

Reviewing constitutive principles of the ENP

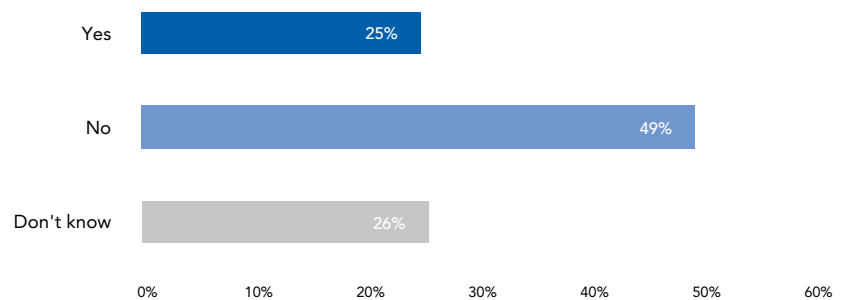
The third block of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey aimed to assess the application of constitutive principles of the ENP: differentiation, “incentive-based approach” (more for more) and joint-ownership. It also sought to collect respondents’ views on how the relationship between the ENP and the UfM, as regional mechanisms, should be developed.

Main findings:

- There is a consistent consensus amongst respondents: they believe that the constitutive principles of the ENP have not been effectively applied.
- At the same time, a large majority of respondents consider that these principles are still valid and should remain in any future revision of the ENP.
- Respondents clearly agree that the overlap between the regional dimension of the ENP and UfM causes confusion and that mechanisms must be simplified. They do not, however, see the need in replacing the ENP with the UfM as a regional framework.

Question 4 was designed to capture opinion on the application and utility of the differentiation principle. Under the differentiation principle, the EU wanted to recognise the different aspirations of partner countries in their relations with the EU, offering them tailor-made partnerships. Results displayed a consistent agreement among respondents, namely that the differentiation principle has not been effectively applied (graph 8). 'Don't know' even outranked 'Yes' responses.

Graph 8: Q.4a Do you think the EU has applied this principle of differentiation effectively?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

In their comments respondents expanded on their views, vis-à-vis the (in)effectiveness of the differentiation principle:

Yes, differentiation has been applied effectively, even though I would add that the 'tailor-made partnerships' are highly imbalanced, as the EU is both the model and the tailor. As a result, differentiation only matters insofar as partner countries want to deepen their relations with the EU but are content that is done in a way that is overwhelmingly shaped by the EU.

— Italian respondent

The EU has made significant efforts to apply the principle of differentiation effectively within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). This approach acknowledges that partner countries have different levels of ambition, interests, and capacities when it comes to their relations with the EU. These are some reasons why the EU's application of differentiation can be considered effective.

— Moroccan respondent

The tailor-made partnership arrangements are offered and shaped according to the “wish list” or “demands list” put forward by the higher echelons of the state in the individual countries. Countrywide consultation of the public opinion (be it a survey, be it a referendum) is almost never practiced. Therefore, the EU apparently offers tailor-made partnerships to some extent, but not effectively or satisfactorily due to being drawn up without full diversity, inclusion, and equity.

— Turkey respondent

ENP differentiation recognises the aspirations of different countries, but this does not necessarily open collaboration. For example, with agricultural trade exchanges and agreements, conditions (e.g. social and human rights) in production systems are not at an acceptable level for the EU.

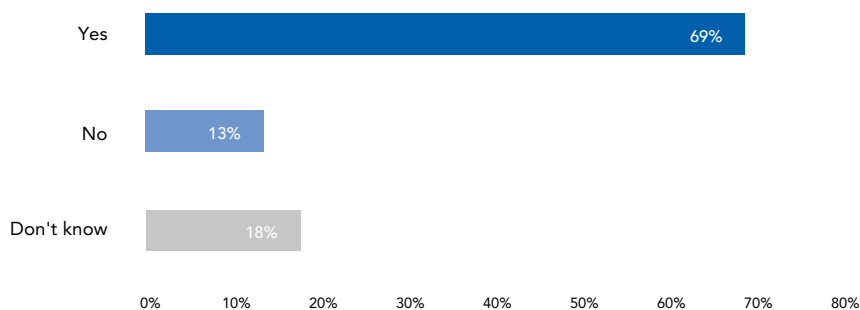
— Spanish respondent

The EU may face budgetary and resource constraints, which may limit its ability to provide adequate support to all partner countries. It is, however, also worth noting that some partner countries have benefited from effective differentiation, with tailor-made partnerships that met their specific needs.

— Moroccan respondent

The results of **question 4b** showed, however, that the belief in an ineffective application does not imply a refusal of the differentiation principle. 70% of participants considered that differentiation still serves a purpose (graph 9) in recognising the different aspirations of partner countries in their relations with the EU.

Graph 9: Q.4b Do you think differentiation still serves a purpose?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

In their comments, respondents explained their arguments on the differentiation principle:

This principle allows the EU to tailor its engagement strategies to better address the unique needs and aspirations of each country. However, it is crucial that differentiation is applied consistently and transparently, with a firm commitment to upholding the EU's core values of democracy, human rights, and rule of law.

— Lebanese respondent

It provides flexibility, acknowledges political realities, and can help foster cooperation based on the specific needs and aspirations of each neighbour. The EU must, however, continually assess and adapt its approach to ensure that differentiation contributes effectively to the overarching goals of the ENP and the EU's relations with its neighbours.

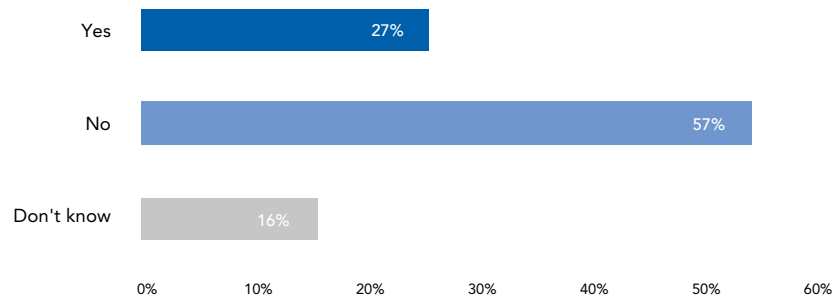
— Moroccan respondent

Differentiation in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) can still serve a purpose, but its effectiveness depends on various factors, including evolving geopolitical dynamics, the specific goals of the EU, and the willingness of partner countries to engage with the EU on their own terms.

— Jordanian respondent

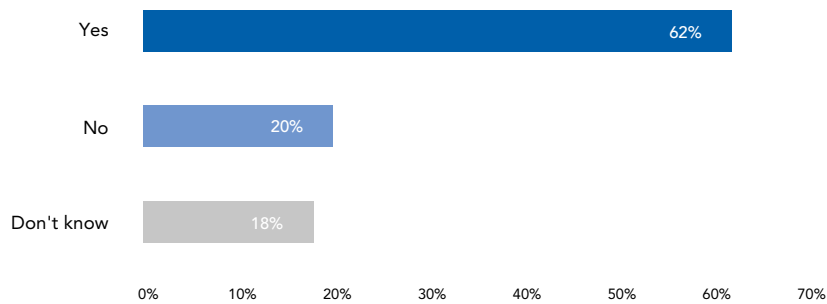
Question 5 was focused on another ENP principle, the “incentive-based approach” (more for more), under which the EU wanted to develop stronger partnerships with those neighbours that progressed in political and economic reform. As with the differentiation principle, a pattern emerges: its application has not been effective (graph 10), but there is a belief that it should remain as a valid principle when revising or revamping the ENP (graph 11).

Graph 10: Q.5a Do you think that the application of the “incentive-based approach” (More for more) has indeed fostered political and economic reform in Southern Mediterranean countries?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

Graph 11: Q.5b Should this principle remain an underlying principle of a revised policy of the EU towards its Southern Mediterranean neighbourhood?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

In the open comments respondents further elaborated as to why the incentive-based approach has been unsuccessful:

The approach has faced challenges because there is a perception that conditionality is a mechanism for interfering in domestic affairs. Its impact can also be limited by external factors such as regional conflicts and economic crises. Therefore, while it has yielded some positive results, the “More for more” approach alone may not be sufficient to drive comprehensive and sustained reforms in the Southern Mediterranean region.

— Lebanese respondent

It failed because the incentives are not measurable and accountable. The incentives are reliant on elites rather than a broader set of stakeholders in each country.

— Cyprus respondent

We do not see any notable change for us in civil society: exchanges, their financing and development programmes are done essentially and almost exclusively with governments; exchanges have been directed at governments, while ignoring civil society. These closed off exchanges have excluded civil society from cooperation and financing opportunities with the EU.

— Algerian respondent

The EU repeats patterns of the past without being aware of the paradigm shift and the penetration of new actors that do not require conditionality and can match and/or surpass its offer. Maybe the incentive-based approach was outdated.

— Spanish respondent

From the very beginning, conditionality has been problematic as it has not been implemented in a coherent way and it has created unmet expectations. At the same time, it has been very difficult for those countries that were taking their first steps towards reform. This, however, does not mean that conditionality should be scrapped.

— Italian respondent

Open comments for the incentive-based approach outlined several arguments for keeping it in the ENP:

The EU should always try to remain open to closer relations with those countries that are truly interested in forging such relations.

— Irish respondent

Its effectiveness depends on balanced implementation, transparency, and strong monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the incentives genuinely lead to meaningful reforms. A revised policy should maintain this principle while addressing the shortcomings and challenges of its application, emphasising a balanced approach that combines incentives with constructive engagement and dialogue to foster sustainable change in the region.

— Lebanese respondent

I believe that there are some principles, such as democracy and human rights, that the EU should follow and push for, as much as possible, in third countries. Thus, conditionality could be useful in this sense. The EU will, however, have to compete with other financial assistants that will be more flexible in this regard. The EU, therefore, may need to recalibrate and be prepared to offer more for less conditions, if it wants to compete in this arena.

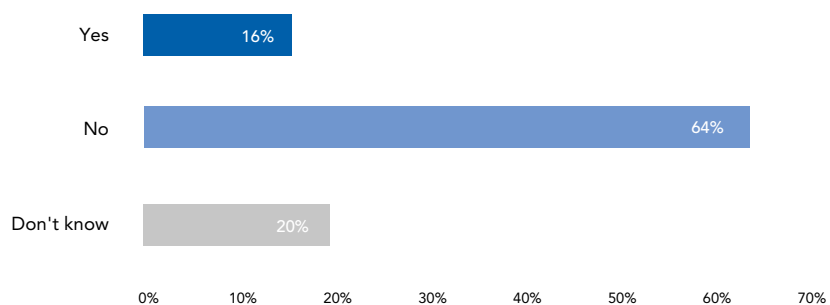
— Belgian respondent

It is an effective behavioural modification tool that can yield constructive structural changes, theoretically speaking. But we should improve our protocols/procedures for applying it, lifting it, and ensuring cohesion behind it before we use it again, otherwise all it does is make Europe look weak and dictatorial.

— Libyan respondent

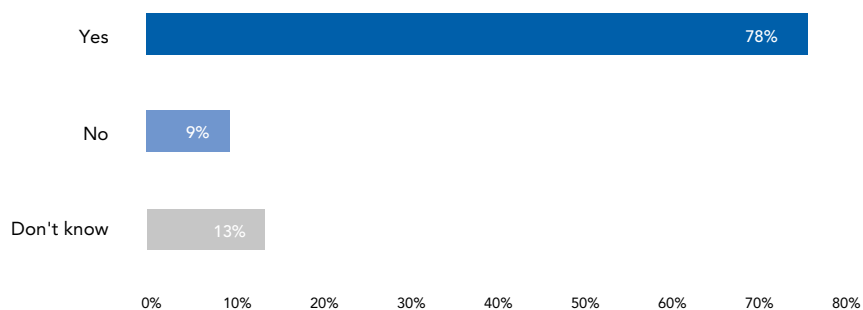
Question 6 assessed the joint-ownership principle which, based on the awareness of shared values and common interests, aims to be unimposing in terms of the priorities and conditions of ENP partners. When asked whether they felt the ENP is based on a relationship of co-ownership with the Southern Mediterranean countries (SMCs) a substantial majority of respondents (almost 70%) said 'no' (graph 12). As with the former questions on the ENP principles, this result is not a refusal of joint-ownership: respondents considered that it should be present in EU-SMCs relations. Indeed, a vast majority (80% of respondents) think that this principle should continue guiding the EU's efforts in redefining its approach vis-à-vis Southern Mediterranean neighbours (graph 13). It was, however, deemed ineffective.

Graph 12: Q.6a Do you think EU Southern Mediterranean countries feel they co-own the ENP?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

Graph 13: Q.6b Do you think the principle of joint ownership should continue guiding the EU's efforts in redefining its approach vis a vis its Southern Mediterranean neighbours?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

In their open comments, respondents clarified why SMCs perceive that co-ownership has not been successfully applied by the ENP:

I think some southern countries suffer from weak institutions or organisational capacity and lack sustainable policies combined with clear visions and strategies, so they feel and act like reacting or interacting rather than sharing or co-owning. It needs some kind of assistance, follow-up and encouragement, if not guidance, regarding administrative and organisational aspects. This would lead to effective organised and well-prepared policies and priorities on both sides.

— Egyptian respondent

There is a feeling across the southern flank that the EU acts in a paternalistic way with its partners. The ENP's application needs revision in a way that allows southern countries to speak for themselves and engage more productively in designing Euro-Med cooperation.

— Algerian respondent

I'm not familiar enough with examples where joint ownership has led to concrete results. Institutionally, I heard positive remarks about it. As the EU is such a cumbersome institution, I think it will be rare – but most useful – for a southern country to see how joint ownership translates into action.

— Israeli respondent

When given space to provide open answers on the continuation of joint-ownership, respondents highlighted its value for accommodating diverse perspectives, objectives and expectations.

It is the only way for the approach to have a chance to succeed. That said, the EU must be honest in that it has its own goals on which it is not willing to negotiate. Unfulfilled (and misguided) expectations are one of the main sources of discontent with the ENP in the SMCs.

— Polish respondent

If truly acted upon, it can reduce sentiments of eurocentrism/post-colonialism. It may stimulate more strategic thinking among partner countries.

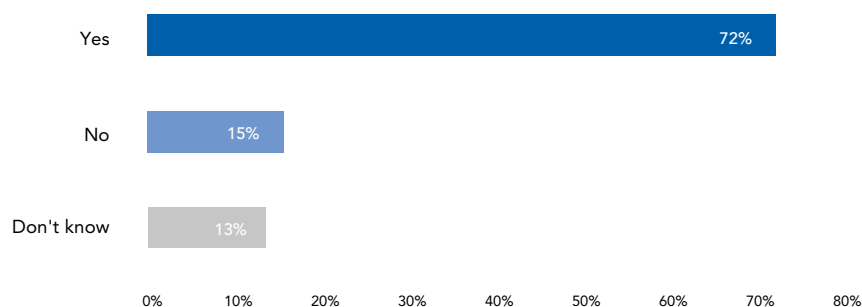
— Israeli respondent

The perception of a common Euro-Mediterranean destiny is essential to the renewal of the Mediterranean basin, but given the severely degraded local situations, we are starting from scratch.

— French respondent

Closing this block, **question 7a** was designed to identify if the EU should seek to simplify mechanisms to avoid the confusion caused by the overlap between the regional dimension of the ENP and the UfM. Respondents clearly agree (72%) on the need to simplify these mechanisms (graph 14).

Graph 14: Q.7a The overlap between the regional dimension of the ENP and the UfM introduces unnecessary confusion, and the EU should seek to simplify its mechanisms.



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

By simplifying mechanisms, the EU can avoid unnecessary redundancy and allocate resources more effectively to achieve its objectives in the region. Simplification also allows for a more focused and impactful approach. It enables the EU to concentrate its efforts on key priorities and areas where it can make a real difference, rather than spreading resources thinly across multiple platforms.

— Lebanese respondent

When reading EU documents, it is not clear who are the main actors of Euro-Med cooperation and through which mechanisms cooperation should take place.

— Italian respondent

The rise of the ENP as the main instrument for EU foreign relations, with its Southern neighbours, has entailed a shift of emphasis from region-building to bilateralism. While some Mediterranean countries thrived outside the constrictions of the regional framework, the shift left the Europeans without a clear vision for the area.

— Algerian respondent

The Union for the Mediterranean is political, institutional, and diplomatic. The specific tools of the ENP, however, are pragmatic and practical. They fund concrete actions that contribute to reducing inequalities. They propose solutions to common challenges and improve the quality of the lives of Mediterranean citizens in small positive ways: help with training, employment and starting businesses.

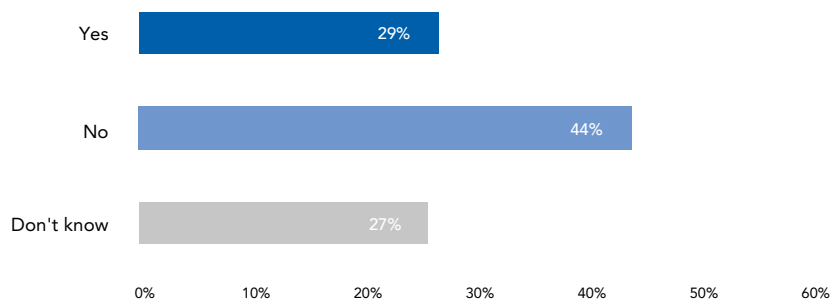
— French respondent

People are already confused as to the relationship between the EU and member states. Having multiple overlapping forums just exaggerates that confusion, and it pushes a regression towards bilateral relationship building in place of the multilateral forums that such bodies intend to build.

— Libyan respondent

When asked, in **question 7b**, if the UfM should replace the ENP as a regional framework, near a half of respondents (44%) considered that this was not necessary. Interestingly, 27% of the answers indicated uncertainty. Almost the same percentage of those that wanted the ENP to be removed as a regional framework (see graph 15).

Graph 15: Q.7b The EU should get rid of the ENP as a regional framework and further invests in the UfM as a regional mechanism.



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

In the open comments, respondents offered a variety of opinions about regional framework structures, be it the UfM or the ENP.

The decision to eliminate the ENP as a regional framework and further invest in the UfM as a regional mechanism is a policy choice that requires careful consideration and negotiation among all stakeholders involved.

— Moroccan respondent

The EU should consider investing further in both the UfM as a regional mechanism while also keeping the ENP as a separate framework. Consolidating efforts within the UfM could lead to a more coherent and streamlined approach to addressing the complex challenges and opportunities in the Mediterranean region. This move would signify the EU's commitment to a more unified and effective engagement strategy in its Southern Mediterranean neighbourhood.

— Lebanese respondent

Rather organise a clear sharing of roles with the means of a policy specific to an OECD function of the UfM; otherwise make the UfM the instrument of the European Commission for the regional ENP which would see it appropriate the countries of the South.

— French respondent

The UfM has been using more tangible tools to approach the Mediterranean partnership. It is less theoretical and more responsive to the developments on the ground. It is, therefore, equipped with the best tools to generate creative solutions and plan for co-owned policies. From these incremental steps, macro-level strategies should be designed; through a bottom-up approach not a top-down approach.

— Egyptian respondent