Mediterranean Platform School of Government

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Conference Main Take-Aways

Mediterranean 2028 Envisioning the Medium-term Future of the Broader Region

School of Government, Luiss Guido Carli University

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Panel III: The Big Transitions: Climate, Energy, and Technology

Adaptation to the impacts of climate change has become a priority, requiring financial investment, improved knowledge, nature-based solutions, governance, and behavioral changes. However, the capacity to address these challenges varies across the region. Concurrently, the dominance of fossil fuels in global energy and the MENA region's role as a major oil source significantly affect geopolitics.

In Europe, the recent energy crisis, spurred by the Ukraine war, highlighted energy security issues and accelerated the shift towards renewable energy. This crisis and Europe's energy transition efforts, along with the MENA region's growing focus on renewable energy for climate change mitigation and economic diversification, present opportunities for strengthened partnerships and connectivity between Europe and MENA countries.

The Mediterranean is a Strategic Bomb of Climate Change

- **Climate is the foundation of our identity.** In the north and south of the Mediterranean we share the same history. We are who we are because we share a similar climate. It is a founder of identity and interest.
- Sitting on a strategic bomb of climate change. The Mediterranean is the second fastest warming region in the world. Water temperatures are increasing rapidly and sea water levels are rising at a rapid pace. Salty water entering coastal regions, threatening hundreds of millions of people.
- Impacts of climate change. The change does not just mean warming, but a randomization in the behavior of climate. There will be unpredictable rain and snow cycles, which hinder agricultural activity. Seas will become engines of chaos, instead of stabilizers. Many phenomena converge in the Mediterranean. Heat is rising, deserts are expanding, and rains are unpredictable. These are expected to increase hunger, terror, and migration flows. There will be deaths due to heat waves and damage to infrastructure. Climate change is a threat multiplier. The MENA region is responsible for only 1 percent of climate change yet is one of the most hardly hit areas and does not have the capacity to deal with the impacts.
- Divisive trends: The Northwest Passage: Azores' Anticyclone influences the weather and climatic patterns of vast areas of North Africa, Western Asia, and Southern Europe. It cuts our region into two and make our interests diverge. Current policies do not integrate the impact of climate in the Mediterranean as a historic trade route. If the temperatures keep rising and the Northwest Passage becomes navigable, the Suez Canal will become obsolete.
- Unifying trends: Agriculture. There is a growing interdependence because of climate change. In the coming years, the climate in the North Mediterranean will come to resemble that of today in the South Mediterranean. Accordingly, the North will inherit traditionally Middle Eastern crops, and in turn, the climate of Scandinavia will be similar to that of the North Mediterranean. Policies will need to reflect this interdependence through increased cooperation, ecological awareness, and heritage allowing for adaptation of agriculture. A good example is Champagne, the know-how needed to produce Champagne is in France and Italy, but it might be use to develop Scandinavian Champagne when the conditions are ripe.
- **Collapsing Himalayan glaciers.** Glaciers play a regulatory role by storing excess humidity during rainy seasons and releasing them during dry seasons. As they crumble, a population of nearly half a billion people will have to manage floods and droughts. The consequences of these crises will impact neighboring regions.
- Advanced solutions for advanced problems. The asymmetry across the Mediterranean basin in various fields continues to increase. No one in the Mediterranean is rich enough to face a crisis of this magnitude on their own. If we set aside divergences, we have a large basket of cooperative solutions. There is growing cooperation in energy, agriculture, and technology sectors. Building more connections and interdependence could result in fairer markets that could address the conflicts in the region.

• **Climate diplomacy.** The EU can play two roles: one in facilitating energy transitions in the south Mediterranean region, and another in technology transfer, which has followed a linear model until now.

The MENA Region needs Homegrown Research

- No real research environment in the Middle East. There is no constructive research environment in the Middle East region. There is a top-down model to producing research and the results areis not widely disseminated. This is ineffective when dealing with cutting edge problems like climate change, which require room for experimentation, problem-solving, and mistakes.
- **Region has many idiosyncrasies.** Technologies face different conditions, which reduces their practicality. The structures of the economies are also different from the West.
- **Foreign research.** There is a heavy reliance on foreign consultancies as an alternative to homegrown research, but they do not have a deep understanding of the nuances of the region.
- **Need for homegrown research.** There is a need for organic, decentralized research.
- Why is research lacking?
 - 1. **Funding.** It is easier to get from foreign parties than local ones.
 - 2. **No official emphasis on research.** Authorities do not prioritize research, nor do they see it as being important. On the contrary, They often see it could be a threat to their legitimacy.
 - 3. Lack of freedom of speech. Strategic documents are often not well drafted but they cannot be discussed, let alone criticized.
 - 4. **Lack of data.** Governments do not make data available since it can be used to highlight shortcomings.
- **Fossil fuel dependence vs. living standards.** Gulf countries are trying to reduce the level of dependence on fossil fuels while maintaining living standards. There is no literature on this issue and whatever contributions there are come from foreign scholars.
- **Transition is not a simple problem.** Energy transition needs to be studied carefully and there needs to be room for mistakes.

The Energy Transition is not on Track

- **A reality check on energy transition.** The war on Ukraine caused Europe to panic. It needed an alternative to Russian gas. We saw the lack of commitment to the energy transition on three levels.
 - 1. EU Member States signing energy agreements that go against EU recommendations.
 - 2. International and European companies signed decades-long deals with Qatar despite previous pledges for renewable energy.
 - 3. European Commission attempted to sign an energy deal with Israel, showing intention to continue investment in gas and oil.
- **Major oil and gas producers rely on it.** Major oil and gas producers rely on the revenue of oil and gas and are unable to entertain the thought of the complete transition to no oil and gas. They want to maintain the same living standards, provided by the oil and gas. They will work to produce cleaner fuels but envision themselves to be the last ones producing oil and gas. This is to say that they will be the ones to decide if and when to conduct the energy transition, and at what pace.

Energy Transition is a Long-term Process

- **Energy transition is a long-term process.** Although well under way, it is only just starting. It is advanced in Europe and the U.S. but not so much in other regions.
- All immediate crises can impact the transition. Crises can either accelerate it or slow it down. However, arranging immediate security of supply with LNG supplies in the MENA region does not diminish the drive towards net zero. On the contrary, the vulnerability of a single supplier like Russia is evident and has led to an acceleration of renewables implementation. The long-term contracts will not be fulfilled because the demand will increase over time with the increase of renewables.
- A force of good for the region. Countries that have historically had less hydrocarbons can be producers of renewables derivates like green hydrogen and ammonia. Gulf states will also benefit from this pivoting away from oil and gas but probably in tandem with keeping up supplies. New projects in Morocco on green hydrogen and NEOM in Saudi Arabia are evidence of that trend.
- Socioeconomic and political stability are key. A just transition needs to take into account the mutual needs of both the north and south Mediterranean countries as well as how the populations will benefit from these projects. There will be no large investments when high uncertainties loom in the political and social systems of some of the MENA countries. The plans and pledges will be there, but the investment will not take place.
- **Favorable conditions.** Fostering technology transfer, vibrant innovations, and better governance is key to ensuring the region is better connected and integrated with the northern half of the Mediterranean and Europe as whole.

Renewable Energy and the Future

- **Gaza War and energy.** There is no big energy impact-exports are continuing, and prices are stable-but it is powerful reminder that security is essential in the energy discourse. The Gaza War also shows that the future of gas extraction has a strong dependency on security.
- **Growing energy consumption in Africa.** Consumption in Africa will grow due to a growing population.
- **Efficiency measures.** Resuming high production levels in Europe will not meet need levels. This is significant in the relationships between Europe and South Mediterranean/North Africa.
- **Current model unsustainable.** EU policies give strict deadlines for energy transitions, but current deals are signed regarding gas productions.
- **Renewable energy needs.** For effective hydrogen projects, there needs to be stronger governments and centralized institutions.
- **Growing connectivity and digital transition.** There is growing connectivity and increasing communication but the EU Agenda is missing out on energy connectivity in the south

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Mediterranean Platform

Founded in 2022, and directed by Prof. Luigi Narbone, the Mediterranean Platform is a research, dialogue, and educational programme at the School of Government, Luiss Guido Carli. It offers a space for collective reflection on the opportunities and challenges of the Mediterranean region and promotes informed policymaking and advocacy at the national and transnational levels.

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