

# CHANGING EURO-MEDITERRANEAN LENSES

A contribution from EuroMeSCo to the public debate

1. The EuroMeSCo Annual Conference on “Changing Euro-Mediterranean Lenses” took place in Rabat on 12-13 July 2018. It gathered representatives of 106 institutes that are members of the EuroMeSCo network (the largest Euro-Mediterranean network of think tanks dealing with political and security issues), alongside a number of practitioners, diplomats, policy makers and young researchers.
2. Following this conference and ahead of the next meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Union for the Mediterranean to be held in Barcelona on 8 October, EuroMeSCo is eager to reach out beyond circles of experts or policy makers and contribute to public debates, too often dominated by eurocentric reflexes on the European side, and recriminations on the southern Mediterranean side.
3. Too often, in the European public debate, the southern part of the Mediterranean is portrayed as the source of problems facing the European Union. Misinformed and misleading public debates on violent extremism and migration have exemplified this. Violent extremism tends to be presented as an import product, ignoring thereby the European own responsibility in the surge of the phenomenon. Similarly, Europe tends to be portrayed as a continent under siege by migrants, ignoring thereby the migration challenges posed to countries of the southern Mediterranean.
4. Healthy and balanced Euro-Mediterranean relations require a serious effort of introspection on the European side. A number of developments in the European Union also have an impact on the southern Mediterranean and ultimately Euro-Mediterranean relations.
5. The necessary and above-mentioned effort of introspection in Europe should not be accompanied by misplaced recriminations against the European Union that too often dominate political discourse on the Southern Mediterranean side. The European Union is a very reliable as well as committed partner and remains part of the solution rather than a problem.

6. However, the rise of populism in some member states, translating among other things in the securitisation of the EU's approach, the breach of some foundational values of the European Union such as solidarity or human rights, and the renationalisation of EU foreign policy, affect not only the European integration process but also the Southern Mediterranean region, the way the EU is perceived in this region, the credibility of its actions and the overall Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The EU needs to better assess the consequences of some of its actions for southern Mediterranean countries and better understand how it is perceived on the other side of the Mediterranean.
7. Statements from European heads of state and government on the idea to open regional disembarkation centres in North African countries without a proper consultation of these partners, have been badly received in southern Mediterranean countries.
8. The development of a more realist EU Foreign Policy and the need for the EU to take full responsibility for its own security, should not lead to renouncing to some of its foundational principles.
9. At a time when multilateralism is under serious threat and given that Euro-Mediterranean relations are still largely perceived as asymmetrical by southern Mediterranean countries, the Union for the Mediterranean uncontestedly represents an institution to cherish and further strengthen.
10. Almost 25 years after the Barcelona Declaration, 10 years after the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, it is important to overcome the negativity of public debates on both sides. Leaders of the 43 countries of the Union for the Mediterranean and the European Union have a responsibility in contributing to a more positive public debate. Euro-Mediterranean cooperation is part of the solution to address issues such as climate change or youth unemployment. The Brexit largely happened as a result of a flawed public debate and the incapacities to explain the benefits of the European integration process over the last decade. Let's make sure both rims of the Mediterranean do not drift further apart as a result of equally misconceived public debates.