

The IEMed Youth forum was held on 11 July 2018 at *Ecole de Gouvernance et d'Economie* in Rabat.

It gathered 40 participants from 10 countries in the Euro-Mediterranean area, with the objective to explore ways to further stimulate youth research and mobility in the region.

During the opening plenary session, three young researchers from Tunisia, Algeria and Turkey shared their experiences of participation in EU-funded research projects and mobility, highlighting some of the challenges they have been facing. Inaccessibility and ineligibility to participate in national research projects and programmes, lack of trust from the senior researchers, limited



funding for research, difficulties to obtain and gather relevant data, as well as obstacles to publish their research were mentioned, among others.

Opening space for young researchers would bring new dynamics to the research on Euro-Mediterranean political and security issues

In this view, the importance of international research programmes was highlighted as one of the most effective tools to get recognition and visibility, together with peer learning and networking. The need to recognise and open the space for young researchers was stressed as a way to bring new dynamics to the research on Euro-Mediterranean political and security issues.

### **BUILDING A YOUTH EUROMED COMMUNITY THROUGH LEARNING MOBILITY**

During the session, nine junior researchers discussed the challenges faced by EuroMed young scholars and students while participating in the EU mobility programmes, as well as exchanged ideas on how youth mobility in the Euro-Mediterranean region could be further fostered.

The analysis of selected country case studies (Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Poland, and Tunisia) allowed participants to identify some common obstacles, which prevent young experts from both shores of the Mediterranean from taking part in mobility programmes.

Information gap and centralisation of information are major factors impeding youth mobility

Information gap and centralisation of information were highlighted as some of the major factors impeding youth from participating in mobility programmes. Information tends to reach only big cities (usually capitals) in a given country and does not reach rural terrains. Moreover, even if information reaches an institution, it tends to remain at hands of few people. Teachers and students are not always kept up-to-date by the administration about the possibilities to travel abroad.

The participants observed also a different treatment of Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood countries, as well as some priority treatments benefitting some specific Southern Mediterranean countries, including additional assistance to Tunisia under Erasmus+ to increase the numbers of exchange of students and staff between Tunisia and Europe.



The difficulties in obtaining visa were highlighted as one of the major impediments for youth willing to participate in interuniversity mobility exchanges. Very often, EU Member States use Schengen visa as a means of selecting and filtering nationals of countries from the southern shore of the Mediterranean. It happens that the latter apply the principle of reciprocity and sometimes complicate the stay of EU citizens. Moreover, the participants noted that mobility and exchanges are affected by the prevailing security-based approach of migration, in particular since the Arab spring. In other words, the fate of young researchers and research projects is highly conditioned by political and economic developments.

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Bureaucratic red tape was also mentioned as a discouraging factor for young people and staff willing to partake in mobility programmes.

A participant observed that a limited choice of destinations and host institutions linked to the field of study might also be a source of difficulties, especially when it comes to language problems. Lack of administrative assistance on the part of hosting institutions, language gap, lack of special housing for youth and staff taking part in mobility programmes, and, above all, limited scholarships, which often do not cover all the expenses were enumerated as challenges faced by successful candidates.

A participant noted that some of the above challenges apply to labour mobility. A special focus was given to the mobility partnerships / programmes and bilateral

agreements between Tunisia and some EU member states. A significant inconsistency between the agreed number of workers to move temporary to the EU and the actual number was stressed. The major impediments enumerated were very short work permit visas (6 months), as well as difficulties to obtain blue card.

Regional cooperation could be further fostered through creation of South-South mobility programmes and schemes

Participants agreed on the importance of South-North mobility programmes as a way to promote cross-cultural dialogue, thus forging a genuine Euro-Mediterranean community. At the same time, they observed that South-South mobility programmes and schemes should also be promoted to increase regional cooperation.



Focusing on the Southern Mediterranean shore, a participant presented a specific case of a growing number of Syrian students in Jordanian higher education institutions, as well as the main barriers Syrian refugee students face in accessing and performing higher education in Jordan. It was noted that given the long-lasting conflict, Jordanian higher education system is heavily overloaded and should thus be reshaped following such a new type of demand. This specific issue is currently under the attention of European Governments and actors (i.e. German Ministry of Education) since Jordan represents a key-case for learning best practices on inter-institutional cooperation in order to efficiently reply to the Syrian refugee students higher education demand.

In the light of the common challenges, participants to the session issued a number of recommendations to improve the mobility programmes, so as to open them to a growing number of young experts.

The administrative and visa procedures should be standardised and simplified as much as possible, in order to give equal chances to the youth from the Southern Mediterranean to participate in the exchanges. A need to increase the female participation was stressed, with possibility to create some gender quota.

Taking example of a special window for Tunisia under Erasmus + programme, a specific Euro-Med Erasmus + Programme should be created to reflect the regional approach of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Similarly, an Intersouth Programme should be launched, targeting the exchange among students of the south Mediterranean shore.

Euro-Med Erasmus + Programme should be created to reflect the regional approach of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

In addition to mobility programmes and to further promote exchange among researchers from the two shores of the Mediterranean, research hubs could be created both in the EU and in the South, where young experts would interact with their peers, but also with representatives of private sector and civil society.

The cooperation between policy makers and academia should be promoted (regular meetings and exchanges) to understand the needs of researchers in order to improve programmes for the youth and mobility.

In the same vein, regional, national and local youth associations as well as civil society organisations should be further involved in the process, in order to better tailor and to increase the outreach of mobility programmes.

Youth associations should be involved to better tailor and to increase the outreach of mobility programmes

Additional budget should be allocated to targeted campaigns publicizing and promoting mobility programmes offline and online, including in Arabic.

The scope of destinations and host institutions linked to fields of expertise should be broadened, which would thus lead to decreasing problems arising from

language gaps. Accommodation facilities for the students of mobility programmes should be created. Moreover, the facilities should adjust and reply as much as possible to the needs, with a focus on matters linked to religion and culture.

## **YOUNG RESEARCHERS AS ACTORS OF CHANGE: NEW DYNAMICS OF RESEARCH ON EURO-MEDITERRANEAN POLITICAL AND SECURITY ISSUES**

The lack of cooperation between researchers and decision makers

In this session, nine selected young scholars shared their thoughts with the rest of the group about research on Euro-Mediterranean political and security issues with the objective to identify shortcomings and put forward new ideas and perspectives.

affects the quality of research on Euro-Mediterranean political and security issues

Taking stock of the state of play of political and security oriented research in the Euro-Mediterranean region, the participants identified a number of trends or challenges.

Gender imbalance in the political and security oriented research could be overcome through creation of specialized women networks

The lack of cooperation between researchers on the one hand and decision makers and security practitioners on the other hand is a serious handicap to the discipline. Practitioners tend to perceive researchers as naïve and disconnected from reality and often reluctant to share relevant data. This, in turn, undermines the quality of academic research and complicates the development of evidence-based policy making, which is important. Some participants shared their experience in doing research on issues related to migration or violent extremism in the region and the difficulty to access data and policy makers. Young researchers are bound to seek new avenues of cooperation with practitioners and improve their outreach strategies, while officials should become more receptive to the inclusion of research-based evidence in decision making processes and therefore open-up to cooperation with researchers.

Gender imbalance is particularly acute in the political and security oriented research. A number of layers of difficulties complicate the work of young female researchers in particular. Specialized women networks that would offer a platform



for the work of some female researchers to gain visibility could be one of the options to consider to overcome this situation.

It was also observed that the “Euro-Mediterranean” dimension of research as such tended to decline, i.e. to be less a focus of research than it used to be. This trend is arguably mirroring a rebilateralisation of relations in the Euro-Mediterranean region to the detriment of the regional dimension that is losing momentum. Through their work, young researchers can contribute to reinvest the Euro-Mediterranean dimension and demonstrate that genuine Euro-Mediterranean fora represent the adequate level to address policy issues on top of the agenda such as migration or terrorism.

Young experts can reinvest Euro-Mediterranean dimension of research that tends to decline



Too often, researchers tend to look into EU policies developed vis-à-vis the Southern Mediterranean without paying sufficient attention to how these are perceived in MENA countries or even to their real political, economic and social impact. Therefore, there should be renewed attention towards these dimensions, including perceptions by both elites and societies in MENA countries of EU migration management and free trade agreement negotiations. It was proposed that additional funding for research in these areas should be made available.

Perceptions of the EU and of EU policies by MENA countries should be given more attention in the Euro-Med research

Analyses by young researchers could contribute to reframe Eurocentric approaches towards migration and violent extremism

Similarly, the socio-economic component should be reintegrated at the core of political and security analysis. Both European researchers and policy-makers pay great attention to the macroeconomic performance of MENA countries and IMF data, while significant microeconomic phenomena remain relatively unexplored. It leads to an insufficient focus of EU policies on poor population and middle class in MENA region and on the effects economic hardship or exclusion have on insecurity. This in turn leaves a large space for young researchers who could first, as mentioned above, contribute to identify local socio-economic problems in the Euro-Mediterranean area and their interlinkages with politics and security in the region and second contribute accordingly to solutions by issuing policy recommendations related for instance to Euro-Mediterranean partnership priorities.



The discussion then turned more specifically to two major issues on the Euro-Mediterranean policy agenda. It was acknowledged that research and in particular analyses by young researchers could contribute to reframe Eurocentric or biased approaches towards migration and violent extremism, channelled by mainstream media or politicians. On the migration front, European media have contributed to shaping a negative image of migrants and refugees, which in turn fuels a culture of fear as well as

Young researchers have a role to play in integrating the voice of civil society in the research and policy proposals

anti-immigration discourses and policies. Young researchers have a role to play in integrating the voice of civil society in their research and policy proposals, developing research on the causes of flows rather than on their impact for Europe and confront media and policy makers with evidence-based findings. A participant explained how the distinction between “strong regulating” member states and weak regulators could help understand not only the EU internal policy responses and discourses on migration but also the policies developed by the EU vis-à-vis Southern Mediterranean partners. The deals, crafted by the European Union under pressure from public opinions and from some member



states, consisting in externalizing migration control could not be sustainable. Young researchers have to challenge the current policy framework, remind the importance of coming up with joint Euro-Mediterranean solutions based on mutual respect and shared ownership and try to include migrants' voice in research, policies and media. It was suggested that genuine Euro-Mediterranean policies, programmes or research initiatives on migration would be useful.

Similarly, young researchers should challenge Eurocentric approaches in the sphere of violent extremism. Limited access to data is a major challenge for research on violent extremism. Short of evidence-based references, the risk of politicization of debates on violent extremism, biased information or stigmatizing certain persons and groups in political discourse and media are real. A participant argued that the dominance of ISIS and other jihadist actors on the agenda had overshadowed the diversity of actors using violence including the non-jihadist driven threats. Young researchers could also contribute to renew CVE related research that had over-explored traditional drivers such as economy, religious interpretations and authoritarianism. More individualistic oriented studies of the radicalization phenomena were still to be made, taking into account that the majority of radicalized youth is not connected with any political or religious entities, especially in countries with high level rates of non-jihadist related violent extremism such as Egypt, Libya or Tunisia. The case of Morocco was also discussed. Despite the involvement of a number of Moroccan nationals as foreign fighters and in terrorist attacks in Europe, there had not been major terrorist attacks in Morocco over the last years. If this is to be attributed to the tolerant interpretation of Islam and the Moroccan model of training the imams, the question is why this has not prevented Moroccan nationals from getting involved abroad, which was one of the main research questions for one of the participants. More generally, a participant commented that, despite the effective cooperation between the intelligence organisations of the Euro-Mediterranean countries, the absence of multilateral Euro-Mediterranean formats for exchanges on best CVE practices was striking.

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