

## **VII EUROMED YOUNG RESEARCHERS FORUM**

Navigating Between Climate Action  
and Energy Security: A Shared Agenda  
for the EU and the EU's Southern  
Neighbourhood

Rabat, 5-6 March 2024

Report

# Summary



This year's edition of the Euromed Young Researchers Forum focused on "Navigating Between Climate Action and Energy Security: A Shared Agenda for the EU and the EU's Southern Neighbourhood." The challenge of balancing energy security and climate change has become increasingly acute in recent years. Energy demand is rising, and geopolitical shifts add urgency to securing energy sources. The current dominant energy source, burning fossil fuels, comes at the expense of fighting climate change. This necessitates the search for alternatives. Policymakers are grappling with how to transition to cleaner energy and boost efficiency without jeopardizing energy security. Renewables like wind and solar power are promising, but require hefty up-front investments in infrastructure and technology, which adds a layer of complexity to the challenge.

Finding a balance between securing energy and addressing climate change is a difficult task that has a great

impact globally, including the EU and the EU's Southern Neighbourhood countries. These regions face similar struggles, and bilateral cooperation can offer a promising solution, promoting sustainable and resilient energy systems. This cooperative effort is not without its obstacles. Different actors often have their own priorities, which can hinder progress. To overcome this, a shared vision and common goals are essential to ensure everyone benefits and cooperation thrives.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Euromed Young Researchers Forum aimed to spark a conversation among young researchers, policymakers, and experts on climate action and energy security. By reflecting on the outcomes of COP28 and identifying areas for collaboration, the forum sought to inspire further action by governments, civil society, and the private sector to ultimately foster a common agenda for the EU and the MENA region to tackle this complex challenge.



# WORKING SESSION I

## Exploring Climate Change and Energy: Security Challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

Chair

**Abdullatif Sleibi**

Senior Data Analyst & Project Officer - PAX for Peace

Speakers

**Adrià Rivera Escartín.** Postdoctoral Researcher, Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals – IBEI

**Ignacio Urbasos Arbeloa.** Research Assistant, Elcano Royal Institute

**Natália Tkáčová.** Project Coordinator, Prague Security Studies Institute – PSSI

**Samer Fakhoury.** Researcher in the Sustainable Development Pillar, West Asia North Africa Institute – WANA Institute

**Zineb Znagui.** Doctor of Philosophy in Economics, Hassan 1st University

Discussant

**Sabrina Emran**

Economist, Policy Center for the New South – PCNS



The first of the Working Sessions of the VII Euromed Young Researchers Forum provided an overview of energy security in the Mediterranean region. In this context, young researchers addressed, among others, common themes such as the need for comprehensive data analysis, consideration of external factors, and the integration of technological advancements in renewable energy. Future research directions may involve exploring the role of technology in renewable energy, policy implications, and the role of non-state actors in shaping energy security policies.

Several research projects explored the potential of green financing mechanisms (green bonds) and renewable energy sources (solar, hydrogen) to enhance energy security in the Southern Mediterranean. Discussions emphasised the value of collaboration between countries, knowledge sharing, and leveraging advancements in renewable energy technologies.

One of the most discussed issues during the session was the **need to transform things on a policy level, not just on a technical one**. The session emphasised

the need for the EU to support partner countries, and to continue employing efforts to find collective responses to the shared environmental challenges. Moreover, the session also highlighted the continuous North to South dimension. The colonial mindset, prioritising European energy security, was questioned during the session, and pinpointed as a hindrance to the prospects of sustainability and better results. The situation should be a win-win one, not a zero-sum game. Participants were mindful of the next European elections and the impact they may have, as well as the possible shift or change in their policies.

**The need for decarbonisation was underlined as a matter of urgency** to be able to strike a balance between climate change and energy security. Important regional players should continue to move away from burning fossil fuels, towards more green investments. Moreover, speakers highlighted the effectiveness of decentralised, low-carbon energy systems. For developing countries, it is important to establish frameworks that provide the capacity to invest in this transition and technological innovation.

The working session explored pathways for resilience and lessons learned. On the one hand, young experts discussed how the European Green Deal can strengthen the European Union in the MENA region, as well as how to mitigate its potential negative impacts. On the other hand, past initiatives were also examined. The Mediterranean Solar Plan, and especially its shortcomings, were taken into consideration to provide better policy recommendations for the new Mediterranean Hydrogen Partnership.

Additionally, speakers analysed the potential effects of the European Green Deal on the political stability of the region and raised concerns about the potential barriers faced by national governments and multinational oil companies in implementing policies to mitigate climate change. Another key aspect of the debate was the role of diverse actors in the energy matter. Not only countries are involved in energy security, but multinational companies and civil society

also play a significant role in the energy transition of the Southern region.

Finally, young researchers also reflected on geopolitical competition. While competition for influence in the new global order is well-discussed, the fierce struggle for energy resources deserves equal attention. This competition can have a significant impact, potentially triggering or escalating conflicts. Researchers emphasized the need to explore environmental peacebuilding and peace-making strategies to mitigate these risks. China and its investment towards green energy, as well as the US' own actions in the industry are competing strategies. The session delved into how China's aggressive investments in green energy and the US's counterstrategies contribute to this complex dynamic. Besides, internal incoherence within the European Union, with member states pursuing diverse energy policies and harbouring competing interests, further complicates the quest for energy security.



# WORKING SESSION II

## Shaping the Future of the Euro-Mediterranean Energy Partnership

Chair

**Malek Lakhal**

Research Fellow, Arab Reform Initiative – ARI

Speakers

**Filomena Annunziata.** Policy Advisor, Mediterranean Programme ECCO Think Tank – ECCO

**Hussein Suleiman.** Researcher, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies – ACPSS

**Lorena Stella Martini.** Policy Advisor, Foreign Policy Programme ECCO Think Tank – ECCO

**Nazih Toubal.** PhD Candidate, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona – UAB

**Othon Kaminaris.** Research Fellow, Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy – ELIAME

Discussant

**Afaf Zarkik**

Senior Economist, Policy Center for the New South – PCNS

Building on the general overview provided during the first Working Session, the focus of the Second Working Session was on exploring and discussing the significance of energy cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The presentations collectively addressed the complexities of energy and climate cooperation, emphasising the need for integrated strategies, effective communication, and dynamic responses to contemporary challenges impacting the region's energy landscape. The feasibility and benefits of green energy initiatives in the Euro-Mediterranean region were discussed, including green hydrogen communication strategies, policy coherence, and cooperation among regional actors.

The Working Session examined, among other topics, the potential of the European Green Deal, especially the areas for improvement. Speakers also explored the tension between national and people's interests in energy transition policymaking, while stating the complexity of the EU's neighbourhood policy. The EU's Green Deal was criticized for

being presented as a set of individual uncoordinated policies by each member country, rather than a unified regional approach. This lack of cohesion is further complicated by the fragmented energy mix across the Mediterranean, where each country pursues its own energy strategy and development at its own pace. Besides, the colonial concern of Europe-North Africa partnership was raised. Countries' expectations and contexts need to be considered to avoid repeating mistakes and falling into a green colonialism trap. In this regard, young researchers concluded the significance of a coordinated and unified approach among EU member states.

In this vein, the need for EU member states to prioritise national energy strategies in the MENA region (over the strategies and interests of the EU) was underscored. The need for the EU to push the climate and energy agenda through its Neighbourhood policy was stressed, emphasising security of supply. Energy interests are widely prioritized over climate goals and concerns. One of the main countries that was discussed





was Egypt. Egypt increased natural gas exports to Europe after the Russia-Ukraine war, raising revenues. This deepened Egypt's struggle with its reliance on fossil fuels. Invest in renewable energy sources in Egypt, including green hydrogen, solar and wind farms should be prioritised, while addressing financial, technical, regulatory challenges.

Another topic on the table was the need to acknowledge that recent events such as conflicts, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the US-China rivalry have reshaped the global political, climate, and energy landscape. This has led to a heightened awareness that adaptable and responsive solutions to address the complex challenges of our time are paramount. Once again, the European elections were recognized to be a pivotal moment for green energy and partnerships.

The importance of public understanding towards green hydrogen as a clean energy source was underscored, particularly in Southern Europe and Northern Africa. Public perceptions and opinions and strategic communication on this

source are vital to achieve positive outcomes to the green transition and to close gaps between reality and strategies, which are currently in early stages of development. Moreover, investment is a powerful tool towards this transition. The importance to fund green hydrogen storage R&D in developing countries was highlighted.

Young experts acknowledged the interrelation of the energy transition and other areas of sustainable development, such as water and food security, as well as land distribution.

The working session highlighted the critical need for a more strategic and collaborative approach to energy security and the green transition in the Mediterranean. The upcoming COP conferences present opportunities to solidify commitments and establish frameworks for regional cooperation. Researchers' diverse perspectives offered valuable insights for navigating the complexities of Euro-Mediterranean partnerships and addressing energy security challenges in a rapidly changing global scenery.



# **PRACTITIONERS SESSION**

## **Exploring solutions for the complex intersection of Regional Climate Action and Energy Security**

Chair

**Sabrina Emran**

Economist, Policy Center for the New South – PCNS

Speakers

**Mounia Boucetta**

Senior Fellow & Former Secretary of State to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Morocco, Policy Center for the New South – PCNS

**Samir Rachidi**

Acting General Manager, Research Institute for Solar Energy and New Energies – IRESEN



To provide a multidisciplinary perspective on this issue in the region, the session featured the participation two experts: **Mounia Boucetta**, who is a Senior Fellow from the Policy Center for the New South and Former Secretary of State to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Morocco, and **Samir Rachidi**, Acting General Manager in the Research Institute for Solar Energy and New Energies, a Moroccan research institute dedicated to promoting research and development in the

field of renewable energy and sustainable development.

The presentations sparked discussions with the young experts on the role of innovation, collaboration, and partnerships in accelerating the transition to renewable energy, as well as the potential of green hydrogen production to enhance energy security and resilience in the Mediterranean region. These two participants exchanged ideas on overcoming challenges and maximizing opportunities through cross-sectoral cooperation and knowledge sharing.



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Co-funded by  
the European Union

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