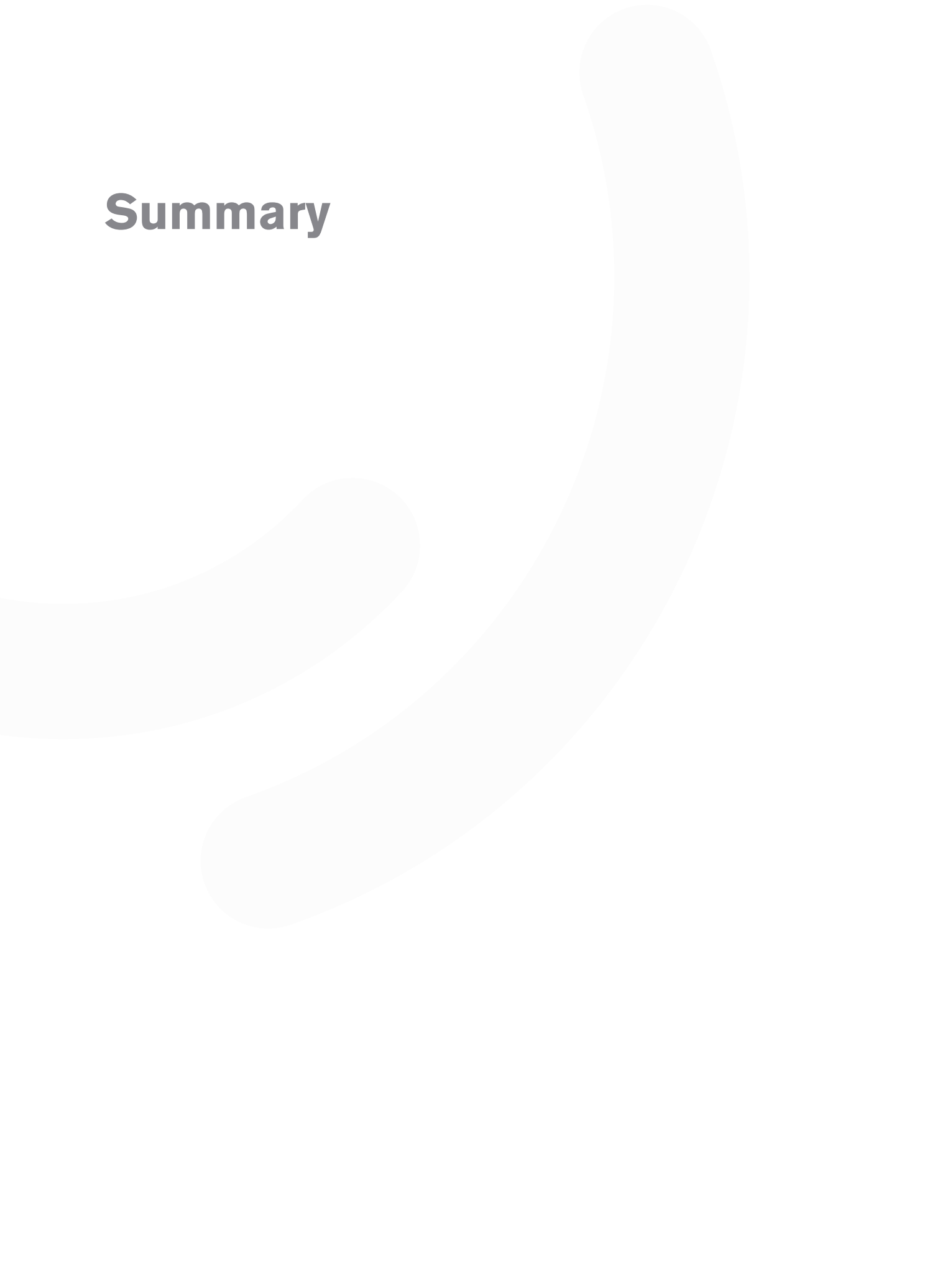


EUROMESCO ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2024
MEDITERRANEAN FORESIGHT:
EXPLORING FUTURE SCENARIOS
OF COOPERATION

European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Brussels, 16-17 May 2024

Report

Summary





“Mediterranean Foresight: Exploring Future Scenarios of Cooperation” was the theme of the EuroMeSCo 2024 Annual Conference, which took place at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in Brussels on 16-17 May 2024. The event welcomed 140 participants from 27 countries, including representatives from think tanks, academic institutions, governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, officials from EU institutions and member states, and the Union for the Mediterranean, in view of discussing common regional challenges and contributing to policy shaping in the region.

The world order has become increasingly complex, turbulent, and contested, facing the highest number of active conflicts since the end of World War II, with emerging actors gaining significance in the international arena. The Euro-Mediterranean region is not immune to these

challenges. Longstanding conflicts have recently been joined by the escalation of the war in Gaza. Both the world and the Euro-Mediterranean region are entering a new phase of redesign in this world of radical uncertainty in which the scope and speed of change is exceptional. Ahead of political changes in Brussels with the European elections and a new Commission to be then assembled, the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference 2024 aimed to shed light on possible future scenarios of cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The conference consisted of three plenary sessions on maritime security, migration cooperation, and economic interdependence respectively. The first plenary session focused on maritime security from the Gibraltar Strait to the Persian Gulf. The second plenary session discussed future scenarios of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the

field of migration, highlighting the risks of a politicized approach and the benefits of a collaborative approach. The third plenary session focused on the future of economic interdependence in the Mediterranean.

The conference also hosted a Multi-stakeholders Platform on “Fostering Understanding: Communication, Perceptions and Narratives in Euro-Mediterranean Relations” and three parallel Foresight Working Sessions on the future of the Palestinian issue, new connectivity politics in the Eastern Mediterranean, and scenario building for

Euro-Mediterranean cooperation after the elections in 2024 and 2025.

The event was organised by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) in the framework of the EuroMeSCo: Connecting the dots, a project co-funded by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Regional Programmes Neighbourhood South Unit (DG NEAR B2) and IEMed that aims to connect the dots between diverse stakeholders – think tanks, experts, civil society, the private sector, academia – as well as between the EU, its Southern Neighbours, and the wider region.

Opening Session



Speakers:

Amb. Senén FLORENSA, Executive President, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed).

Carmen MAGARIÑOS, Director-General for the Maghreb, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Cooperation.

Henrike TRAUTMANN, Acting Head of Unit, Regional Cooperation Neighbourhood South, Economic Investment Plan, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR B2), European Commission.

Thomas WAGNSONNER, President of the Euromed Follow-Up Committee, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

Thomas Wagnsonner, President of the Euromed Follow-Up Committee, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) opened the EuroMeSCo 2024 Annual Conference by introducing the European

Economic and Social Committee (EESC), its role, and its origins. He expressed a warm welcome to EuroMeSCo and all attendees, emphasizing the importance of this annual gathering for fostering dialogue and cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Following Thomas Wagnsonner, Ambassador Senen Florensa, Executive President, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), thanked him and extended a cordial welcome to the distinguished speakers and participants. He highlighted the timely significance of the conference, especially in light of the recent events in Gaza. Ambassador Florensa underscored EuroMeSCo's long-standing mission to continuously seek pathways for cooperation and provide policy recommendations that can guide the Euro-Mediterranean region through challenging times. He stressed the importance of fostering dialogue to bridge peace and prosperity in the region.

Henrike Trautmann, Acting Head of Unit at DG NEAR B2 of the European Commission, discussed the crucial role of EuroMeSCo in annually assessing the state of



Mediterranean affairs. She emphasized the timeliness of the conference, focusing on foresight and key considerations during these changing times. Her speech covered the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the challenges, instruments, and future of EU-Southern ENP partnerships. Trautmann explored geopolitical tensions affecting the EU, difficulties with its international image, and the EU's significant role in global trade and aid. She also addressed prospects for energy and economic development in the region, including mobility, the green transition, and water scarcity.

Carmen Magariños, Director-General for the Maghreb, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Cooperation, spoke about the evolving dynamics in the Mediterranean region. She reflected on Spain's role in maintaining a strong focus on the EU's Neighbourhood Policy and the role of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). Carmen highlighted upcoming changes anticipated due to new international elections and a shift in the UfM's directorate. She congratulated EuroMeSCo on its efforts to influence and prepare Mediterranean policy effectively.



**Plenary Session I:
Maritime Security from
the Gibraltar Strait to
the Persian Gulf, a shared
Euro-Mediterranean interest**



Chair:

Harry TZIMITRAS, Director, PRIO Cyprus Centre.

Speakers:

Joseph BAHOUT, Director, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI), American University of Beirut (AUB).

Héloïse FAYET, Research Fellow, Security Studies Centre, French Institute of International Relations (IFRI).

Luisa PUCCIO, Senior Director, Shipping Policy and Communications, European Community Shipowners' Associations (ECSA).

Patrick SIMONNET, Special Envoy for the Mediterranean, European External Action Service (EEAS).

The session focused on the crucial role of maritime security in the Euro-Mediterranean region, addressing the importance of safe and secure maritime routes for global trade and the impact of regional conflicts on mari-

time security. The speakers discussed the renewed security tensions in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, the implications of contested maritime borders in the Mediterranean (specifically the Israel - Lebanon border demarcation negotiations), the impact of the war in Gaza for maritime security and trade, and the increased presence of extra-Mediterranean actors such as China and the United States (US) in the region. The need for renewed cooperation efforts between the EU and its Mediterranean partners to ensure maritime security was emphasized.

Joseph Bahout delved into maritime security in the Eastern Mediterranean, discussing the implications of the Lebanon-Israel maritime agreement and the situation in Gaza. He emphasized that these issues not only affect bilateral relations but also have broader regional security ramifications, potentially disrupting maritime traffic and increasing the risk of conflict spillover. Bahout highlighted how the war in Gaza poses significant challenges for maritime security, affecting not just the immediate region but also the broader Mediterranean trade routes, necessitating heightened vigilance and cooperation.



Héloïse Fayet addressed the military presence in the Mediterranean and the significance of military cooperation in the region. She elaborated on the security interconnections between the Red Sea, Black Sea, Arabian Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea, noting that instability in one area can quickly influence the others. Fayet pointed out that the increased presence of extra-Mediterranean actors such as China, with its base in Djibouti, and the US, with its missions in the Red Sea, complicates the security dynamics. She stressed the importance

of coordinated efforts to maintain stability across these interconnected waters, highlighting how military presence and operations must be synchronized to prevent security lapses.

Luisa Puccio provided a testimonial from the perspective of shipowners, detailing how ongoing crises affect maritime operations. She highlighted the practical challenges faced by the shipping industry due to instability and insecurity, such as rerouted trade paths, increased insurance costs, and the need for enhanced security



measures. Puccio underscored the importance of reliable and secure maritime routes for global trade and economic stability, explaining that the continuous threats and conflicts make navigation risky and costly, thus impacting the overall efficiency of maritime trade. She specifically mentioned the instability this situation creates for Egypt, noting that the Suez Canal has seen a 50% decrease in crossings, significantly affecting its revenue. Additionally, she pointed out that Gulf states are also impacted as commercial ships reroute towards the south of Africa, bypassing the need to transit through Gulf states.

Patrick Simonnet offered an update on the ASPIDES mission, explaining its objectives and achievements. He emphasized its importance for broader maritime security in the Mediterranean, highlighting how the mission enhances cooperation among EU and regional partners, improves surveillance

and response capabilities, and addresses emerging maritime threats. Also, Simonnet stressed the insecurity of Houthi actions for the region and international security.

The session concluded with an open debate segment. Attendees raised the issue of Non-State Actors (NSAs) in the region and Iran's support, underlining its destabilizing role. Other questions addressed human security and the externalisation of the EU's security to other states and NSAs in the Mediterranean. The impacts of EU member states' competition, specifically between Italy and France, were also discussed. Finally, the issue of transactionalism in cooperation and conflict resolution, particularly between the EU and Turkey, was raised. The interactive discussion underscored the complexity of maritime security in the Euro-Mediterranean region and the need for continued collaboration among all stakeholders to navigate these challenges effectively.



Plenary Session II: Scanning scenarios of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of migration



Chair:

Michael KOEHLER, Associate Fellow, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed).

Speakers:

Tarek MEGERISI, Senior Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR).

Tasnim ABDERRAHIM, Analyst, Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC).

Mercedes GARCIA PEREZ, Head of Unit, Migration and Human Security, (GLOBAL GI 4), Service of Deputy Secretary General for Economic and Global Issues, European External Action Service (EEAS).

Anna KNOLL, Head – Migration and Mobility, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM).

This session focused on the challenges and future scenarios for migration cooper-

ation in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The speakers analysed the risks of politicised approaches to migration and highlighted the potential benefits of collaborative efforts. They discussed the importance of understanding the central issues for countries on both sides of the Mediterranean and the need for mutually beneficial solutions to migration challenges.

The session opened with Michael Koehler framing the discussion around the importance of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of migration, emphasising that the primary focus should be on cooperation modalities rather than solely on migration flows and trends. He encouraged panellists to incorporate a prospective dimension into their analysis, looking at the likely future of this cooperation and how to steer it in a desired direction. Koehler also introduced a third thread for the panel: assessing the realism of working towards depoliticised cooperation on migration, what it means, and what it takes to get there.

Tarek Megerisi was asked to elaborate on the effects of the cooperation model based

on externalisation and securitisation, referencing his December 2023 piece, “Road to Nowhere: Why Europe’s Border Externalization is a Dead End.” Megerisi detailed how this model creates dependencies and exacerbates existing tensions, arguing that if this approach continues, it will likely lead to more instability and human rights abuses. He emphasized the need for a paradigm shift towards cooperation that addresses root causes of migration and fosters sustainable development.

Tasnim Abderrahim built on the risks highlighted by Megerisi and discussed the specific needs and expectations of Southern Mediterranean countries. She proposed more positive scenarios for migration cooperation, such as enhancing legal migration pathways, investing in local economies to create jobs, and supporting educational exchanges. Abderrahim stressed that addressing these needs could lead to more stable and prosperous societies, reducing the pressure to migrate irregularly.

Mercedes Garcia Perez was asked to elaborate on the importance of getting the migration cooperation model right for the broader future of Euro-Mediterranean relations. She explained how recent developments in EU-Tunisia and EU-Egypt relations might indicate what the future of EU cooperation with its partners could look like. Garcia Perez shared insights on opportunities for cooperation on legal migration, highlighting that successful models could serve as blueprints for broader regional initiatives. She emphasized that a well-structured cooperation model would contribute to stability and mutual growth.

Anna Knoll suggested ideas on how to recentre migration conversations in Europe around economic matters and avoid the trend of migration debates being weaponised by radical political forces. Knoll proposed framing migration as an economic necessity that can benefit all parties involved, highlighting



successful integration stories and economic contributions of migrants. She also elaborated on the nexus between migration and development, stressing that migration policies should be integrated with development strategies to ensure

they address the root causes of migration and promote sustainable development. She also shed light on the EU's needs for foreign workers, despite the politicised anti-migration trend on the continent.



The session concluded with an open debate, where audience members engaged with the panellists. Attendees asked about how to support government efforts to manage migration and integration challenges, what could the EU do in Sub Saharan Africa to reduce migration towards Northern Africa and the EU. The issue of

how to deal with migration from source countries who want skilled migrants to stay was discussed. Participants reflected on the fact that, despite the growing anti-migration rhetoric in EU member states, migration flows do not actually suppose security or economic disadvantage for Europeans.



**Keynote Speech:
The role of the EU
in the Mediterranean,
by Helene Le Gal**



Helene Le Gal, Managing Director, Middle East and North Africa, European External Action Service (EEAS)

Before the first lunch organised in the framework of EuroMeSCo's Annual Conference, Helene Le Gal delivered a keynote speech that underscored the European Union's pivotal role in Euro-Mediterranean relations within the current geopolitical context. She highlighted the EU's ongoing commitment to fostering stability, development, and cooperation in the region through various initiatives and funding mechanisms.

Le Gal emphasized the significance of the EU's strategic engagement in the region, noting the multifaceted challenges and opportunities presented by the current global landscape. She elaborated on the EU's Global Gateway initiative, a flagship project aimed at enhancing connectivity and infrastructure development across the Euro-Mediterranean area. This initiative focuses on several key areas:

- **Digital Infrastructure:** Enhancing digital connectivity to bridge the digital divide, improve communication networks, and support technological innovation.
- **Energy Transition:** Promoting sustainable energy projects to facilitate the green transition, reduce dependency on non-renewable energy sources, and address climate change.
- **Transportation Networks:** Developing efficient and sustainable transportation networks to improve trade routes, facilitate mobility, and boost economic integration.
- **Healthcare:** Strengthening healthcare systems to ensure access to quality medical services and to enhance public health resilience.
- **Education and Research:** Investing in educational institutions and research programs to foster knowledge exchange, innovation, and capacity building.

Le Gal also touched on other EU-funded initiatives that are tailored to address

specific regional challenges. These include programmes aimed at supporting economic development, enhancing governance and the rule of law, promoting social inclusion, and addressing migration issues. She concluded by reaffirming the EU's dedication to working collaboratively

with its Mediterranean partners to build a prosperous, stable, and resilient region. The EU's efforts, she noted, are designed to create a framework for sustainable development, peace, and cooperation that benefits all stakeholders in the Euro-Mediterranean region.





Plenary Session III:

The future of economic interdependence in the Mediterranean

**Chair:**

Roger ALBINYANA, Managing Director, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed).

Speakers:

Hamza MEDDEB, Director, Political Economy Program, Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center.

Katarzyna SIDLO, Director, Middle East and North Africa Department, Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE).

Alia MOUBAYED, Managing Director, Jefferies.

Adel HAMAIZIA, Managing Director, Highbridge Advisory.

This session aimed to analyse the future of economic cooperation and assess whether the current window of opportunity can lead to greater economic integration in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The speakers discussed the socio-economic disparities intensified by recent global crises and the need for a revised approach to economic integration and convergence.

Hamza Meddeb emphasized the importance of economic links, including trade, remittances, and investments, in mitigating economic crises in the region. He explained that trade between the EU and Southern Mediterranean countries helps diversify economies and reduce dependency on limited sectors. Remittances sent by migrants working in the EU support household incomes and

stimulate local economies. Moreover, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from the EU can spur economic development, create jobs, and improve infrastructure. Meddeb highlighted that these economic links act as stabilizers in times of economic crisis, providing much-needed financial inflows and opportunities for growth.

Katarzyna Sidlo discussed trends in trade relationships and policies, incorporating a foresight dimension. She noted a growing trend for Southern Mediterranean countries to diversify their trade partners beyond the EU, with increased trade with China, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) nations. Sidlo elaborated on recent shifts in EU trade policies aimed at creating more inclusive and sustainable trade agreements, focusing on green and digital transitions. She pro-

jected that future trade relationships would increasingly incorporate elements of sustainable development, digital trade, and technological innovation, further integrating Mediterranean economies with the EU. Alia Moubayed addressed the general economic conditions and the remnants of the spirit for economic integration envisaged in the Association Agreements between the EU and its southern partners. She discussed the ongoing challenges many Southern Mediterranean countries face, such as high unemployment, income inequality, and political instability, which hinder economic integration. Moubayed pointed out that while the Association Agreements laid the groundwork for economic integration, their full potential has not been realized due to various political and economic barriers. She highlighted the failure of the negotiations of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) with some partners as a significant obstacle. Mou-



bayed suggested that a new approach focusing on more flexible and context-specific agreements could pave the way forward for economic integration.

Adel Hamaizia elaborated on the role of China, GCC, and BRICS in the region. He highlighted China's significant increase in presence through investments in infrastructure, trade partnerships, and strategic initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Hamaizia noted that GCC countries have become major economic players, investing heavily in various sectors, and fostering closer economic ties with Mediterranean countries. Additionally, the BRICS nations are emerging

as important economic partners, offering alternative sources of investment and trade, complementing traditional EU partnerships.

During the open debate, participants discussed: how the Southern Neighbourhood sees trade and association agreements with the EU and what should be the path forward, if not DFTAs; the new geopolitics and geoeconomics of GCC buying land and infrastructure in the Mediterranean countries; and whether the crisis in the Red Sea and Eastern Mediterranean will strengthen the nearshoring trend.

FORESIGHT WORKING SESSIONS





This year, three foresight sessions were organised during the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference to provide a critical perspective on the future amidst rapidly evolving events in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Given the increasing complexity and unpredictability of global and regional dynamics, it is crucial to anticipate potential scenarios and strategize accordingly. These sessions were designed to foster in-depth discussions and generate strategic insights to guide future policies and cooperation frameworks.

I. The Future of the Palestinian Issue

The attacks on October 7, 2023, triggered an escalation of the long-standing conflict between Israel and Palestine. This session

focused on analysing possible scenarios for the future of this conflict, considering the potential for peace, the role of the EU and the Euro-Mediterranean region, and the broader geopolitical impacts.

Facilitators:

Amb. (ret.) Dr. Abderahman SALAHELDIN, Member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs; Expert, Diplomats – The Council for Mediterranean Diplomacy.

Erwin VAN VEEN, Team Lead and Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael Institute.

Following a comprehensive foresight working session with 30 experts, several strategic recommendations emerged regarding potential actions the European Union (EU) can and should take. The experts sug-



gested that the EU should recognize the State of Palestine to affirm its commitment to a two-state solution and stop arms exports and transit to prevent further escalation of violence. Additionally, increasing the economic and political costs of the occupation was advised to encourage progress towards peace. The convening of a new international peace conference was proposed to facilitate renewed negotiations, along with advocating for Palestine's membership in the United Nations to enhance its international standing. The EU was also urged to support the enforcement of International Court of Justice rulings relevant to the conflict and to expand sanctions specifically targeting settlers to deter illegal settlements. Applying greater peer

pressure on international actors to support the peace process and investing in rebuilding human capacity in Gaza were also highlighted as crucial steps.

II. New Connectivity Politics in the Eastern Mediterranean

This session focused on the geopolitical and economic implications of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), announced in September 2023. The discussion explored how connectivity initiatives could enhance regional peace plans and contribute to sustainable development.



Facilitators:

Stefania BENAGLIA, Head of Foreign Policy Unit, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS).

Paula GURTNER, Researcher, Global Governance, Regulation, Innovation and Digital Economy (GRID) unit, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS).

Fanny SAUVIGNON, Researcher in the Foreign Policy Unit, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS).

The session delved into three different scenarios: Profit-Focused Scenario, where the private sector would drive the development of IMEC; Collaborative Inclusive Scenario, the most difficult to realise for political reasons, much broader and inclus-

ive of other countries and NSA; and No IMEC Scenario. The collaborative scenario was deemed the least likely due to political complexities. The profit-driven scenario could aggravate challenges in the South Mediterranean, inconsistent with the EU's ENP. Ensuring Palestinian inclusion was underscored as critical to avoid exacerbating the Israel-Palestine conflict. The IMEC project, though complex, builds on long-term trends and could significantly influence regional dynamics. Challenges include environmental impacts, local community harm, and geopolitical stability.

III. Scenario Building Session: What 2024 and 2025 Hold for Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation?

This session explored potential future scenarios for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, considering various factors such as EU elections, US elections, European Neighbourhood Policy revisions, and regional geopolitical developments.



Facilitator:

Adel HAMAIZIA, Managing Director, High-bridge Advisory.

At a critical juncture for Euro-Mediterranean relations, participants reflected on future political and economic scenarios. They discussed migration management, the need to address pressing issues such as food security and water scarcity, maintaining cooperation and stability

considering the influence of external players such as GCC and BRICS, and potential future effects of ongoing conflicts within the region and in neighbouring regions.

On possible political scenarios in Europe and the US post-elections, experts reflected on the risk of convergence of EU far-right governments and MENA region autocrats at the expense of human rights, migrants, and the ecological transition.

