

# New dynamics to the Euro-Mediterranean relations? Settling an “unnecessary confusion” between the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

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Ever since the idea of the “interrelation between ... security in Europe and security in the Mediterranean area” (Helsinki Final Act, 1975, pp. 36-37) and the necessity to cooperate between the two emerged, the understanding that “strengthening of security and the intensification of co-operation in Europe would stimulate positive processes in the Mediterranean region” (Helsinki Final Act, 1975, pp. 36-37) became the basis of the further development of the Euro-Mediterranean space on the one hand, and the idea that the projection of European values could add to this mutual security, on the other.

Almost fifty years later and following three efforts to institutionalise the relationship through the (Euro-Mediterranean Partnership – 1995, European Neighbourhood Policy – 2004 and Union for the Mediterranean – 2008) the rationale – security and cooperation – has gained increasing support yet, there have been questions around the methods of implementing these.

In the Euro-Mediterranean space, the rationale – security and cooperation – developed in the last decades, has become increasingly supported, yet, the modalities have come to raise questions regarding the implementation.

The present paper aims to review to identify the main issues regarding the ENP and the UfM based on the results of the survey conducted by the European Institute of the Mediterranean in 2023 on “The future of the European Neighbourhood Policy”, which aimed to collect perceptions and draw conclusions regarding the achievements (or failures) of the Euro-Med frameworks. Q.7 sought opinions and experience with regards to ‘structure’ related issues in the frameworks, especially the ENP and the UfM.

## Different eras, different priorities

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The relationship between the European Union and the countries in its Southern neighbourhood has been reflected in three different institutionalised partnerships, each representing a different era and a different phase of European interests and understanding relations. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, based on the Cold War model of the Helsinki Process, led to the OSCE and organised the different aspects into three baskets (political-security / economic-financial / social-cultural), its comprehensive approach was at the forefront. From the EMP to the ENP, Europe was not just establishing the European Union, but also went on extending it. Thus, the principles of the organisation and extension were in focus. While the European Neighbourhood Policy was still formally arranged according to the three baskets (as the bilateral agreements show), its priorities – following the regime changes in Central Europe and the newly independent states accessing the European Union – were the “shared values, the promotion of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and social cohesion” (European Neighbourhood Policy, 2004). But while the Euro-Med Partnership’s ‘target’ partners were the countries on the Southern/Eastern shores of the Mediterranean, the European Neighbourhood Policy wanted to attract into partnership a much wider set of countries, that are historically, socially and culturally largely different. The Union for the Mediterranean finally came to complement the EMP with a mutually beneficial fourth pillar, where the six main projects strengthened the regional approach.

## Structure - the regional dimension

Framing the Euro-Mediterranean as one region was a rational choice, partly based on the consequences of historical contacts, yet, ever since the delineation, it put forward challenges: namely, the region as such was too big, smaller sub-regions having different characteristics and interests, or countries geographically located far away from the shores of the Mediterranean had not been directly impacted, etc. Yet, with the European integration process going forward, by the tenth anniversary of the EMP, the concept of the Euro-Mediterranean region became accepted and implemented.

While in the North, the development of the European Union as a unified actor made the implementation of the concept of the Euro-Med region relatively easy, in the South, the regional dimension and the ‘South-to-South’ relations had to be supported and promoted (as foreseen in the EMP documents). While there have been some

sub-regional cooperation frameworks in the South, most notably the Arab Maghreb Union, it is the projects proposed in the fourth pillar of the UfM that seem to improve such relations (e. g. the trans-Maghreb highway, etc.). The same idea seems to recur in the “cooperative regional orders” of the Global Strategy. (Global Strategy, 2016, p. 10, 32)

Yet, the Southern/Eastern shore countries have no ‘regional’ perception of themselves, despite the cultural-historical-emotional bonds among the Arab states, from which definition Israel and Turkey are excluded, and which is intricately broken down into different, even shifting pieces along political, security and economic fault lines.

Consequently, although it may seem like it, this Euro-Med relationship is not between two regions, but it is within one greater region (the Euro-Med), where the EU is one big entity and the rest are there ‘individually’. (Although there are institutionalised dialogues between the EU and the African Union, or the EU and the Arab Maghreb Union, these are much less developed in substance.)

A further remark on regionalism reveals that, despite the efforts to adjust to the realities<sup>1</sup> the European Union’s regional approach, this has no (or very limited) consideration of changing regionalities, i.e. that regions that had been defined for decades may break down and/or new regions may emerge based on local developments. The fact that the Maghreb (an integral part of the Mediterranean region) is increasingly turning attention away from the Mediterranean towards the Sahel due to security concerns (state failures, migration, terrorism, etc.), (N. Rózsa & Marsai, 2022) or that the Levant has started to develop increasingly stronger relations with the Persian Gulf (before the current war in Gaza) seems to support this observation. While the Red Sea in itself is not directly on the Mediterranean, via the Suez Canal it is connected, thus the evolving crisis there may also prove the above remark on the importance of the flexibility of regional delineations. Although there have also been new regional strategies issued by the European Union, such as the EU’s Sahel Strategy, and the institutionalised ‘EU-to-a-region dialogues’, in which two that belong to the Euro-Med space (EU-AU, EU-AMU) are also included, it seems that the EU still relies on the so-far accustomed regional terminology – making the issue even more complicated.

Another element related to the definitions of regions is the European Union’s neighbourhood itself: the ENP covers two, widely different regions, the Eastern and the Southern neighbourhoods (the ENP South is ‘hostage’ to the ENP East, and vice versa): in the East, partners are – at least in principle – potential members of the EU, while in the South they are excluded from this potential opportunity (a criticism raised from the South ever since the EMP was launched). Nevertheless, since the two neighbourhoods are both related to the European Union, recent political developments in both pose a serious challenge for the EU, over and above the distribution of the allocation of ENPI funds: namely, what are the consequences of

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The ENP covers two, widely different regions, the Eastern and the Southern neighbourhoods. Can the political-security situation in one neighbourhood block the EU’s action or ability to move forward in the other?

1. The two reviews of the ENP in 2011 and 2015, and the New Agenda for the Mediterranean are the best indicators.

the Russia-Ukraine war in and for the ENP South, and vice versa, what are the consequences of the war in Gaza for the ENP East? Can the political-security situation in one neighbourhood block the EU's action or ability to move forward in the other?

## Structure - bilateral and/or regional

As some respondents in the survey noted, the "rise of the ENP as the main instrument for EU foreign relations with its Southern neighbours has entailed a shift of emphasis from region-building to bilateralism ... This may also indicate that the emphasis turned slowly but relentlessly away from the multilateral framework of the EMP and towards bilateral relations with the Southern neighbours as framed in the ENP". This may also imply that the regional elements within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ministerial meetings, regional programs) have not been convincing and seem to overlap with the regional programs and institutions of the EMP/UfM.

The EMP from the beginning was managing relationships both on a bilateral and on a regional level, while the ENP was started on the basis of bilateral relationships. The UfM became a kind of an extended version of the EMP, by adding the fourth pillar of the six great projects of mutual interest.

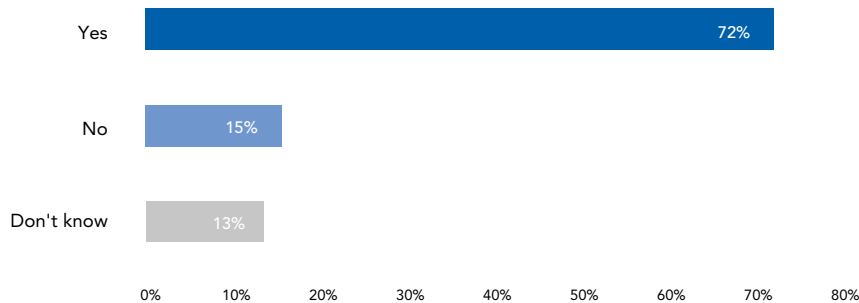
From the beginning, the EMP, was managing relationships both on a bilateral and a regional level, with regional institutions and programs, while the ENP was started on the basis of bilateral relationships. Although it was suggested that the bilateral/regional EMP would be included in the ENP Southern dimension, this seemed problematic from the very beginning, yet, it gave the impetus to further develop the Eastern dimension of the ENP (Eastern Partnership). The UfM became a kind of an extended version of the EMP, by adding the fourth pillar of the six great projects of mutual interest, signalling from the EU's side not only that the previously often mentioned criticism of a 'European dictate' was meant to change, but also adding to the regional understanding of the framework.

The fact that there is a difference in the partners of the ENP and the UfM, and also that the ENP covers two, widely different regions, the Eastern and the Southern neighbourhoods also further complicate the issue of bilateral vs regional relations, and is another reason why the overlaps and differences should be clarified. (All the riparian/littoral states of the Mediterranean are partners in the UfM, including the former Yugoslav non-EU members, except for Serbia, but the ENP South is still lacking such states as Türkiye and the former Yugoslav non-EU members.)

## Substance – a distribution of labour?

According to the survey results, 72% of the respondents think that the overlap between the regional dimension of the ENP and the UfM introduces unnecessary confusion, and the EU should seek to simplify its mechanisms (but the opinions vary from the unification of the two to a clear distribution of labour between the two). (graph1)

**Graph 1: Q.7a** The overlap between the regional dimension of the ENP and the UfM introduces unnecessary confusion, and the EU should seek to simplify its mechanisms.



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14<sup>th</sup> Euromed Survey

While some respondents even stated that the “UfM is dealing with the third and the fourth pillars only” (an opinion shared by several others), the UfM website seems to support this idea, when apart from the annual ministers of foreign affairs meetings practically no political and security related issues are on the agenda – and even these are usually discussed in the context of the third/fourth pillar issues’ context. (Annual Report 2022)

This distribution of labour goes further especially in these pillars as well, but to a certain (limited) extent in the ENP, too, when these institutionalised partnerships are struggling with the EU’s wish and desire to have an impact, not only on the state actors, but also on the societies, stakeholders and businesses, etc. There are several programs in which civilians are involved (e.g. the Erasmus program, etc.), yet, where the discrepancy between ‘state actors’ vs. ‘non-state actors’ is most evident is the Anna Lindh Foundation. The discrepancy was already manifested at the very beginning, when state-actors decided that non-state actors should build up a network and cooperate. Although by now it has been simplified to states providing finances for non-state actors’ projects, the mechanism of how to cooperate between state and non-state is not always easy.

ENP and UfM as institutionalised partnerships are struggling with the EU’s wish and desire to have an impact not only on the state actors, but also on the societies, stakeholders and businesses, etc.

It has to be noted, however, that it is not necessarily anyone’s fault: An examination of the state administrations – both within the EU, and in the South – would most probably show differences as to how and in which departments the different sections of both the ENP and the UfM are handled. In Hungary, for example, the ENP belongs to the Department of Common Foreign and Security Policy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), which coordinates with the Department of the Middle East and North Africa on the ENP South, and with the Department of Eastern Europe on the ENP East. The financial tool of the ENP, the ENPI belongs to the competence of the Deputy State Secretary in charge of regional and cross-border developments. The UfM belongs to the Department of the Middle East and North Africa, which

is the direct contact point of the UfM Secretariat, and which forwards the relevant issues and information (economy, energy, cultural, etc.) to the relevant ministries to develop a common understanding. The Anna Lindh Foundation, because of its specific portfolio, belongs to the competence of the Ministry of Culture and Innovation, yet, Hungary's official, state-related representation at the ALF meetings – based on practical considerations – is usually performed by the MFAT.

## Conclusion

The European Union has established institutionalised partnerships, not only with regional organisations, but with its two direct neighbourhoods, the East and the South. Due to the specific circumstances of times and places, the regionalisation, and the concept of looking at the South as one wide region, the Euro-Mediterranean started earlier. Based on the complex understanding of security towards and soon after the Cold War, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in 1995, later complemented to include six big projects, thus becoming the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008, has maintained the set of bilateral relations besides the overarching regional framework. The European Neighbourhood Policy, having its main focus on both the East and the South, and with the idea to spread European principles, mostly remained on the bilateral track.

Despite of the efforts by the European Union to maintain and even improve the regional dimension in its relations to the South, due to several reasons – as the Euromed Survey 2023 proves – this has not been successful. The above remarks aimed at pointing out the main structural and substantial issues to be addressed.

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