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Introduction

1. The Arab Uprisings, Civil Society and the EU's Response

The EU has a long-standing history of supporting civil society and has, for over more than a decade, developed policies and established a number of instruments to support CSOs in capacity-building and implementing human rights and development projects. However, January 2011 was a watershed moment for EU relations with its southern partners. The imbalance in the EU's dialogue and cooperation with the (autocratic) governments of partner countries was brought into sharp focus and challenged. The emerging scenario added new momentum to an active participation of civil society in the shaping of new democracies and political reforms in the Southern Mediterranean. Men and women insist on being part of the decision-making process, and in contributing to the design and implementation of national policies. Thus, the Arab uprisings demanded a recalibration of EU relations with its southern neighbours, a renewed balance of dialogue between Europe, the southern authorities and civil society actors. Policies were renewed, instruments reinforced, new ones created and programmes adjusted with the objective to redirect EU support to the emerging new governments and transition processes and to engage with and support civil society actors as key stakeholders.

This evolution of EU policies was articulated in the various EU Communications and policy reviews that followed from 2011 to 2015 (i.e. European Neighbourhood Policy – ENP Review in autumn 2015). Internally, EU institutions have improved their coordination to increase support to civil society in the Southern Neighbourhood, i.e. by creating an Inter-Institutional Steering Group (IISG) dedicated to improving relations with civil society. The EU will continue to fully support an increased role for civil society. This will require – *inter alia* - the development of new capacities and skills, a change in mind-sets on all sides and the creation of an enabling regulatory framework. At the same time, we are witnessing political and legal developments in certain partner countries which may seriously undermine the independence of civil society organisations and jeopardise their activities.

The European Neighbourhood Policy Review of 2015 took account of recent positive and negative developments in the southern and eastern neighbourhoods and concluded that EU policy relating to the neighbourhood would make stabilisation its main political priority. This reorientation has raised concerns among some stakeholders that the level of political priority and attention that the EU gives to Human Rights, democratisation and civil society space has been diminished. The ENP review reinforced the centrality of these issues to a democratic, stable and prosperous neighbourhood and continues to view civil society as an important stakeholder, a fact reiterated at the Civil Society Forum.

2. Civil Society as a strategic actor at regional level

In this complex and fast-evolving context, the political leadership of the European Union (former Commissioner Füle, Commissioner Hahn and High Representative Mogherini), EU services (mainly the European Commission - NEAR and EuropeAid - and the European External Action Service; as well as the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of Region) have encouraged various stakeholders to engage in renewed exchanges and dialogue (after the previous editions of this CS Fora of 2014 and 2015) with a wide range of actors mainly from Civil Society (2012-2016) while opening a consultation ahead of the review of the European Neighbourhood policy (2015).

These initiatives in the region are echoing the 2012 Communication of the European Commission - ***The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations***¹

¹ COM(2012) 492

and related [Council Conclusions](#), as well as the EU Country Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society, a joint initiative between the European Union and Member States, which aims to strengthen the strategic engagement with civil society. EU Delegations have coordinated the development of such roadmaps in eight countries in the Southern Neighbourhood. The main objectives of those initiatives are to promote a conducive environment for CSOs in partner countries, a meaningful and structured participation of CSOs in policy making, and to increase local CSOs' capacity to perform their roles as independent development actors². In parallel, several regional programmes - mostly funded by the EU - have been established in the Southern Neighbourhood of the EU: [Anna Lindh Foundation](#), ENPI [InfoCenter](#), [Civil Society Facility South](#), [SwitchMed](#), [Med Culture](#), etc.

The participating countries from the Neighbourhood South are: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia.

With similar ambitions, some civil society actors have been organising networks at regional level for many years (with or without support from the EU) and between European and South Mediterranean actors. For example, Development and Human Rights NGOs and CSOs like the Arab NGOs Network for Development (ANND), Euromed Platform, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), and also regional networks of Women ([Karama](#)), youth organisations, journalists (i.e. Euro Mediterranean Academy of Young Journalists – [EMAJ](#)), academics (Euromed University Network - [Unimed](#), [European Institute of the Mediterranean](#)) and Business actors (Association of Organisations of Mediterranean Businesswomen – [AFAEMME](#), [Chambers of Commerce](#)), etc.

3. Objectives and issues at stake for the 2016 Civil Society Forum Neighbourhood South

The third Edition of the Civil Society Forum Neighbourhood South (held in Brussels on 26-27 May 2016) is therefore part of this ambitious initiative to **build a meaningful Multi-Stakeholders Dialogue with Civil Society Organisations** (CSOs) from the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The forum based its agenda on the recommendations from previous editions (2014 and 2015) and from 3 thematic preparatory regional seminars held with CSOs only (held in parallel in Jordan, on 26-27 April 2016).

The Forum in Brussels was attended by 160 participants including a wide range of actors from EU institutions, national and Local Authorities, Academics, NGOs, CSO platforms and networks, Social Movements, Women and Youth Organisations, Journalists and other international organisations (UNESCO).

The outputs and proposals developed in the 2016 Forum are linked to the following official processes:

- implementation and next priorities of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP);
- ongoing coordination between EU Institutions (at headquarters' level) and EU Delegations in the region's countries, especially regarding the role of Civil Society in national and regional strategies (i.e. Civil Society roadmap exercises);
- contribution to the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial dialogue in the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean (from 2008 following on from the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, known as the Barcelona process, which was initiated in 1995);
- specific inputs into ongoing initiatives for peace and conflict resolution in the region.

The key issues at stake at the 2016 Forum focused on the following 3 building blocks (identified in Tunis 2014):

² COM(2012) 492 - Communication of the European Commission - *The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations*

- **Migration and mobility:** Update on recent EU Negotiations with countries in the region / Assessment of the new Regional decisions on Migrants & Refugees (including new ENP) / Role of CSOs within it / Proposals of a few benchmarks to monitor EU agreements against international Treaties and commitments / initial discussions on advocacy strategies to influence the terms of the debate in Europe and in the South Region;

- **Inequality and Sustainable Development:** Based on previous policy papers and reports issued by CSOs, discussion on possible advocacy strategies to influence the terms of the debate in Europe and in the South Region regarding: current economic paradigm, current Free Trade Agreements, Investments Policies, etc. / Proposals of a few benchmarks to monitor Economic frameworks in the region / Which CSO actors to involve in those discussions? (Trade Unions, Social Economy actors, Business organisations, Women's organisations, etc.) / Link with the new international agreement on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs – Agenda 2030), etc.;

- **Shrinking space for Civil Society** (including issues of Human Rights and democratisation): Assessment of the ENP review and the way it integrates CSOs / Update on the 'CSO Roadmaps' in the region & links with EU Delegations / New EU Human Rights programmes – impact in the region / possible advocacy strategies to influence the terms of the debate at EU level and in the South region.

In addition, the *Brussels Civil Society Forum Neighbourhood South* gave specific attention to **other priorities**:

- participation and voices of **Youth and Women**;
- opportunities for a **meaningful dialogue for Civil Society** at national and regional levels;
- **links between this regional dialogue and global initiatives** such as the 'Agenda 2030' (on Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs);
- issues arising between the two regions such as **preventing radicalisation, security and stabilisation**, space for **Human Rights Defenders, Peace Building and refugees** and **employability**.

Methodology and format

Building a multi-stakeholder dialogue calls for a methodology which is as **inclusive as possible for different prospects and approaches**, to provide opportunities for participants to express their points of view. The dialogue agenda was prepared by the CS expert, who consulted CSOs and moderators, and the EU institutions involved.

While requesting high-level representation from the EU as a sign of political commitment, the Forum in Brussels combined:

- **Plenary sessions:** allowing all participants to contribute to the discussion on a mainstream subject;
- **Workshops:** fostering debate on specific issues in small groups (20 to 60 people) for more fluent exchanges and swifter consensus-making;
- **Networking fair:** allowing participants to mingle in an informal way, and to exchange information on projects and ongoing initiatives.

This mix also allowed the main difficulty of this exercise to be confronted: to **cover, in two days, diverse subjects** ranging from migration to civil society capacity-building, providing CSOs with **space for networking**, and to come up with **concrete recommendations**.

5 plenary sessions and 9 workshops were organised. 3 parallel working sessions were organised at different times during the two-day agenda. This allowed participants to take part in different discussions and to share their experience.

- 1st set of parallel workshops based on three building block topics, agreed upon in Tunis in 2014:
 - Migration and Mobility;
 - Civil Society Space;
 - Reducing Inequalities.

The objective here was to review the recommendations from the Jordan Preparatory Meeting and to then identify priority recommendations targeting the EU institutions.

- 2nd set of parallel workshops on three cross-cutting issues:
 - Women and youth;
 - Participation in public life;
 - Civil society capacity-building.

The objective was to formulate recommendations based on best practice and lessons learnt, to foster the participation of civil society in public policy making at local, national and international level.

- 3rd set of parallel workshops to explore emerging issues:
 - Counter-radicalisation;
 - Security and stability;
 - Support for employment.

The key outputs were forward-looking recommendations for DG NEAR under the framework of the upcoming programming and the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

In total, there were **14 working sessions** over the two-day agenda with the objective of promoting a fruitful, structured and balanced dialogue, aimed at producing concrete recommendations. Therefore, each of the 14 working sessions took place with a **session facilitating team**, selected from the list of participants: a moderator, a rapporteur and keynote speakers. One of the main advantages, sought by this arrangement, was to **involve participants as much as possible in discussions**, in a peer-to-peer, self-managing dynamic.

This facilitated exchange between stakeholders from 10 Mediterranean countries and the EU. The debates were gender-balanced and provided space for young representatives to take the floor. The selection of participants from the region combined participants from previous editions, proposals for new CSOs as proposed by EU delegations, CSOs regional platforms from both regions, EU institutions, UNESCO and from the CS expert.

Opening the Forum - Civil Society and EU Institutions' Dialogue

Moderator: Shahira Amin

Mr. George Dassis (President of the [European Economic and Social Committee](#) (EESC)), welcomed participants attending the meeting at the headquarters of the EESC. He initially referred to the importance of issues such as migration and refugees, freedoms of association and expression, the socio-economic development and consultation of civil society.

He called on the involvement of all stakeholders, non-governmental organisations, trade unions, socio-economic organisations, as they are the ones who share their expertise and will carry forward future policies to reach concrete results. The collaboration between these different actors is crucial, while at the same time it is important that they have their space to discuss their specific interest.

President Dassis highlighted the importance of dialogue for the EESC which, for the last 20 years, has been involved in exchanges with socio-economic stakeholders in the Mediterranean region and cited recent examples of successful cooperation: the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the EESC and the Tunisian Quartet, the cooperation with the Economic and Social Council of Morocco in participating in, and contributing to, COP22, and joint future work with representatives of Jordan, Israel and Palestine.

"EU policies need not only to effectively involve Civil Society but to ensure its freedom of expression and assembly in the North and in the South of the Mediterranean. It is the EU's duty to promote or defend these freedoms and it is the responsibility of Civil Society to organise itself, take initiatives and work at all levels, local, national and regional."

He repeated that Civil Society must be united and consistent and come out with clear proposals. Mr Dassis concluded by highlighting the importance that the second stage of work allows for a clear and concrete dialogue, and participatory and democratic management - a process which the EU supports without directing it.

Mr Luc Van den Brande (Vice-President of the [European Committee of the Regions](#) CoR, Member of the Bureau of the [Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly](#) (ARLEM)), welcomed participants and attendees of the opening session and briefly introduced ARLEM as a joint body that brings together local and regional politicians from around the Mediterranean to encourage technical cooperation and foster political dialogue at the decision-making level closest to the citizens.

His address stressed the importance of a strategic partnership between Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) and CSOs as being essential:

"There are a number of requirements for good local governance: the role and autonomy of local authorities must be strengthened; the electoral principle widely established and local democracy consolidated; civic engagement strengthened at the local level; dialogue with citizens promoted and a participatory approach to governance adopted".

"LRAs and CSOs are strategic partners for good governance and successful development outcomes, and for bringing Euro-Mediterranean cooperation closer to ordinary people, producing tangible results in their daily

lives. We must therefore strengthen our partnership if we want democracy to succeed across the Mediterranean region”.

The topics of migration management, urban development, sustainable economic development and democratisation are our common concern, he added. Any support requires investment in institutional capacity-building. Subsequently, ARLEM recommends a macro-regional approach to the Mediterranean basin and favours extending the European cohesion policy model to the Southern Neighbourhood. In his view, this means supporting decentralisation in the South by using existing resources, promoting common initiatives and setting joint development objectives.

He concluded by expressing that, with the many challenges the Mediterranean region is facing, the socio-economic ambition is to promote inclusive and sustainable growth, generating jobs, in the face of a backdrop of a globalisation process generating greater demands on productivity and pressure on demographic trends, migration, coastal urbanism and rural neglect.

Mr Johannes Hahn (Commissioner for DG NEAR), highlighted the important role that Civil Society (CS) has played in democratic development:

“The most prosperous functioning democracies are those where civil society can thrive, where every group can have its voice heard and where civil society can freely monitor government activities. An active and vibrant civil society acts as a bridge between people and their authorities [...] (Y)our role as representatives of civil society is fundamental in promoting change towards increased freedoms, human rights and the respect of rule of law in the Neighbourhood”.

Commissioner Hahn added that the challenges for stability in the region originate from poverty, inequality, injustice and exclusion, corruption, poor economic management and the inability of governments and international organisations to address these factors. Therefore, he underlined that the core objective of this revised ENP is stabilisation. He reassured the attendees that the EU will defend those principles in their dialogue with partner governments, and that he also counts on the CSOs ‘to engage - where possible - with (their) governments at all levels (national and local), to participate in policy development and dialogue, and to encourage more inclusive and sustainable social and economic development’.

Lack of economic opportunities and jobs is also at the centre of instability. Socio-economic development is a priority for the EU, job opportunities for young women and men, as well as the promotion of long-term sustainable growth, connectivity, energy efficiency, security and managed mobility.

Commissioner Hahn gave examples of the EU’s increased support for civil society: the increased budget for civil society support in the Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility, the European Endowment for Democracy, support for intercultural dialogue in partnership with the Anna Lindh Foundation. He also shared that EU Delegations are instructed to think and build long-term trust in their engagement with Civil Society, to reach out to marginalised groups in society, to engage with existing CS platforms and to ensure feedback of EU dialogue with CS. He added, the EU is also promoting innovative methods, like the ‘Dialogue Fellows Programme’ with the objective of strengthening leadership capacity and potential to encourage and prepare talented, committed young people to get involved in policy making and dialogue in the Southern Mediterranean region.

An important step is **setting up a more permanent mechanism, owned by Civil Society, to provide more focused, regular and accessible exchanges.**

He reassured the participants that the recommendations issued by this Forum will be shared with Ministers at the UfM Ministerial meeting on Regional Cooperation in Jordan, and that the EU will act as an intermediary in places where it is difficult for CS to interact with the authorities.

Two prominent speakers from Civil Society networks started the dialogue with the representatives from the EU institutions: Mr Ziad Abdel Samad (Arab NGO Network for Development, ANND) and Ms Jamila Sayouri (Association Adala).

Referring to the recent letter the Core Advisory Group (CAG) sent to Commissioner Hahn, **Mr Samad** opened the session expressing the CAG's appreciation of the fact that the **Commissioner's speech reflects the serious commitment to take decisive steps forward towards a regional dialogue that includes civil society on policy matters** concerning the Southern neighbourhood. He stressed that:

- It is important to ensure the commitment by the EU that an independent, open and frank dialogue on policy matters (for example on the new EU Global Strategy for foreign and security policy), including youth inclusiveness, will be at the heart of the future regional dialogue between the EU and civil society. This cannot happen without political commitment.
- The EU should also commit to handing over the organisation of the civil society part of the dialogue to civil society actors, ensuring ownership mainly by the South, which are selected by taking into consideration their different visions and positions. A main task of these civil society actors would be to establish clear and transparent criteria for participation in dialogue, such as transparency.
- This dialogue should be more policy-oriented. It should focus on policy matters related to political issues that have strong impact on the realities on the ground, for example the security policy.

Ms Sayouri focused on the situation of human rights and women in the Arab region. She suggested the following recommendations based on current common challenges:

- The EU should help to establish a concrete dialogue based on a bottom-up approach with the EU on one side and Civil Society on the other. Through the dialogue process, civil society actors can play a key role in proposing solutions on a wide variety of issues, including migration and terrorism, based on their in-depth knowledge of the reality on the ground.
- Mutual consultations should be promoted especially in those regions affected by political turmoil, and a proper follow up and evaluation of the situation on the ground should be ensured.
- Women in Civil Society are still an underprivileged category. While it is important to implement sustainable development projects to promote socio-economic rights, a proper monitoring of the programmes is necessary to ensure that women and other layers of society are mainstreamed and have the necessary resources to operate.
- A dynamic mechanism/instrument should be set up to guarantee that the implementation, monitoring and follow-up of cooperation programmes ensures tangible results on the socio-economic conditions of women.
- Monitoring and follow-up should be ensured, especially in those regions particularly affected by political turmoil where governments put restrictions on freedom of movement, preventing women from travelling within and outside their regions. This has an impact on their rights and freedoms. Equal rights for both genders should be included in all policies.

Comments and recommendations from the participants on identified challenges:

- Youth and women are not yet properly included in policy making. Youth CSOs should be better integrated, through an inclusive and open dialogue, to draw up concrete and tangible policies. The EU should further support this process. Socio-economic problems should be at the core of the dialogue.
- The EU should increase the support for women's economic empowerment as this would ultimately lead to their social and political empowerment.
- The stability of the European Union also means the stability of the southern region. The road map should take into consideration the stability and peace in the Neighbouring countries.
- EU countries still tend to promote their interests, turning a blind eye to violations of human rights in certain countries, especially in Egypt. The EU must put the issue of freedom of speech high on its list of priorities. It should rely more on direct consultations with civil society, especially when it comes to monitoring these violations.
- Human rights are universal and must be respected. In Egypt, the EU has, so far, only expressed concern about the jailing of journalists, and the repression and muzzling of the press. This complacent attitude has contributed to a worsening of the situation. The EU should rather increase pressure on the authorities. For example, more recently, international campaigns in solidarity with some of the jailed journalists have piled pressure on the authorities, resulting in a positive outcome.
- The EU should further engage in dialogue in those countries where freedom of expression is at stake, especially Jordan and Egypt. Prosecuted journalists need special legal support.
- Yemen should be re-included in the EU policy-making process, especially in light of the precarious socio-economic and political conditions in the country.
- Effective mechanisms should be set up to monitor and evaluate the dialogue process. The Janoub-Chamal platform initiative is a concrete example that should be thoroughly followed.
- Under-represented people, including people with disabilities, should be involved in the dialogue process. The criteria to ensure this should be clarified.

Response by Commissioner Hahn

The key message addressed by **Commissioner Hahn** at the end of the session was the **commitment to work together with civil society to invest more in the potential of youth** as this is one of the prerequisites for bringing about stability and development in the region. He acknowledged the **crucial role civil society plays in ensuring that all categories of society are represented**. He reiterated the importance of establishing a dialogue based on mutual **co-ownership** without imposing rules. He stressed the fact that it is important to take into consideration that, no matter what our religious belief is, democracy can only be achieved if equal rights for everybody are guaranteed. He also clarified that investment is not only about allocating money but it is aimed at getting something in return, which is prosperity, democracy, stability and more rights for citizens. He concluded by calling on participants to give as much input as possible to achieving the common objectives based on the Jordan recommendations.

Plenary sessions

I. Supporting Civil Society and Human Rights: which global initiatives?

Moderator: Marc Schade-Poulsen ([EuroMed Rights Network](#))

Keynote Speaker: Jean-Louis Ville, EuropeAid, Director for Human Development and Migration

“The EU cannot act alone; it needs the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to play a crucial role, both as advocates for strengthened approaches, and as implementing partners in the EU response to the migration and refugee situation globally, and in Europe's Southern Neighbourhood.”

EU policy described by *Mr Jean-Louis Ville* with regard to three main areas of concern:

Shrinking Space for Citizen Participation

The **political objective of the 2014-2020 EU instruments** is to have a stronger **focus on the most difficult countries and emergency situations where human rights and fundamental freedoms are most in danger**:

- EIDHR Crisis Facility to operate in countries where the EU cannot launch calls for proposals (projects up to EUR 1m, 18 months);
- urgent protection needs of human rights defenders at risk;
- new comprehensive HRD mechanism '[Protectdefenders.eu](#)' (EUR 15m, addressing short, medium and long-term needs of HRDs, including core funding and support for advocacy).

Specific elements characterising this policy:

- **Stronger wording on the role of civil society**, including a specific reference to the cooperation between civil society and local authorities and relevant state institutions: priority given to local organisations in local and global calls for proposals.
- **New eligibility criteria on non-registered organisations**/organisations registered in another country in situations where registration in the targeted country is made impossible by the national authorities or might put the applicant in danger (e.g. Belarus, Syria): EU Delegations will be reminded to take this flexibility into account in their local calls for proposals.
- **Protection of partners**: confidentiality at the request of project partners (non-publication of beneficiaries, anonymised contracts, etc.).
- **Clear effort to reach out to smaller, remote, grassroots organisations**: through sub-granting; through the specific dedicated component for HR organisations at risk under '[Protectdefenders.eu](#)' (both can allow grants up to EUR 60 000 = core funding).
- **Flexibility in eligibility of money transfers** between project partners (e.g. through pre-paid cards).
- **Predictability**: MAAP, themes of 2016 and 2017 global calls for proposals published (with specific consultations during the CSO Forum last March).

Beyond EIDHR, the **rights-based approach to development** has a specific added-value in sensitive contexts where it might be difficult to work openly on human rights (e.g. Algeria):

- Use the development cooperation / ENI money as a leverage on human rights (especially economic, social and cultural rights) and fight discrimination (positive approach contrary to the 'stop and go' of aid conditionality).
- Specific gender equality objective in all EU external action programmes (GAP2).

EU Country Roadmaps for engagement with CSOs are a joint initiative EU / Member States (MS) to implement the 2012 policy on '[The Roots of democracy and sustainable development](#)'. To date, 100 Roadmaps have been developed around the world. All Neighbourhood South countries (apart from Syria and

Libya, which were not in a position to develop such a strategy) have emphasised an **enabling environment as a main priority**.

- We need to promote multi-stakeholder approaches and innovative forms of interactions between CSOs and LAs in local public policy-making to ultimately reinforce the LAs downward accountability to citizens.

Migration

- In the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, migration is recognised as a **potential positive force for development**. The 2030 Agenda also identifies **forced displacement** as one of the key factors which threatens to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades.
- The EUR 1.8 billion EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa is a good example of this strengthened approach, and projects totalling EUR 752 million have already been launched.
- The EU has re-doubled its efforts to support countries bearing the heaviest burden of the displacement linked to the continuing **Syrian conflict**, in particular through increased funding of the Syria Trust Fund, and the development of targeted pacts with Lebanon and Jordan. The EU also established a special Facility for Syrian Refugees in Turkey to support their efforts in providing protection and support for the more than 2.5 million refugees on their territory.
- The EU's new and **strengthened development-oriented approach** towards forced displacement in our Communication on 26 April. This Communication – '[Lives in Dignity – from aid-dependence to self-reliance](#)' - puts forward a comprehensive and strengthened development approach to support refugees, internally-displaced persons and their host communities.
- CSO actors should be supported to provide services, information and protection, as well as to support actions for the resilience of refugees and host communities.
- CSOs are also essential advocates *vis à vis* their governments to provide better services, for instance in the areas of health, social protection, education and access to livelihoods. Also, civil society actors play a crucial role as agents of change in fostering a positive narrative on migration and on the positive links between migration and development.
- Therefore, capacity-building support to both civil society and authorities in partner countries will continue to be a priority in our cooperation on migration. In line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, this capacity-building should aim at ensuring migration takes place in a safe and regular manner, and that the rights of migrants and refugees are respected.

Inequalities

- EU policy is coherent with the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which provides a new conceptual context to tackle inequality. It encompasses a separate goal with its targets on reducing inequalities together with a number of targets related to inequality under other goals. This is all in response to the multi-dimensional nature of inequalities.
- **DEVCO is integrating an inequality-focused policy into its wider cooperation policy** by fostering inequalities-reduction, decent jobs creation and improving opportunities for all in its development cooperation policies, programmes and financial instruments.
- The main instruments in place are:
 - Action plan: focuses on inclusive and sustainable growth patterns essentially through a territorial approach to local development in partner countries. It also concentrates on corrective redistributive policies, such as progressive fiscal systems, social protection and assistance programmes, employment and labour protection, quality education and health for all as the basis of human development.

- Research Facility on Inequalities: DEVCO will grant an inequality-related research project under the [Global Public Goods and Challenges](#) programme by 2016, which will define a conceptual and measurement framework to improve DEVCO policies and strategies.
- European Expert Network on International Cooperation and Development: the main objective is to acquire specific knowledge and advice to strengthen capacity in inequality-based policy making.

The Southern Neighbourhood: Politics, Partnerships and People

Moderator/Facilitator: Paul Gillespie, Journalist at The Irish Times

Keynote speaker: Nick WESTCOTT, Managing Director, European External Action Service (EEAS)

Mr Nick Westcott – EU Commitment for an Inclusive Dialogue

- ‘Tunisia represents the idea of how the EU would like to work, not only with governments, but also with civil society, as this is the country that managed to achieve democratic governance in cooperation with civil society actors, including trade union movements’.
- The **EU commitment for an inclusive dialogue** is reflected in the new [European Neighbourhood Policy](#) and [EU global strategy](#). Both instruments emphasise the need for the EU to expand outreach to civil society in its broadest sense. This means continuing to work more effectively with all parties whilst expanding networks and finding new ways of working together.
- The EU is working on supporting the **tripartite dialogue**, not only in Tunisia, but also in those countries where it is not easy to achieve the same level of engagement; for example, the EU is discussing partnership priorities for Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan and has held consultations with civil society on all of these countries, at the country-level and in Brussels. ‘These are three very different countries, and the range of issues the EU can work across the three goes from economic development, to provision of social services, to human security, to human rights’.
- On **Libya and Syria**: high appreciation for the crucial work done by the civil society organisations, especially the ones operating at the local level, in cooperating with the municipal local councils. Being aware of the urgent need to provide any possible kind of support to save people’s lives, Mr Westcott called on civil society actors to approach the EU institutions to request timely support.

Respondent: Ms Jihane Erraji - The Situation of Youth and Women in the Region, Recommendations based on [NET MED Youth Morocco’s Experience](#)

- The **dialogue** between the EU and civil society should be **more horizontal**, without intermediaries. This would help to build mutual trust between these two parties.
- The EU should encourage governments to give civil society actors more space for **action and autonomy in decision making**.
- The EU should also **reach out** to the numerous fledgling organisations in Morocco that need their capacity strengthened in order to better implement projects on health, education and human rights that are at the core of citizens’ life. Many of them are not yet aware of the possibility to receive EU support.
- A number of **thematic committees** should be set up to ensure that sustainable funding is delivered to tackle all thematic areas (health, education, culture, rule of law, etc.) in an equal manner.

Respondent: Mr

Niccolo Milanese – European Alternatives and of the Cultural Innovators Network

- Dialogue between decision makers and civil society should **involve civil society in setting the agenda**, in drafting policy options and evaluating those options, in implementing the policy and in evaluating the results of the policy at every stage of the policy cycle. This dialogue should be based on an exchange of arguments (for example, the reasons for which one option is adopted or refused should be explained, based on rational argument). The EU still does not apply this method with regard to its partners in the South.

- The EU should **include civil society in political decision-making** for two reasons: it leads to better policy-making as civil society actors bring a set of concerns which are not represented by other actors (business actors, the security lobby, etc.); and it leads to policies which are accepted more by the people that are affected by them, because those people have been involved in their development.

Specific Areas of Concern and Recommendations Identified by Participants

- The EU institutions should give concrete feedback to the positions of **trade unions**.
- A clearer partnership agenda with key priorities should be drawn up through the **tripartite dialogue to build democracies** in the countries concerned.
- **Sustainable mechanisms based on mutual consensus** should be established in order to design an objective-oriented partnership that includes all parties. Mutual framework agreements and regular meetings should be ensured on the basis of these mechanisms.
- On Libya:
 - The EU should support civil society organisations in Libya, especially those based in **rural areas**. For example, support well-established civil society organisations that have the capacity to train emerging CSOs at the rural level, to empower them to implement projects and play the gap-filling role in response to a lack of local representative institutions.
 - The EU should **boost its support to women and youth CSOs**. Special support should be given to **establish networking platforms to strengthen coordination and interaction** with the rural CSOs that have, so far, helped local authorities to grow.
- On Palestine: the EU should push more for a political solution to address the situation of human rights' abuses in Palestine.
- On Egypt: regarding **freedom of expression**, the situation remains a matter of concern that requires more measures to be taken by the EU, especially to defend prosecuted journalists and activists in Egypt.
- The EU should make greater effort to **engage with CSOs in Gulf countries as well**.

II. Implementing the European Neighbourhood Policy

Moderator: Nicollo Milanese

Keynote Speakers: Maciej Popowski, Deputy Director General of DG NEAR, and Michael Koehler, Director Neighbourhood South, DG NEAR, European Commission

*“The EU cannot alone solve the many challenges of the region, and there are limits to its leverage, but the **new ENP will play its part in helping to create the conditions for positive development**”. ([ENP Review](#))*

Mr Maciej Popowski stressed the importance of the ENP review and highlighted that the Commission is now moving into the implementation stage. **Priorities in the [ENP review](#):**

- good governance;
- democracy, rule of law, and the promotion of the universality of human rights;
- security.
- **The EU policy will focus on long-term opportunities** for growth and socio-economic development, especially looking at the situation of young women and men. Other priority areas are connectivity, energy efficiency, security and managed mobility.
- Most of those key challenges **need to be addressed through regional cooperation and integration also**. The ENP is a **framework for a common, shared vision** of a region that collaborates, is integrated and inter-connected.
- In that context, the central objective of the revised ENP is **stabilisation**, and **enhanced democratic governance is a fundamental part of the stabilisation agenda**.
- The EU deeply values CSOs' engagement, both with the EU and between CSOs and national governments, keeping dialogue on reform agendas open and inclusive, pushing forward reforms **and making the EU and national governments accountable**.

ENP Implementation in Security and Migration - Two of the Key Priority Areas

Security

- The EU approach covers support for Security Sector Reform, prevention of radicalisation, disruption of organised crime and fighting cyber-crime.
- In our cooperation with partner countries in the Neighbourhood, it is **crucial to improve security for citizens**. The EU firmly believes that State security cannot be achieved at the expense of fundamental freedoms and citizens' safety and integrity.
- In the roll-out of the revised ENP, the EU is seeking the **political will and ownership of our partners**. However, the EU's priorities may not always match the needs and expectations of ENP countries. It is important to deliver tailor-made and country-specific responses that show results – **there is no development and stability without security**.

- However, the EU will not apply this blindly. The volatility of the context obliges us to evaluate our support along the way and remain **critical and flexible in the face of changes**. For that purpose, systems of checks and balances need to function. CSOs have a crucial role here: joint oversight pursuing accountability and transparency of the security structures is a must.

Migration

- The EU acknowledges that migrants are **powerful agents of development**: they transfer knowledge, skills and experiences to their countries of destination; they invest in countries of origin and destination; they contribute to cultural diversity.
- However, without development opportunities (jobs, education, rights), tensions between populations can lead to the destabilisation of entire regions, instigating massive secondary movements.
- The ENP offers support to partner countries to provide a balanced response in managing migration and refugee flows and to integrate the benefits of migration. This is done by reinforcing legal migration, international protection and fostering links between migration and development.
- CSOs are essential actors in our common aim to regulate migration and protect the rights of migrants and refugees – CSOs must **remain vigilant, highlighting their crucial role in oversight, making us and your governments accountable**. They are in the best place to **advocate for the delivery of basic services**, such as education, health, housing, as well as promoting a **positive narrative on migration**, portraying the constructive links between migration and development.
- The EU has spearheaded the international response to migration and refugees with more than **EUR 5 billion of the total budget mobilised**. Specifically, for the region, the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis committed EUR 427 million by May 2016, and the Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa will soon submit EUR 28 million to the Board of the Trust Fund North Africa window.

Specific Areas of Concern and Recommendations Identified by Participants

- **Need to invest in peace-building as part of ENP policy**; peace being crucial in the processes of democracy building.
- Negotiation of ENP priorities – **the priorities should be more transparent and known by the public**.
- **Lack of coherence of ENP policies and financial instruments according to ENP priorities**. Popowski mentioned the need to review them, however highlighting that the financial ceiling would not move.
- In order to build security, there is a **need to focus on socio-economic issues and democracy first**.
- Security in Libya: **no instruments to ensure transparency on the final beneficiaries of the support**. Need to cooperate more with civil society.
- **There is a need for differentiation on the countries, taking into consideration the refugee crisis**. Koehler mentioned that the budget was reshuffled; however, the Commission is also focusing on resettlement issues and trying to foster circular migration and build capacity for people to come back and start a business & rebuild the economy.
- **Need for short-term visa-lifting mechanism to facilitate mobility**.
- **Coherent response regarding Human Rights violation** (e.g. Egypt): need for more consistency between MS and EU response. Mr Koehler explained that the reduction of the development assistance can serve as an indicator of the EU response.

III. Enriching the Ongoing European Operational Priorities for the Southern Neighbourhood Region with Participants

Moderator: Olivier Consolo

Keynote speaker: Irene Mingasson - Head of Unit - Regional Programmes Neighbourhood South

“Civil Society has a critical role in the region. I would like to invite you to take this regional space where dialogue happens in different areas”. Irene Mingasson

- This platform should be fully in the hands of civil society.
- The EU would like to open the channels to new actors and wishes it to be sustainable.
- The core of the messages CSOs have passed to the EU, after the preparatory meeting in April, is very important.
- The EU is committed to continue to support civil society.
- The Young civil society fellowship will be launched in Jordan.

Regional Cooperation

- Regional outlook between the EU and the South Neighbourhood is becoming more of a priority in the ENP.
- Engagement of the EU in the region has a regional dimension.
- The thematic subjects such as economic development, energy, climate change, security, growth and employment have an increasing importance.
- 15% of the EU annual programming goes to the regional programmes.
- Regional cooperation is structured under three pillars:
 - Political and Social Development;
 - Economic Development;
 - Environment, Energy and Transport.

Union for the Mediterranean

- The revised ENP endorses the important role of the [Union for the Mediterranean](#). The policy directions adopted at the various thematic UfM ministerial meetings in recent years have great potential as drivers for growth, employment, inclusion and stability.
- The Commission continues to support the UfM Secretariat, a unique platform for sector policy dialogue between the 42 countries' members, and which is in charge of promoting concrete projects of regional relevance.

The EU League of Arab States: is a different actor to bring around the table and with which to discuss what the practical solutions to the problems we are having in these priority areas could be.

Ministerial Meetings

- Next UfM meeting will focus on 'Regional Cooperation'.
- There are 42 representatives from UfM. Different Ministries from different countries.
- Mr Hahn will meet the other stakeholders from the private sector, civil society fellows and representatives from the chambers of commerce to talk about the outlook.

Dialogue with Irene Mingasson - Specific Areas of Concern Raised by Participants

➤ **Energy** is a rich cooperation area in the region and energy development in the region is very important. These countries represent opportunities on energy investments. It is a fact that energy efficiency creates enormous potential.

Irene Mingasson (IM): The EU puts emphasis on **policy coherence on energy efficiency**. Renewable energy and energy efficiency are the most important areas in our energy cooperation. Energy is a huge area of cooperation in the region and also bilaterally. It has to be coherent with the long-term sustainability programmes. Please seize the opportunities in this area. Dialogue and effort exist in EuroMed engaging with the other actor. The EU is engaging more and more in this context. We have policy dialogue and expertise sharing on projects. The programmes and projects are an open door to Civil Society and have space for actors in different areas. We can also have your advice.

➤ If the EU is really serious about **gender equality**, they should talk with CSOs like Nazra for Feminist Studies and Women Rights.

IM: The EU is a political institution. We are dealing with the Arab League and also UfM. **UfM is preparing a conference on women** to broaden the scope of invited organisations to bring in fresh ideas. We are not going to have strong language in the upcoming UfM meeting. We have Ministerial meetings on different topics, such as we held last year on Environment and Climate Change. We will do it step by step. Let's work on it.

➤ Collaboration for **protecting people with disabilities** and a set of rights for them in the region are very important. CSOs are expected to fill the space for this. Please take them into consideration as well.

IM: Collaboration for protecting disabled people is possible regionally or in the country. **You should provide us and our delegations with your suggestions**. Please continue to play your part and your voice will be heard.

➤ It is important to have **interaction with the Arab League**...we have to pursue our dialogue in this area.

IM: Interaction with the Arab League is possible and it is a win-win situation. Regional and International Cooperation Opportunities speed up reforms in the region and also in Turkey. They are becoming more democratic and reforms are on the way. **Civil Society should talk with the EU on these topics, in the presence of high-level officials, to promote CSOs engagement in the region on important issues**.

➤ Certain compromises have to be reached in EU-Region relations. The **European Commission and Member States** must be coordinated.

IM: We are trying to **be creative, practical**, and help you to be involved in dialogue and to interact. Capacity-building works. We would like to extend our dialogue to other partners. We want this forum to evolve. Tell us and give us ideas on what to do. We want to have ownership from your side.

"We should keep working, have more flexibility, have more tools. This meeting is important because we meet a lot of people from the other CSOs. CSO Participant"

IV. Concluding Session - Recommendations

Mustafa Haid focused on the high expectations created by this kind of event and often the disappointments resulting from them. Activists sometimes risk their lives to attend civil society events. However, there is little follow-up afterwards and their voice is still not being heard or understood.

Motivation and inspiration are an important part of this kind of process

He:

- encouraged CSO participants to remember that they are the actors of change;
- pledged the creation of a platform to bring the voices of Syrian CSOs together against crimes against humanity;
- called on the EU to act against violations of human rights and to be consistent in its messages;
- highlighted the need to make accountability an important part of the Syrian transition process;
- stressed the need for a special crisis-oriented programme developed by the EU and targeting the MENA region with financial and non-financial support to CSOs.

The following recommendations resulting from each workshop
were presented at the closing session of the Forum.

Workshops – Recommendations put forward

I. MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

Moderator: Samir Aita

Recommendations

1. Call on EU/EC to **respect the rights of mobility and asylum seekers**, in particular UN Convention 1951, 1990, European Human Rights Convention and ILO conventions 97 and 143. Create a mechanism with south CSOs to follow up and monitor the implementation of the above.

2. Act to **facilitate mobility and visa mechanism for the south populations**, including programmes for education, especially, but not limited to, undergraduate and programmes for circular migration, with focus on women and youth.

Some specific suggestions around this topic:

- Include abolition of short-term visas as part of the key recommendations;
- Change to 'create a mechanism to assure right to education';
- Increase the number of Scholarships;
- Call on the EU to stop the policies of 'hotspots' and 'take back to the border' and replace them with policies of encouragement to return.

3. **Revise Dublin Convention** to respect refugees' choice, providing mechanisms, with local regional authorities, for equitable distribution of refugees between European regions. Special focus should be made on education and family reunification.

4. Create a mechanism with the help of CSOs giving **refugees the right to organise themselves** and to have a voice in the policy-making process.

5. **Combat human trafficking and forced labour**, and protect victims, especially women, children and marginalised groups through the creation of a mechanism/structure to combat people trafficking.

6. Clarify European policies towards the southern countries, concerning South – South migrants and refugees. Act to combat child labour, female abuses and to ensure education and respect of labour rights, with proper monitoring mechanisms mentioned in point 1.

Other suggestions (sent by email or received during or after the session):

1. Create a mechanism for **social solidarity**.
2. Strengthen **multi-stakeholders' partnership** including, but not limited to, CSOs and LAs in the field of Migration forced or not and Mobility.
3. Financing: allocate **adequate budget** to Migration and Mobility; develop innovative tools for inclusive economic development in host countries for both migrants and host communities.
4. **Inform migrants** in their own language about their rights and threats.
5. Abolition of **short term visas**.

II. REDUCING INEQUALITIES

Moderator/Facilitator: **Ms Dareen Abulail (Med Youth – UNESCO) and Ms Mabel Grossi (SOLIDAR)**

Speaker: **Mr Christophe Masson (DG NEAR, CoTE Economic Governance)**

Christophe Masson, DG NEAR ([Centre of Thematic Expertise on Economic Governance](#), in charge of social policy and employment) described the policy framework for Southern Neighbourhood countries: (a) Association Agreements, (b) Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), (c) Financial Support, (d) Region marked by increasing political instability. He concluded by providing an insight into Aid schemes.

Specific Areas of Concern Identified by Participants

- To go for tools, not only policies, for working more on **convergence** between policies and research.
- To enhance local partnership and identify which social actors are in the field and what their needs are.
- Pay attention to **coherence** between different donors. An appeal to the institutions to set priorities with partners.
- **Youth** employment, ownership, inclusion, practice. Having innovative and inclusive proposals. It is important to ensure CS comes at an earlier stage when we talk about setting up programmes.
- **Disability** within sustainable development. It is important to look for ways to converge the issues disabled people face. Only 13% of people with a disability have access to work, but then do not receive social support. In addition, women with mental health problems are a subject to be addressed.
- Make sure that **monitoring tools** are true and effective feedback instruments for modifying programmes when needed and not routine procedures. People who have the information, have the power (CS aspire to the right to access information).
- **Time framework** for grants should be revised.

Recommendations

1. An important part of EU budget support discussions with governments, social partners and civil society should be focused on **establishing country programmes prioritising decent work and social protection**.
2. The EU should set up working groups involving different donors active in the countries to **coordinate and harmonise programmes and funding** (with Civil Society participation).
3. Adopt a **code of conduct for partnerships** based on binding rights-based accountability mechanisms.
4. **Support economic empowerment, inclusive growth and social inclusion** by:
 - a. Taking into consideration SDG 10 indicators in the 2030 Agenda.
 - b. Focusing on NEETS, disability, children, minorities, refugees, displaced – gender perspective.
 - c. Supporting social economy actors (cooperatives, social enterprises, inclusive financing, SMEs, etc.).
5. **Ensure CSOs' participation** in implementation, monitoring public policies and funds allocated through budget support to governments to implement public policies.

III. CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

Moderator: Anne-Sophie Schaeffer, Programme Director, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Foundation

Recommendations

1. The **European Parliament should play a watchdog role**, together with the independent civil society from the region - including local human rights, youth, women and media NGOs - to monitor and assess that the implementation of the human rights conditionality principle is ensured under the framework of the EU partnership agreements with the Southern-Mediterranean governments and that proper impact assessments are conducted prior to the conclusion, renewal and signing of trade agreements or other bilateral agreements.
2. **Independent civil society** - including those working in remote areas - should be an important driver for the establishment and monitoring of both a national and a regional mechanism for dialogue between governments/EU/civil society on legislation and measures that relate to the space for civil society, including anti-terror legislation. Governments should not be a part of this dialogue if the civil society space is closed.
3. **Increase, diversify and simplify access to sustainable core funding** to independent civil society organisations from the South, notably through programme-based or operating grants, the conclusion of Framework Partnership Agreements or other innovative schemes and, in general, more direct funding to civil society organisations based in the South.
4. Review pledges and yearly budget allocations, and **scale up the support to Human Rights Defenders** from the South-Mediterranean region (including independent journalists who support civil society) notably those who are at risk and working in the most difficult situations as a result of the closing down of civil society space in the countries in the region.

Other suggestions presented during the closing session:

- Civil society organisations should be able to receive direct funding from the EU without tenders as intermediaries.
- This annual forum should become a space for human rights defenders (HRDs) to speak out and make their voices heard. The EU should therefore make sure that they are invited, even if they are often banned from travelling and may not be able to attend these meetings.

IV. YOUTH & WOMEN'S VOICES

Moderator/Facilitator: Ms Basma Al Nabulsi (EU Delegation to Jordan, Focal point on Civil Society)

Speakers: Ms Serena Romano (Gender Expert)
Mr Hatem Atallah (Executive Director, Anna Lindh Foundation)

EU development projects are designed with good intentions, they aim to help people access basic services, then aim to strengthen political engagement and they certainly have a big objective in reducing disparities. But in most cases, we have many missed opportunities to design even better programmes because we collectively tend to fail to consider the culture and needs of all people, and usually those are the marginalised groups (Women and Youth).

It is very common as preconceived notions of what girls and women need are usually not context-specific, not factual and not consultative nor inclusive.

Mr Atallah, from the Anna Lindh Foundation, mentioned the **importance of providing sustainable Youth participation, and creating an alternative to extremist narrative, for youth radicalisation.**

In her speech, Ms Serena Romano addressed the following facts, highlighting the **cross-cutting nature of women issues:**

- **Mobility and migration**, women are invisible as migrants. Women travelling are subject to human trafficking and sexual abuse.
- Mainstreaming gender in **employment**. MENA region has the lowest rate of female participation. In order to act, list jobs where women are unable to work and lobby for it.
- **Welfare, pension schemes, maternity laws**. Women should be treated as autonomous and independent.
- **Women suffer from insufficient information**. Better information systems, more transparent procedures.
- Important to seek ways to allow women to **work without having to seek their husbands' permission**.
- **In politics**, candidacy of women and the organisation of parties and women's networks. It is important to have quotas, special temporary measures and support of CS for more networks and participatory democracy. Women elected are being accountable. Quotas upset the system.
- Working together and including women is important for society.

Recommendations

Youth

1. **Remove barriers that restrict mobility** for employment, education, cultural exchanges.
2. **Develop formal and informal education** systems in the region to adopt new and modern techniques.
3. **Support youth entrepreneurship**, vocation training and soft skills programmes.
4. **Continue supporting leadership**, dialogue (critical evidence based dialogue), new media exchanges programmes that promote youth inclusion in policy making and prevent extremism in urban and rural areas.
5. Design **programmes that are context-specific**.
6. Supporting Youth in facing **climate change** in the South region and supporting a peaceful approach in **counter radicalism**.

Gender

1. **Develop the institutional culture**, concepts and messages to be gender-sensitive. Encourage networking and cooperation amongst women and girls (at national & regional levels) for exchanges, exposure, best practice and lessons learnt, coordinated responses to gender equality.
2. Assess and design actions that would **create an enabling environment** that is context-specific and looks at all ages groups.
3. **Foster legal literacy** amongst women in Southern regional societies.
4. **Empower communities** to drive the design of an action plan, and the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SFGs.
5. **Encourage innovation of women's initiatives** that enhance and increase women's and girls' voices and economic participation.
6. Working with the **Security Council Resolution 1325**, on women and peace and security that 'reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction, and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.'

V. PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

Moderator: **Ms Beatriz Porres, Head of Unit for External Relations, European Economic and Social Committee**

Speakers: Ms Neta Kenneth, NET-MED Youth - Israel; Mr Sadok Ben Hadj Hassine, UGTT – Tunisia

Ms Neta Kenneth, from NET-MED Youth, stressed the importance of **creating a space for youth in the political arena**:

- It is important to give youth the chance to affect public policy, as youth have unique needs that other age groups do not. It is important to implement policy that can successfully deal with these needs. **Investing in Youth will ensure that society functions better in the future.**
- The EU should therefore support youth in these four dimensions:
 - Change in attitude: youth need the encouragement to think about themselves as a political interest group and to believe that they have the power to affect their country.
 - Diversity: Young people from different backgrounds face different challenges (Men vs. Women, young people from different regions or different religious backgrounds). It is important to give youth from all layers of society a voice.
 - Capacity-building: youth need to understand how public policy works, and also to be able to understand and use the terminology that government organisations use.
 - Creating an ongoing connection: youth cannot meet with policy makers just once. There has to be a continuing connection that allows for a process with feedback along the way.

Mr Sadok Ben Hadj Hassine, from UGTT – Tunisia, described the situation in his country:

- The revolution brought about a new wave of active dynamism within civil society witnessed by the fact that the number of Civil Society Organisations in Tunisia increased from 3 000 to 18 000.
- Since 2011, a deep sense of solidarity and participation has been perceived between civil society actors when taking initiatives and establishing consultations to promote citizen-based governance. This **sense of solidarity** was coupled with a **greater networking** that helped CSOs to organise themselves in the areas where they need support and to **mobilise citizens, not only from the cities, but also from the most remote areas of the country**.
- Civil society in Tunisia has so far been very proactive and committed to making people's voices heard at both the urban and rural levels. These efforts have been crucial to pass on the right message when advocating for proper policy reforms.
- When the constitution was approved in 2014, **civil society in Tunisia played a key role** in developing proposals, based on regular consultations with the authorities, to build up effective democratic structures tasked with bringing about a sustainable development of our society.
- **Civil society consultation in Tunisia remains at a primary level.** The EU should support the establishment of a civil society consultative body to play the watchdog role to monitor the observance of good governance principles and the proper implementation of the new Constitution. The members of this body should be selected based on the following criteria: neutrality, inclusiveness, integrity, transparency, independence, expertise, representativeness and a sense of responsibility.

Recommendations

1. The EU's solution to involving civil society in public life was the setting up of **civil society institutions with a compulsory consultation role in the legislative process**. The EESC is also fostering the setting up of such institutions in the southern countries of the Mediterranean: in Tunisia, where it is already provided for in the new Constitution, but also in Israel, where the existing network is not officially recognised, or in Palestine, where it is provided for in a draft law.
2. While **Artists and cultural operators are an important component of civil society** and play an essential role in promoting democratic practices and integration, they are still absent from the civil society discourse. The EU should support this category of civil society better through capacity-building programmes on advocacy, entrepreneurship, partnership development and fundraising. **They should also be invited to this annual forum.**
3. Dialogue between Civil Society and authorities is an entry point to ensure participation in the public sphere. For example, in Turkey new **NGOs' platforms at local level** have been established as channels of communication with the city councils. Another positive example is civil society activism in Palestine that has recently managed to counteract political decisions on bad legislation such as the draft law on setting up a Council for the Media which was withdrawn, and the legislative proposal on social security which has been redrafted as a result of pressure from Civil Society. A third example is local CSO networks contributing to solving environmental problems.
4. Based on the Tunisian example, **South-South networks should be created for each sector of interest** (e.g.: trade unions, environmentalists, etc.) to exchange best practice. An example is the recently created Arab Trade Union Network.
5. Measuring the representativeness of CSOs is not an easy task. The proliferation of thousands of NGOs does not facilitate a proper dialogue or the identification of best practice that deserve support by international donors. CSOs should organise themselves to establish a **rotation-based representative mechanism for structured consultation** with donors and authorities.
6. Awareness-raising among governments and international institutions on the need to consult and involve CSOs is much needed: OECD guidelines for public administration, for instance, do not mention civil society at all.
7. Following the model of the Code of Practice of the Council of Europe, CSOs should also develop and follow their own **code of conduct** based on best practice to include citizens in decision-making. NGOs should also be more transparent when it comes to financing models.
8. Proper mechanisms should be implemented for **diaspora communities** abroad to be heard.
9. Old and well-established NGOs and newly-established NGOs need to set up **regular dialogue for mutual recognition** and knowledge sharing.
10. **Financial transparency** should also be a must within the CSOs themselves.

VI. CSO CAPACITY-BUILDING

Moderator: Gaby Hagmüller (European Commission, DG NEAR, Centre of thematic expertise on CS)

Speakers: Ahmed Al Damrawy (Team Leader, Civil Society Facility South),

Patrice Lenormand (EC, EuropeAid, Unit Civil Society and Local Authorities)

Patrice Lenormand highlighted EuropeAid's priorities on civil society, focusing on the necessity to work with civil society as an actor of governance and the need to support CS participation in public life, as well to create an enabling environment for CS. He presented the **European Commission's instruments**: European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and Civil Society instrument. He highlighted the issue of sustainability in the civil society sector, the need for capacity-building for civil society and the capacity absorption problem that exists in many Southern countries.

Lenormand stressed the necessity of **long-term partnerships between the EU and CS, focused on capacity-building and the need to agree on some common objectives**. He also raised the questions of **project sustainability and how to ensure capacity-building in the supported projects**. Moreover, he argued for the necessity to work with big organisations that would be able to redirect the funds to smaller ones.

Ahmed Al Damrawy (Civil Society Facility South) presented the [Civil Society Facility South](#) and its main objectives, such as support for capacity-building, covering governing aspects, advocacy, lobbying and support for civil society organisations. The instrument is also focused on supporting youth leadership and youth involvement in the civil society. He presented the main results, but also highlighted the challenges, such as **issues of mobility, sustainability and multiple consultation dialogues**.

Recommendations

1. Need for **360-degree capacity-building** (top-down, down-top, peer to peer; but also north – south, south-south, south-north); Necessity to focus capacity areas and knowledge transfer in specific areas.
2. Involvement of private sector to create **CSO financial sustainability**, so the CS is not dependant on external funding.
3. **Involve civil society in monitoring** sectorial policies and EU programmes.
4. Encourage **civil society coalitions** and make them eligible to receive EU funding.
5. Focus on **empowerment** rather than training.
6. Foster **long-term partnerships** between Donors (EU) and civil society and between civil society organisations.
7. **Consult CS on priorities** of CS support programmes. Conduct needs assessments; monitoring and evaluation together with CS on the ground in order to assure sustainability and relevance of the programmes.
8. **Tailor-made capacity-building** to countries in emerging situations.
9. There is a **need for a mechanism** to create a pool of skills exchange between Maghreb countries.
10. Use **evaluation reports** of capacity-building programmes to draw lessons learned.

VII. COUNTER RADICALISATION

Moderator: Alvaro Alcalde Fàbregas, NOVACT

Speaker: Souria Saad Zoy, UNESCO

Ms Saad Zoy called on the audience: *'this is an opportunity to learn from you (participants of the South regions). It is important to address governments and institutions and not only the public.'*

She called for a framework for action:

- The need for a holistic approach, a global policy for violence prevention.
- Contextualisation is a key word.
- On the spot research – work hand in hand, governments with civil society.
- A counter narrative is also very important.
- There is online radicalisation which it is also very important to consider and face.
- Young people have to be kept at the centre of attention, with instruments to counter extreme violence.
- And it is essential to have citizens' participation.

Specific Areas of Concern Identified by Participants

- The need to stop branding Islam.
- There is a need for initiatives. Prevention of violence requires policies.
- Be aware of 'state terrorism' that leads to what we have today (for example in Syria). We need to prevent these regimes from acting with impunity.
- Tips for counter terrorism strategy:
 - Addressing sources of grievances (fighting poverty, unemployment, etc.).
 - Education, culture and educational institutes promote positive behavioural standards.
 - Gender empowerment and emancipation.
 - Religion can work positively, condemning violence, spreading messages of peace.
 - Disengagement programmes, in prisons, schools, communities.
 - Working with people in groups or individually.
 - Legal and justice framework, legislation and effective court application.

Recommendations

1. Building a culture of closeness through education and media.
2. Diffusing the tools extremists use to counter extremism, by holding workshops on how to deal with it.
3. Let's not forget about children, the situation is discouraging, but it could be improved. It is still hard because children are not a priority.
4. Re-activating UNESCO clubs in universities. Working on social media with messages against terrorism, counter mainstream media, raising critical thinking amongst people, taking decisions on what the priorities are.
5. Developing observatories.

VIII. SECURITY AND STABILISATION

Moderator: Paul Gillespie, Irish Times

Speaker: Stéphane Halgand, EC/DG NEAR Centre of Thematic Expertise (CoTE) on Crisis Reaction and Security Sector Reform

M. Halgand (DG NEAR) first set the scene on the recent security issues affecting the region and then focused on the role Civil Society can play when addressing these challenges.

- There is no security and stabilisation without development. Today we face not only hard security challenges (failed States, stalled peace processes, terrorism, etc.), but also soft security challenges (energy, climate change, water scarcity, unemployment, etc.). The Union for the Mediterranean only tackles soft security challenges at the political and technical levels.
- In order to address the security issues in the region, the EU relies on different tools (European Neighbourhood Instrument, Europol, Member States, UN agencies), however coordination between them has been quite difficult.
- The EU has responded to both hard and soft security challenges through three initiatives:
 - a) The EU Global Strategy (<https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/strategic-review-european-union-changing-global-environment>), to be communicated in June 2016. It aims to increase the EU commitment to addressing the security situation in the Neighbourhood and beyond, by combining a short-term and a long-term approach.
 - b) The new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), whose main objective is to bring about stabilisation in the region by addressing the urgent and immediate challenges in the EU and the Neighbourhood, and to find new approaches to uphold the rule of law, democracy, human rights and gender balance.
 - c) The EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq and Against Da'esh, adopted in March 2015 (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/03/16-council-conclusions-eu-regional-strategy-for-syria-and-iraq-as-well-as-the-isil-daesh-threat/>). It aims at addressing the political root causes, mitigating humanitarian consequences (the Madad Trust Fund) and reducing the terrorism threat.
- As for the security sector reform (http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2016_eeas_001_cwp_security_sector_reform_en.pdf), the European Commission, jointly with EEAS, will soon release a statement on the new security strategy (border management, prison management, etc.). The new strategy will place greater emphasis on the role Civil Society can play in designing and implementing this policy. The EU will step up its cooperation in the Neighbourhood through more security projects that will prioritise human security above State security.
- He concluded by calling on the audience to suggest the role Civil Society can play in conflict prevention, peace building, especially in the case of failed states. He also invited the audience to suggest how the EU can reach out to new types of Civil Society actors focusing on security issues.

Recommendations

1. In the new EU Global Strategy, the EU should pay more attention to how to **avoid the 'diplomacy for development' approach** as it seems that this is the new form of conditionality when it comes to EU relations with the region.
2. The EU needs to support initiatives that **include the private sector** in the discussions on security reform.
3. A **concrete and transparent code of conduct** should be in place to hold those EU governments that support business activity in the field of weapons' production and trade accountable.
4. The EU needs to be **transparent** when it comes to relations with the region in order to lobby civil society organisations and activists to support the EU programmes on peace building and conflict resolution.
5. The EU needs to **improve coordination with other entities working on security issues**, such as the UN and other major donors within the context of the UN SG plan of action on peace and security.
6. More support should be given to **existing Civil Society** actors before the newly-established ones. Why support new actors if the existing ones do not have the necessary resources in the first place?
7. The EU should **work more closely with grassroots associations working on security** to influence public policies.
8. The EU should be **careful in addressing the soft challenges** when it comes to managing the issue of migration and mobility. When addressing soft challenges, the EU should make sure that its programmes benefit all socio-economic levels of society for an equal distribution of wealth.
9. While the EU is Egypt's main trading partner, the EU's support to citizenship rights and religious freedoms is very little (mass police violations and sectarian strife in Minya are examples of security challenges that the EU should be dealing with).

IX. SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYMENT

Moderator: **Maurice Claassens (Solidar)**

Speakers: **Tlili Mustapha (Director ITUC/Arab Region)**, **Dafne Mazo (SWITCH-Med)**, **Malin Elander Oggero (EC/DG NEAR)**

The Director of ITUC highlighted the main challenges regarding unemployment in the MENA region, such as the employment crisis, especially the youth employment crisis. Youth unemployment leads to immigration and a rise in extremism and young people joining extremist organisations. There is no reliable body to track the statistics. He argued that the **main challenges are poor governance, no investment that would be commensurate to the need of the employment, no fair tax policy and the banking system**. He argued that the same policies are in place that led to the employment crisis in 2012 and that there is a need to reform them.

- CSOs should advocate for new policies that would allow **jobs to be created**.
- **Social policy** should be included higher up the list of economic priorities.
- There is a need to **involve young people in policy making**, so that they feel part of society.
- Social economy is easy to set up and there is a **need for civil society and trade unions to cooperate** and come together with a common programme.

Dafne Mazo presented the [SWITCH-Med regional programme](#) (EU funded), based on sustainable development in the Mediterranean area. They **work with industries to ensure that programmes support entrepreneurs and green entrepreneurs**. **There is a growing interest in the targeted countries**. The objective is to integrate green growth into the business-as-usual model and to build the capacity of civil society to participate in programmes aimed at promoting energy efficiency, agriculture and waste management.

Malin Elander Oggero highlighted the importance of the ENP review, where the main political priority is how the EU can create stabilisation in the region (political, economic and security). She presented how DG NEAR implements its Private Sector approach, which is based on four levels so that the EU support is comprehensive:

- Policy level – economic integration through trade and regional cooperation;
- Macro level – contributing to an enabling environment through policy reforms (for Private sector and the investment framework);
- Meso level – institutional capacity-building and business cooperation;
- Micro level – micro and SMEs through access to finances.

The EU will also launch the [EU Initiative for Financial Inclusion](#) to support access in the Mediterranean: financial instruments for SMEs finance, advisory services and other means of access to finance.

Recommendations

1. **Re-discuss the role of labour unions**, which can play an important role in responding to challenges in the labour market.
2. Support to SMEs should be tracked, especially whether the credits really reach the people. There is a **need for more transparency and monitoring** regarding financial operations.
3. **Increase social dialogue between civil society and governmental institutions** in order to tackle unemployment.
4. The policies on tackling unemployment need to be accompanied by **policies neutralising radicalisation**. Terrorism is not just a problem of the unemployed, it is a problem of good governance and democracy, which needs to be addressed in order to tackle extremism.
5. EC should **focus on creating sources of revenue**, rather than just creating jobs. Social and solidarity-based economy is not receiving enough attention.
6. Adopt a holistic approach and **include disabled people**, as disabled people also do not have access to education. Need to help companies and civil society to set up inclusive organisations. There is a need to revise the educational framework so that disabled people are included in the programme.
7. Support **trade union reform** in some countries so that they are independent from the Government.
8. **Strengthen economic integration** in the region.
9. **Support the development of local economic initiatives**, led by regional and local authorities. This will assure their sustainability and empowerment.
10. Pay attention to the momentum of **demographic transition**: need to **respond to the context of the growing number of youth** as soon as possible.
11. **Labour unions need to advocate for the freedom of association and the freedom of expression** by joining human rights organisations and other CSOs on these issues.
12. Regarding the **economic transition**, labour unions can provide their members and workers with scaling-up training programmes to cope with the rapid changes in the labour market. Rehabilitation and reintegration of current labour forces are necessary for the privatised labour market. On the other hand, labour unions can use their facilities as training institutes for youth employability actions.

CONCLUSIONS

of the CS Forum Neighbourhood South... and Looking Ahead

By *Olivier Consolo*, CS Expert (based on exchanges/groundwork made in the preparatory meetings in Jordan and the CS Forum in Brussels)

Achievements

2016 is an important milestone in this 4-year process. The current dialogue process between EU institutions, Civil Society from the South Mediterranean region and Europe, local and national authorities and other stakeholders has attained the following achievements in 2016:

- The European Union institutional leadership has re-stated its commitment to maintain and develop the EU commitment to this multi-stakeholder dialogue framework.
- Civil Society from the South Mediterranean Region has confirmed its own commitment to the process while firmly requesting higher autonomy, on the one hand, in organising and facilitating CSO participation at regional level and, on the other hand, in co-building with EU institutions the framework and the agenda of the dialogue.
- This initiative has demonstrated its value over the recent period by allowing Civil Society to alert the EU of the current risks and trends of undermining or postponing the priority agenda of democratisation, human rights and sustainable development in the current context characterised by new conflicts in the south Mediterranean region, by an increasing level of mobility and migration between the two regions and by the threat of terrorism in the two regions.
- This dialogue offers opportunities for civil society from the Southern Mediterranean region to meet and exchange at regional level in a safe and open environment. This aspect is particularly important and welcomed in the current context of shrinking space for Civil Society at national level in almost all countries from the region.
- The current process aims at complementing and building coherence and joint visions with the other ongoing initiatives which exist between the EU and CSOs from the two shores of the region.

Looking ahead

- **This dialogue should lead to improving coherence and a joint vision on the partnership between the EU and the countries from the Southern Mediterranean Region:** at EU level (several institutions engaging in the process), at CSOs level (high diversity of actors) and country level (local and national authorities).
- The quality and relevance of international partnerships involving comprehensive approaches including: political dialogue, trade relations, respect of international standards such as human rights, development cooperation, investments framework, mobility, cultural and academy cooperation, tourism, stability and security issues, environment, etc. This dialogue process should allow the different stakeholders to bring those different topics into the discussion in an open way, **while pursuing greater policy coherence for development (PCD) which is a Lisbon Treaty provision applying to all EU external relations.**

- The voices of Women and Youth have been at the core of the process since 2012. **It remains a high priority to identify and incorporate more organisations and leaders representing women and youth constituencies.** As a result, both Women and Youth organisations should be better represented in the governance of the Dialogue itself.
- **The protection of Human Rights Defenders, the role of independent journalists and media, the processes of democratisation, as well as the attention to citizen-driven initiatives should form the backbone of the dialogue between the two regions.** None of those aspects should be undermined or postponed because of other 'political' or 'commercial' priorities.
- **To maximise the potential of such dialogue, it is urgent to link (in a more structured way) this initiative to other existing dialogues between the EU and CSOs from the region** with the Policy Forum for Development (facilitated by EuropeAid at global level), the Human Rights Forum, or the CSO mechanism led by DG Trade on trade negotiations.
- **More coherence is needed between this dialogue and the ongoing dialogue with CSOs from the region and EU Delegations.** EU Roadmaps for engagement with civil society provide guidance and tools to EU delegations in engaging with Civil Society at national level.
- **Civil Society from the region has shown an interest in capitalising on the existing capacities and resources allocated to this process for engaging in dialogue with other institutions present in the region,** such as the United Nations or international financial institutions (World Bank, regional development banks or International Monetary Fund), the African Union or the League of Arab States.
- **The current phase of EU programming of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) provides the opportunity to openly and constructively assess the ways in which the EU is supporting Capacity Building for Civil Society in the South Mediterranean region.** There are expectations from CSOs to adapt the existing mechanisms and approaches.