

Position Paper



MENA-EU COOPERATION

Providing answers to challenges that impede
fruitful cooperation between the MENA and EU.

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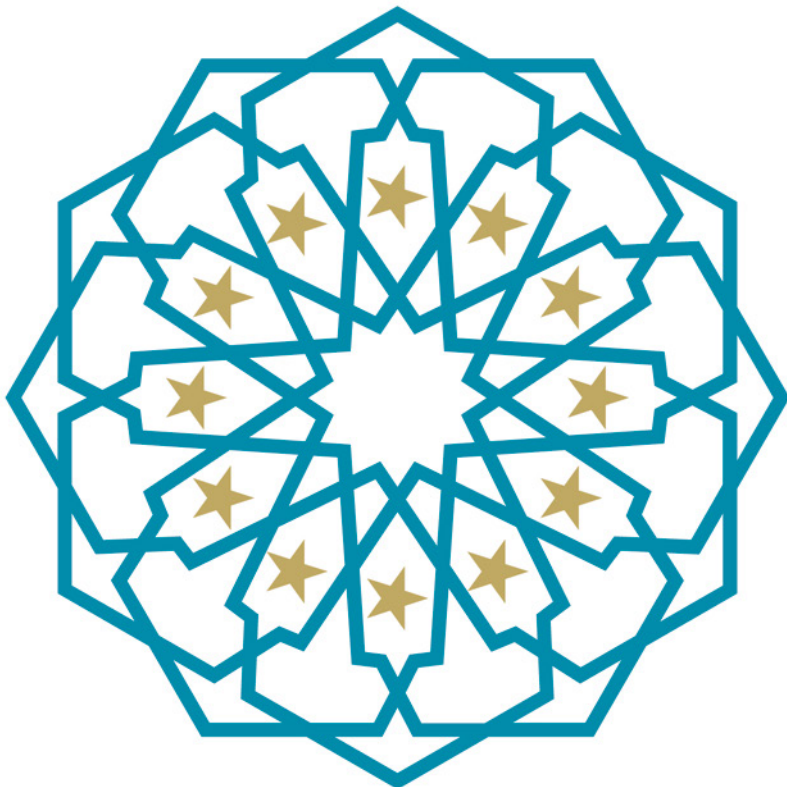


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Introduction

In this paper we provide answers to challenges that impede fruitful cooperation between the MENA and EU. Firstly, we explain how complex systems theory such as the modelling of bird flocks can be used to craft more effective coalitions in EU and MENA. Secondly, we identify a range of issues that are of mutual interest to policy makers in the EU and MENA and we explain why these intractable, so called "wicked" issues are so hard to solve. Furthermore, we discuss a process to prioritize issues and define levers that can be effectively dealt with, thus 'cleaving' the wicked issues into smaller blocks that can be solved. Thirdly, we zoom in on which institutions can be most effective in solving these identified issues, and delivering results.

The focus on shared interests, key levers, and prioritized issues should provide the tools to develop a fruitful cooperation.

However, we will start with a brief overview of how we got here.



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Key Issues



LEAGUE OF
ARAB STATES
CO-CHAIR



EUROPEAN UNION
CO-CHAIR



1. Mare Nostrum: *A Shared Past*

“For centuries in early and middle antiquity, Europe meant the world surrounding the Mediterranean, or Mare Nostrum (“Our Sea”), as the Romans famously called it. [...] But the swift advance of Islam across [the Middle East and] North Africa in the seventh and eighth centuries virtually extinguished Christianity there, thus severing the Mediterranean region into two civilizational halves, with the “Middle Sea” a hard border between them rather than a unifying force.”¹

Robert D. Kaplan, 2016

After the collapse of the Roman empire – an empire spanning the Mediterranean Sea – Europe would come to define itself as the opposite of Islam in the following centuries. However, with the world ‘flattening’ the last couple of decades the sea between Europe and Middle East North Africa (MENA) seems a bridge rather than a wall – as during Roman times – a telling signal that geography can’t be fooled forever. This demands new ideas about cooperation in the Mediterranean region.

Due to shared challenges such as migration, energy transition, radical Islam and climate change, Europe and the MENA region are struggling to develop an answer on how to deal with the forgotten Roman geographic reality. The region is increasingly connected. Thus, the question is: how can we develop a shared agenda where cooperation can be a rising tide that lifts all boats?

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/05/how-islam-created-europe/476388/> accessed October 30.

Image: Thomas Cole, “The Course of Empire: The Savage State” Painting, *Enlightenmens*

4 Challenges

The road to 2030 will be lined with challenges: “regional decision-makers will have to face a geostrategic environment shaped by climate change, energy diversification, a growing and young population, rapid urbanisation, digitalisation, food insecurity, and a gradual shift of its export base from Europe to Asia.”²

This compounds the already existing conflicts in the region and the frosty relations between - and within countries where civil disobedience is not unlikely. The social, political, and economic drivers of the 2011 uprisings are still present across MENA.³

Image: Alexander Grigoryev | Unsplash

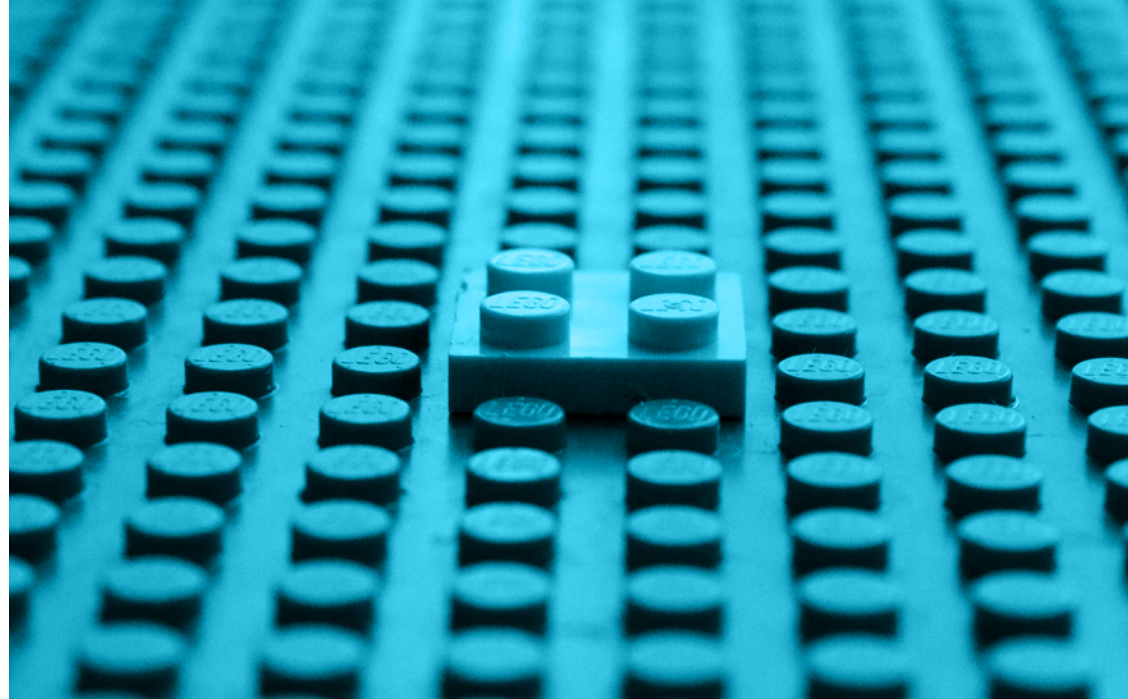


Image: Alexander Grigoryev | Unsplash

Opportunities

Fortunately, there are opportunities as well. The energy transition bodes well for the MENA region as a reservoir for solar power. The retraction of US presence in the MENA region underlines the importance of closer intraregional cooperation. It also creates the possibility for the EU to reposition itself as a strategic ally.

² ARAB FUTURES 2.0, Chaillot paper

³ https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_eu_leverage_mena/
accessed November 16

2. EU-MENA Relations

2.1 The Importance of MENA for the EU

According to the EUISS the MENA is of strategic importance to the EU “for three reasons:



It is an immediate geographic neighbour.



It is a crucial passage for goods traveling to and from Europe (including oil and gas);



It is notoriously unstable. The region's security and economic situation is consequently closely intertwined with that of Europe.

This explains the Union's desire to contribute to regional stability through different means such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the Barcelona Process and the Union for the Mediterranean.⁴ EU-MENA-cooperation is not a luxury but a necessity for the EU.

Bilateral relations between European states and the MENA region have been active for centuries governing trade, cultural exchange and more recently development cooperation. Not only the EU, but also its member states (MS), and of course many NGOs, businesses and diasporas paint a closely interlinked region.

The EU has no real overarching interlocutor in the MENA region, hence cooperation is fragmented between organizations either geographically too narrowly defined like the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) or too broadly like the OIC (Organization for Islamic Cooperation). This asymmetry complicates effective cooperation. However, there are many relations to choose from as we will develop in the next paragraph, the question is which are effective. The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) for example seems promising as it covers most involved parties on both sides of the Mediterranean.

2.2 Bridging the Gap

We can identify five pillars, bridges if you will, for relevant relations between the EU and MENA:

1) Bilateral Cooperation:

Most EU countries have official and unofficial relations with countries of the MENA region. Example is the Dutch Shiraka program, aimed at supporting sustainable democratic transitions and institution building⁵. Also France, Italy and Spain have historic (colonial) ties with MENA. And from the EU level the European Neighbourhood Policy is an example.

2) Multilateral EU Initiatives:

For example, the Union for the Mediterranean.

3) Non-Governmental Programs:

From civil society actors: for example, the programs of the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung.

4) Entrepreneurial Relations:

Inter-regional business activities, looking for opportunity in demographically interesting regions. But also the bilateral trade agreements between the EU and individual states in MENA.

5) Diasporas:

Due to migration, regions are closely linked through family/tribal connections with an (imagined) community spread around the Mediterranean.

Plenty of ways to connect. However, much work remains to be done to bridge the gap.

⁴ <https://www.iss.europa.eu/regions/mena>
accessed November 13

⁵ <https://english.rvo.nl/subsidiaries-programmes/shiraka>
accessed November 14

3. EU Policy towards MENA

3.1 Five EU Policy Lines

The EU suggests five lines of action in its 2016 global strategy⁶ for a peaceful and prosperous Mediterranean.

1) Support functional multilateral cooperation through the Union for the Mediterranean on the issues of:

- Border security, trafficking, counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, water and food security, energy and climate, infrastructure and disaster management. Additionally, dialogue and negotiations are fostered in conflicts in inter alia Syria and Libya.

2) Deepen sectoral cooperation with Turkey and conditionality in the accession process. Topics for dialogue are:

- Counter-terrorism, regional security and refugees, a modernised customs union, visa liberalisation, education, energy and transport.

3) Bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the Gulf countries and Iran. Issues for debate are:

- Regional conflicts, human rights and counter-terrorism, seeking to prevent contagion of existing crises.

4) Support cooperation between the horn of Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and MENA on:

- Security issues and economic opportunity.

5) Invest in African peace and prosperity within the existing multilateral framework. The EU aims to stimulate:

- Growth and jobs, integration and mobility, include Africa in global supply chains, invest in sustainable development. Other issues are migration, health, education, energy and climate, science and technology, notably to improve food security. Other joint efforts are based on conflict prevention, counterterrorism and organised crime, migration and border management.

2 million

Palestinians in Gaza who will benefit from a new desalination plan.

The initiative is promoted by the EU and UfM



What the Global Strategy Proposed

"The EU will intensify its cooperation with regional organisations in the Middle East, as well as functional cooperative formats in the region. We will back practical cooperation, including through the Union for the Mediterranean."



What we have Done

In difficult times for the Mediterranean region, we have invested in regional cooperation at all levels. In 2019, we held the first-ever summit between the EU and the League of Arab States. We resumed the Union for the Mediterranean's (UfM) regular ministerial meetings. We hosted three Syria Conferences, created the Quartet for Libya, and continued to invest in the Middle East Peace Process.

3.2. The Role for Civil Society

The EU accepts that there are cleavages in the existing frameworks and regional organisations. To bridge these divides, civil society will play a role according to the EU's playbook.⁷

In the infographic are the results as described by the EC in their 2019 evaluation of the global strategy.⁸

⁶ EU Global strategy 2016

⁷ Ibid

⁸ https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-global-strategy/64034/vision-action-eu-global-strategy-practice-three-years-looking-forward_en accessed November 18

4. How it Started → How it's Going

Up till now the EU and MENA have only been partially able to address the 'wicked' problems of this volatile region in a structural way.

We can identify three types of challenges that prevent an effective and fruitful cooperation between the EU and MENA. We paired these challenges with solutions.

- 1) Diverging Interests → Learn from Flocks of Birds
- 2) Wicked Problems → Cleave Away
- 3) Absent Structures → Building Bridges

4.1 Diverging Interests

Competing blocks in the MENA region separate the EU MS; MS are picking sides. France and Italy are on different sides in the Libyan war. France and Greece support the conservative 'status quo countries' like Egypt, Saudi and Israel while Spain and Malta prefer the revolutionary forces of Turkey, Qatar and Iran.⁹ Also, the East-West divide in the EU on for example migration makes any concerted effort towards the MENA region more difficult. These diverging interests of course only complicate a concerted effort towards an already complex region.

The EU misses political leverage leading to less traction with MENA actors who can choose between the EU, the US, China, Russia,

and Turkey. The rise of China moreover presents an economic but also an ideological systemic rival. This diminishes the attraction of the EU's carrots. China is famously less preachy about human rights issues and is hence easier to work with. Without EU hard military power, it is harder to enforce control and wield the proverbial stick. However, with China, Russia, and Turkey increasingly active on the regional stage, the EU's stick is even less frightening than before.

"The rise of China moreover presents an economic but also an ideological systemic rival. This diminishes the attraction of the EU's carrots. China is famously less preachy about human rights issues and is hence easier to work with."

⁹ <https://euobserver.com/foreign/149254>
accessed November 14



4.1.1 Overcome EU Disunity. Learn from Flocks of Birds

Successful cooperation is impeded by the complex interplays between states, regions, cultures, interests, and people. Complexity theory offers explanations for how these complex systems operate. Flocks of birds fly coherently, and this behaviour can be modelled. Looking at the fundamental laws of how flocks of birds operate and navigate we can find applications for the EU-MENA challenges in finding fruitful cooperation.

Computer simulations that model flocks of birds act according to three laws:

- 1) Alignment: Steer to the Average Heading**
→ **Envision a Shared Direction**
- 2) Separation: Avoid Crowding out Others**
→ **Empathize with Each Other's Interests**
- 3) Coherence: Move to the Average Position**
→ **Negotiate a Shared Future**

These three laws on how to maintain a coalition should be central to delivering any policy or initiative.

When a flock of birds, or policy makers for that matter, understand and adhere to these three key laws, more effective projects and policy can be crafted.

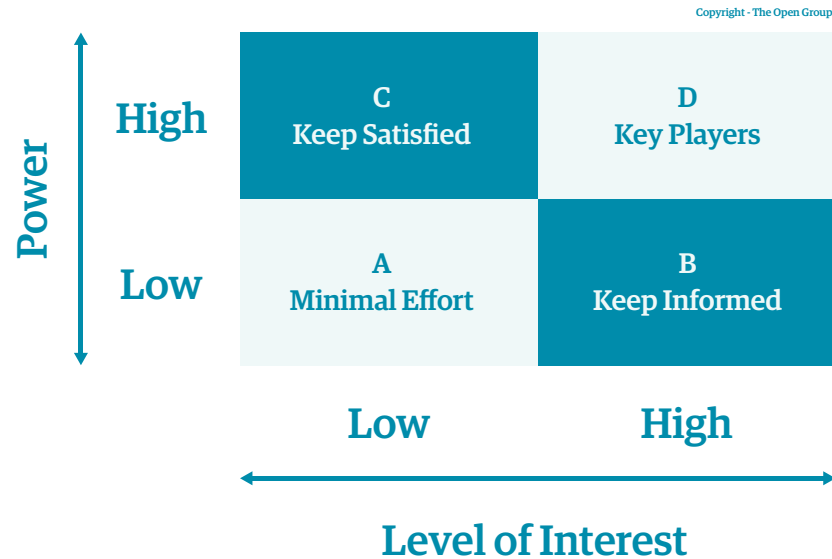
Within any issue alignment, separation, and coherence must be taken as a first step. However, the matter of successful dealings with the issues at hand remains.

4.2 Wicked Problems

The range of issues affecting MENA and the EU is broad, complex, and intractable. Intractable issues, also known as wicked problems, call for deep and strategic thinking and problem-solving skills. For example, solving the migration crisis seems to have been focused only on reducing the flows of irregular migration and decreasing the pull factors (economic opportunity or security elsewhere), while the push factors (the reason people leave) remain unaddressed. As long as, the possibility of conflict is high and economic opportunity is low, people will vote with their feet.

The problem with wicked problems is that they are so... intractable. Above, we have seen a list of issues that are urgent and important for actors in the EU-MENA region. Migration is, as discussed previously, a symptom from a deeper disease. Economic opportunity and social mobility are fundamental drivers for migration which are indeed more difficult to ascertain but will - at the end of the day - deliver more impact for our communities in preventing conflict and radicalisation. Once we cure the root causes the symptoms disappear. However, unlike to COVID-19, a vaccine for the challenges impeding fruitful EU and MENA cooperation is not close by. The issue at hand is too complex.

"The problem with wicked problems is that they are so... intractable."



4.2.1 Cleave Away

In order to be effective, it is key to pick the right priorities. Shift the focus from short term approaches, like preventing terrorism and migration and focus on the root causes of regional instability.

We should **prioritize the key issues**. This can be done according to painting a matrix along two axes:

1) The extent to which the issue at hand is important and

2) The likelihood we are able to effectuate a meaningful resolution. If the issue is in the upper right corner, the issue should be discussed. If there are no issues in the upper right hand corner, a new issue should be identified until one is found that is important, is in our shared interest and can be solved.

Subsequently we should **focus on the drivers that are influenceable and that can deliver the biggest results**. By focusing on those parts of the issues that are solvable, the building block underlying the bigger issues, we can craft a more effective approach to the complexities that challenge successful EU-MENA cooperation. This means cleaving the issue into smaller building blocks that can be managed and solved. In the example of migration this means identifying which push or pull factors can be addressed, deliver results, and can be agreed upon to accomplish a successful EU-MENA dialogue. **This cleaving from macro problems towards micro solutions with a focus on influenceable levers is the key to success.**

4.3 Absent Structures

We have identified five layers of cooperation from multilateral institutional cooperation to diasporas. As with any complex system the issues at hand have many levels. Actors within the system have ways to adopt new knowledge and consecutively new behaviour. As actors learn, new playing fields open up. The key learning here is that we **organize objectives on the proper level**. Civil society can play its role in developing think tanks, professional civil servants, and a thriving civil society. Meanwhile, states can develop public-private cooperation solar powered energy grids that connect sunny Rabat with rainy Brussels.

With a broad range of interactions in these five pillars between the EU and MENA, the question is how to organize a fruitful, strategic, and cohesive cooperation together. Kissinger's (apocryphal) remark about whom to call in Europe still rings true. But it is even more difficult to find the leader of MENA, if such a region even exists. The EU has taken steps forwards with the

creation of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs with the adoption of the Lisbon treaty, nonetheless a lack of coordinated approach persists.

As the EU has taken a more active stance with the Lisbon treaty in conducting a shared foreign policy, cohesiveness and coordination are increasing. Unfortunately, this has not led to long-term commitment in its dealing with the MENA region. The EU remains - even after Lisbon - an economic giant, but a political dwarf.

This is compounded by the continued attraction of populist parties in the EU that oppose migration, EU coordination and inclusive policy towards the MENA region. This is an additional pressure on governments in MS to wield their veto against a shared position to satisfy their home electorate. Key issue here is the consensus vote governing EU foreign policy.

4.3.1 Build Bridges

The lack of effective coordination tools for EU-MENA cooperation on the five levels (multilateral, bilateral, non-governmental, economical, and tribal) call for better structures. **Successful institutions can be constructed on the building blocks of trust, cooperation, and shared interest**. These three key issues should be fostered based on

the ideas of bird flocks and effective problem solving to identify policy that delivers. Difficult choices must be made to satisfy all partners involved.

Build European coalitions. There is hope as "[m]ore than half of European respondents to ECFR's survey backed greater assertiveness

16 from the EU high representative for foreign and security policy in relation to the MENA region." [...] "Europe's engagement with the MENA region should also move towards a greater focus on smaller, more agile, European coalitions, as spearheaded by the efforts of the EEAS and the E³ (France, Germany, and the UK) on the Iran nuclear deal."¹⁰

5. Towards Successful EU-MENA Cooperation

Theodore Roosevelt famously summarized foreign policy as, "speak softly but carry a big stick." It seems the EU is inclined to do the opposite: cry wolf but remain absent in the face of crisis. The EU's sticks are not effective, and its carrots seem less attractive. The EU seems to drive for cooperation as equals, but it remains to be seen whether this proves to be the silver bullet. Especially as the EU seems genetically unable to find consensus.

ECFR advises to **make better use of European assets, leverage diplomatic and economic instruments, European investments, and development cooperation for increased political capital. In addition to using DCFTA negotiations strategically to increase the relations with key states.** "Civil society and governments in the MENA region continue to see the EU as a key potential partner in domestic governance and economic reform programmes."¹¹

Decouple from US policy and increase European hard (military) power. An Iranian contributor to ECFR's EU-MENA policy project said that the EU governments failed to "push back against draconian US sanctions and thereby pursue their stated goals". As a result, "most Iranians see Europe as a weakened global player that can neither incentivise nor penalise Iran in a meaningful way". It seems the EU is willing to talk the talk but is unable to walk the walk on an independent EU foreign policy towards MENA.

¹⁰ https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_eu_leverage_mena accessed 17 November

¹¹ https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_eu_leverage_mena accessed 17 November

¹² https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_eu_leverage_mena accessed 17 November

¹³ This list should be plotted in a matrix according to the scores that follow from this list of issues

According to a survey done by ECFR amongst European officials, more than ⁶⁰ percent of respondents described the EU's regional role in MENA as "fairly ineffective". On the bright side of life; there seems to be a willingness among the respondents to work more coordinated and strategic to protect the EU's critical interests in the MENA region. We will develop a focused approach by adhering to three principles.

- 1) Cleave Away
- 2) Learn from Flocks of Birds Way
- 3) Build Bridges

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Image: James Wainscoat | Unsplash

5.2 Cleave Away: Issue Mapping and Prioritization

The list of issues from the five EU policy lines are consolidated in the following list:¹³

The job now is to cleave away the less strategic and impactful issues. So, we can focus on key issues that are a shared






interest, are likely to be resolved between EU and MENA and/or are important. We identified the issues that will lead to constructive and fruitful cooperation, especially when we take into account the potential impact.

Issue	
	Migration (Border Security/Management, Trafficking)
	Non-proliferation
	Science and Technology, Notably to Improve Food Security
	Water Security
	Invest in Sustainable Development (Energy and Climate)
	Transport/Infrastructure (Integration and Mobility)
	Disaster Management
	A Modernised Customs Union / Visa Liberalisation
	Security Issues (Conflict Prevention, Prevent Contagion of Existing Crises, Dialogue and Negotiations)
	Refugees
	Counter-Terrorism
	Organised Crime
	Human Rights
	Economic Opportunity (Growth and Jobs)
	Include Africa in Global Supply Chains
	Health (Including Corona)
	Education

5.3 Learn from Flocks of Birds: Stakeholder Mapping and Prioritization

Flocks of birds adhere to three principles, coherence, alignment, and separation (don't collide). These three metrics determine the successful cooperation of flocks of birds. These principles are central to coalitions as well. Once the issues are prioritized the stakeholders need prioritization too. These should be prioritized

along three lines: influence (on key issue), agreement (on key issue) and importance (of issue to stakeholder). This step should be taken once the issues are prioritized on order to have the most relevant list of stakeholders to these specific issues.

Issue	
	Pillar 1: Bilateral Cooperation: Most EU countries have official and unofficial relations with countries of the MENA region
	Pillar 2: Multilateral EU initiatives: for example, Union for the Mediterranean
	Pillar 3: Non governmental: non-governmental programs from civil society actors
	Pillar 4: Entrepreneurial relations: businesses and bilateral trade agreements between the EU and individual states in MENA programs from civil society actors
	Pillar 5: Diasporas: Due to migration regions are closely linked through family/tribal connections with an (imagined) community spread around the Mediterranean and EU

14 This list should be plotted in a matrix according to the scores that follow from this list of issues

With key issues and stakeholders known it is time to map the existing bridges. Identify working institutions and put effort in these cooperation mechanisms. Delegate where possible to the lowest common denominator in order to retain focus on the big picture in the high level structures. Nurture promising regional networks which are the blood of inter-regional cooperation on issues such as visa-free travel, migration, security, fighting climate change and energy security. Where networks lack, create incentives to develop one

and reward participants with responsibility and make their effort worthwhile and meaningful. The five pillars identified previously can as bridges. To increase the chance of results, each forum should first provide an answer to the question: are we the best positioned entity to resolve this particular issue?

In the darkest hour of WW2 Winston Churchill asked President Roosevelt to “give us the tools, and we will finish the job.” Now let’s finish ours.

“Give us the *tools*, and we will finish the *job*.”





— Winston Churchill

15 We refer to the two list that are provided by the authors: Lara Saade; who approached this issue from a MENA-centric view and Friso Rip who used a more EU-centric approach.



When we cross-reference the two lists of key issues that are instrumental to EU and MENA policy makers we can see where the overlap arises. Climate change and health issues are currently the big challenges that are on most short lists. However, when we look at the most effective forum to resolve these issues, institutions such as the COP-meetings or the WHO are probably better suited to deal with these global challenges. The levers to accomplish results on these issues are not sufficiently in scope. With this in mind the key issues which EU and MENA most likely can start discussing are thus the following.

Once the first six issues are (to a certain extent) dealt with many of the push factors of migration diminish, leading to less refugees and hopefully less of a brain drain from MENA to Europe leading to more socioeconomically stable EU-MENA region with more economic opportunity and less conflict. A virtuous cycle may begin.

Theme	Security	Economy	Sustainability	Migration
Issues	 <p>Food Security</p> <p>Security issues (conflict prevention, dialogue and negotiation)</p>	 <p>Economic Opportunity</p> <p>Changing global supply chains due to geopolitical shifts from Europe to Asia</p>	 <p>Energy Diversification</p> <p>Sustainable development, transport and disaster management</p>	 <p>Refugees</p>

Recommendations:

- 1) Prioritize.**
Identify those issues that are likely to be resolved and generate impact.

4) Plan for success.
Successful institutions are built on trust, a willingness to resolve the joint issues and an understanding of shared interests. These ingredients should be the foundation of each cooperation.

7) On rabbits and carrots.
Leverage diplomatic and economic instruments such as development cooperation, DCFTAs for a holistic approach where everything is on the table.
- 2) Cleave.**
Focus on levers that can be influenced and deliver the biggest results. Identify and work on the root causes to succeed.

5) Bridge the right gap.
Organize objectives and dialogues on the proper level. Identify the proper forum for the proper challenge. Global issues are unlikely to be resolved by local dialogue and vice versa.

8) Act now.
EU-MENA cooperation is a necessity, not a luxury.
- 3) Remember the birds.**
Align: envision a shared direction; separate, don't collide: empathize with each other's interest; cohere: negotiate a shared future.

6) Agile coalitions.
Sometimes smaller more agile coalitions can spearhead particular issues that are unlikely to be resolved on a EU-MENA level. Be pragmatic in which coalitions are best suited for the challenge at hand.



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Towards
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1. MENA-EU Relations

The MENA region occupies a unique position in the regional order, primarily due to its geostrategic importance and to the presence of key energy and trade links.

1.1 Types of Interaction and Modes of Cooperation

Each of the MENA countries has been involved in a cooperation pathway with the European Union that responds to its individual needs and domestic priorities.

Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia have been deeply involved in bilateral cooperation through the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), in four main domains:

- 1) Good Governance, Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights;
- 2) Economic Development for Stabilization;
- 3) Security;
- 4) Migration and Mobility.

However, each of them has different levels of engagement and working arrangements. For instance, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia have each negotiated a formal protocol that sets out a customized agenda of political and economic reforms with short and medium-term priorities and enables their formal participation or association

In addition to political and economic interdependence, the EU is the most important trading partner for many MENA states including the globally-connected GCC members.

to EU programmes. Israel and Tunisia have additionally become full Horizon 2020 partners in 2014 and 2016 respectively.¹⁶

“This form of cooperation aims to foster economic integration through the implementation of regional and sub-regional exchanges and projects...”

16 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/strategy_on_research_and_innovation/documents/ec_rtd_h2020-association-agreement.pdf Accessed 13 Feb. 2021

17 <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/negotiations-and-agreements/> Accessed 13 Feb. 2021.

18 MENA countries members of the UfM: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Syria (suspended), Tunisia and Turkey. Libya is an observer.

Association Agreements between MENA Countries Members of ENP and the EU ¹⁷	
Country	Status
Algeria	In force since 2005
Egypt	In force since 2004
Israel	In force since 2000
Jordan	In force since 2002
Lebanon	In force since 2006
Morocco	In force since 2000, Negotiations on Modernization began in 2013, On hold since 2014
Tunisia	In force since 1998, Negotiations on Modernization began in 2015, on hold since 2019

The same MENA countries¹⁸, in addition to Mauritania, are also engaged in functional multilateral cooperation with the EU, that is the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). This form of cooperation aims to foster economic integration through the implementation of regional and sub-regional exchanges and projects - rather than national projects - in areas related to economy, environment, energy, health, migration, education, and social affairs.

Other countries like the GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates) are not members of the ENP nor the UfM. Yet, they have been collectively engaged in negotiations with the EU on free trade agreements through multilateral cooperation between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the EU. These negotiations started in 1990, shortly after the signing of the 1988 Cooperation Agreement and have been suspended since 2008.

24 Furthermore, GCC countries have maintained institutional exchanges with the EU through the yearly Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting and some expert meetings aimed at advancing cooperation in the areas of environment, energy, education, and combating criminal activities.²⁰ The GCC countries also benefit from the Erasmus Mundus programme.

Iraq, who is neither a member of ENP nor of FM, has also signed a Partnership and

Cooperation Agreement with the EU, which has been provisionally applied since 2012.

Besides, MENA countries hold a relationship with the EU at the regional level through their regional organization, the League of Arab States (LAS), in the form of regular dialogues on political and security issues- the EU-LAS strategic Dialogue- and regular or annual senior official meetings between representatives of both organizations.

1.2 The role for Civil Society

MENA Civil Society Organizations are also engaged in the EU-MENA cooperation through the European Endowment for Democracy and the Civil Society Facility (CSF).

Non-governmental groups seeking to take an active part in setting and influencing the political and governance agenda at the national level or the multilateral level can apply for grants through the Civil Society Facility. Activities carried out in partnership between civil society organizations (CSOs) from across the MENA region and from EU Member States to develop networks and promote the transfer of knowledge and experience are prioritized.²¹

Local political actors, including political movements, journalists, and NGOs seeking political change in their countries and reforms or progress in thematic areas such as anti-corruption and public accountability, independent and social media platforms, civic activism and participation, human rights activism and monitoring, women's civic and

political participation, sexual orientation and gender identity, youth, arts and culture, are encouraged and supported by the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) that was established in 2012 further to the Arab uprisings.

24% of the applications received by the EED 2019 were from CSOs in the MENA region. 26% of the initiatives that were effectively supported were for the MENA.²²

¹⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/negotiations-and-agreements/>
Accessed 13 Feb. 2021

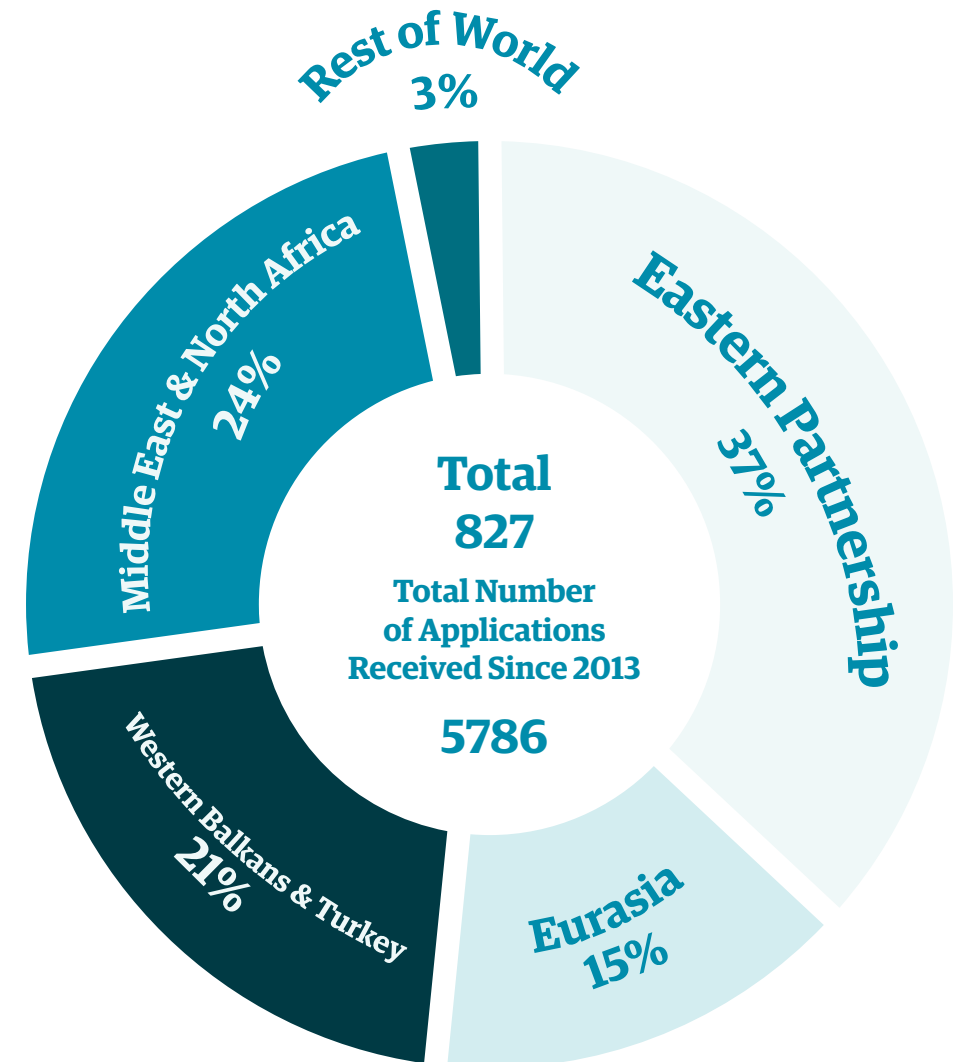
²⁰ https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iairp_14.pdf
Accessed 13 Feb. 2021

²¹ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/policy-highlights/civil-society_en

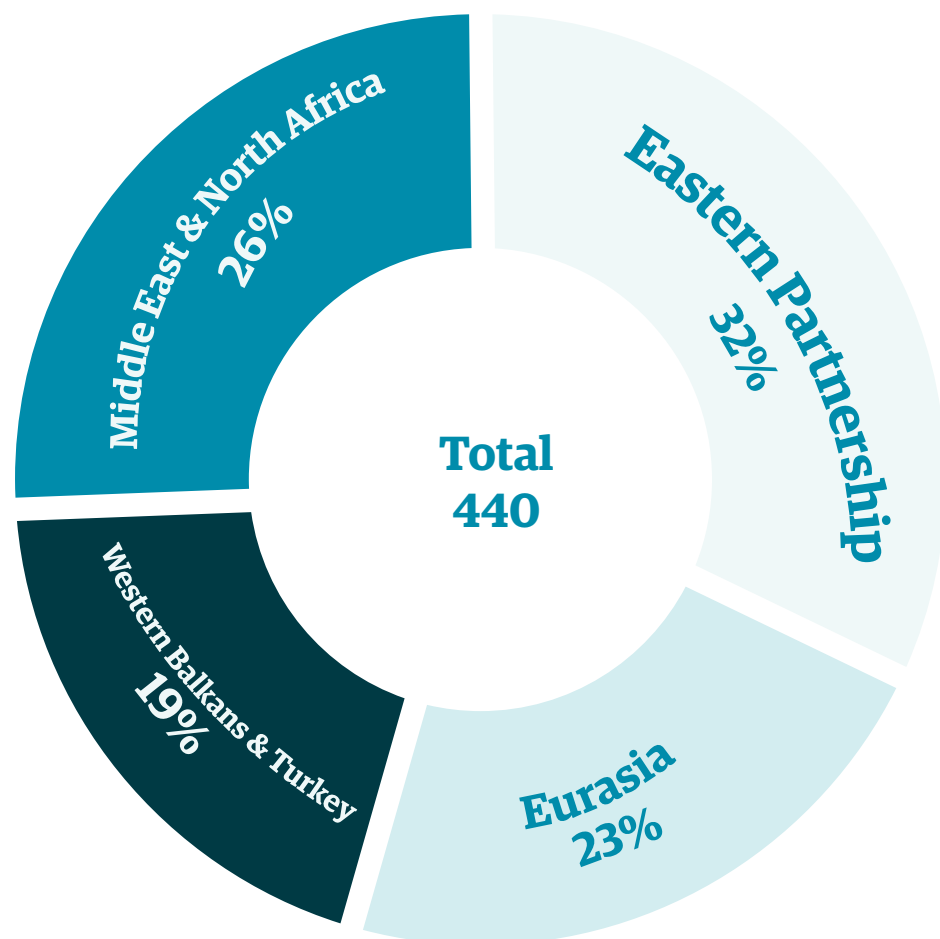
²² <https://www.democracyendowment.eu/en/component/attachments/attachments.html?id=336>

No. of Applications Received by Region (2019)

25



No. of Initiatives Supported by Region (On going in 2019)



2. MENA Policy Towards EU: Fragmented Policy Lines

Despite its relative cultural and historical homogeneity, the MENA is a fragmented region. Its disparate states do not share common policies and security understandings, making it hard to imagine it as a unified space.

Unlike the EU, there is a little sense of 'regionness'. This is explained by the fact that the MENA is not as integrated as the EU. While the region appears to be as one, it spans different features in terms of political systems and socio-economic conditions. Furthermore, it has some of the lowest levels of intra-regional trade, political cooperation, and legal migration in the world, which is negatively compounded by the disparities between oil-exporting and oil-importing countries.

This reality is reflected in the MENA's "fragmented" policy towards the EU: a grouping of individual MENA countries' policies that lack in most instances coherence and coordination.

Many of the region's interactions with the EU take place at the bilateral rather than the inter-institutional level. Major countries frequently act in a self-serving manner in the MENA space. Despite instances of cooperation, the tendency for all states - notwithstanding the collective rhetoric - has been to pursue distinctive pathways: sometimes overlapping, sometimes competitive, in pursuit of particular interests.

This is not to say that regional organizations, the LAS, GCC, or OIC have not been principal

frameworks for cooperation with the EU; however, they have been less effective in the articulation of common policy lines that translate the MENA interests as a region. Nonetheless, the coexistence of divergent MENA agenda and the absence of alignment among major players remain an obstacle to the development of a common MENA policy towards the EU.

A better understanding of this fragmented reality results in a better understanding of the conditions that govern relations between the MENA and the EU and those that hinder effective cooperation.

"A better understanding of this fragmented reality results in a better understanding of the conditions that govern relations between the MENA and the EU and those that hinder effective cooperation."

3. The Peculiarities of MENA- EU Relations Lines How it Started → How it's Going

This section identifies three main challenges that impede an effective and fruitful EU-MENA cooperation. We matched these challenges with solutions.

- 1) Diverging interests among MENA countries
- 2) Lack of effective coordination tools among MENA states in the relationship with EU
- 3) Different priorities between MENA and EU

3.1 Diverging Interests among MENA Countries

Individually and collectively, the MENA states have failed to agree on a formula to promote a single regional policy. One would think that they have agreed on one approach in their relations with the EU, that is talking past rather than to each other, as their instances of rivalry and mistrust have indeed outnumbered their moments of cooperation. Nevertheless, they have not reached consent on any set of shared principles and lines that might govern the shared neighborhood.²³

First, this is caused by the prevalence of rivalries (e.g. Intra-GCC feud), geostrategic competition

between states in the region, and the oppositions that often emerge in their positions concerning strategic decisions regarding both domestic and external issues. Second, the protracted conflicts and interrelated challenges that are confronting countries in the region at multiple levels are another factor. Finally, the third reason is the diverging interests among MENA countries. A degree of differentiation between oil-exporting and oil-importing countries in the MENA is normal. Indeed, each of them has different needs and priorities depending on their state of wealth and development, and thus have different objectives and expectations from

the EU. This is very apparent in the nature of cooperation and exchanges they strive for in their relations with the European Union.

Oil-exporting countries mainly pursue foreign direct investment, free trade agreements, and market access. Energy relations are the main driver of EU-GCC relations: Europe needs to secure the procurement of its growing energy demands, and the GCC countries seek to obtain access to technology and know-how. Furthermore, The GCC countries seek a broad economic and technical cooperation in a number of sectors ranging from trade and financial

cooperation to higher education and media and communications.²⁴

Whereas Northern African and Mediterranean countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon face dissimilar challenges: socio-economic pressures, budget deficits, and low productivity and growth. Thus, they seek types of cooperation settings and agreements with the EU that would ensure them access to finance, mobility schemes and simplified visa modalities, developmental projects, and humanitarian assistance.

3.1.1 Solution 1: Identify Common Policy Issues and Lines

²³ Louise Fawcett (2018) MENA and the EU: contrasting approaches to region, power and order in a shared neighbourhood, *Contemporary Politics*, 24:1, 65-80, DOI: 10.1080/13569775.2017.1408172

²⁴ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/179/gulf-countries-iran-iraq-and-yemen>
Accessed 13 Feb. 2021

MENA states do not necessarily have to agree on a unified MENA policy on all levels, but they should at least identify the policy issues and main lines that enjoy consensus, and separate them from the ones that they don't agree upon. For the former policy lines, a common strategy should be developed in their dealings with the EU. For the latter ones, bilateral cooperation can be resumed until an agreement is reached.

3.2 Lack of Effective Coordination Tools and Frameworks among MENA States

MENA is a region that lacks common institutions, making it hard to harmonize regional cooperation among MENA states themselves and between them and the EU. For

Guillaume Périgois | Unsplash



30 the major MENA states, institutions perform secondary roles in the pursuit of their regional interests. Therefore, bilateral relations are dominant in the relations with the EU and Euro- Arab relations are largely unregulated by any common regional organization.

The League of Arab States (LAS) maintains a multilateral relationship with the EU, yet it does not serve as a vehicle for Arab inter-state cooperation. It has tended to play secondary roles with EU institutions. The relationship between the European Union and the Arab League cannot be described as a true and equal partnership at present.

“The League of Arab States (LAS) maintains a *multilateral relationship* with the EU, yet it does not *serve as a vehicle* for Arab inter-state *cooperation*.”

3.2.1 Solution 2: Set up a Regional Mechanism for Coordination

A regional mechanism of coordination should be put in place for the shared policy lines. This mechanism could be under the framework of the League of Arab States.

Many interactions that take place in MENA are focused on sub-regional cooperation such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU).

The absence of any overarching institutional framework in the MENA space, capable of ensuring an effective and functional intergovernmental coordination, has hindered effective cooperation between the EU and a peer regional MENA power independent of its member states.

Marius Oprea | Unsplash



3.3 Different priorities between MENA and EU

MENA and EU states, historically and at present, have different priorities and understandings of the regional order. This poses an obstacle to realizing common objectives and policy coordination.

MENA actors pursue different and separate goals and have not shared the EU vision whether in terms of common policies, priorities, and norms and even of the region itself: what is good for Europe is not necessarily good for MENA²⁵. For

example, the EU and MENA do not look at the issue of migration through the same lens.

Unfortunately,, the policy issues identified in the ²⁰¹⁶ EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy underlined the EU priorities, have not been fully adopted and owned by MENA countries. This has led to likely cooperation between both sides where interests align and to a state of relative indifference where they diverge.

3.3.1 Solution 3: Put the MENA priorities in writing in an official document

Correct identification of the MENA priorities and the challenges facing most states in the region is of utmost importance, to enable the region to negotiate with the EU based on these priorities and to agree on a shared and co-owned agenda. Thus, an official document including these priorities should be discussed, agreed on, and put in writing by relevant MENA stakeholders.

²⁵ Paul Aarts, The Middle East: A Region without Regionalism or the End of Exceptionalism?, Third World Quarterly, vol. 20, no. 5, 1999, pp. 911-925. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3993603

“What is *good* for Europe is *not necessarily* good for MENA.”

4. Towards Successful EU-MENA Cooperation

Promoting more equal participation and 'co-ownership' between European and MENA partners will require any future cooperation to take into consideration the priorities of the MENA states, and refrain from viewing it exclusively through the lens of the EU's self-interest.

Thus, moving forward, mapping most important issues as perceived by the MENA countries and identifying the degree of prioritization and shared interest for both regions, is essential for effective and successful cooperation.

4.1 Issue Mapping and Prioritization

Many new issues have been brought to the table in the past few years. According to a publication titled "Arab Futures 2.0. The road to 2030" by the European Union Institute for Security Studies²⁷, regional stakeholders in the MENA will be facing, in addition to the protracted security issues and refugees' crises, seven priorities for the next decade in relation: **1) Climate change; 2) energy diversification; 3) A growing and young population; 4) Rapid Urbanization; 5)**

"The relationship between the European Union and the Arab League cannot be described as a *true* and *equal partnership* at present."

Digitalization; 6) Food security; and 7) geopolitical changes.

An 8th priority issue has caught the world including the MENA region by surprise by the end of 2019, that is health (essentially corona).

²⁶ Louise Fawcett (2018) MENA and the EU: contrasting approaches to region, power and order in a shared neighbourhood, Contemporary Politics, 24:1, 65-80, DOI: 10.1080/13569775.2017.1408172

Issue	
	Climate Change
	Energy Diversification
	A Growing and Young Population (Economic Opportunities - Growth and Jobs, Mobility, Education, Human Rights)
	Rapid Urbanization (Sustainable Development, Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management)
	Digitization
	Food Security
	Health (Incl. COVID-19)
	Geopolitical Changes (Incl. Gradual Shift of Export and Trade Base from Europe to Asia)
	Security Issues (Conflicts, Dialogue and Negotiations)
	Refugees

²⁷ Florence Gaub (2019) Arab Futures 2.0. The road to 2030, European Union Institute for Security Studies, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISS-Files/Chaillot_154%20Arab%20Futures.pdf



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