

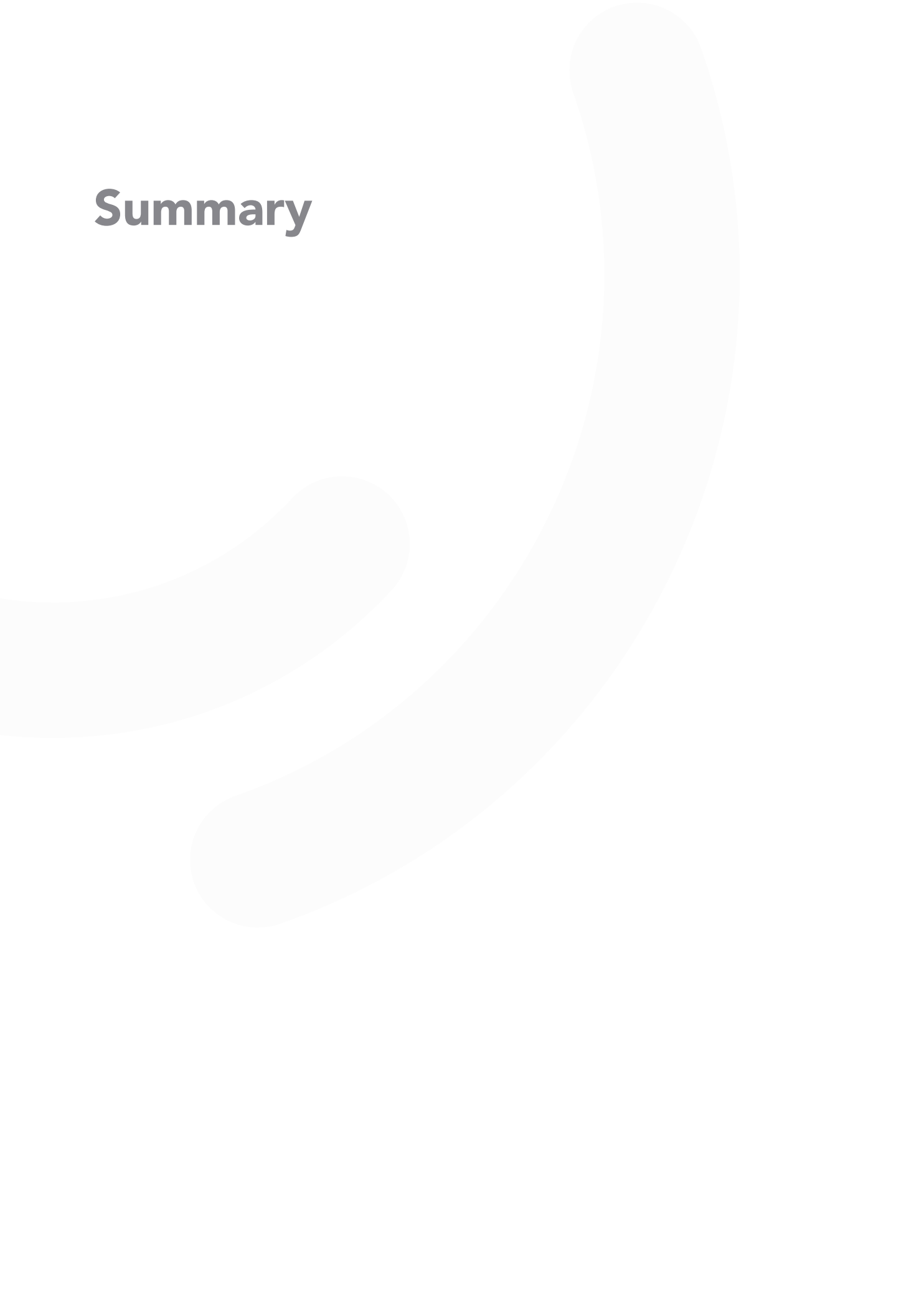
VI YOUNG RESEARCHERS FORUM

Bridging Divides: Exploring Youth Approaches to Conflict Resolution in the Changing Euro-Mediterranean Region

Madrid, 9 October 2023

Report

Summary



This year's edition of the Euromed Young Researchers Forum was about "Bridging Divides: Exploring Youth Approaches to Conflict Resolution in the Changing Euro-Mediterranean Region." The changing global landscape has profoundly impacted conflicts and conflict resolution mechanisms in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The current dynamic geopolitical environment is characterized by shifting power dynamics, the emergence of new conflicts, and the ascent of influential actors. Traditional alliances and power structures are being tested, triggering intensified competition for resources and influence, which has created fertile ground for conflicts to arise or escalate in the Euro-Mediterranean region. These conflicts are shaped by a new paradigm of warfare and security, with hybrid conflicts including cyber warfare and disinformation campaigns becoming increasingly prevalent.

The evolving nature of conflicts in the region requires innovative and adaptable approaches to conflict resolution and security strategies in order to effectively address the complex challenges arising from the changing global landscape. With the emergence of new conflicts

and shifting dynamics, traditional approaches alone are insufficient to tackle the intricate interconnections of these conflicts. In this context, technology has provided valuable opportunities for the development of innovative conflict resolution mechanisms. New dynamics of conflict resolution have already started emerging, with external powers such as China presenting themselves as mediators, or with Lebanon and Israel reaching ground-breaking agreements.

As the world continues to evolve, the Euro-Mediterranean region must navigate these geopolitical shifts while striving to find sustainable and inclusive solutions to conflicts that arise in this dynamic environment. For this reason, the VI Euromed Young Researchers Forum invited young researchers to explore new types of conflicts in the Euro-Mediterranean region and the innovative approaches that young people can bring to conflict resolution. The Forum brought together a diverse range of young researchers and practitioners to share their insights and experiences, fostering a collaborative and interdisciplinary dialogue on conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Euro-Mediterranean region.



WORKING SESSION I

Exploring Conflicts in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: New Approaches and Strategies

Chair

Sara Nowacka

Analyst Middle East and Africa Program, The Polish Institute of International Affairs – PISM

Speakers

Valentina Gruarin

Junior Researcher, Austrian Institute for International Affairs – OIIP

Pablo Pastor Vidal

Academic Assistant in the European Interdisciplinary Studies (EIS) department at the College of Europe – CoE

Brahim Ramli

Project Manager, VJW International

Natália Tkáčová

Project Coordinator, Prague Security Studies Institute – PSSI

Discussant

Lina Khatib

Director of the Middle East Institute, SOAS, University of London



The first of the Working Sessions of the VI Euromed Young Researchers Forum provided an overview of some of the main current conflicts in the Euro-Mediterranean region. In this context, young researchers addressed, among others, the Libyan civil war, the intra-ethnic conflict in Turkish Kurdistan, and the Cypriot issue. Furthermore, during the session, an assessment was also conducted on the effectiveness of crisis management policies and mechanisms of the EU and NATO in the Mediterranean region. Overall, young researchers advocated for new conflict resolution approaches that are decolonised, human rights-based and that actively involve youth and civil society. The potential of energy resources as a conflict resolution mechanism and as a stabilisation factor of the region was also tackled.

One of the most discussed issues during the session was the **need to decolonise peacebuilding or conflict resolution responses**. In this context, the roles of the EU, the United States, and NATO in the MENA region were addressed. Special emphasis was

placed on the necessity of **involving voices from MENA region** countries in Western international organisations. This way, **peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and mediation processes in the region would be much more inclusive and could yield better results**. The session also highlighted the importance to have the perspectives and participation of civil society organisations in efforts to achieve a long-lasting peace. Furthermore, one of the main conclusions was that the EU should have an independent voice from NATO and the US and that it should act with strategic autonomy in the region to promote its objectives and values.

Another key aspect of the debate was the role of energy in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this regard, energy can play a significant role in the region as an instrument for achieving peace. Additionally, there was discussion about the emergence of new actors in that area such as Russia, Turkey, or China, especially following the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, after which the energy dimension has acquired special relevance for the EU.

Young researchers also reflected on and debated how peace should be built in the region. Currently, **the region faces a series of interconnected challenges that make conflict resolution efforts increasingly complicated.** Among others, factors such as political transformations, intra and inter-state socioeconomic disparities, migration and refugee crises, climate change, and the emergence of new global actors with significant geopolitical aspirations in the region were addressed. In this regard, young researchers concluded that the key is to treat all these root causes as a single one and **that a comprehensive approach should be considered to address these root causes and achieve peace in the region.**

Finally, participants discussed inclusivity in conflict resolution processes and

mediation efforts in the region. In addition to the aforementioned need to include voices from the Global South in these processes; young researchers stressed the **importance of including different communities and minorities.** It was also highlighted that there is a need to be critical of narratives that aim to confront different cultures in the region and to confront exclusionary discourses from various sectors of the far right. Finally, it was emphasised that within the comprehensive approach to addressing the interconnected causes of conflict in the MENA region, **young people** must play a crucial role, as they **should pave the way towards conflict resolution.** Thus, the session concluded by reinforcing and remarking the fact that **young people in the region can be one of the most significant peace-building actors.**

WORKING SESSION II

Shaping Peace in the Euro-Mediterranean: Unravelling the Role of Youth in Conflict Resolution

Chair

Francesco Schiavi

Associate Research Assistant for the MENA Centre, Istituto
per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale – ISPI

Speakers

Aya Badr

PhD Candidate, Cairo University

Reef Itzhaki

Government and External Relations Coordinator, the Israeli
Institute for Regional Foreign Policies – MITVIM

Mariam Mecky

Independent Researcher

Jusaima Moaid-Azm Peregrina

PhD Candidate in Political Science, University of Granada

Abdullatif Sleibi

Senior Data Analyst & Project Officer, PAX for Peace

Discussant

Camille Limon

Coordinator and member of the Executive Board –
Diplomeds – The Council for Mediterranean Diplomacy

Building on the general overview provided during the first Working Session, the focus of the Second Working Session was on exploring and discussing the significant role of young people in understanding and addressing emerging conflicts in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It analysed the critical role that youth play in promoting sustainable peace in fragile and conflict-affected countries, how youth-centred feminist activism can be encouraged for inclusive conflict resolution, and how the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda can be promoted within the European framework. The Working Session also examined the potential of social media as a tool for building peace, as well as the role of Erasmus+ as a platform for peace.

The importance of strategic communication in conflicts was one of the most discussed topics during the Second Working Session. In this regard, young researchers concluded that one of the significant challenges for the EU lies in reaching out to the population of the Euro-Mediterranean region. While the

EU mostly relies on English for its communication, Russia and other global powers go further and publish some of their media outlets such as Russia Today in Arabic. In fact, they are some of the most widely consumed media in the region, thus exerting a significant influence on the inhabitants. The same goes for Facebook or Telegram groups, where messages from other global powers are predominant, influencing the citizens' opinions. Therefore, the young researchers emphasised the potential of the **EU in Arabic** as a communication tool in the Euro-Mediterranean region, although they concluded that it **should be a much more exploited instrument, and the EU should allocate more resources to improve its Arabic communication.**

Another of the most discussed topics was the **implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agendas.** Given the challenges in implementing these agendas, young researchers debated how to improve their implementation. The issue is prag-



matic because according to mediators the groups have to be essentialised. Therefore, the question lies in how to make these groups more intersectional and how to enable young people and women to participate in peace processes. The young researchers concluded that **there is still work to be done**, but suggested increasing the participation of these actors in private Track II Diplomacy efforts, which can subsequently assist the mediator in Track I processes.

Regarding peacebuilding efforts, young researchers discussed the challenge of translating policy recommendations into practice. In this regard, one of the main solutions proposed was the **need to work with local actors** in the implementation of peacebuilding or mediation initiatives. These actors are the ones who have the best knowledge of the field and, therefore, they are the ones with the greatest capacity to identify gaps in the implementation of different initiatives. They also have a greater capacity to identify the root causes of a conflict and to give greater

visibility to peacebuilding initiatives. Therefore, the young researchers concluded that greater **collaboration between donors and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working on the ground is necessary**.

The Second Working Session concluded with young researchers discussing the potential of intercultural dialogue programmes for achieving peace in the region. In this regard, there was a significant consensus on the need to promote such dialogue through platforms like the Erasmus+ program. However, there are still significant challenges and issues to address, such as social class problems. After all, the beneficiaries of exchange programs are mostly young people from higher social classes, so there is still a gap that needs to be addressed. By making **these programmes** more inclusive, they would **have the potential create a much richer intercultural dialogue that helps address the current challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean region**.



PRACTITIONERS SESSION

Moderator

Karim Hauser

Head of Culture and International Relations,
Casa Árabe

Speakers

Nadim Houry

Executive Director, Arab Reform Initiative – ARI

Camille Limon

Coordinator and member of the Executive Board –
Diplomeds – The Council for Mediterranean Diplomacy

Liel Maghen

Co-founder, Elham - the Day After

Guillem Riutord Sampol

Head of Division, Conflict Prevention and Mediation
Support (ISP 2), European External Action Service

Natalia Sancha

Former Correspondent of “El País” in Lebanon and
Syria; Strategic Communications Officer, Task Force
South – MENA and Gulf, Strategic Communications,
and Information Analysis, (SG STRAT 2), European
External Action Service

Conflicts in the Euro-Mediterranean region have been a persistent issue in recent years, often exacerbated by factors like technological advancements and changing geopolitical landscapes. The Euro-Mediterranean agenda acknowledges the importance of cooperation and dialogue among the Euro-Mediterranean countries to address these conflicts and promote peace and stability. During this session, participants had the chance to interact with relevant stakeholders, gaining a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics and challenges facing the region. Through this practitioner's session, young researchers had the opportunity to explore and discuss strategies for empowering young people to play a pivotal role in building a more peaceful and stable Euro-Mediterranean region.

To provide a multidisciplinary perspective on the conflicts in the region, the session featured the participation of five professionals from various fields. These experts included **Nadim Houry**, Executive Director of ARI, one of the

leading think tanks in the region; **Camille Limon**, Coordinator of Diplomeds, a policy group dedicated to improving relations between Mediterranean countries, promoting regional cooperation, increasing inclusivity, resolving conflicts, and advancing peace in the region; **Liel Maghen**, Co-founder of Elham - the Day After and a peace activist in the Israel-Palestine conflict; **Guillem Riutord**, Head of Division in the Conflict Prevention and Mediation Support unit of the EEAS; and, **Natalia Sancha**, Strategic Communications Officer in the Task Force South – MENA and Gulf, Strategic Communications, and Information Analysis, (SG STRAT 2), European External Action Service. She is also a former correspondent for "El País" who has covered various countries and conflicts in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The conversation between young researchers and experts covered four main blocks. The first of these blocks was related to the role of young people in conflicts and how to empower young individuals as actors in conflict resolution



processes in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Both parties agreed that the participation of both young people and women in these processes is often symbolic, and when it comes down to it, they end up being sidelined in Track I diplomacy processes. It has been demonstrated that **when spaces are created for young people's participation, they indeed step in to fill those spaces.** However, to create these spaces, **the key lies in establishing a political framework or imaginary that allows young people to participate in decision-making processes across various areas.**

The second block of the Practitioners Session focused on strategies to advance the path to peace in the Israel-Palestine conflict, which gained special relevance in light of recent events. Both experts and young researchers shared their perspectives on potential solutions to the conflict. Both parties concluded that one of the main avenues to explore is the role of civil society. Through such initiatives, it is easier to bring the parties, especially young individuals, together and **start building a common awareness of the need to resolve the conflict, taking steps towards creating a political imaginary that facilitates the conflict's resolution.** An example of such civil society initiatives is **"The Day After,"** which aims to bring young Israelis and Palestinians to Northern Ireland to learn from the experience and see that a similar resolution in the Middle East is possible.

The other two blocks of the Practitioners Session addressed the role of the EU in conflict resolution. On one hand, there was a discussion about the European Union's strategies for identifying potential future conflicts and its role as a mediator in various conflicts. Additionally, **the implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda and the efforts made by the European Union to empower young people in the conflict resolution processes** in which it is involved were discussed. There was also time to discuss about the need to decolonise the EU's mediation and conflict resolution efforts.

Finally, the last block of the Practitioners Session centred on the importance of strategic communication in today's context. Disinformation is becoming an increasingly important weapon in contemporary conflicts. On one hand, it was emphasised that disinformation is a tool to exacerbate existing conflicts, and various **EU strategies to combat disinformation in conflicts were analysed.** On the other hand, as previously mentioned in earlier sessions of the VI Euromed Young Researchers Forum, young researchers remarked the European Union's need to improve its communication in Arabic and thus connect with the region's inhabitants. However, **the young researchers acknowledged the EU's efforts and recognised that the creation of EU in Arabic is a significant step forward** in this regard.

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