

THE ROLE OF CHINA IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA). BEYOND ECONOMIC INTERESTS

Warsaw, 3 December 2019

report
from the Dialogue Workshop



REPORT No. 27
December 2019
www.euromesco.net



CASE – Centrum Analiz Społeczno-Ekonomicznych
CASE – Center for Social and Economic Research

IE Med.



THE ROLE OF CHINA IN IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA). BEYOND ECONOMIC INTERESTS

Warsaw, 3 December 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dialogue Workshop “The Role of China in in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Beyond Economic Interests” was held on December 03, 2019 at the Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE) as part of the EuroMeSCo ENI Project, co-funded by the European Union and the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed). It was organised by the Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE), and the IEMed.

A total of 14 participants, including EuroMeSCo researchers directly involved in the project, as well as other experts and scholars, attended the dialogue workshop. This event aimed at discussing the initial research results ahead of the publication of a Joint Policy Study (envisaged for March 2020) and



engaging the participants in analysing and sharing their perspectives on the present and potential future role of China in the MENA region. Specifically, this workshop discussed and analysed economic, political, cultural, and security aspects of the China's presence in the region.

The workshop unfolded with the presentation of the main findings from the authors that have drafted the chapters of the Joint Policy Study. Dr. Katarzyna Sidlo (CASE – Center for Social and Economic Research) – the coordinator of the research group – kicked off the event by providing the background and context to the study, and discussing economic aspects of the China's engagement in the MENA countries. Specifically, she focused on the analyses of the development and future prospects of trade and investment patterns in the region. During the second presentation, Dr. Erzsébet Rozsa (Institute of World Economics) presented the chapter on the cultural, political, and security context of the China's presence in the MENA region, which was written in partnership with Tamás Peragovics. This chapter highlights the importance of the soft power approach and discusses the development of the China's approach to peace and security in the region. In the last session, Lars Andersen (DIIS – Danish Institute for International Studies) and Camille Lons (IISS - The International Institute for Strategic Studies), focused on the geopolitics implications of China's further involvement in the MENA region and its effects on the global order and the balance of powers in the region.

DETAILS OF THE SESSIONS

China's Economic Engagement in the Region

Katarzyna Sidlo presented the prime pillars of China's economic engagement in the MENA region. She explained the interplay between the foreign direct investments (FDIs), development aid, and the China-led construction projects in the region. Additionally, she discussed the development of the current trade patterns between China and the MENA countries. It was argued that, while persistent dominance of the energy sector in the China's imports from the MENA supports regional growth, a rising share of the China's exports in

textiles sector could undermine the competitiveness of local business in the MENA region. The feedbacks from the researchers and practitioners pointed to the importance of the China's internal demographic and economic dynamics and the role of China's private sector in the development of its international economic relations. Additionally, the participants asked for more details on the duration and type of the China's construction projects in the region and suggested to include a comparative perspective that would discuss China's economic engagement in the MENA region within a broader context of China's role in other regions.

China's Political, Military and Cultural Engagement in the Region

Erzsébet Rozsa presented the findings of the chapter she writes with Tamás Peragovics, focusing on the cultural, social, and security aspects of the China's engagement in the MENA countries. Additionally, it discussed a broader political context of the China's growing role in the region. It was argued that the transition from the non-interference approach to the participation in the counter-piracy and peacekeeping missions and eventual regional conflict mediation has been guided by the China's perceived role as the responsible superpower. Additionally, the presentation highlighted the importance of the cultural aspect and soft power approach which complement China's political and economic engagement in the region. With this regard, while the Confucius Institutes and student exchange programs promote positive image of China in the region, the situation of the Uighur minority in China remains a sensitive issue. The feedbacks from the researchers and practitioners pointed to the importance of the bilateral academic exchange and media cooperation in the development of people-to-people and cultural ties between China and the region. The participants suggested to include more details on the arms trade between China and the MENA countries, as well as on the difference between China's and Western concepts of peace.

The Geopolitical Implications of China's Presence in the MENA

In the last session, Lars Andersen and Camille Lons discussed China's role in the regional security architecture and explained the nexus between energy and

security in the MENA countries. The presentation focused on the evolution of the balance of powers in the region and highlighted the likely heterogeneous implications of the China's presence in the region. Additionally, it was argued that despite China's growing involvement in the region, it is most probable that China will balance its activities without challenging the US in the region. The feedbacks from the researchers and practitioners highlighted the importance of the China's presence in the region for the global order and pointed to the role of the nuclear technology development in the MENA countries' for the long-term regional stability. Additionally, the participants asked for more details on the implications of the China's engagement in the region for the EU and suggested to compare the tools and geopolitical consequences of the China's involvement in the MENA countries with its experience in other regions.

