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The Mediterranean: A Space of Division, Disparity and Separation

Daniela Huber, **Asma Nouira** and **Maria Cristina Paciello**

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Abstract

The Mediterranean is perceived by Southern stakeholders as a space of division, disparity and separation, performed into being through European depoliticizing, securitizing and technocratic practices in the spheres of politics, economics/development and migration. This imaginary holds up a mirror to the EU's boundary-drawing exercise and production of the "ideal European self against its imperfect Southern Mediterranean others" (Cebeci and Schumacher 2017: 22). In contrast to the EU's self-production, it is no longer externally perceived as a model; other models are emerging (Tunisia, Turkey, Russia) but do not yet represent an alternative. EU policies are seen as ineffective, mainly due to problems in EU visibility, coherence and a substantial gap between expectations in the South and actual EU output.

Introduction

When the MEDRESET consortium last met in Beirut in June 2018, with all researchers presenting the results of their stakeholder consultations in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia, Egypt and Europe, a member of our Advisory Board who has worked on Euro-Mediterranean relations in practice for many years asked us what was really new about our results. Have we not been discussing the same themes since the 1990s? Did we not always know this? The answer of this report to his crucial question is three-fold:

- Firstly, we agree. Many of the things which research has pointed out to policy-makers over the past three decades are identified as pressing issues also in this report: the EU continues to work with authoritarian regimes and thereby becomes complicit in the denial of democracy and human rights to citizens of the Southern Mediterranean; it continues to promote a development model which has not been able to provide for the daily needs of people in the South; and it continues to securitize migration and other issues at an accelerating pace. However, if policy does not change even though European research has presented it with an almost consensual assessment of what is going wrong, we need to continue to point out the same problems.
- Secondly, we disagree. There is a new quality of urgency in Euro-Mediterranean relations. This report shows the increasingly looming presence of a sharp sense of separation, division and disparity. Thus, the urgency for the EU to press the reset button in Euro-Mediterranean relations is imperative – at a time when the EU seems to be caught so deeply in domestic problems that such a response becomes increasingly unlikely.

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- Thirdly, we "beg to differ". While much of the literature on Euro-Mediterranean relations has assessed the EU alongside its own standards, we are assessing the EU alongside standards set by stakeholders from all sides of the Mediterranean. The results are different, since they expose EU policies more clearly alongside their securitizing, depoliticizing and technocratic dimensions.

This report is structured as follows. We will first present the non-Eurocentric methodology on which research for this report has been based. We will then investigate how the Mediterranean space has been framed by the stakeholders on all sides of the Mediterranean, comparing them alongside North–South, civil society–institutions and gender dimensions. The perceived role of EU practices in creating a divided, separate and disparate Mediterranean space through securitizing, depoliticizing, and technocratic practices is examined in the third part of the report. We then move to investigating alternative models in the Mediterranean which stakeholders have raised, as well as EU ineffectiveness in terms of the EU's (in)visibility, incoherence between the policies of the EU and those of its member states, and the enormous gap between local expectations and the EU's actual output. Finally, we also explore our results in terms of their impact on gender, and conclude with policy recommendations put forward by the stakeholders regarding substance, actors and instruments.

1. METHODOLOGY

As is already elaborated elsewhere in detail (Huber and Paciello 2016, 2018) MEDRESET's overall methodology is based on a non-Eurocentric approach with the aim to move against the marginalization of local perspectives. To achieve this, we proceeded in the following way in Work Package 4. In a first step, the work package leaders (the authors of this report) wrote a concept paper (Huber et al. 2017) as well as an initial open questionnaire that served as the basis for a first round of semi-structured interviews with 83 stakeholders in Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia (not in Egypt due to the restrictive political situation). These stakeholders included representatives of youth organizations; organizations working on economic, political and social rights; women's, minority, identity (Amazigh) and migrant rights; rural development organizations; new social movements; student movements; Islamic organizations (non-political); unemployment organizations; trade unions and syndicates; and in some cases also institutions (Tunisia). Except for Lebanon, the interviews were gender *un*balanced, being over-representative of men (see Table 1 and Figure 1 below for concrete numbers). As Khalid Mouna highlights, the "field work confronted a difficulty with gender balance, because of the omnipresence of men in the structures chosen for our field work" (Mouna 2018: 3). In other instances, interviewers told us that men responded more to requests for interviews than women. We speculate that this might be related to the fact that working women often have to handle double burdens of formal and informal (family care) labour, and have therefore less time to spend on additional interviews.

Based on these interviews, we wrote a first, unpublished report on the key findings which highlighted several hypotheses and what we at first perceived as contradictions. This report was presented and discussed in a workshop of the MEDRESET consortium in Meknes in December 2017. Following this, the authors of this report formulated a more rigid questionnaire for the second round of stakeholder consultations which was conducted with 23 selected interviewees from the first round in Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, and 2 interviewees in Egypt

(again highly gender unbalanced in the case of Tunisia, less in Morocco, Lebanon and Egypt), as well as with 21 stakeholders in Europe (slightly gender unbalanced). These stakeholders in Europe included representatives of European institutions (the European External Action Service and the European Commission), of EU-financed organizations working in the neighbourhood in general or in the Mediterranean specifically, and of independent European, transnational or international organizations which work on various issues (conflict resolution, human rights, socio-economic development, labour rights) in the Mediterranean as well as in other world regions. They represent a European/transnational "expert community" on the issues dealt with in this report (in the sense that they are not representative of European public opinions and in the sense that they deal with Mediterranean issues in their daily work). Furthermore, since we only interviewed 2 representatives of the Egyptian human rights community in the framework of Work Package 4, in this report we also relied on the Egyptian elite survey report from Work Package 3 which is based on 31 interviews (16 men, 12 women, 3 unspecified) with policy-makers, activists, artists, journalists, designers, business and banking professionals, start-up sector professionals, humanitarians and academics (ASI-REM forthcoming).

It is worth mentioning that the interviewed women mostly came from non-institutional organizations, particularly human rights and women's human rights organizations. This can be explained by the fact that, in these countries as in the rest of the Euro-Mediterranean region, women still tend to be highly underrepresented in decision-making positions, political parties and trade unions, while human rights organizations are likely to be more women-friendly. Regarding the European stakeholder report, as in the local consultations, the female stakeholders mostly came from human rights organizations (6), while 2 were from European Union institutions and 1 from a Euro-Mediterranean institution. In the case of the elite survey on Egypt, women were from an academic background.

Table 1 | Gender composition of the interviewed stakeholders in the first and second rounds

	First round		Second round		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Tunisia	16	8	7	1	32
Morocco	14	3	5	3	25
Lebanon	10	11	4	3	28
Egypt	/	/	1	1	2
Europe	/	/	12	9	21
Sum	52	31	29	17	**108**

These recursive rounds of stakeholder consultations were the basis for five stakeholder reports on Lebanon (Goulordava 2018), Morocco (Mouna 2018), Tunisia (Nouria and Redissi 2018), Egypt (Moonrises and Zenzzi 2018) and Europe (Huber and Paciello 2018). These reports were discussed in an academic workshop which also included civil society stakeholders in Beirut in June 2018. Led by the authors of the three forthcoming policy reports in Work Package 8, we agreed on an analytical grid which serves as the basis of analysis for the five stakeholder reports in the framework of this final policy report. It is tailored to examine (1) the effectiveness and potential of EU policies, (2) the gender dimension of all issues researched and (3) main themes which came across in the interviews and will flow into the project's infographics.

Furthermore, this report also contextualizes the findings by comparing them to the findings of other major European-funded research projects which included interviews or surveys (notably POWER2YOUTH,[2] Arab Transformations,[3] MENARA[4]), as well as the IEMed Surveys of Experts and Actors on Euro-Mediterranean Relations.[5]

Figure 1 | Gender composition of the interviewed stakeholders
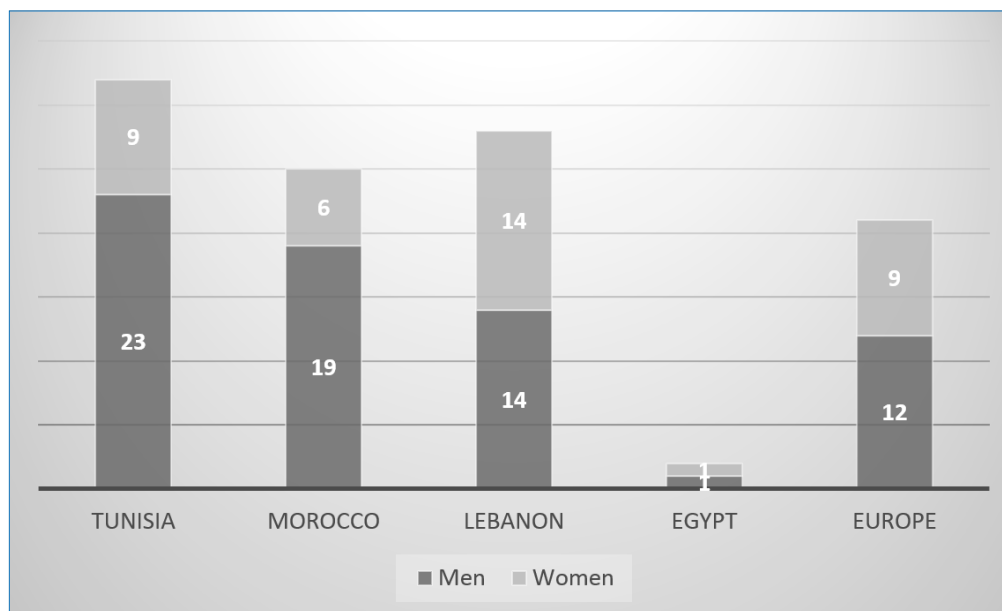
It should be noted that this methodology includes an array of "subject positions": of the authors of the questionnaires and papers, the interviewees and interviewers, and the participants in the workshop from all shores of the Mediterranean. With our methodology we aimed specifically at having concepts, questionnaires and final reports being written by a Northern and Southern partner together to force them/us to combine their subject positions. Interviews were conducted by "insiders" (i.e., the interviews in Morocco by our Moroccan partner, the interviews in Tunisia by our Tunisian partner, the interviews in Europe by our European partner, and so on) on the premise that interviewees would perhaps express their subject positions more freely with a local partner while being reminded that their audience will be Euro-Mediterranean. We specifically asked at the beginning of the interview for the interviewee to speak to us in terms of her/his role as a representative of the organization/institution/ movement, etc. However, interviewees tended to revert to the "I"-form during the interviews, which we interpret as formulating a subject position which includes not only the interviewee's role in the organization, but also her/his own life history, experiences, worldview, etc. In other words, it includes a layered and multidimensional position – which, however, we did not take account of as the interviews did not include questions in this respect. Thus, we might have neglected some complexity here.

2   See POWER2YOUTH publications: http://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/lista/all/power2youth-papers.
3   See ArabTrans Project publications: http://www.arabtrans.eu/publications-and-reports-.
4   See MENARA publications: http://www.menaraproject.eu/publications.
5   See IEMed Surveys of Experts and Actors: http://www.iemed.org/euromedsurvey.

Furthermore, while the inductive and recursive methodology of this project tries to be as "agnostic" as possible, authors of papers can act more like gatekeepers than interviewees can, as in the process of interpretation they necessarily need to highlight or filter out information. However, we tried to adopt a reflexive position whereby through the interviews, reading various reports and discussions during the workshops and conferences, our subject positions were also influenced. Throughout this report, we seek to give as much voice and space as possible to the interviewees. The anchor of analysis was the data obtained in the interviews. We did contextualize these data by also analysing publications of these organizations, but this was not the focus of analysis.

The following observations regarding this methodology and subject positions seem crucial for us to share with the reader before going into the analytical part. Firstly, while we felt after the first round of interviews that we faced several contradictions, through the second round of interviews we had the chance to clarify these. What we perceived as a picture of contradictions after the first round became one of complexity after the second round. This is most likely related to our methodology and how it influences subject positions of all interviewees, interviewers and authors involved. While the first round of interviews were rather open even though they took place "under the larger shadow" of Euro-Mediterranean relations, in the second round participants were forced to react to another position we presented to them. This had the effect of channelling discussion and crystallizing positions.

Secondly, we experienced that the reversal of the usually Eurocentric methodology – whereby we invited EU-level stakeholders to react and position themselves with reference to structured inputs coming from Mediterranean partners – in some cases resulted in rather emotional responses of institutional stakeholders who reacted to what they perhaps perceived as a highly critical interview grid to which they had to respond. One of them stated, for example, that he was "surprised" – a clear indication that institutional stakeholders rarely experience a situation in which they need to react to such clear positions of outright critique from the South Mediterranean. Nonetheless, no institutional representative refused to speak with us and all were open to engage on the issues and questions we presented to them. Tendentiously, we found younger institutional interviewees to be more reflexive on the EU's policy (for example questioning the socio-economic dimension) than older ones.

Thirdly, as for women and their subject positions, they did tend to raise gender issues spontaneously (and this applies to all interviewees, not only those from women rights organizations). This is reflected in the fact that the Lebanon report, which is based on a very balanced representation of gender, includes much more detail on gender issues than any of the other reports. For the European stakeholder report, while civil society interviewees highlighted gender issues when asked about key issues in the Mediterranean, institutional representatives – except for one institutional representative who works specifically on gender issues – only referred to them when asked about these issues. Civil society groups see gender issues as crucial (Huber and Paciello 2018: 6).

Yet, while women appeared to be more available to discuss gender issues, they extensively elaborated on broader political and economic questions, showing a critical position vis-à-vis their governments and EU policies. Unfortunately, given the gender imbalance of the sample, it is very difficult to compare and draw conclusions on the differences between men and women in their responses.

2. The Mediterranean: A Space of Division, Disparity and Separation

In general, there is no hesitation to endorse a Mediterranean component of identity, as became distinctly clear in the interviews in Tunisia. Asma Nouira and Hamadi Redissi point out in their report that while the Tunisian–Mediterranean element was deleted from the constitutional draft, the "idea still inspires empathy". They found that while the interviewees made a natural link between Tunisian citizenship and Arab identity, they also highlighted concepts such as Tunisia's "multicultural background", support for "multi-citizenship" or the idea of being a "citizen of the world". However, in their interviews it also became clear that issues such as EU migration policy, the "hegemony imposed by the North on the South", as well as the Palestine question undermine a shared Mediterranean identity. "[W]e cannot speak of 'Mediterranean citizenship' as long as inequalities undermine the congruence" (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 10). Thus, we interpret these interviews in the direction that there is a willingness to adopt a Mediterranean identity but inequality prevented the interviewees from taking on that identity.

The concepts of *division*, *disparity* and *separation* are, indeed, the three key concepts that emerge as central in the interviews in Tunisia, Lebanon and Morocco to describe the Mediterranean space; the main *line of division, disparity, and separation runs between the North and South Mediterranean*. The North, as Karina Goulordava (2018: 7) highlights, is seen as "holding power and funds, with most of the trade coming from the north into the south, whereas movement of people is primarily from south to north". The primary division of the north Mediterranean versus the south is "reflected in power, trade, funds and movement" (Goulordava 2018: 7). Similarly, Khalid Mouna points out that interviewees in Morocco saw the Mediterranean as "primarily dedicated to countries of the north. The gap between countries south and north of the Mediterranean consolidates the image of a closed space for the former and an open one for the latter" (Mouna 2018: 12).

Division, disparity, and separation are evidenced in the spheres of politics, economics/ development, as well as migration. Regarding politics, Mouna highlights that the EU's longstanding and continuing support to authoritarian regimes of South Mediterranean countries contributes to that perception. He quotes one interviewee as saying that

> The real problem in countries of the south, from the point of view of countries of the north, is development, terrorism, violence and the economic crisis since 2008. Issues here are primarily related for us to the lack of education. […] Our youth are excluded from development and culture, and this is why they seek alternative solutions which are often an easy way out. The cause of this situation is primarily the support given by countries of the north to oppressive regimes in the south. The allegation is that the colonial era did not end politically in our countries. (Mouna 2018: 13)

As evident in this interview excerpt, the political and economic spheres cannot be separated in this respect. As Mouna points out, it appeared in the interviews that countries of the south are not seen as

> the masters of their own fate. The economic factor remains crucial, because countries of the north control the economies and wealth of countries of the south. This

dependence of southern economies on northern economies has a direct impact on the distribution of wealth. The peoples of the southern side of the Mediterranean are not consulted; no one asks them for their opinion on economic choices; political will is censored. The solution resides in democracy; it is the only way to give people the possibility to choose their fate. (Mouna 2018: 13)

Also in Tunisia, interviewees referred to dependence on international actors (particularly the EU and the International Monetary Fund) as a divisive issue, "at odds with national sovereignty and self-determining decisions" (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 14).

Finally, interviewees pointed out that with the Syrian refugee crisis "they have begun to see the Mediterranean differently, as a border", whereby Europe fails to provide safe passage and is blatantly seen as responsible for the deaths at sea of refugees and migrants. The Mediterranean is not seen as a "space that is open for easy travel and exchange" (Goulordava 2018: 7). Similarly, one Moroccan interviewee stated that "relationships between north and south are asymmetrical, and the EU profits from these relationships until today, it subcontracts its problems to countries of the south, as it is the case with migration" (Mouna 2018: 13).

This situation was also framed with the concept of neo-colonialism. As an interviewee in Lebanon pointed out, the "EU says that they are no longer colonial but the need to control the ex-colonies is there. […]. They have to […] detach from the colonial past" (Goulordava 2018: 9). The EU is here seen as amnesiac of its colonial past,[6] while the history of foreign intervention (by both Western and non-Western countries) made local interlocutors in Lebanon wary of outside participation, even though the EU was seen "as less culpable than other foreign powers" (Goulordava 2018: 14),[7] except in its handling of the refugee crisis.

Despite perceptions of a neo-colonial relationship and a memory of colonialism, actors do remain interested to engage with the EU, but on an equal footing. Two specific suggestions were presented in this respect. Firstly, the EU should take account of agency within the region and support it. An example is Tunisia and its actions and visions for peace and cooperation in the region (Parks and Bakır forthcoming). Secondly, the EU should abandon its amnesiac attitude to Europe's colonial past (for more on this, see policy recommendations).

European stakeholders framed the Mediterranean space differently. Huber and Paciello (2018) corroborate the findings of Cebeci (2017) that institutional stakeholders constructed the Mediterranean as a space crucial for EU interests, a dangerous space and a diverse geopolitical space. Huber and Paciello quote an interviewee who pointed out that building a Mediterranean space is difficult as there are currently "more and more divergences", and "shaky alliances and increasing instabilities" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 2). The sharp economic divide between the North and the South of the Mediterranean was addressed in the neutralizing frames of "trade balance" or "donor–recipient relationship" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 7). Virtually all institutional stakeholders rejected the point of view that the EU approach could be read as neo-colonial, with some arguing that this instead pertained to bilateral member state relations with Mediterranean countries. Institutional stakeholders pointed out that the EU has abandoned the notion of the

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6   This corroborates findings of Pace and Roccu (forthcoming).
7   This corroborates findings of the 2018 round of IEMed surveys (IEMed forthcoming).

"Mediterranean" since 2008 due to the failure of the Mediterranean project, instead adopting the terminology of "Southern neighbourhood" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 5). Explaining this failure, they argued that "the EU does not 'have the keys to change in its hands'" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 6) and that, instead, the region has "an attitude of getting stuck in conflicts, and having conflicts of all kinds prime over humanitarian and social challenges" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 3) or that in the region "there are generally more failures than success stories" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 6). This discursive move distances the EU and its member states from their own roles in the conflicts, as well as in the economic development in the region at large, as pointed out by European civil society stakeholders. They argued that the EU itself violates human rights in terms of its approach towards migration, and that it is "reluctant to use its economic weight to raise human rights issues. […] The EU is systematically underplaying its cards. […] [it] is not using tools at its disposal for political reasons" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 8).

In contrast to the European institutional imaginary of the Mediterranean, European civil society and grassroots actors are constructing the Mediterranean as a space in which all types of universal rights (civil, political and socio-economic rights; the rights of migrants and refugees; the rights of civilians under war and occupation; and the rights of women) are being violated; as a space that is economically, but not geopolitically or ideationally, dominated by the EU; and as one where civic space is shrinking and xenophobia, authoritarianism and "wall politics" are prevailing (Huber and Paciello 2018: 3). Bottom-up actors thus contest the institutional imaginary as they highlight that it is not only the Mediterranean space in which human security is in danger, the same also applies to the EU. Gendered violence, for example, was highlighted to exist on all sides of the Mediterranean, and civic space is also shrinking and authoritarian trends growing in some EU member states. Some of the European or transnational civil society stakeholders also highlighted economic asymmetries, with a few of them referring to the Euro-Mediterranean space as a neo-colonial space "par excellence", because it brings in Europe's North, but not North Africa's South, and because trade agreements are negotiated bilaterally between the EU as a bloc with single Southern countries that become in consequence "weak and with little bargaining power vis-à-vis the EU, making the relationship highly unfair/unequal" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 7).

As Huber and Paciello (2018) point out, these different approaches of European institutional and civil society stakeholders justify diverse policies. If it is not the Mediterranean as such which is dangerous but the practices of various actors in it which violate universal rights, then the policy response would need to place human rights and social justice upfront, rather than security and stability.

However, it should be noted that while European civil society stakeholders did raise disparity, they hardly raised the concepts of division or separation, which shows that civil society actors in the North and South clearly experience the Mediterranean space differently. European civil society representatives can travel relatively easily in most of the Mediterranean, whereas Southern civil society representatives cannot.

3. THE PERCEIVED ROLE OF EU PRACTICES IN CREATING A DIVIDED, SEPARATE AND DISPARATE MEDITERRANEAN SPACE

As pointed out in the previous section, the Mediterranean is perceived as a space of division, disparity and separation, and these features were evidenced in the spheres of politics, economics/development and migration. It is interesting to note that the perception of Southern stakeholders represents a mirror image to how the EU and member states have constructed the Mediterranean space. As Schumacher and Cebeci have pointed out, the "EU's discourse on the region can be read as a boundary-drawing exercise" which "produces and reproduces European and Southern Mediterranean identities and constructs the ideal European self against its imperfect Southern Mediterranean others" (Cebeci and Schumacher 2017: 2); in other words, the boundary the EU has drawn has arguably resulted in a perception of separation, disparity and division. This section inquires specifically into which EU practices have fostered this perception, arguing that it is EU *depoliticizing, securitizing and technocratic practices* towards *oppressive regimes, trade/development and migration* that are performing such a Mediterranean space into being. We also added a gender dimension to Table 2 below, which is elaborated in depth in the gender section of this report.

Table 2 | Examples of perceived depoliticizing, securitizing and technocratic practices

Sphere / Practice	Politics	Economics / Development	Migration	Gender
Depoliticizing	EU continues to support oppressive regimes rather than demands for locally rooted democracy	EU does not foster (or prevents) a development model which responds to social justice claims	EU seeks to keep migrants in recipient countries, but is not responsive to their needs	EU development model ignores socio-economic needs of women
Securitizing	EU prioritizes security, preventing migration, and counter-terrorism	Resilience as a strategy for stability (not development)	EU makes South its policeman	EU puts its own interest first
Technocratic	EU biased to work with pro-Western elites and professionalized civil society	Rather than following local needs, programmes respond to international trends and the need to foster trade liberalization	Everything is viewed through the migration lens	Check-box ticking approach

Regarding EU *depoliticizing practices* in the area of migration, many interviewees stated that EU policies "were discriminatory towards certain people in the region and were generally engineered to be more beneficial towards the EU and its individual member states" (Goulordava 2018: 8–9), specifically when it comes to the Syrian refugee crisis. One female interviewee

pointed out, for example, that

> they think to keep migrants in this country, and [so that they do] not go to the EU, they need to pump money here. [...] [This policy] is trying to more deeply entrench global inequality. Keep refugees in Lebanon but in liveable yet bad conditions but not in a way that they will leave. Their response has been to raise the standard of living but not tackle the reasons why the standard of living is so low. This is through education, network with local actors. (Goulordava 2018: 9)

This perception was confirmed by European civil society stakeholders, who also pointed out that "oligarchies in the South are allying with the EU and are using migration as an instrument" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 7). Regarding the EU's policy towards oppressive regimes, as already became evident in the section on the Mediterranean at large, there is a general perception, among both men and women, that the EU continues to support such regimes, instead of a locally rooted democracy.

> Just by looking at what happened in Morocco at the time of the *Hirak* in the Rif. It is a problem due to the lack of democracy, a true democracy rooted in politics, economy and culture at the same time. [...] We saw that Europe did not budge. Europe supports our oppressive regimes because it wants to protect its interests; it considers the stability of these regimes as more important than democracy. (a female interviewee, quoted in Mouna 2018: 13)

Institutional stakeholders argued that some cooperation with authoritarian regimes is often better than closing all doors and that the "ability of the EU to change the region fundamentally should also not be overestimated" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 13). EU civil society stakeholders instead pointed out that while the EU should maybe not suspend the association agreement (as this would negatively impact on development), it could still take a more critical posture; and that due to its economic power, the EU does have leverage (Huber and Paciello 2018: 13).

In the area of EU development policies, there is also a perception that

> EU policy does not seek to be involved in the growth and development of countries of the south; it is simply protecting its economic interests and protecting its borders. The interviewees emphasized that the EU should treat countries of the south fairly, particularly on the economic level. (Mouna 2018: 17)

As has become evident in other surveys (and the Arab Transformation surveys have been particularly informative in this respect), what is really needed in the South is a better economic situation and fighting corruption (Abbott et al. 2018). EU institutional stakeholders argued that it "is not possible to impose social justice from above" while at the same time stating that "IMF programmes are an excellent instrument, as they bring more balance to macro-economic indicators" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 8). The EU uses "budget support" to "incentivize" states to move in this direction. Another institutional representative argued that "the EU only proposes models or agreements to the South, but it is up to them to choose or not" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 6) – a statement which ignores the EU's enormous economic power in the region and trade dependence of Southern partners on the EU. Furthermore, EU institutional representatives explained the failure of the development policies in relation to the youth bulge, rather than the

development model as such (Paciello and Pioppi 2014), a perspective that was contested by European civil society stakeholders who argued that EU policies have remained firmly rooted in free market prescriptions, and have continued to neglect negative employment effects (Semplici 2017, Hibou et al. 2011). Moreover, they pointed out that pressure applied by the EU on Southern Mediterranean countries to further enlarge trade agreements is also limiting the ability of post-uprising countries such as Tunisia to rethink their own social and economic policies in ways that favour social justice and fair redistribution (EuroMed Rights 2015).

Furthermore, all these policy practices of the EU – its support for oppressive regimes, development and migration policies – are not only perceived as depoliticizing in ignoring the needs of citizens at large and of refugees, as well as refugee-hosting communities in particular, but also as highly *securitized* insofar as they are seen as driven by an EU prioritization of security and stability. One Egyptian interviewee for example argued that

> The first response of the EU to the Arab Spring was very positive, but it got tuned down because Europe felt it is affecting its social integrity and security with the influx of migrants and the instability in those countries of the Arab Spring that resulted in the rise of Islamic terrorism. The priorities for the EU were supporting the democratic transition, and people's aspiration to freedom and a better life, then those priorities got changed to security and anti-radicalization and preventing illegal migration. (ASI-REM forthcoming)

The general perception is, indeed, that in the initial phases of the uprisings, EU securitizing practices were less evident. However, after the coup in 2013, the EU is seen as returning to business as usual and to "having shifted towards counter-terrorism, security and control of migration" (ASI-REM forthcoming). The EU is now seen as a much more self-interested, pragmatic actor than in previous years, pursuing "business as usual" to a greater extent than before (ASI-REM forthcoming). This perception was actually confirmed by European institutional stakeholders who argued that the EU has interests in the stability of its neighbourhood in "view of a protection of the EU itself" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 13). The new concept of "resilience" was in this respect presented as an overall approach to established EU policies, defined as the "stabilization of societies" or as a "strategy for stability" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 8). The EU's renewed securitizing practices are seen as having a negative effect on Southern countries. One interviewee in Morocco pointed out that some EU "actions have a negative impact, for instance, transforming Morocco into Europe's policeman" (Mouna 2018: 17). Finally, interviewees also mentioned that EU member states continue to sell arms to highly autocratic regimes involved in conflicts (see also IEMed forthcoming).

A key issue raised in the interviews was the EU's *technocratic practices*. These practices came out in the interviews with European institutional stakeholders themselves, who referred to civil society as good service providers to the EU (see Huber and Paciello 2018: 10). This approach reverberates in the view of Southern stakeholders. As Goulordava (2018: 8) has pointed out, interviewees "perceived that, rather than following the local needs in Lebanon, EU programmes respond to international trends". One Lebanese female interviewee stated that the EU

> does not take into consideration what people want but what EU leaders think they want. People in Lebanon do not tend to be asked their views. […]There are policy trends or programme trends that, for example, once was livelihood, and then it is capacity

building. This pumps money in a certain direction but it does not take nuance of a situation or possible harm. In some areas things work differently and aren't the most needed everywhere. If people can eat or send their children to school, this is more important than becoming a hairdresser, for example. EU policy becomes imposed on local NGOs. Some embassies have told us what they are working on and we have to design our response on their approach or we don't get the money. The money becomes self-filtered. (Goulordava 2018: 8)

A much greater proportion of aid should go into sectors where there are local needs, such as water supply, renewable energy or waste management. A Moroccan female interviewee pointed out that

[e]very year, the EU makes a call for proposals for different issues. […] These projects focus on the issues of migration and illiteracy. This cooperation serves the interest of the EU first and foremost. The EU works on issues such as diversity, freedom of women and religious freedom because they serve its interest. (Mouna 2018: 17)

European and transnational civil society stakeholders pointed out that "everything is viewed through the migration lens" and that this focus is "sucking all the oxygen out" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 6). Interviewees also perceived EU contributions to be biased to pro-Western elites and civil society (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 14). In response to this, civil society has professionalized; it is not only organizing its activities in line with EU needs, but is even structurally dependent on donors. Some interviewees argued that the EU is supporting a range of inefficient, corrupt and co-opted organizations. As an interviewee in Morocco has pointed out, "marginal actors are excluded from these funds" (Mouna 2018:16). These projects are also seen as run by the EU in a technocratic way; interviewees pointed out that the timeframes of the projects are too short, as a result of which beneficiaries are "unable to plan past a very short time" (Goulordava 2018: 8), while there is also a general perception about "a complicated, bureaucratic, lengthy process and procedure to access funds" (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 14).

4. Alternative Models in the Mediterranean

The EU, it should be noted, was generally no longer seen as a model in the Mediterranean. Southern interviewees commented that "it is no longer regarded as an economic model" or that "countries of the north are also losing their authority to decide due to the pervasive power of financial institutions and multinational companies. People have lost the power to stand against this bureaucratic power" (Mouna 2018: 15–16). Furthermore, growing right-wing extremism in Europe emerged as a specific concern in interviews in the South and several interviewees mentioned that the EU needs to overcome xenophobia (unpublished overview report extracting hypotheses on the first round of interviews, May 2018; this is also confirmed by the IEMed survey). European civil society stakeholders similarly argued that "European policies are a model in crisis" and that the "EU itself is adopting an economic model […] which does not take care of social issues, and is worsening the situation of European populations" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 9). Thus, there is a decisive convergence between Mediterranean stakeholders on this issue, with one European interviewee arguing that the "EU could turn to the South of the Mediterranean saying that it is rethinking a new model [… and] to try to understand together which model we could adopt, always tailored to the local context" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 9).

Which other models, then, are circulating in the Mediterranean? It was generally pointed out that there currently is a "lack of ideas" (Mouna 2018: 16) on all shores of the Mediterranean. Social democracy is mentioned on the sidelines, while neo-liberalism is seen as the hegemonic model in the North, and "a mix of liberalism and globalization" in the South, albeit with differences as the "South is less homogenous than the North". Furthermore, the "political right" is seen as increasingly dominant in the North Mediterranean and the "religious right" in the South (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 13).

Tunisia's transition is seen as an inspiration, including by European institutional stakeholders who, however, referred in a highly patronizing way to Tunisia as "our darling" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 13). Tunisia's socio-economic situation harms its perception as a model. Tunisian interviewees highlighted that "the same social and economic model based on corporatism and social and regional inequality" (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 14) continues to exist, which undermines loyalty within Tunisia to the state. Interviewees in Tunisia thus stress the need to reform the Tunisian model, either suggesting to intensify the current development model (more investment, diversification, growth, etc.), or, instead, to move towards a more "participatory economy". Moroccan interviewees also commented on the fact that despite the transition, the political and economic situation in Tunisia is bad. In light of this, authoritarian models such as that of Morocco, which portray themselves as security providers, might also score points (Mouna 2018: 15).

Another model mentioned is the Turkish one which appeared specifically to appeal to Islamist interviewees as it is seen as relatively successful in combining secularism and religion, even though interviewees highlighted the regression of rights in Turkey as problematic (Mouna 2018: 16). Stakeholders in Tunisia specifically highlighted that the "opposition between secularity and religion is 'a false opposition', a 'false problem', a 'false comprehension', an 'inflammatory opposition', an 'untrue' opposition" (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 11). At the same time, interviewees in Tunisia also asserted that political Islam was a divisive issue and that some of them would not trust political Islam.

Geographically speaking, all interviewees in North and South saw the geography of the Mediterranean as an extended one which stretches to the Gulf as well as to Africa. Furthermore, specifically European stakeholders frequently referred to Russia and Gulf states and the alternative model they might represent in the region. A European institutional stakeholder pointed out that

> we are really concerned to see the influence of Russia which becomes a normative power, a point of reference. We think that we are a normative power. Egypt, Algeria, Israel are all looking to Russia as an example in terms of laws and standards to prevent a civic space. (Huber and Paciello 2018: 12)

Similarly, some civil society stakeholders were concerned that the EU is "is strategically underplaying, not only compared to the US, but also Russia. [...] Even in place like Tunisia, the EU is not standing up to the UAE [...] which [is] pushing for polarization" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 12).

A problematique raised in this respect was also the EU's ineffectiveness in the region. In her report Goulordava points out that she found in the interviews a "widespread perception that EU policy is failing to achieve its goals" and that most of "those interviewed were disillusioned with the influence EU policy has on economic and civil development in Lebanon" (Goulordava 2018: 8). This perception is also corroborated in the other country reports. A Moroccan female interviewee, for example, stated that

> [t]he EU policy, particularly in the field of human rights, did yield results, but it should be mentioned that many initiatives are implemented through the government, namely through the ministry of family and women's affairs. These funds do not actually achieve their objective as they are distributed based on political calculations. (Mouna 2018: 15)

In Tunisia, the general perception was that there is a positive European contribution, but that the "support is insufficient and considered less effective than expected. [...] The words that come are 'limited' support, 'insufficient', 'unsubstantial', '*ad hoc*' and firmly negotiated between a strong partner and a weak one" (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 14). Similarly, respondents in Egypt pointed out that the "era of political assistance" from Europe "did not yield any results. The evidence of that is in the indicators of the fields of education and justice, and the regression in the fields of transparency, human development and freedom of expression" (ASI-REM forthcoming). What, then, were seen as the key problems in terms of the EU's ineffectiveness, and how is this explained?

5. Investigating EU (In)Effectiveness

Problems regarding the effectiveness of EU policies in the region start with a *visibility problem* of the EU. As Goulordava (2018: 8) points out that for Lebanon, for the

> most part, the interlocutors were not sure of exact EU policies, but did have some notions or information. In general, the EU was seen as "invisible" within Lebanon, with any EU projects that do occur in the country being unknown to the larger public. Only a very small cohort were able to provide a detailed account on how these policies materialized into their everyday life and work.

Similarly, Nouira and Redissi (2018: 14–15) found that "few are able to indicate the amounts, the mechanisms and channels of European aid". Finally, also in Egypt there is a visibility issue, as the EU "as such is somewhat overshadowed in the Egyptian public consciousness by the more visible policies of key member states" (ASI-REM forthcoming).

This is specifically problematic, as there is a perception of *incoherence between the policies of the EU and those of its member states*. Goulordava (2018: 9) points out that

> [m]ost of the interviewed actors identified the difference between the policy aims of the EU and those of individual member states. [...] EU policy was viewed to be broader in scope than policy of individual member states. Individual EU states were perceived as operating with less diverse goals and with greater self-interest.

Similarly, interviewees in Egypt had an perception of "contradictions between the position it [the EU] holds and those of individual member states; Brussels proclaims an agenda of democracy, human rights and social equality, while member states conduct relations with the Egyptian government seemingly independently of these values and objectives" (ASI-REM forthcoming). The resulting impression is that "there are a lot of EUs" (Goulordava 2018: 9), and that there is "no united voice of the EU" (ASI-REM forthcoming). Furthermore, the EU is perceived to be in a crisis, where the roles of member state are resurging. As one Egyptian interviewee stated,

> I believe that, generally, the EU is now in the phase of redefining itself, especially after the separation of the UK. The individual countries are still strong as regards the foreign policies and their direct benefits. As a result, the policy of interests and governments dominates the common interest. (ASI-REM forthcoming)

The incoherence is clearly perceived as limiting the EU's effectiveness: "They have to unify their vision and to detach from the colonial past. They need to arrange their house first and then come and work in our region. The ways they are dealing with refugees are inefficient" (Goulordava 2018: 9).

Finally, there is an *enormous gap between local expectations and the EU's actual output*, specifically in the area of human rights, which was much discussed in the interviews conducted in the framework of Work Package 4. There was less focus on outcome, also since – as Mouna has pointed out – "change is perceived as complex and not linear", specifically when it comes to human rights. One interviewee, for example, pointed out that

> Morocco is an old country ruled by a new kind of power. Some things have changed, for example the *Hirak* in the Rif: in the past, if the same events occurred, thousands would have been killed, and the arrested activists are today the figures of the *Hirak*. There are certainly many changes in terms of respect for human rights. (Mouna 2018: 14)

Thus, interviewees focused more on their expectations and the corresponding EU output. Expectations on the EU in the area of the protection of human rights relay a very comprehensive picture which – as evident in the interviews pursued with European institutional stakeholders – is not seen by them in its complexity.

Firstly, EU aid is seen more positively than aid policies of other actors, notably the Gulf States (see also IEMed forthcoming). As one interviewee in Morocco pointed out, there are "two kinds of assistance, on the one hand the EU aid which promotes human rights, and aid from oil-producing countries who seek to hinder our societies' progress using particular ideas" (Mouna 2018: 17). However, in its support for human rights organizations, the EU is seen as "orbiting in just one space" (MEDRESET 2018); it was also mentioned that civil society cannot perform as a substitute for political society, and is actually fracturing the political landscape, thereby reinforcing authoritarianism (Mouna 2018). Furthermore, interviewees pointed out that while the EU supports human rights organizations, it does not back up their work by exerting pressure towards political power.

> Europe does not really care about human rights and just funds human rights organizations. It works with civil society along "safe lines" (culture, gender, etc.), but

when it comes to the real issues, the EU sides with the authorities and the status quo. (MEDRESET 2018)

This ambivalence of the EU also came across in the interviews in Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia, and has harmed trust in the EU. As Mouna points out, there is a perception that "the EU provides physical, economic and technological assistance and at the same time strengthens the dominant political power" (Mouna 2018: 17). As a result, the

> EU looks like an institution that funds civil society making the rise of development agents possible, and at the same time it looks like an institution seeking to protect its interests. This relationship based on proximity and distrust towards the EU is explained by what a few actors call Europe's double-dealing. The EU funds civil society but also funds other state institutions that are the impediment to development, as state action is structured from a security perspective. (Mouna 2018: 17–18)

Regarding what pressure on regimes could look like, some interviewees stated that the EU should pressure the government to change the laws which breach human rights, the rights of refugees and women, and the freedom of expression. There was, however, disagreement on "monitoring of the southern countries that do not respect human rights", an approach that was favoured by some interviewees, but that others rejected as a reflection of an asymmetric relationship between North and South (Mouna 2018: 14–15). Specifically rejected in this respect is a "civilizing" rhetoric from the EU's side which denies local actors agency. As pointed out by a Moroccan interviewee:

> Europe holds a culturalist view towards countries of the south in general, and towards us specifically. It is thought that we are not fit for the human rights culture under the pretext that Islam is [an] impediment. Hence, Europeans think that we are establishing human rights institutions because they force us to do so. *It does not occur to them that the human rights issue is our fight because it is we who have suffered and been put in jail.* It is both founded on a superiority point of view and contempt towards what we are trying to achieve. (Mouna 2018: 15)

This denial of local agency which is inherent in a "civilizing" approach has indeed been so harmful that some interviewees argued that the EU should not jeopardize/compromise new actors on the political scene by supporting them. One Lebanese interviewee for example argued that

> What I meant by this is [...] that Lebanon does not need any support from other countries in the field of democracy and human rights since this should be a Lebanese issue, an internal issue, and that the internal movement of our civil society should address these issues by itself, without any external (and suspicious) interventions. The problem with EU and USA interventions, when they try to "civilize" our societies and to spread democracy and human rights in our region is that they are jeopardizing the credibility and the legitimacy of our local human rights movements. These interventions are counterproductive especially when they are accompanied by a Eurocentric ideology (the civilized north Mediterranean countries trying to democratize their neighbours in the South). So please, don't help us in issues related to democracy and human rights, and we don't have any lesson to take from any European official or politician when it

comes to democracy and human rights. We can read Kant by ourselves, thank you! (ASI-REM 2017)

Similar to this, European civil society argued that the EU should stop presenting human rights as European instead of universal values. Interviewees argued that "values such as civil and political liberties, equality and justice are not EU values, they are universal values and the EU does not own them" or that these "are not European values. They are universal values. The EU should not add geographic boundaries to something that is universal. It should not represent them as values external to the region" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 7).

6. The Gender Dimension

Because of the methodological considerations described above, very little information was collected on the stakeholders' perception about the gender dimension of EU policies. With this in mind, this section will review the evidence that is available according to: how the interviewed stakeholders frame gender issues in their respective countries; how they perceive and assess the effectiveness of EU policies in the field of gender equality; and which specific concrete policy recommendations they suggest to bridge gender gaps.

Regarding the first issue, only in Lebanon were women clearly identified, together with Syrian refugees and migrant worker communities, as a group that is denied its human rights (Goulordava 2018: 10–11). As Goulordava says, "all expressed a strong concern in regard to women's rights", although "many interlocutors felt that the situation in Lebanon was incredibly difficult for everyone" (Goulordava 2018: 10). The major forms of discriminations were found at the level of law, which continues to prevent women from passing on their Lebanese nationality to their children and spouse, to not give adequate protection against domestic violence and sexual harassment, or to allow a rapist to marry his victim of rape in order to avoid punishment. Also sexual harassment, the lack of women's representation in politics and unequal pay were highlighted as a problem (Goulordava 2018: 10–11).

In the other country case studies, while gender equality was not considered as a priority issue, it was portrayed as a very contentious and sensitive issue, albeit for different reasons depending on each country's political economy context. In Tunisia, for example, while equality between women and men is accepted and enormous progress has been made, the secular/religious cleavage is still high with regard to gender issues, as reported in the interviews and as shown by the constitutional debate (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 6–9, 12). In Tunisia (like in Lebanon), the major controversial question concerning women's rights has to do with inequality in inheritance (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 12–13). In Egypt, the interviewees in the elite survey made the point that, after 2013, under al-Sisi era, "gender and sexuality are no longer safe topics" (ASI-REM forthcoming). As a result, many NGOs defending women's human rights have been under attack and have suffered from judicial procedures (Moonrises and Zenzzi 2018). In particular, violence against women came up as an urgent matter not only in domestic situations but also in the frequent cases of sexual harassment. Women activists appear to be particularly exposed to harassment by security forces (Moonrises and Zenzzi 2018). Violence against women and children is also perceived as a key priority by European civil society actors in the context of war and conflict (Huber and Paciello 2018: 6).

In discussing women's rights, the issue of LGBT rights was also raised in the case of Lebanon and Egypt. In Lebanon, the existence of some divergences among the stakeholders shows how this is still a very contentious question (Goulordava 2018). In Egypt, several grassroots human rights organizations have been active in defending LGBT rights but they have been subject to harsh crackdown under al-Sisi (Moonrises and Zenzzi 2018).

Interviews also brought attention to gender discrimination with relation to socio-economic rights. In Tunisia, while women's rights have been enhanced in many fields (e.g., parity in elections; law criminalizing violence against women), women continue to face discrimination in the labour market, particularly in the private sector and in the countryside, where they are hired for low wages (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 13). In Morocco, the relevance of the labour question emerged in an interview with a female member of a union movement. She reported the case of one hundred women who lost their jobs after a factory in Meknes shut down and then started striking in spite of silence on the part of official trade unions and political parties (Mouna 2018: 16–17). Not only does this interview shed light on the growing precariousness of labour relations in the country affecting, among others, the export-oriented clothing sector that is a female-intensive industry, it also highlights the lack of independent civil society organizations that protect the socio-economic rights of the Moroccan population (Mouna 2018: 18).

The European civil society stakeholders expressed particular concern over the issue of women's social rights, questioning the market economy (Huber and Paciello 2018). Referring to EU–South Mediterranean trade agreements, a female representative of an European civil society organization highlighted that the EU should have done more on the way women have been included in the labour market:

> When trade negotiations with the EU neighbourhood countries were ongoing, CSOs asked the EU to include a focus on social rights, particularly concerning youth and women, in the negotiations – as a sort of positive conditionality. The impact assessment of these agreements nevertheless led to the finding that the EU had not put this issue as one of the priorities of the negotiations. CSOs had raised that the opening of the EU market would impact certain sectors in the Southern Med countries' markets, carrying more flexibility and consequently the social rights setting. One example is the textile sector in Morocco, which is a sector that traditionally recruits many women and already presents many aspects of flexibility – i.e., precarious contracts and a lack of social protection. The EU could clearly have done more to put this issue on the table, particularly as it was asked to do so by CSOs. (Huber and Paciello 2018: 10)

Alongside presenting the results specifically concerning discussion on gender issues, it is worth mentioning that even when the stakeholders did not consider gender inequality as a priority issue, this was because they felt that violation of women's rights was part of a broader violation of human rights and therefore required actions targeting the whole system. A Lebanese woman representative of a new social movement noted:

> Any rights in Lebanon are needed, not just women's rights. There is discrimination against women, but also against LGBT and some religions. The actions of the politicians are violating all human rights, children's rights are also violated as well. Elderly are heavily affected. (Goulordava 2018: 11)

A member of a labour organization said:

> You have to tackle not only exploitation or gender, but everything. You cannot fight exploitation without given women's rights, you cannot fight to give the right of the women without fighting sectarianism. The solution is complicated because the system is complicated. (Goulordava 2018: 11).

This position is also reflected in the way the stakeholders explain the violation of women's rights in their respective country, linking it to broad structural systemic factors such as sectarianism and authoritarianism. In Lebanon, the interlocutors saw the larger sectarian and religious system in the country as the main barrier to providing women with more rights (Goulordava 2018: 10–11). A representative of a women's rights organization furthermore notes that the political class is responsible for human rights violations and that nothing will change in the country unless that changes. In this situation, women's rights organizations and civil society organizations are considered "band-aid work as the root cause is so deep" (Goulordava 2018: 13).

In Morocco, a female representative of a women's rights association said that "the main problem remains the lack of democracy that allows considering human rights violations as normal. This is the very nature of political systems in Arab countries" (Mouna 2018: 13). Similar considerations apply in the case of Egypt. Discussing the case of sexual harassment, the authors of Egypt report note that this is part of the strategies pursued by authoritarian regimes to control the population through controlling women's bodies:

> Controlling women's bodies is a way to control the population, leaning on the consent or even the active complicity of males who themselves are victims of oppression. This explains the specific harassment that women defenders have to face. Gender is one of the cornerstones of authoritarianism. (Moonrises and Zenzzi 2018: 19)

With regard to how EU policies in the field of gender are assessed, while some stakeholders express more positive views and others are more critical, there seems to be agreement that the EU could do much more. Positive assessments tend to reflect the views of researchers and women working in the development cooperation field. According to an Egyptian journalist-researcher, "programmes such as gender and sexuality, mostly funded by the EU and its member states, were really great" (Elite survey in Moonrises and Zenzzi 2018: 18), while, according to a female researcher, the EU gender programme should be integrated into every EU programme rather than continue separately (ASI-REM forthcoming). In Morocco, a representative of a progressive organization for women's rights working in the development cooperation field stated that with "the support of the EU, many women's rights associations were able to establish support centres" (Mouna 2018: 13–14).

Other stakeholders, while acknowledging the important role the EU is playing – or should play – in the field of women's human rights, nonetheless were critical. A women's association representative from Morocco lamented that the EU initiatives are implemented through the government, namely through the ministry of family and women's affairs, with the result that "these funds do not actually achieve their objective as they are distributed based on political calculations" (Mouna 2018: 15). Others see the work by the EU on women's rights as purely serving its own interest (Mouna 2018: 17), echoing what other Moroccan stakeholders noted more in general for EU intervention in their country. The words of an Islamist student movement

representative show that the EU liberal model is seen to negatively affect family cohesion:

> The liberal model is dominant in Morocco, individual freedom is seen as negative influence on people in general and the family in particular, and this is what the EU supports in Morocco unfortunately. In this context, the EU is seen as a bad partner, particularly financing projects based on this kind of thinking, which affects family cohesion. (Mouna 2018: 14)

In Lebanon, while interlocutors felt that, by sustaining women's rights organizations or women's rights work in their country, the EU was helping break down barriers to gender equality (namely the sectarian and religious system), nonetheless they called for the EU to be more effective by placing "greater pressure on the Lebanese government" (Goulordava 2018: 11).

European civil society stakeholders pointed to the "very superficial" EU discourse on gender and its sectorial approach, or what they called its "check-box ticking approach" which, instead of producing a "real integration" of women actually generates their "ghettoization" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 10). Others were critical of the EU's Eurocentric approach to gender issues in the South Med region. One pointed out that the EU discourse that women in the South are worse off than women in other regions "is a power discourse that goes to the disadvantage of women" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 10). Others noticed that women in the Southern Mediterranean and European women are faced with similar problems such as "precarious labour, badly paid, and the discrimination" as well as "violence" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 10).

More in general, the interviewed women were critical of EU policies in the field of human rights, although they did not deny the potential positive role the EU could play role in this regard. A female representative of human rights organizations in Morocco noted: "[The EU] supports our oppressive regimes because it wants to protect its interests; it considers the stability of these regimes as more important than democracy" (Mouna 2018: 13). Other women argued that the EU is reinforcing authoritarianism, by ignoring regression in civil and political rights (Mouna 2018: 14) and by excluding marginal actors from funds, namely those not co-opted by the regime (Mouna 2018: 16). In Lebanon, a female interviewee criticized the EU because of its discriminatory migration policy and because it "does not take into consideration what people want" so that "EU policy becomes imposed on local NGOs" (Goulordava 2018: 8). In Tunisia, while there is no specific assessment of EU policies in the field of gender, in two interviews women defined the EU role in the post-uprising period as "limited", "insufficient", "unsubstantial" and "*ad hoc*" (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 14).

Lastly, as far as policy recommendations specifically regarding gender equality are concerned, only a few stakeholders explicitly provided them. In terms of *priority issues*, as seen above, in Lebanon and Tunisia the interlocutors claimed that women's rights in their countries could be fully realized provided that a reform of the civil code which targets entrenched forms of gender discrimination is implemented. As shown above, other relevant issues to be taken into due account by EU policies should concern sexual harassment, violation of women's socio-economic rights and violence against women in the context of conflict.

Concerning *instruments*, there seems to be agreement in all the consultations that, in order to be more effective, the EU should adopt a more critical stance toward human rights violations, including women's rights. In Lebanon, for example, the EU should exercise more pressure

on the government in overcoming systemic problems that are at the root of women's rights violation (Goulordava 2018: 11). In Egypt, the EU should be "more reactive towards women's human rights violations and show more public support towards NGOs dealing with women's inclusion" (Moonrises and Zenzzi 2018: 19).

In the field of socio-economic rights, a number of European civil society actors referred to the need to "redefine labour rights as a major priority also outside the EU territory [...] and stop advertising the South Mediterranean as an area of cheap labour to European companies" (Huber and Paciello 2018: 10) as well as to give more attention to the gender impact of free trade agreements (Huber and Paciello 2018: 15).

On the issue of combating violence against women, European civil society stakeholders proposed EU ratification of the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and its ratification by Southern governments as a part of the Advanced Status package (Huber and Paciello 2018: 15).

Finally, as shown above, the causes behind the many violations of women's rights are perceived to be the same as those behind the violation of other human rights, namely structural, therefore reflecting the persistence of authoritarian regimes and the implementation of an economic model that exacerbates inequalities. This means that EU policies aiming at dealing effectively with women's human rights violation need to accompany sectorial measures and projects targeted to women with broader initiatives placing human rights and social justice at the centre.

7. Policy Recommendations

In sum, our analysis shows that even though southern stakeholders believed in the contradiction between EU discourse on promoting democracy and EU policy on supporting authoritarian regimes, they think that the south shore of the Mediterranean still needs EU support for democratic transition and human rights protection. To that end, the EU should work, first of all, to change the perception of Europe as a domineering and neo-colonialist force.

Moreover, *in terms of substance*, it should expand its field of intervention to include more general topics related to democracy, democratic transition and human rights, such as education, culture and social-economic rights. Investment in education and culture is more effective, in the long term, in the fight against terrorism and authoritarianism. In Egypt, the EU should also be wary to not too easily give in to the fight-against-terrorism and border-management narrative that portrays the new regime as a necessary shield in the region. The EU would gain in all aspects by devising a genuine human-rights-based foreign policy and by dropping the need to look, at all costs, for areas of consensus with unwilling state partners.

In Tunisia, while stakeholders ask for European support to democratization, no model should be imposed from the EU. In general, what is expected from the EU is: firstly, to give consistency to the Mediterranean zone and provide it with a multidimensional project with concrete impact, making this area visible and viable. Secondly, to engage in a broader dialogue in order to remove the confusion and misunderstanding on European policy, objectives and mechanisms. And finally, to reconsider the meaning of common interest and to diversify the fields of cooperation (Nouira and Redissi 2018: 15).

To rebuild an equal Mediterranean space and a flexible, inclusive and responsive EU role within it, European stakeholders suggest two policy alternatives: a policy of social justice and human rights, and a policy of reconciliation (Huber and Paciello 2018). Bottom-up actors reject the securitizing trend in the region and suggest that a policy of reconciliation could work against such trends, prioritizing a mutual "ethics of care" (Robinson 2011).

In terms of actors, the EU should focus on working with grassroots actors. In other words, it should work with civil society organizations, and less with governments. In Egypt, the new NGO law made it increasingly difficult for local civil society to acquire foreign funding and implement many of their programmes, particularly for political and human rights projects. That is why the EU should support civil society actions in the field of culture, education and socio-economic rights.

In Morocco, the EU is now funding the modernization of Moroccan justice, but it is important to invest in the human beings themselves who constitute a real obstacle, such as judges, lawyers and prosecutors (Mouna 2018: 18).

Furthermore, it is more effective to work with local governments than with the central government (cases of Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon). The EU can help by not siding with corrupt governments, by pointing out corruption when it is happening and by applying economic pressure. For example, the EU should acknowledge election fraud if it has occurred (the case of Lebanon).

In terms of mechanisms and instruments, in seeking to strengthen civil society the EU should help it access professionalization in order to obtain autonomy. It could use the weight of its global power and influence to put pressure on governments regarding policies and laws in order to support civil society.

Also, the EU should create an equal dialogue with southern grassroots actors, instead of a top-down dialogue. Interlocutors stated that funds coming from the EU should be based on grassroots actors' decisions to create particular projects and programmes, and not based on focus areas decided upon in the EU, by the EU.

Furthermore, the EU should make access to information easier, so that southern stakeholders will be able to know more about EU policies and opportunities. It should also make institutional mechanisms less complicated and access to funds more diverse in order to meet local demands.

Finally, regarding the perception of Europe as a neo-colonialist power, the EU should a) establish a reconciliation mechanism that would make the colonialist archive open and accessible for colonized nations to know about policies and practices of colonialist powers; b) issue an official apology for crimes and other forms of aggression conducted against colonized nations; and c) encourage and support research that looks into colonialism and its impact on the current migration and socio-economic and political conflicts across the region (ASI-REM 2017).

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