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Report of the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference 2017
1 - 2 June 2017, Barcelona

**CONFRONTING VIOLENT
EXTREMISM IN THE
EURO-MEDITERRANEAN
REGION**





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INTRODUCTION

On the occasion of the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference “Confronting Violent Extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean” held in Barcelona on 1-2 June in Barcelona, over 150 researchers and practitioners from 22 countries debated the scope of the threat of violent extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean region, its manifestations, drivers, impact and what responses could be developed to confront it. The following report summarizes the discussions and outcomes of the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference 2017.

The report starts with an account of the presentations and discussions that were held in the Plenary Sessions. They constitute a valuable contribution to the mapping of violent extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The sessions explored how the Euro-Mediterranean region is affected by violent extremism, the specificities of violent extremism today and possible strategies to counter the phenomenon, the complex drivers and root causes motivating the radicalisation of individuals across the Euro-Mediterranean, as well as the interactions between violent extremism and other phenomena such as populism, islamophobia and authoritarianism.

Three “working sessions” offered an opportunity to discuss in smaller format specific angles of the phenomenon of violent extremism. The link between violent extremism and geopolitics was explored in one working group, with a specific focus on Sinai and Libya. Another group looked into the complex nexus between violent extremism and populist, nationalist and islamophobic trends in EU countries on the one hand and authoritarian trends on the other. Lastly, concrete examples of policies and initiatives in Lebanon and Turkey in the fields of preventing and countering radicalisation were presented and discussed.

Ahead of the Annual Conference, about 10 young researchers from the network exchanged their views with practitioners on how to deal with youth radicalisation in the MENA region.

In addition to the thematic focus, EuroMeSCo annual conferences are traditionally a pivotal moment for the research activities of the network. Accordingly, the report also includes a reference to the sessions in which the work of the three 2016-2017 joint

research groups was presented (on the Tunisian transformation, migration challenges in Europe and post-conflict future Syria) and to the kick-off sessions of the research groups to be developed in 2017-2018 (situation of minorities in the Middle East and North Africa region, new dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean region and security challenges in the Sahel).



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Below are some significant messages that the EuroMeSCo network would like to convey to policy makers and stakeholders of the 43 member states of the Union for the Mediterranean, including the 28 member states of the European Union.

Understanding violent extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean region and its impact

1. Violent extremism is a worldwide phenomenon. But it is particularly acute in the Euro-Mediterranean area. All 43 countries of the UfM are affected in one way or another. There is a prevailing perception, in Europe, that violent extremism is imported from abroad and in particular from the southern Mediterranean region and is affecting mostly the European Union. While recognizing that violent extremism can be fuelled by chaos, civil wars, foreign interventions and other phenomena in the MENA region, it is important to acknowledge that this perception is misleading and should be countered at least on two accounts. First, violent extremism affects primarily the southern Mediterranean region. Second, the majority of terrorist acts that took place in some European countries are carried out by home-grown self-radicalized young people in Europe; In other words, violent extremism is also thriving among European citizens and generated within the European Union.



2. The root causes of extremism are numerous. Similarly, the profiles of extremists are so varied that it is difficult to establish a general diagnosis and devise simple recipes or policies to address the issue. However, it is important to acknowledge that creeping islamophobia, the surge of populist and nationalist groups in the EU and the continuation or the reproduction of authoritarianism in the southern Mediterranean region are factors fuelling violent extremism.

3. In the Euro-Mediterranean region, and in particular in the southern Mediterranean, socio-economic triggers of radicalisation should not be overlooked, as reveal the initial findings of the Euromed survey on violent extremism. Lack of opportunities, prevailing corruption, and dysfunctional economies tend to push some young people to resort to violent extremism, as they harbour a deep sense of helplessness.
4. Furthermore, violent extremism is also driven by geopolitics. Foreign interventions in the Mediterranean and MENA region, continued occupation and colonisation, proxy wars and sectarian divide have all contributed to ignite violent extremism. Therefore, it is important to work towards “a New Security Architecture in the Euro-Mediterranean” and MENA region as it was proposed by the 2016 EuroMeSCo Annual Conference, in Brussels. Solving protracted conflicts, avoiding counter-productive military foreign interventions, or even addressing the sectarian divides will not dry up the swamps of extremism but it can contribute to trim the instrumentalisation of these phenomena by extremists.
5. Extremism may also be identity-driven. Some young muslims, born in Europe, may feel alienated, with a fractured identity, discriminated or marginalised, disconnected from their families or even communities. Some individuals may radicalize because they are in search of a meaning for their life, a cause to defend. In some cases, violence is a way for them to transform their self-hatred into hatred of the others.

Addressing the Euro-Mediterranean missing link on countering violent extremism

6. Given the variety of root causes and profiles, only security-driven responses may be counter-productive as they may exacerbate the phenomenon of radicalisation, undermine social cohesion or even widen the gap of misunderstanding between both shores of the Mediterranean. Policies geared towards defeating violent extremism ideology should be pro-active, long-lasting and comprehensive rather than confined to reactive and rushed responses. Miscalibrated responses to violent extremism only driven by domestic considerations or only tackling the security dimension are likely to be self-defeating.

7. The EU, on its part, should combat the tendency to portray Islam itself as a religion generating violence and extremism. Misportraying Islam produces frustration, humiliation, anger and even hatred. As illustrated in a number of studies conducted in the framework of EuroMeSCo, religion is rarely the main reason for radicalisation and there are number of political, cultural, economic, social and geopolitical factors that may contribute to an individual's decision to turn to violent extremism as mentioned above.
8. Numerous initiatives, policies and programmes have been designed over the last years to prevent and counter violent extremism at the local, national, European and multilateral level. However, the Euro-Mediterranean dimension is often missing.
9. In this context, the role of civil societies is of paramount importance. The OPEV (Observatory to Prevent Violent Extremism) has set an example in organising a conference in Barcelona in January 2017, with the participation of 320 representatives of 172 civil society organisations. "The Plan of Action of the Euro-Mediterranean civil society to prevent all forms of violent extremism" is inspiring and its recommendations are largely in line with EuroMeSCo's findings.
10. At the Euro-Mediterranean institutional level, more should be done to coordinate and exchange good practices not only on counter terrorism but also on other strands to prevent and counter violent extremism, in line with the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism that calls for concerted actions to support national, regional and global efforts.
11. There should be a sort of "clearing-house mechanism" or office to better coordinate the initiatives taken by the 43 UfM Member States and by European institutions and promote synergies.
12. The UfM roadmap "The Union for the Mediterranean: an action-driven organisation with a common ambition" endorsed by the UfM Foreign Affairs Ministers at the second UfM Regional Forum in January 2017, included a chapter on prevention of extremism and terrorism where it is stated that the Secretariat should not only continue addressing through its activities the socio-economic root causes of terrorism and extremism but will also "play a facilitator role to promote best practices and

enhance confidence building measures to contribute to the deconstruction/counter-narrative of radical discourses and ideologies." Therefore, EuroMeSCo thinks the UfM Secretariat is well placed to participate in the much needed effort of coordination and monitoring of activities related to PVE and CVE in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

13. EuroMeSCo is equipped, willing and prepared to work with the UfM towards this goal. As a start, a EuroMeSCo task force could come up with a comprehensive compilation of existing policies, strategies and projects carried out at the local, national and regional level in the Euro-Mediterranean region.
14. At the EU level, the EU-financed Radicalisation Awareness Network gathering practitioners is a unique and very important tool as it facilitates exchanges between first line practitioners coming from the 28 EU countries that can then feed into policies. This work with practitioners should be sustained and the network could be upgraded.

DEBATING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGION

In Plenary sessions

Welcome remarks

Ambassador **Senén Florensa**, Executive President of the European Institute of the Mediterranean and President of the EuroMeSCo Steering Committee, officially welcomed the participants of the conference in and thanked the host **Joandomènec Ros**, President, of the Institute of Catalan Studies (IEC) for hosting the event. He recalled the network's responsibility to reflect on developments of the Euro-Mediterranean space, arguing that a contribution of EuroMeSCo to the study of violent extremism was particularly necessary.



The Spanish Ambassador for Mediterranean Affairs, **Milagros Hernando**, insisted on the important role of the knowledge provided by think tanks and other research institutes for policymakers. This point was also stressed by **Emma Udwin**, Deputy Chief of Staff for the EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. Emma Udwin argued that tackling such a complex, diverse and constantly-changing phenomenon as violent extremism required a large evidence base to develop context-specific remedies. She informed the audience about the latest initiatives the European Commission had taken to prevent and counter violent extremism mentioning in particular the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). Moreover, Emma Udwin highlighted that reducing the vulnerability of societies to violent extremism was a priority in the EU's relations with the Southern Neighbourhood.

On behalf of the Barcelona Town Council, the Director of City Diplomacy, **Felip Roca**, stressed the crucial role local institutions could play in this regard. Being

Reducing the vulnerability of societies to violent extremism is a priority in the EU's relations with the Southern Neighbourhood

both closer to the citizens and able to respond quickly to emerging problems, such institutions are well-equipped to deal with the local manifestations of global problems such as radicalisation and violent extremism. Felip Roca stressed that such local responses (ranging from education policies and access to jobs to hosting refugees and confronting xenophobia) all required sufficient resources and support from other levels of government.

Representing the Government of Catalonia, **Maria Badia**, insisted that a response to violent extremism, as one of the main issues on the global security agenda and a very high concern among citizens, had to involve actors from all levels of government and different sectors of society. Maria Badia called on governments to move forward and implement the over 70 recommendations laid out in the resolution approved by the UN General Assembly on 12 February 2016. She claimed that the traditional security-based approach had in the past served to justify Western support for authoritarian regimes, the use of repressive instruments against the population and even military interventions, which had destabilised countries like Iraq. A security-based approach therefore has to be complemented by measures to combat poverty, lack of opportunities, as well as social and political exclusion.



Violent Extremism, A Common Threat to the Security of the Euro-Mediterranean Region

Miguel García-Herráiz (Chair), Deputy Secretary General, Union for the Mediterranean; **Enrique Ayala**, Member of the Council of European Affairs, Fundación Alternativas; **Amr El-Shobaki**, Head of Arab European Unit, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS); **Mohammed Masbah**, Junior Research Fellow, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Associate Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House; **El-Haouès Riache**, Ambassador-Counsellor to Algeria's Minister of Maghrebi Affairs, the African Union and the League of Arab States

The first plenary session explored how the Euro-Mediterranean region was affected by violent extremism, the specificities of the phenomenon today and possible strategies to counter it.



On the one hand, violent extremism poses a major security risk. Violent extremism is associated not only with violent conflicts and terrorist attacks but also with criminal activities more generally. On the other hand, and more insidiously, violent extremism is also challenging democracy and social cohesion in societies. In some cases, terrorist attacks have been used to justify increased surveillance and repression to the detriment of individual freedoms by both democratic and authoritarian regimes. Right-wing populist movements for instance have tried to take advantage of the fear terrorism spreads among the population and to turn this fear into anti-minority, anti-migrants or even anti-democracy feelings. As such, the effects of violent extremism are not limited to the context of national

Violent extremism contributes to a growing polarisation in the Euro-Mediterranean space

societies; Violent extremism also contributes to a growing polarisation in the Euro-Mediterranean space, in other words tensions between Europe on the one hand and the south and southeast Mediterranean on the other hand.

When discussing the factors that explain radicalisation, it was observed that the effects of violent extremism sometimes resembled its causes: Authoritarianism, marginalisation and exclusion are all causes as well as consequences of violent extremism. Among the explanations offered by the panel (that referred to the initial findings of the Euromed survey on violent extremism) were ideology, economic marginalisation, psychological vulnerability, a permissive political environment, political repression and military interventions.



Many radicalised individuals have experienced economic marginalisation and lack of opportunities, resulting in perceptions of injustice, low self-esteem and, ultimately, psychological vulnerability. As one panellist argued, the main motivation for young Moroccans and Tunisians who had travelled to Syria to join terrorist formations was a sense of altruism and the search for purpose, social status and power, things they could

not find at home (typically in the marginalised areas of large and medium cities such as Casablanca, Tunis or Paris). A number of countries were neither willing nor able to stop individuals from travelling to conflict zones. As a member of the audience pointed out, it is not only the weakness of states but also authoritarianism or even state violence that drive individuals into the arms of radical groups. Moreover, military interventions by foreign powers have contributed to undermine domestic institutions and created a fertile ground for violent extremist groups, which strategically exploit such interventions for their own purposes. Finally, some narratives involving a religious component and sometimes backed by mainstream Sunni scholars, provide ideological support for the concept of a violent jihad. Such narratives involve the delegitimisation of authoritarian regimes (particularly the

government of Bashar al-Assad), the protection of the Sunni community in Syria and elsewhere, and ideas of building an Islamic state.

However, the panel concurred that religion or religious texts were only of limited importance for the new generation of jihadists. Unlike in the past, violent extremist groups today are characterised by their loose structures. They recruit and operate through aggressive and tailored propaganda campaigns on social media platforms and the dark net without necessarily submitting their sympathisers to long periods of ideological indoctrination. Religion is used in an abusive and very simplistic manner to provide legitimacy to violent strategies.

Religion is used in an abusive and very simplistic manner to provide legitimacy to violent strategies

These differences between “old-school terrorists” (as al-Qaeda under Osama bin Laden) and violent extremism today also points to the need of new instruments to deal with the phenomenon. Here, the panel’s analysis coincided with the preliminary results of the Euromed Survey, which indicated that the main priorities in order to effectively counter violent extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean region should be to address social and economic root causes, and to promote good governance, democracy and human rights. The strategies mentioned by the panel included changes to legal frameworks, increased border control, modernisation of security forces, international cooperation and data-sharing. In addition to such security-oriented policies, the panel as well as the audience emphasised specific deradicalisation policies as well as economic and social policies to address inequalities, lack of opportunities and social injustice. Such policies should target young people as a matter of priority and create employment opportunities for them. They also include vocational and religious education, and educational efforts to develop critical thinking, tolerance and positive identities. Finally, the panel insisted on the importance of democracy and good governance. The right to freedom of expression is of key importance as it allows citizens not only to express dissenting views, including through their vote, but also to reject radical opinions in an open political debate. This also implies a pluralistic media landscape and the representation of Islamist parties in the political arena. In this context, some countries have taken measures to promote moderate interpretations of Islam.

Overall, the model proposed to confront the problem of violent extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean region can be summarised as one of a pluralistic society, which – at the same time – makes sufficient efforts to integrate marginalised groups.

What Responses to the Rise of Violent Extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean Region?

Haizam Amirah-Fernández (Chair), Senior Analyst, Elcano Royal Institute; **Alexander Ritzmann**, Executive Director, European Foundation for Democracy (EFD), Co-Chair of the Communication and Narratives Working Group, Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN); **Omar Shaban**, Director, Pal-Think for Strategic Studies; **Mustafa El-Sagezli**, General Manager, Libyan Program for Reintegration and Development.

The initial assumption of this plenary session was the diversity of violent extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean region, with for instance different drivers prevailing in different contexts. In some countries, an enabling political or socio-economic environment (push factors) may be at the core of the problem, whereas in others, recruitment networks offering radical responses to individual and group grievances (pull factors) represent the greatest challenge. This diversity calls for strategies that are tailored to specific contexts in order to effectively curb – if not eliminate – violent extremism.

Starting in Europe, one panellist argued that the key driver of violent extremism was not primarily socio-economic marginalisation but rather the presence of recruiting networks, which offer an alternative and more radical worldview to individuals susceptible to be receptive to such ideas for reasons that vary from country to country (e. g. identity crises, experiences of discrimination, lack of education, delinquency, mental illness, etc.). Such groups, and in some cases their charismatic leaders, appeal to angry or fearful citizens. Although recruiting networks often operate in the open, governments find it difficult to intervene as their activities are not necessarily illegal.

Arguably, socio-economic conditions are more important for explaining violent extremism in South and Southeast Mediterranean countries. More specifically, panellists



Socio-economic conditions are more important for explaining violent extremism in South and Southeast Mediterranean countries

mentioned historical grievances (colonialism and unequal development between the North and the South), unequal distribution of wealth within societies, poverty and unemployment, lack of education and, more generally, the failure of the state to bring prosperity and equal opportunity to its citizens following decolonisation. In addition, some states have restricted the space for citizens to freely express themselves. According to several panellists, situations of political exclusion and repression have pushed some individuals to take up arms against the regimes in place, providing radical groups with a credible narrative directed against “wrongdoers” and “oppressors”. More moderate groups (e. g. liberals, political parties, the business community, etc.) are seen as ineffective and part of the system in place.

Ideology plays a central role for violent extremism in the entire Euro-Mediterranean region. However, panellists insisted that ideology should not be equated with religion. Violent extremism today is based only loosely on religious texts. As one panellist argued, ideology should be understood as an enabler, a tool that empowers people, allows them to gain status and gives them a reason to fight for something (e. g. the idea of an Islamic state). Some radicalised individuals want to take revenge against the state or those who failed them. Here, ideology is only used to justify acts of violence.

An enabling environment for violent extremism is provided not only by porous borders, new media and globalisation but also by criminal activities (e. g. cross-border drug trafficking and human trafficking in Libya) and situations of conflict, which make arms readily available to uneducated young men nourishing hatred against certain groups, as one panellist pointed out.

Crafting the right policy responses to violent extremism, while not giving in to the temptation to overreact, requires an analysis of the key drivers in a given context

Crafting the right policy responses to violent extremism, while not giving in to the temptation to overreact, requires an analysis of the key drivers in a given context. In some cases, overcoming violent extremism cannot be dissociated from addressing economic development processes aimed at eliminating poverty, reducing inequality and achieving prosperity for all citizens of a country. In countries such as Libya, this also means to rebuild economic institutions. One proposal was to create concrete opportunities for socio-economic integration to (former) members of violent extremist groups, by offering professional training or support for entrepreneurial initiatives.

A necessary response to violent extremism in South and Southeast Mediterranean countries is political reform, with the objective of making the state more inclusive. In places such as Gaza, increasing personal freedoms, including freedom of movement, is a precondition for overcoming the “siege mentality” found among youth, as a panellist argued. A general focus should be on good governance and the fight against corruption. Security sector reform was said to be essential, not only to improve the security of the population, but also to ensure that state institutions abide by the law themselves. A more controversial way of enhancing inclusiveness is to open up a dialogue and enter into negotiations with violent extremists, as suggested by one panellist: while such a step is seen by some as a taboo, it will automatically lead to more political inclusion, thus removing one cause of radicalisation.

A more controversial way of enhancing inclusiveness is to open up a dialogue and enter into negotiations with violent extremists



Another possible response brought forward by the panel is to improve education, as many radicalised youth lack formal education, including about their own religion, and are therefore vulnerable to the simplistic and misleading claims of violent extremist groups. Deradicalisation campaigns should factor in the diversity of Arab societies, show how radicals target innocent people rather than the object of their hatred (e. g. the state) and point out the weaknesses of the political project of violent extremist groups.

The focus should thus shift to resilience-building and those factors that explain why most people do not radicalise

In cases where pull-factors prevail, the most important measure against violent extremism is to empower civil society, particular actors who speak up against hate speech within their own communities, according to one panellist. Governments should dedicate a part of their counter-terrorism resources to identifying, training, connecting and giving a platform to alternative and non-radical networks, which can give a voice to those individuals who would otherwise be prime candidates for violent extremism. The focus should thus shift to resilience-building and those factors that explain why most people do not radicalise.

How to Break the Violent Extremism/Populism/ Authoritarianism Cycle?

Bichara Khader (Chair), Founder of the Centre d'études et de recherches sur le monde arabe contemporain (CERMAC), Chair of the EuroMeSCo General Assembly; **Rosa Balfour**, Senior Fellow, German Marshall Fund (GMF); **Henri J. Barkey**, Director of the Middle East Programme, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; **François Burgat**, Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS); **Rami Mortada**, Ambassador of Lebanon to the European Union and Belgium, Senior Official of Lebanon for the Union for the Mediterranean.

The final plenary session analysed how the rise of violent extremism as well as populism, both phenomena that can reinforce authoritarian trends, were related to the failure of political institutions.

One panellist argued that the most important reason for the rise of populist movements in Europe and the US was the waning legitimacy of democratic institutions, resulting from a crisis of the political system as well as globalisation, whereby decision-making power was transferred voluntarily or involuntarily away from the nations and their citizens. Populist movements, especially those on the far right, are very successful at influencing mainstream parties, which end up adopting populist policy proposals, claiming that there is no alternative. Examples of such policies are restrictions to migration, cuts to foreign aid, securitisation and sometimes militarisation of foreign policy, as well as a trend towards renationalisation. The result is a reduction of democratic space, with disproportionate weight given to populist movements, while leaving out those citizens who do not support these policies.

The most important reason for the rise of populist movements in Europe and the US is the waning legitimacy of democratic institutions



Contested legitimacy and political extremism in South and South East Mediterranean states today has to be understood from a historical perspective. Following decolonisation, the newly independent states in the region were characterised by societal configurations based



Authoritarian regimes and their supporters in the West tend to blame the phenomenon of violent extremism on radical interpretations of Islam rather than on their own political systems

on tribal and family structures, rather than a common national identity. The nation-building process of these countries was, however, interrupted by the confrontations of geopolitical interests the great powers held in the region. Faced with what they perceived as a threat to their very existence, regimes in the region adopted increasingly authoritarian practices. Since the system did not offer an alternative point of identification, religion was almost the default choice of identity for some segments of the population in the MENA region, as one panellist pointed out. Such sub-national (related to the family or the tribe) or supra-national identities (related to umma) represent a challenge for state institutions. Another panellist argued that it has been common for authoritarian regimes as well as their supporters in the West to blame the phenomenon of violent extremism on radical interpretations of Islam rather than on their own political systems. In fact, it was argued that the success of violent extremist groups is always related to the lack of effective, accountable and inclusive political institutions. This institutional failure was in many cases the result of external interventions (e. g. the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan or the US invasion of Iraq).

The panel agreed that it was therefore necessary to start by acknowledging that the responsibility for extremist violence as well as authoritarianism is a shared one. International actors should refrain from exercising leadership with the purpose of moving forward their own interests in the region.

Different approaches on what needed to be done on the regional and national level were suggested. The first proposal involved the creation of a comprehensive security structure for the MENA region, in which all actors of the region are represented and which would act together on a wide range of issues with the aim to align security interests and avoid confrontations within the region.

A comprehensive security structure for the MENA region is much needed

Another line of action proposed by a panellist was decentralisation of power as a first step towards democracy. This would allow to accommodate diverging interest of different ethnic and religious groups and to rebuild the state from the bottom. However, decentralisation can, to some degree, be seen as running counter to the necessary process of state- and nation-building in several South and South East Mediterranean countries. One panellist argued that given the mosaic of identities, decentralisation risked to destabilise the region even further. The focus should therefore lie on building an inclusive, accountable and unified central state.

With representative democracy being increasingly contested, it was suggested that states needed to reform their institutions to make them more inclusive. Actors other than political parties, such as NGOs or even think tanks, should reach out to citizens and give a voice to those who are not represented by the classical institutions. The panel suggested that, in order to deal with populist movements, non-populist actors should recapture the news cycle, reframe the debate and pro-actively propose alternative solutions, instead of following the populists' lead. One panellist argued that populist movements in Europe were only a transitory phenomenon.

Both South and South East Mediterranean countries and European countries need to address authoritarian trends: Violent extremism as well as populism serve as fig leaves for certain policies. Authoritarianism is a permanent human condition, albeit one that can be moderated by democratic institutions. The key to addressing both violent extremism and populism is therefore to put in place political institutions that enjoy the acceptance of the citizens.

In Working sessions

In the three working sessions, researchers from the EuroMeSCo network presented research projects that will materialize in the form of EuroMeSCo papers as a follow-up to the Annual Conference.

The Geopolitics of Violent Extremism

Liess Boukra (Chair), Director, Institut national d'études de stratégie globale (INESG); **Giuseppe Dentice**, Assistant Research Fellow, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI); **Mattia Toaldo**, Senior Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR); **Ziad Akl**, Senior Researcher, Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS); **Ofir Winter**, Research Fellow, The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS).

This session explored the links between violent extremism and geopolitics. The rise of Daesh in particular has been both driven by geopolitical phenomena and has also, in turn, led to new geopolitical shifts in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The cases of Sinai and Libya offer interesting insights in this regard. Both cases present some similar patterns (absence of state, interactions with local grievances and local contexts, regional ramifications) but also display major differences. For instance, Daesh managed to establish territorial control in Libya unlike in Sinai and it seems to have managed better in Sinai than in Libya to instrumentalise the local context.

The gradual penetration of jihadism in Sinai can be related to the deficit of governance in this region as well as to the proliferation of criminal activities. It has capitalized on feelings of marginalisation and resentment from local populations. Sinai has gradually emerged as a security hotspot. Between 2004 and 2006, a series of attacks targeted Southern Sinai's Red Sea resorts. These assaults were the first acts of terrorism involving local Bedouins on Egyptian soil. Violence increased significantly in the Peninsula after the ousting of Mubarak in 2011 in particular in the north. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM, "Supporters for Jerusalem") emerged and presented itself as the defender of local interests. After Morsi's fall in July 2013, the group further radicalized its activities and expanded its operations beyond Egyptian borders with missile rockets against Israel and

The rise of Daesh has been both driven by geopolitical phenomena and has also, in turn, led to new geopolitical shifts in the Euro-Mediterranean region

The gradual penetration of jihadism in Sinai can be related to the deficit of governance in this region



joint-operations with other groups in Libya. In November 2014, ABM became Wilayat Sinai (WS) and pledged allegiance to Daesh. The group continued to internationalize its operations and embraced a global jihadist agenda, targeting not only Egyptian civil and military targets but also its regional and international “corrupt allies”.

The situation in Sinai calls for the development of a more comprehensive and human security based approach

The rise of Daesh has become a threat not only for Egypt but also for the entire region. Egypt has strengthened its security cooperation with Israel to deal with this threat and has adopted a hard security response. The situation in Sinai may call for a review of Egyptian approaches in this region and the development of a more comprehensive and human security based approach.

Reviewing the context in which Daesh rose and fell in Libya also provides with interesting perspectives. The allure and the momentum of the takeover of Mosul in June 2014 played a role in Daesh’s expansion. Jihadists established themselves initially in the eastern city of Derna, before being ejected by an alliance of local groups in June 2015. Daesh then established its “emirate” in the central city of Sirte, one of the most neglected towns after the civil war because of its role as stronghold of Gaddafi loyalists. Within a few weeks, the Daesh province stretched along 200 km of Mediterranean coastline around Sirte, posing a threat to the entire region. One year after the Libyan Political Agreement was signed in Skhirat in December 2015, the militias from Misrata with the help of US airstrikes and British and Italian forces declared victory over Daesh in Sirte.

Daesh in Libya failed more quickly than elsewhere because of a combination of factors. First, former regime loyalists in Libya did not side with Daesh as Baathists did in Iraq. Second, the organisation was mostly composed of foreign fighters who were perceived by the population as foreign invaders. Third, the economic conditions that allowed Daesh to sell oil in Syria and Iraq did not materialise in Libya and Daesh faced fierce competition from other armed groups. Although Daesh has been defeated, the combination between low intensity conflict, alienation of some communities and vast ungoverned spaces as well as the tendency of some Libyan groups to instrumentalise jihadism and magnify their role in combating them in order to get support from foreign powers, could lead again to the rise of other jihadist groups. This is why a narrowly conceived counter-terrorism approach focused on killing jihadist elements within Libya without a political strategy is doomed to fail. Libya needs both stabilisation and reconciliation.

Daesh in Libya failed more quickly than elsewhere because of a combination of factors

Preventing, Countering and Deradicalising

Abdelhak Bassou (Chair), Senior Fellow, OCP Policy Center; **Manni Crone**, Senior Researcher, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS); **Khadije Nasser**, Regional Project Manager, Institute for Strategic Dialogue; **Bedi Çelik**, Visiting Researcher, Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM); **Francesca Fabbri**, Junior Policy Analyst, European Policy Center (EPC); **Patrycja Sasnal**, Head of Middle East and North Africa Project, Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM).

This session analysed initiatives and projects developed to prevent and counter radicalisation. Two case studies were discussed in particular: the Danish model of prevention (and its possible application in Lebanon) and the tracking of ISIL-related content among the Turkish speaking users of Twitter.

The Danish “Aarhus model” of preventing and countering radicalisation is based on an approach consisting in information sharing and coordination between schools, social service providers and police (also called SSP approach). Its aim is to be able to identify people at risk of radicalisation. The approach is based on the so-called prevention triangle: the basis of the triangle refers to prevention across the board, the middle part corresponds to prevention among persons at risk of radicalisation, and the upper part refers to direct interventions targeting individuals active in extremist groups.

Due to the differences between Danish and Lebanese societies, the Danish model cannot be implemented in Lebanon in the same way as it is in Denmark. In Lebanon,

It is important to empower local Lebanese authorities and to raise awareness about the need for a more social approach to prevent and counter violent extremism



the CSOs and NGOs are very much involved in working with youth at risk, whereas the state or local authorities are absent. At the state level, radicalism and violent extremism tend to be addressed mainly through the prism of security and counter terrorism policies. Therefore, the ambition of the project presented at the session is to empower local Lebanese authorities and municipal committees and to raise awareness about the need for a more social approach to prevent and counter violent extremism. It was noted that several obstacles were encountered while developing the project, such as the lack of decentralisation in the country and the lack of trust between the population and law enforcement authorities, as well as difficulties in cooperating with intelligence services in Lebanon due to a lack of trust.

Subsequently, an initiative to track and counter Turkish speaking Daesh supporters was debated. In fact, several studies analysed the use of Twitter by Arabic or English speaking Daesh supporters. However, none of the existing researches focused specifically on Turkish speaking people. The aim of the project was to acknowledge how effectively Daesh supporters use Twitter and how counter narratives can be produced to counter their discourse. In a first stage, seed accounts, referring to the accounts where 100% of the content is Daesh-related, were detected. The contents generated in these seed accounts are then multiplying through other accounts. Out of 3,700 accounts with Daesh related content, 586 accounts were identified as seed accounts. One of the difficulties encountered during the development of the project was that Twitter started its campaign of suspension of accounts. It was acknowledged, however, that suspension campaigns have been effective since a decrease in tweets by Daesh supporters has been noticed. The research revealed that 85% of the Daesh-related shared content comes from 15% of the accounts, meaning that if those accounts were suspended the amount of Daesh-related content would drastically diminish. Nevertheless, it was observed that once the seed accounts are closed, alternatives to spread Daesh propaganda might be quickly developed.

In Turkey, the dissemination of Daesh propaganda on twitter is generated through a rather small number of “seed accounts”

Populism, Authoritarianism and Violent Extremism

Haldun Yalçinkaya (Chair), Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, TOBB Economics and Technology University; **Eman Ragab**, Senior Researcher, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS); **Michal Vít**, Research Fellow, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy; **Teemu Tammikko**, Senior Research Fellow, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA); **Daniela Huber**, Senior Fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

The session examined the link between violent extremism and populist, nationalist and islamophobic trends in EU countries on the one hand and authoritarian trends on the other. Case studies of Egypt and of Central European countries were analysed.

Four types of radicalism can be identified in Egypt: violent religious radicalism, political radicalism, violent political radicalism and political religious radicalism. Nevertheless, the Egyptian government is focusing mainly on religious radicalism, overlooking other types. As a consequence, the main actors empowered by the Egyptian government to counter radicalism are religious institutions, while other actors, such as universities, NGOs, political parties and media do not receive any support. In addition, in its official discourse, the Egyptian government distinguishes three main reasons for radicalism: misconception of Islam, low level of development and lack of employment among young people. Accordingly, the government is adopting a number of policies aiming at increasing economic development in zones that suffer from high level of poverty (Northern Sinai and Upper Egypt).

However, the socio-economic profiles of radicals who have been involved in violent acts contradict this approach. The so-called root causes, including unemployment, lack of education, underdevelopment, as well as contextual causes are not the only reasons for radicalisation. It is important to factor in an additional level: the triggers, i.e. all the direct causes of personal nature, including lack of opportunities, revenge, feeling of belonging, seeking to play a leading role among a group of people. Thus, in order to effectively



In order to effectively counter radicalisation, the Egyptian government should recognise the complexity and plurality of drivers



counter radicalisation, the Egyptian government should recognise the complexity and plurality of drivers. In order to do so, a national strategy to counter radicalism, based on a partnership between state, institutions, society and NGOs, should be developed, thus contributing to redirecting the available

resources for countering terrorism to focus not only on religious radicalism but also on other types. Furthermore, the government should open up a public sphere for dialogue and space for young people in order to enable them to express their grievances.

The instrumentalisation of the 2015 migration crisis by some political forces in Central Europe has led to an increase of violence towards migrants and a serious breach within societies

The participants acknowledged the difficulty of defining the concept of “radicalism”. A participant observed that in the context of Egypt, the term “violent extremism” was not as widely used as in Europe. Instead, in the Arab academic community, the terms “radicalism” or “extremism” are prevailing. Regarding the causes of radicalism, the participants reflected whether authoritarianism should not be considered as one of the reasons for radicalisation. Also, it was noted that the distinction between the root causes and triggers was sometimes blurred, as the latter may be mixed in nature and combine political, social, economic causes motivating individuals to radicalise.

The second case study focused on the key political parties in Central Europe and their strategies of framing national identity discourses in relation to the 2015 migration crisis. In Hungary and Poland, the 2015 crisis was instrumentalised and used as a tool by the governing parties to achieve their political goals and to frame the national identity against certain types of values and groups. This negative framing led to an increase of violence towards migrants and to a serious breach within the societies.

The participants reflected on why resorting to negative discourses on “the other” had gained ground rather than resorting to positive identity building mechanism. In some countries, islamophobia had replaced anti-semitism or anti-Roma discourses. However, it was noted that the examples of Poland and Hungary differed from each other. Contrary to Poland, Hungary witnessed massive entries of migrants in the summer of 2015. Lastly, the participants reflected on how far the political parties were able to go while using the populist discourse and to what extent those policies may endanger the society in the long term and affect social cohesion.

In the EuroMeSCo Youth Forum

Youth to Youth: How to Tackle Radicalisation of Young People

The first EuroMeSCo Youth Forum focused in particular on youth radicalisation and on the importance of youth participation in fighting radicalisation in a Euro-Mediterranean context. About ten young researchers from the EuroMeSCo network presented to each other and to practitioners some case studies. As a follow-up to this session, some of these will be published in the form of EuroMeSCo policy briefs. Practitioners included **Yassine Isbouia**, General Coordinator of the Mediterranean Forum for Youth of Morocco, **Mohammed Jouili**, Director of the National Observatory for Youth in Tunisia, **Salvatore Ronzo**, Security and Counter Terrorism Adviser at the EU Delegation to Algeria, **Yousef Werdany**, Assistant to the Minister of Youth of Egypt and **Pomme Woltman** from the Radicalisation Awareness Network – RAN.

About ten young researchers from the EuroMeSCo network presented to each other and to practitioners some case studies related to youth radicalisation in the MENA region



Michael Asiedu (Research and Project Assistant, Global Political Trends Center – GPoT, Turkey) shared his insights on Tackling youth Radicalism in Libya. **Maram Diaa** (Researcher, Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies – ACPSS, Egypt) focused on the Mohammed Bin Naif Counseling and Care Center and the Assakina Campaign aiming at reintegrating of former young jihadists in Saudi Arabia. **Ali Fathollah-Nejad** (Associate Fellow, German Council on Foreign Relations – DGAP, Germany) decontextualized youth radicalisation from the “War on Terror” to the “Arab Spring”. **Elisabeth Fobo** (Assistant, Center for Applied Policy Research – CAP, Germany) focused on the role of schools in tackling the problem of radicalization through the study of the approach developed by the German organisation Ufuq. **Ece**

Özbey (Research Assistant, Middle East Technical University – METU, Turkey) and **Cana Tülüş** (Research and Administrative Affairs Coordinator, Istanbul Policy Center - IPC, Turkey) looked into the specificities of youth radicalisation in Turkey. **Jerneja Penca** (Research Fellow, Euro-Mediterranean University – EMUNI, Slovenia) stressed the problem of discrimination against young Muslims in European countries. **Eman Ragab** (Senior Researcher, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies – ACPSS, Egypt) shared her insights about the Egyptian efforts to counter radical ideas online. **Inna Rudolf** (Director of Research at the Maghreb Economic Forum, Germany and Tunisia) made the case of cultural inclusion and “indigenization” as a way to address youth radicalisation. **Katarzyna Sidlo** (Political Economist, Center for Social and Economic Research – CASE, Poland) insisted on the need to work with families of radicalised youth.



TAKING STOCK OF THE EUROMESCO RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Concluding the 2016-2017 research groups

The Annual Conference was the opportunity for research groups to present the three Joint Policy Studies published as a result of their work developed in 2016-2017. The three corresponding Joint Policy Studies are available on the EuroMeSCo website.

Transformation in Tunisia: The First Five Years

Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria (Chair), Head of Euro-Mediterranean Policies Department, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed); **Sherin Gharib**, Researcher, Austrian Institute for International Affairs (OIIP); **Isabel Schäfer**, Associate Senior Researcher, German Development Institute (DIE); **Stefano Torelli**, Research Fellow, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI).

The Joint Policy Study looks into various dimensions of the Tunisian transition. Despite the uncontested achievements, one important aspect is the growing polarisation between the Tunisian society and the political elite. The sense of malaise six years after the revolution is not only related to the economic hardship but also to some socio-political features of the transition such as important levels of corruption or the crisis of political representation. Here, the role of Ennahda, as a political movement at the centre of the transition, was discussed. The party has been accepted by the international community as a decisive stakeholder in the post-revolution order.

The Annual Conference was the opportunity for research groups to present the three Joint Policy Studies published as a result of their work developed in 2016-2017



Nevertheless, its new positioning, its pragmatism and moderation caused by the will to stabilise its position in the post-Ben Ali era, has led to its decreasing popularity among some of its constituencies.

The economic hardship and the security situation are two other factors that complicate the Tunisian transition

The economic hardship and the security situation are two other factors that complicate the Tunisian transition. The economic situation is characterised by the absence of foreign investment, structural unemployment, high inflation and high budget deficit. In order to overcome those obstacles, one of the important things to be done is to improve the situation of the labour market by addressing in particular the skills mismatch, through the development of public-private partnership. The jihadist threat may also imperil Tunisian transformation. According to the Ministry of Interior, 12,000 Tunisians were detected before their departure for jihad in Syria while est. 6,000 Tunisians are currently fighting in Syria, Iraq and Libya with Daesh. The discussion focused on the causes of radicalisation in Tunisia and the State response to it.

The Future of Syria



Michael Asiedu (Chair), Research and Project Assistant, Global Political Trends Center (GPoT); **Salam Kawakibi**, Deputy Director, Director of Research, Arab Reform Initiative (ARI); **Sena Kekeç**, Project Assistant, Global Political Trends Center (GPoT); **Eduard Soler**, Senior Research Fellow, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB); **Eckart Woertz**, Senior Research Fellow, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB).

A federal structure could help addressing some of the challenges in post-conflict Syria

During this session, the results of the Working Package on the future of Syria were presented. The objective of the Joint Policy Study was to consider various post-conflict scenarios. There was a consensus among the panellists that a federal structure could help addressing some of the challenges in post-conflict Syria. The future of Syria would also depend on its capacity to deal with its past through transitional justice. While doing so, the traditional tribal justice that has proven to

be efficient in dispute resolution should be taken into account. It was also stressed that confessional divisions were less profound than it appeared.

Six years of war had a tremendous impact on the socio-economic situation of the country. Since 2011, the economy has lost 60% of its GDP and the agriculture sector has been devastated. In addition, there was a decrease in the population (from 26 million to 16 million) and 45% of school-age children and youth do not attend schools. Those factors will have a major impact on the post-conflict situation.

The socio-economic impact of the war will have a major impact on the post-conflict situation

With this in mind, three scenarios were considered. Reconstructing while fighting (1), with different kind of reconstruction efforts that could take place including (re)building infrastructures and providing basic services to the civilian areas that have been in the frontline. Reconstructing without peace (2) would involve a ceasefire agreement among several contending parties, with the backing of global and regional powers, yet no comprehensive peace process. In this scenario, there would be a certain margin for reconstruction efforts but they would be limited in scope and would depend on bilateral agreements between donors and contenders. Reconstructing to consolidate peace (3): a political solution is endorsed in a peace conference, involving local, regional and global players. The parties would agree on a roadmap for an inclusive political transition. Most funds and efforts would be devoted to the reconstruction of basic infrastructures (roads, water pipes, electric grids and sanitation) as well as health and education services.

Mapping Migration Challenges in the EU Transit and Destination Countries

Erzsébet N. Rózsa (Chair), External Researcher, Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (IFAT), Senior Research Fellow, Institute of World Economics of Hungarian Academy of Sciences; **Christian Druck**, Affiliated Expert, Middle East and International Affairs Research Group (MEIA Research); **Gunilla Herolf**, Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA); **András Hettyey**, Researcher, Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (IFAT), Lecturer, National University of Public Service; **Marko Lovec**, Research Fellow, CIR, University of Ljubljana; **Annelies Pauwels**, Junior Analyst, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS).

During the session, the final research results of the Working Package “Mapping Migration Challenges in the EU Transit and Destination Countries” were presented. The Joint Policy Study examined the selected cases of “destination countries” (Germany and Sweden), “transit countries” (Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia), the atypical case of a country that was both transit and destination (Austria), as well as the impact of the migration challenges on the EU policy framework.

The migration crisis revealed a number of divides that were already present within the EU between different groups of Member States. First, the geographical situation of each country influenced how each country saw the crisis. Another difference that came under the spotlight was the society’s perception of immigration, linked to the historical background of each country, its immigration/emigration experiences, as well as previous experiences of integration. Third divide was linked to the economic situation of the Member States: the unemployment rate had an impact on how the countries perceived migration flows and on their capacity to integrate the refugees into the labour market.

Political developments in the selected countries, i.e. elections in Croatia and Austria, and the hardening public attitude towards migrants, but also, as in the case of Sweden, the inability to deal with a huge influx of refugees, pushed the governments to adopt solutions on a national level and to harshen the policies towards migrants, introducing border controls and restrictions on asylum policies. The renationalisation



of migration policies, rather than harmonisation, challenged the existing European asylum framework. Lack of compliance with the agreed relocation and resettlement rules and differences in recognition rates caused further division between “transit” and “destination” countries, leading the latter to advocate that the EU countries refusing to adhere to the commonly set rules should not receive continued support from the EU.

The 2015 migration crisis showed that the EU Member States did not have the adequate means and capacity to face emergency situations on their own. Moreover, it stressed the importance of burden sharing and solidarity and demonstrated that any sustainable solution to critical situations could only be reached on the EU level.

The 2015 migration crisis showed that the EU Member States did not have the adequate means and capacity to face emergency situations on their own

Kicking-off new research groups

The Annual Conference was also the opportunity for newly formed research groups to present the initial concepts they would work during the year and get feedbacks from other researchers of the network and participants to the conference. The work of these three research groups (“working packages”) will materialize in the form of Joint Policy Studies to be published at the beginning of 2018.

Sahel and Security in the Mediterranean

Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck (Carnegie Middle East Center), **Yahia Zoubir** (KEDGE Business School), **Raquel Barras Tejudo** (UNISCI) and **Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde** (DIIS) presented the initial concepts they intend to develop in a Joint Policy Study on Sahel, to which Giovanni Faleg (CEPS) will also contribute as main author. The study will provide extended analysis of various challenges and security problems which are undermining the stability of the Sahel, i.e. the growing jihadist threat, human trafficking, state fragility as well as climate and demographic challenges. The publication will also provide recommendations on policies and actions to be adopted to address the critical situation in the region.

The study will provide extended analysis of various challenges and security problems which are undermining the stability of the Sahel



Among other comments, the participants observed that in order to address the pressing problems in the region, a comprehensive security and development strategy was needed. In this context, the participants welcomed the EU strategy for Sahel adopting a holistic approach towards the region. The importance to

identify and respond to the challenges impeding the implementation of developmental projects was highlighted. With this in mind, it was suggested that the major efforts should be directed to strengthening governance in the region.

New Euro-Mediterranean Dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean

Insights and recommendations will be given on what instruments could be developed to foster sub-regional integration

Nimrod Goren (MITVIM), **Thanos Dokos** (ELIAMEP), **Gabriel Mitchell** (MITVIM), **Muriel Asseburg** (SWP) and **Michael Asiedu** (GPoT) presented the initial framing of the Joint Policy Study they would develop on “New Euro-Mediterranean dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean”. The aim would be to analyse various factors that may constitute both opportunities and threats to an increasing cooperation between some Eastern Mediterranean countries, such as newfound energy reserves and the war in Syria. Insights and recommendations will be given on what instruments could be developed to foster sub-regional integration, building on the already existing initiatives and policies.

Among other comments, the participants highlighted the important role the EU might play in fostering sub-regional cooperation, as two of its Member States are part of the Eastern Mediterranean region. Nevertheless, concerns were expressed about the feasibility of cooperation initiative in this particular zone, based on past intents. Other comments indicated that energy was not a good sector on which the cooperation might be built due to the divergent interests provoked by the discovery of energy deposits. Cooperation on environment, however, was regarded as a good starting point for cooperation in this region.



Minorities in the Middle East and North Africa

Salam Kawakibi (Arab Reform Initiative), **Paolo Maggiolini** (Catholic University of Milan), and **George Fahmi** (European University Institute) presented the initial concepts they intend to develop in a Joint Policy Study on minorities in the MENA region, to which Saïd Bennis (Centre d'études et de recherches en sciences sociales) and Maha Abdelhamid (Arab Reform Initiative) will also contribute as main authors.



One of the objectives will be to deconstruct the concept of minority that has been often misused and instrumentalised for political purposes. Although the Joint Policy Study will include the study of some minority issues in North Africa (with the case studies of the Amazigh question in Morocco and black people in North Africa), the discussion mainly focused on minority issues in Syria. Among other comments, participants to this session invited the authors to factor in gender issues in the study, to look into the concept of citizenship, into the link between Christian minority in Syria and other minorities, into the role of diasporas and into the complexity of the relationship between Christians and the regime in Syria that couldn't be reduced to a simple binary pro or against framework.

One of the objectives will be to deconstruct the concept of minority that has been often misused and instrumentalised for political purposes

THE ROLE OF THINK TANKS AND NETWORKS

Ahead of the Annual Conference, James McGann addressed the EuroMeSCo General Assembly and delivered a much appreciated message to the EuroMeSCo members. He started his intervention by stressing the power and the potential of think tanks in creating, maintaining and amplifying policy networks, especially in the Euro-Mediterranean region, where cooperation between the Southern and Northern part is crucial. Speaking about EuroMeSCo and its Annual Conference, he said “It is gatherings like this and organisations like EuroMeSCo and IEMed that exemplify the power and potential of networks”. He shared his thoughts about the potential of creating a global community of think tanks which can apprehend issues in a way that no institution alone could. He insisted that it is by connecting the think tanks that crucial problems can be addressed.



James McGann, PhD Senior lecturer, International Studies; Director, Think Tanks and Civil Society Programme, University of Pennsylvania

He then thanked the General Assembly, EuroMeSCo and the IEMed for inviting him and agreed that “countering violent extremism” was a most appropriate topic for the Annual Conference of the network.

Subsequently, James McGann addressed the challenges facing think tanks. He first alluded to the highly competitive environment among think tanks and used the word “frenemies” to refer to the relations between think tanks, explaining that the institutes were partners and rivals at the same time, collaborators on some projects and competitors on others. However, he indicated that what has changed is the emergence of a new kind of competitors to the think tanks; Consultancy and policy groups had become indeed competitors to research institutes. As a result, even academic institutions were increasingly coming-up with policy-oriented work in order to compete. According to him, the world also changed with the use of

It is gatherings like this EuroMeSCo Annual Conference that exemplify the power and potential of networks

disruptive new technologies in the political field. He used Donald Trump's election as an example, saying the alliance between sophisticated marketing strategies to target the potential voters and find the themes that could attract them on the one hand, and social media on the other hand, is changing the very nature of politics.

He added that new technologies had made new political movements win. In addition to the example of Donald Trump, James McGann also mentioned new Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte. Part of the technics used in business have been converted into politics, such as customising and segmenting political messages to specific groups. He added that people tended to trust more the information transmitted through their own networks and circles of friends on Facebook than institutional messages, which increased the phenomenon of customisation and individualisation of the information.

James McGann stressed that the increased velocity and complexity of the information and political flow allowed by social media can also be considered as an opportunity for think tanks. In this environment, people were indeed inclined to search for keys of understanding and they could turn to think tanks to obtain it. However, in order to do so, the traditional model of think tanks had to evolve. According to him, extremist groups are far more adaptive than research institutes, and that is what makes them powerful and successful in disseminating their messages. He insisted that think tanks need innovation to survive and compete. He took the example of the Al Jazeera network, which created a think tank, and this institution produces on the Syrian situation the content that is diffused by the Al Jazeera news network. He also cited the case of a think tank in Brazil able to be informed of what happens in all Brazilian territory thanks to Big Data, which allowed James McGann to stress the importance of innovation.

The traditional model of think tanks has to evolve

He then explained that public and research institution failed to understand a series of insecurities that people perceive and that are key for the understanding of today's realities. He mentioned in particular the economic insecurity, resulting from globalisation, the physical insecurity, caused by the rise of terrorism and climate change, and the identity insecurity, provoked by the increase in multiculturalism and mobility. All these insecurities and disorders have to be understood and analysed and think tanks have an important role to play in this regard.

The report was written at the EuroMeSCo Academic Secretariat by Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria, Aleksandra Chmielewska, Vera Pober, Pierre-André Arqué and Pol Rovira



Comprising 107 institutes from 32 European and South Mediterranean countries, the EuroMeSCo (Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) network was created in 1996 for the joint and coordinated strengthening of research and debate on politics and security in the Mediterranean. These were considered essential aspects for the achievement of the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

EuroMeSCo aims to be a leading forum for the study of Euro-Mediterranean affairs, functioning as a source of analytical expertise. The objectives of the network are to become an instrument for its members to facilitate exchanges, joint initiatives and research activities; to consolidate its influence in policy-making and Euro-Mediterranean policies; and to disseminate the research activities of its institutes amongst specialists on Euro-Mediterranean relations, governments and international organisations.

The EuroMeSCo work plan includes a research programme with four publication lines (EuroMeSCo Joint Policy Studies, EuroMeSCo Papers, EuroMeSCo Briefs and EuroMeSCo Reports), as well as a series of seminars, workshops and presentations on the changing political dynamics of the Mediterranean region. It also includes the organisation of an annual conference and the development of web-based resources to disseminate the work of its institutes and stimulate debate on Euro-Mediterranean affairs.