

Peace and Security Cooperation

The last block of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey provides insights into how respondents assess the cooperation between the EU and its counterparts in the southern neighbourhood in preventing and countering violent extremism, and into maritime security and counter-terrorism in the Sahel.

It also aims to define the different actions that the EU could take to contribute more effectively to solving conflicts in the region, as well as to boosting its response to emerging cybersecurity and violent extremism threats exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, in cooperation with its southern partners.

Main findings:

- There is a strong consensus around the assertion that efforts by EU member states to unify their positions and speak with one voice is the most appropriate means to contribute more effectively to solving conflicts in the region.
- In general, opinions on issues related to peace and security cooperation by southern neighbourhood respondents are less critical than EU respondents. For instance, the cooperation between the EU and its counterparts in the southern neighbourhood in preventing and countering violent extremism since the 2015 ENP Review was only perceived as positive by southern neighbourhood respondents.
- Similarly, when asked to assess the maritime cooperation in the Mediterranean between the EU and its southern partners, southern neighbourhood respondents showed more tendency to have a positive view of it compared to EU respondents. The latter exhibited a certain level of scepticism about this cooperation, with a significant proportion of EU respondents assessing it as bad or very bad.

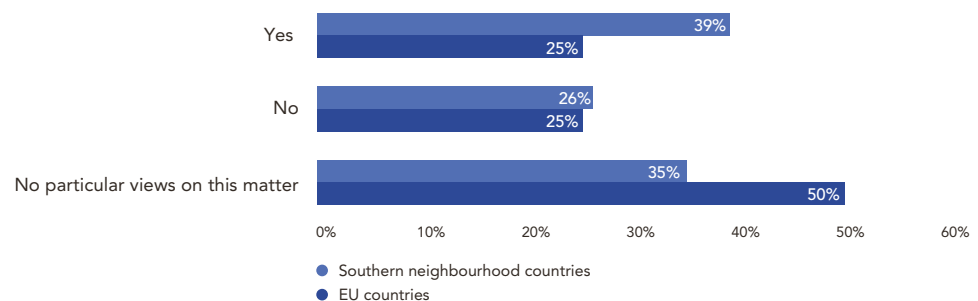
- As far as the cooperation between the EU and its southern partners to counter terrorism in the Sahel is concerned, again, EU respondents were slightly more inclined to have a negative view of this cooperation than southern neighbourhood respondents.
- When it comes to identifying possible actions that the EU could take, in cooperation with its southern partners, to bolster its responses to emerging cybersecurity and violent extremism threats, respondents think the EU's provision of education, promotion of physical and cultural activities, and improvement of employment opportunities for youth in the southern neighbourhood should be the main priority.

The EU's Engagement with its Southern Mediterranean Neighbours in Preventing and Combating Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

Question 20 was designed to capture the opinion of respondents on whether the cooperation between the EU and its counterparts in the southern neighbourhood in preventing and countering violent extremism since the 2015 ENP Review is working.

Exactly half of the respondents from EU countries expressed “no particular views on this matter” and fewer respondents from the southern neighbourhood countries (35%) answered that way. For the rest, respondents from southern neighbourhood countries were less critical of the cooperation with 39% believing it to be working compared to 25% of EU respondents (see graph 37).

Graph 37: Q.20 Is it working the cooperation between the European Union and its counterparts in the southern neighbourhood in PVE and CVE since the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2015?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey

As a follow-up to this question, many of those who do not think that cooperation is working, formulated recommendations by particularly insisting on the importance of addressing the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism, as well as elaborating on the nexus between the fight against violent extremism and the promotion of education, on the one hand, and the fight against violent extremism and good governance, on the other:

The current cooperation between the European Union and the SMCs is based on confronting terrorism without addressing the root causes of terrorism and extremism, which are often weak educational infrastructure, lack of job opportunities, widespread ignorance, government corruption and poverty, and political instability in the region.

— Palestinian respondent

Much more should be done to tackle the root causes of violence and terrorism in the region – in terms of good governance, economic growth and human rights.

— Israeli respondent

Conflict, terrorism, corruption and human rights abuses are complex problems that cannot be treated in isolation.

— British respondent

Violent extremist groups must be confronted with more efforts in support of civic education based on the promotion of democratic values and human rights principles in educational curricula.

— The Egyptian Association for the Advancement of Community Participation in Fayoum

How to Bolster Resilience Against Cyber Threats and Violent Extremism?

Question 21 was open-ended and designed to focus on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on global security, including on cybercrime and violent extremism, and especially on young people spending more time online at home, thus becoming more vulnerable to online recruitment and radicalisation.

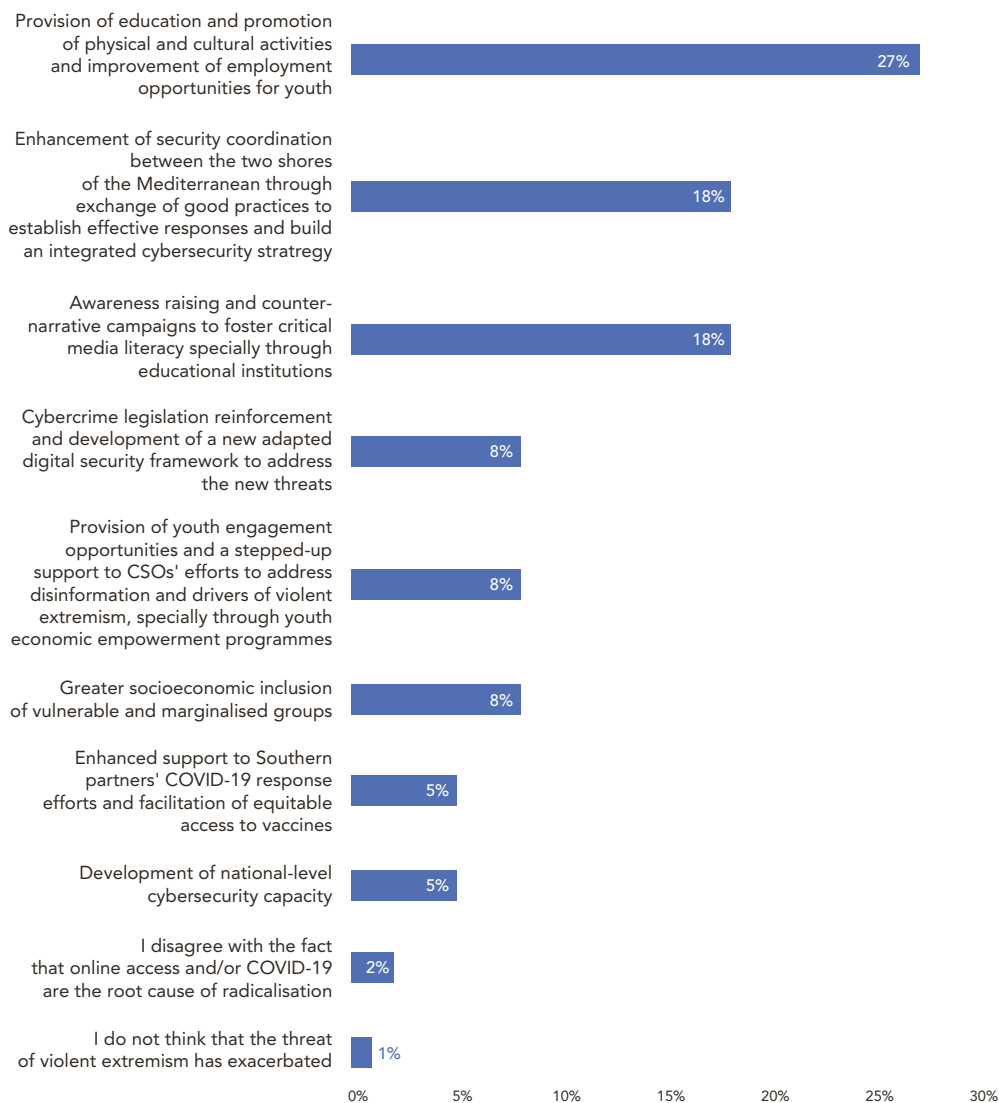
This question aimed to sound out respondents on possible actions that the EU could take, in cooperation with its southern partners, to step up its responses to these emerging security threats.

The ad hoc categories shown (see graph 38) were developed based on the results obtained. The most frequently chosen answer recognises the importance of addressing some of the main drivers considered to be conducive to violent extremism and radicalisation: lack of educational or employment opportunities. Thus, the most recurrent answer is the EU's provision of education, promotion of physical and cultural activities, and improvement of employment opportunities for youths in the southern neighbourhood (27% of all responses).

Security coordination and awareness-raising were the other categories that obtained a significant number of answers (18% each) (see graph 38).

Additionally, a notable aspect of the breakdown of answers is that Maghreb respondents prioritise the enhancement of security coordination between the two shores of the Mediterranean (25%) over the EU's provision of education, promotion of physical and cultural activities, and improvement of employment opportunities for youths in the southern neighbourhood (23%), as well as over awareness-raising campaigns (18%).

Graph 38: Q.21 How should the European Union step up its response to new security threats, in cooperation with its southern partners? (Categories developed from the open-ended answers)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey

Here is a sample of comments formulated by respondents who stressed the importance of education and employment of youths in the southern neighbourhood:

Améliorer le niveau de scolarisation et de l'enseignement en intégrant des activités parascolaires utiles surtout sportives et culturelles.

— Moroccan respondent

Invest in global citizenship education, education for health and well-being, education and gender equality, skills for work and life (TVET), teachers, textbook development, right to education, among others.

— Respondent from UNESCO

Sharpen the focus on youth employment and education, so their feelings of despair and injustice can be addressed. Otherwise, extremist groups could take advantage of their vulnerabilities.

— Spanish respondent

Those are chronic problems that are repeatedly aggravated by wider developments. A lot can be done to minimise these threats (like developing more sophisticated and coordinated legislations), but what can really make a difference is creating alternatives that make crime and extremism less rewarding.

— Daraj (independent digital media platform), Lebanon

Open-ended answers referring to security coordination and awareness-raising mentioned the role of media literacy education and technological convergence:

A common strategy to fight organised crime and violent extremism in the digital sphere, in addition to creating a “regional digital centre” to coordinate actions, exchange good practices and foster dialogue.

— Algerian respondent

Perhaps the most important thing that the Covid-19 crisis has taught us is the fact that we are thoroughly interconnected beyond borders and indeed “sitting in the same boat” where such challenges can only be met if we act together. Only a higher degree of cooperation and concerted efforts can help us all survive these challenges. The EU has the prerequisites and basic capabilities to meet such challenges through wider cooperation, including legal and technological convergence.

— Swedish respondent

Media literacy and dialogue programmes are needed in specialised TV channels that are capable of adequately addressing the situation and have the capacity to reach the vulnerable groups.

— Croatian respondent

Resilience to online recruitment and radicalisation involve education and increased awareness. Hence, school curricula should be amended with courses on how to navigate in an increasingly hostile online environment and how to detect and denounce the recruitment attempts.

— Polish respondent

The EU and Conflict Resolution in the Southern Neighbourhood

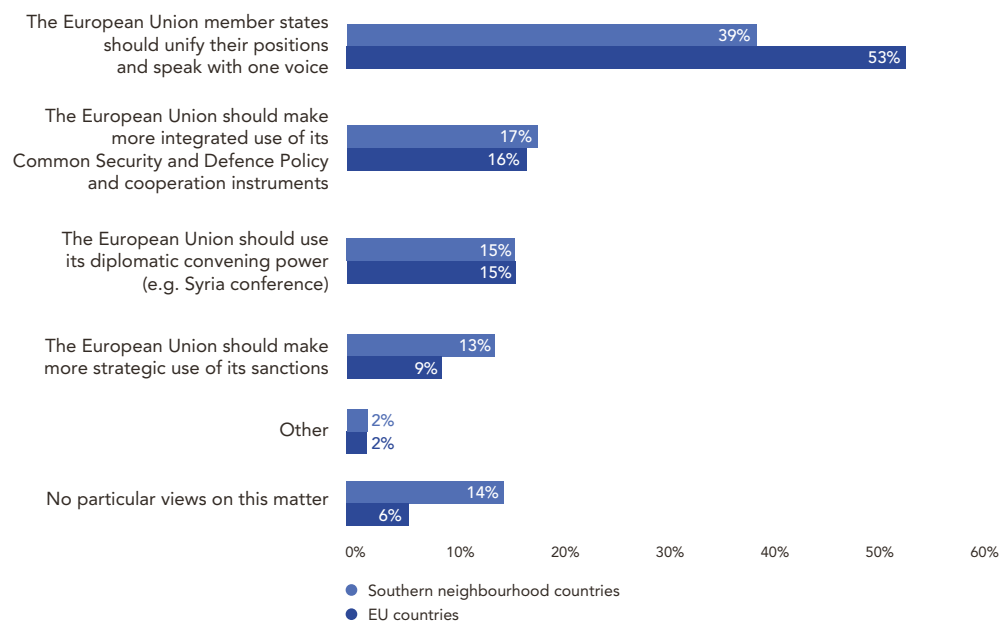
Question 22 invited participants to identify the main options the EU should consider to contribute more effectively to solving conflicts in the region.

Nearly half of respondents (46%) chose the EU member states' efforts to unify their positions and speak with one voice as their most preferred option.

The second most preferred conflict resolution strategy (16%) is for the EU to make more integrated use of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and co-operation instruments, followed (15%) by the EU's use of its diplomatic convening power (e.g. Syria conference). Only 11% of respondents identified the fourth and last option as their top priority, which called for the EU's more strategic use of its sanctions.

There were no significant differences in patterns between answers from southern Mediterranean and EU countries, although a higher proportion of respondents from the latter said that their top priority is for EU member states to speak with one voice, as shown in graph 39.

Graph 39: Q.22. Options for the European Union to contribute more effectively to solving conflicts in the region (Ranked as first option)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey

In their comments, some participants elaborated on their answers, while others formulated alternative ideas:

The EU should step up its multilateral cooperation with the League of Arab States and the African Union.

— Spanish respondent

The EU should take a stronger stand on human rights violations in the region without excluding any country.

— Jordanian respondent

The EU should not only adopt a coherent strategy and put aside single member's interests, but it should also invest in the development of hard power policies in order to make its voice really heard.

— Czech respondent

Long-term solutions for achieving peace and stability initially require the EU to contribute to a paradigm shift from a state security approach to a focus on human security. Peace-building initiatives should also ensure national ownership, enhanced inclusivity and should be designed and implemented based on the specific needs of the country.

— Lebanese respondent

The real problem lies within the EU: member states often have diverging strategic interests in the region. In this regard the self-proclaimed EU Foreign Policy is pure fiction.

— Italian respondent

La coopération sécuritaire devrait être multidimensionnelle et intensifiée. Pour cela, il faudrait renforcer les capacités des pays vulnérables en matière de prévention et de lutte contre les activités terroristes et assurer un transfert des compétences; adopter une approche socio-économique pour apporter des réponses de fond aux facteurs générateurs de l'insécurité.

— Institut Royal des Études Stratégiques (IRES)

Maritime Security in the Mediterranean and Counter-Terrorism in the Sahel

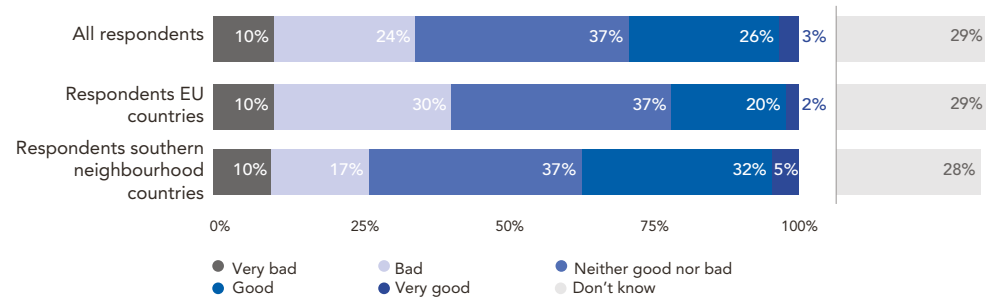
Question 23 focused specifically on key CSDP actions of the EU in the region, namely maritime security in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI) and counter-terrorism in the Sahel (EUTM Mali, EUCAP Sahel Mali, EUCAP Sahel Niger).

Respondents were asked to assess the cooperation of the EU with its southern partners in both cases. Reflecting the rather technical nature of these questions, a higher proportion of respondents than in other questions of the Survey chose the "don't know" answer.

Overall, respondents were rather sceptical, with 34% believing the maritime security cooperation in the Mediterranean to be "bad" or "very bad" in comparison with 29% of respondents deeming it "good" or "very good" (see graph 40). Likewise, 36% of respondents considered the cooperation of the EU with its southern partners on counter-terrorism in the Sahel to be "bad" or "very bad", while 25% believed it to be "good" or "very good" (see graph 42).

However, there was a greater tendency for southern neighbourhood respondents to have a positive view of the maritime security cooperation (32%) compared to EU respondents (20%). The latter exhibited a certain level of scepticism about it, with 40% believing it to be "bad" or "very" bad (see graph 40).

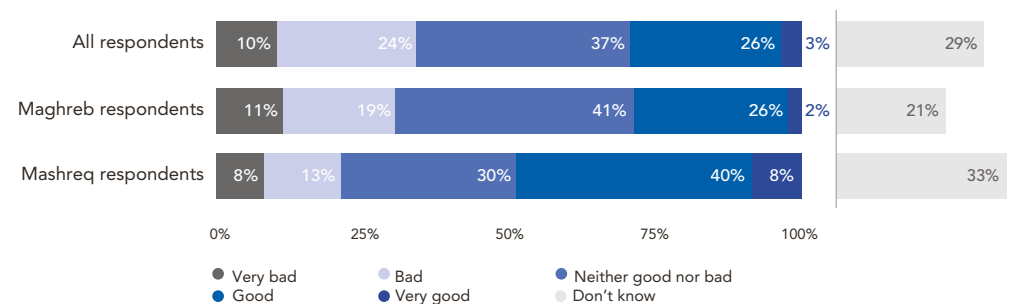
Graph 40: Q.23 How do you assess the cooperation between the European Union with its southern partners on maritime security?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey

There are significant differences between the patterns of answers from Maghreb and Mashreq participants: 48% of Mashreq respondents considered this cooperation to be “good” or “very good” compared to only 28% of Maghreb respondents.

Graph 41: Q.23 How do you assess the cooperation between the European Union with its southern partners on maritime security?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey

In their open comments as a follow-up to the question, some respondents pointed out the importance of prioritising humanitarian or mobility aspects rather than border control:

The priority should be search and rescue (SAR) operations and not border control, especially considering the hosting conditions of migrants in Libya.

— French respondent

Maritime missions should be intended for rescue, and cooperation with riparian states should be designed to govern an orderly migration and not to counter it.

— Un Ponte Per / Medlink

Comments also called on the EU to review its policies of cooperation with Libya on border control:

Il faut encourager les États membres à dépénaliser la solidarité avec les migrants et leur sauvetage, mettre en place un mécanisme de sauvetage européen des migrants en mer Méditerranée. Enfin, des sanctions envers les pays de départs comme la Libye, dont les gardes côtes ne respectent en aucun cas les droits humains, devraient être établies.

— REF - Réseau Euromed France

The EU should first support the most vulnerable, among them the migrants and refugees who are facing inhumane and degrading treatment in Libya.

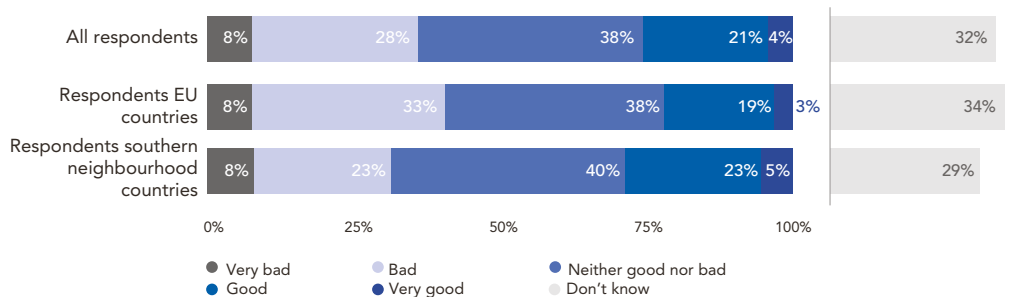
— EuroMed Rights

The EU must stick to its values; stop pushing migrant boats back into the sea, or cooperating with the Libyan Coast Guard, which is involved in grave human rights violations.

— Polish respondent

As for the cooperation between the EU and its southern partners to counter terrorism in the Sahel, again, respondents are more negative than positive about it overall. However, it is worth observing that there are significant variations between EU and southern neighbourhood respondents. The former were more inclined to have a negative view of this cooperation (41% considered it “bad” or “very bad”) than southern neighbourhood respondents (31%), as shown in graph 42.

Graph 42: Q.23 How do you assess the cooperation between the European Union with its southern partners on counter-terrorism in the Sahel?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey

Question 23.4 was a follow-up question as it invited respondents to elaborate on their answer and identify areas for improvement.

Avoir une meilleure connaissance des cultures des nations concernées, développer une approche plus respectueuse des sociétés, soutenir plus résolument le développement socio-économique des populations.

— CERMAC (Centre d'Études et Recherches sur le Monde Arabe Contemporain) UC Louvain

Face à des problèmes régionaux, l'UE oppose des mécanismes nationaux comme EUCAP Niger et EUTM Mali. Il faut penser à la régionalisation de la réponse en régionalisant les missions EUCAP, et en assurant la coordination entre ces missions et d'autres initiatives UE dans la région comme CIVIPOL.

— Moroccan respondent

Adopt a comprehensive approach that takes into account the achievement of sustainable development in these African countries, especially in the poorest areas which represent a fertile environment for recruitment and shelter terrorist groups.

— Egyptian respondent

Expand the political dimension of the missions in the Sahel. What we see are not pure violent insurgencies but classic cases of weak central governance that fail to address the grievances of the peripheries.

— German respondent

Une meilleure coordination entre l'Union européenne, les forces locales de sécurité et l'Union africaine permettrait d'optimiser les résultats des actions menées au Sahel tout en assurant plus grande visibilité aux partenaires africains, garantissant, de ce fait, une appropriation locale de la gestion des conflits.

— Institut Royal des Études Stratégiques (IRES)

Northern countries must be aware that their progress, stability, and security are directly related to the progress, stability and security of their southern neighbours. Greater communication is needed in everything that is being done and what is intended to be done.

— Atalayar (online news magazine) Spain

Réduire la présence militaire de certains pays européens clés, et cela passe par le renforcement qualitatif des moyens de défense des pays du Sahel.

— Algerian respondent