

EUROMESCO CONSULTATION CIRCLES: EXPERT VOICES AND REFLECTIONS ON THE NEW PACT FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

April-June 2025

EuroMeSCo has become a benchmark for policy-oriented research on issues related to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, in particular economic development, security and migration. With 126 affiliated think tanks and institutions and about 700 experts from 30 different countries, the network has developed impactful tools for the benefit of its members and a larger community of stakeholders in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Through a wide range of publications, surveys, events, training activities, audio-visual materials and a strong footprint on social media, the network reaches thousands of experts, think tankers, researchers, policy-makers and civil society and business stakeholders every year. While doing so, EuroMeSCo is strongly engaged in streamlining genuine joint research involving both European and Southern Mediterranean experts, encouraging exchanges between them and ultimately promoting Euro-Mediterranean integration. All the activities share an overall commitment to fostering youth participation and ensuring gender equality in the Euro-Mediterranean experts' community.

Coordinated by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), EuroMeSCo has been in the past months at the forefront of shaping the New Pact for the Mediterranean through the project [Support to Reflection and Consultations on the Pact for the Mediterranean](#), co-funded by the European Union (EU) and the IEMed.

This initiative supports the EU's renewed efforts to build comprehensive, co-owned partnerships with its Southern Neighbourhood, in line with the priorities outlined by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and the newly appointed Commissioner for the Mediterranean Dubravka Šuica.

Senén Florensa,
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Chair of EuroMeSCo General Assembly,
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REPORT

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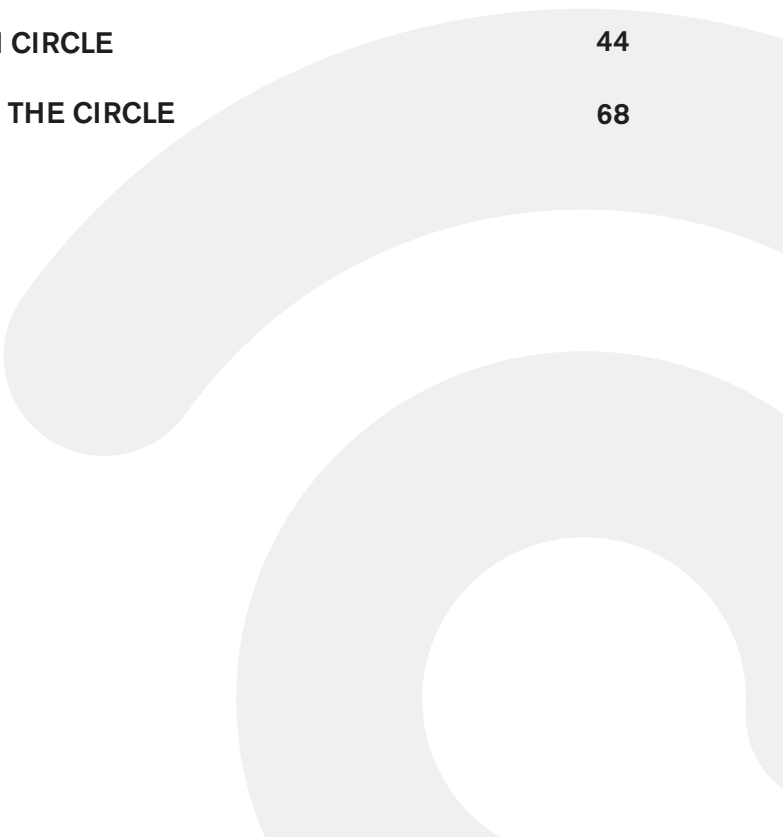
The **European Institute of the Mediterranean** (IEMed), founded in 1989, is a think and do tank specialised in Euro-Mediterranean relations. It provides policy-oriented and evidence-based research underpinned by a genuine Euromed multidimensional and inclusive approach.

The aim of the IEMed, in accordance with the principles of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), is to stimulate reflection and action that contribute to mutual understanding, exchange and cooperation between the different Mediterranean countries, societies and cultures, and to promote the progressive construction of a space of peace and stability, shared prosperity and dialogue between cultures and civilisations in the Mediterranean.

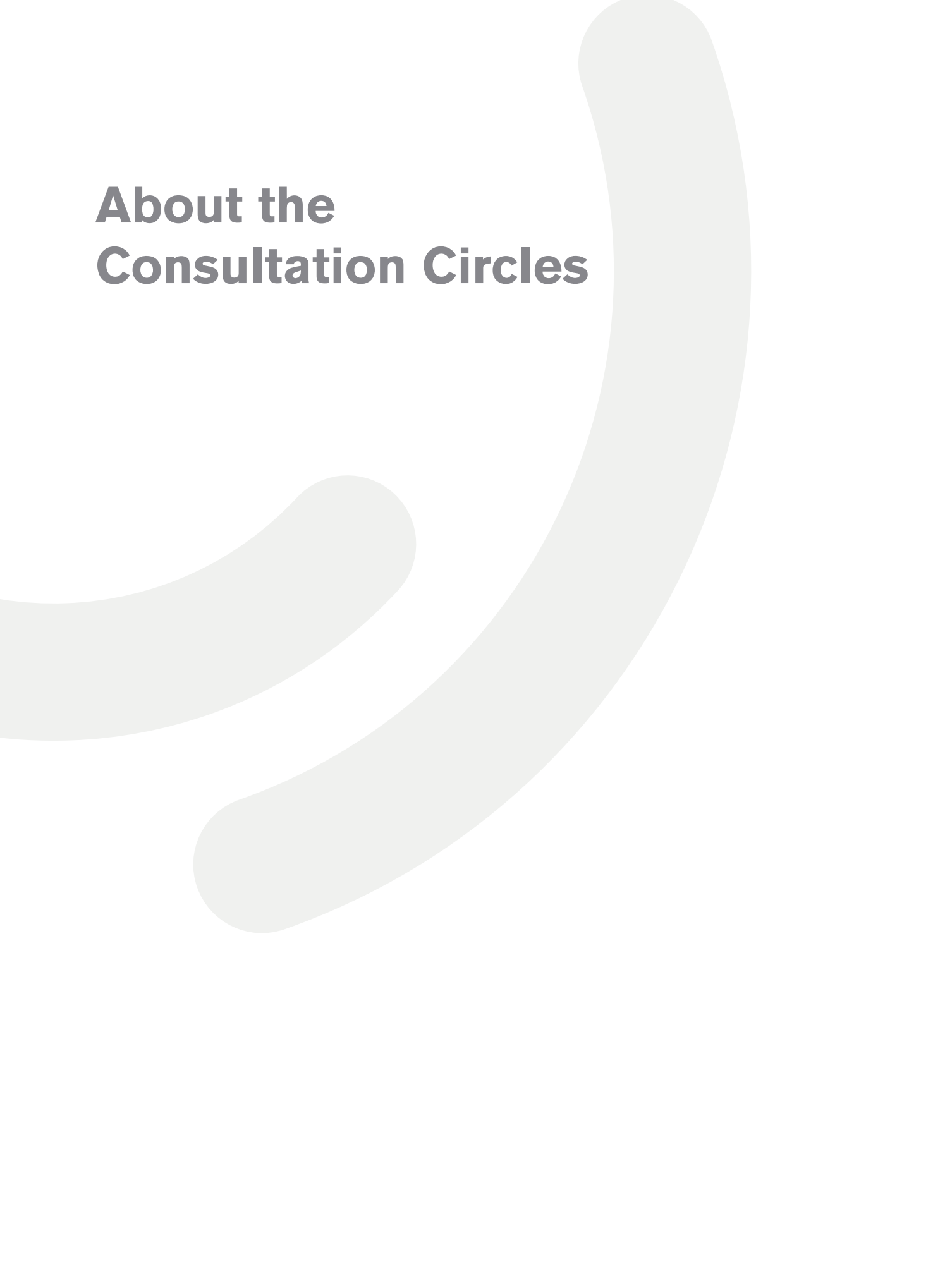
The IEMed is a consortium comprising the Catalan Government, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, the European Union and Barcelona City Council. It also incorporates civil society through its Board of Trustees and its Advisory Council.

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About the Consultation Circles

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The Consultation Phase

The IEMed-led project unfolds in two interconnected phases over 19 months, starting with a first phase that focuses on consultations, stakeholder mapping, and building a shared narrative to shape the Pact's priorities.

These activities include:

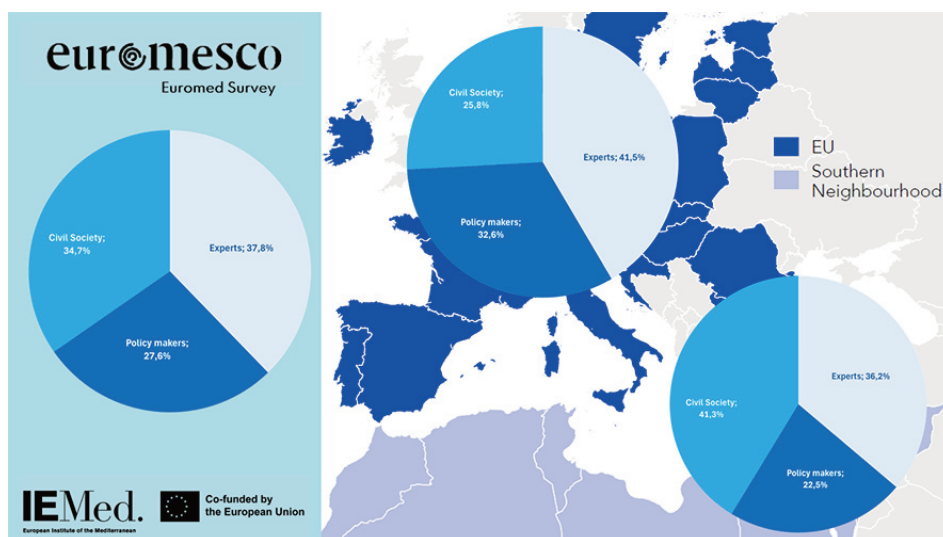
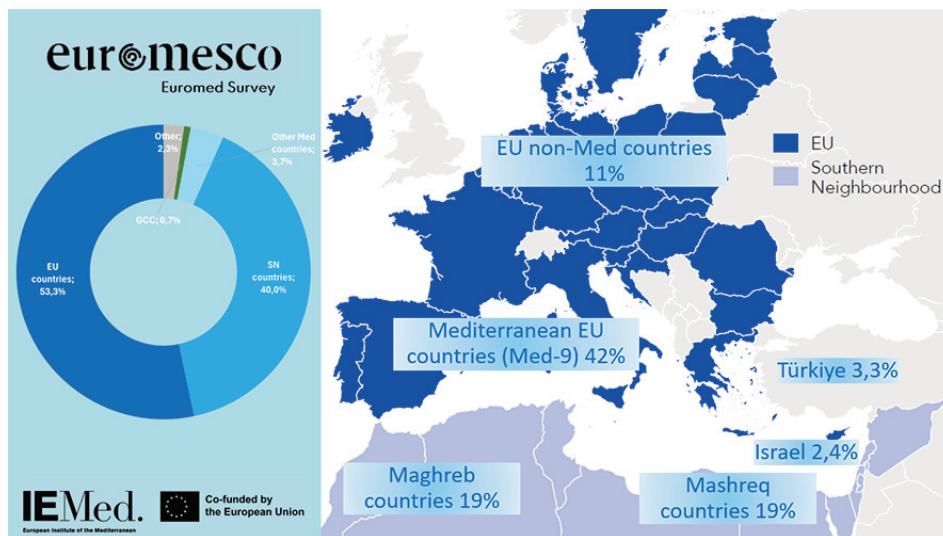
- The [15th EuroMed Survey](#), which gathered responses from 700+ policymakers, experts, and civil society actors across 24 countries.
- A series of Consultation Circles held in Rabat, Cairo and Brussels.

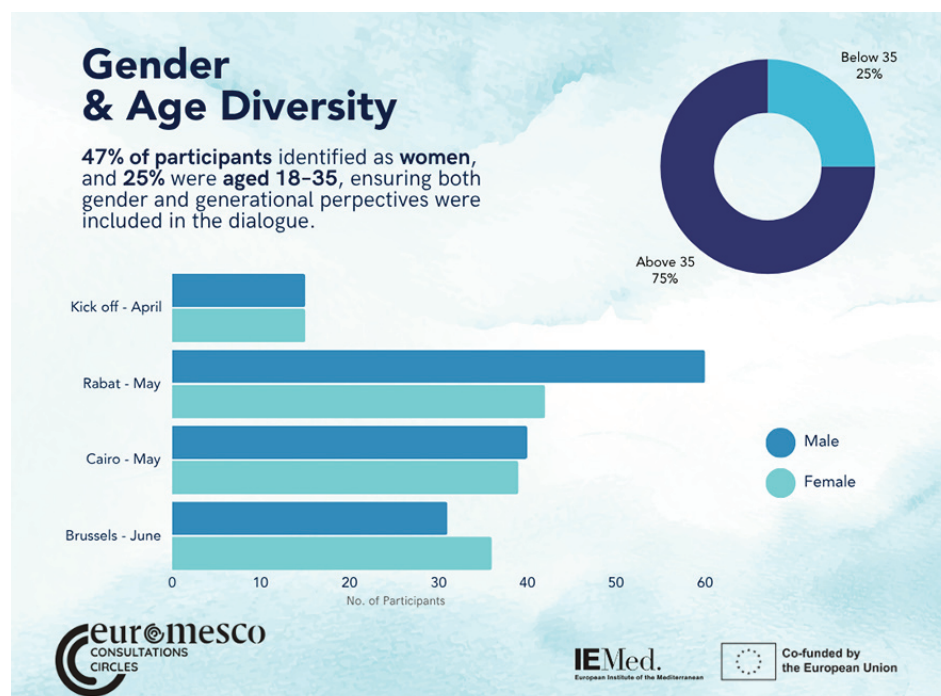
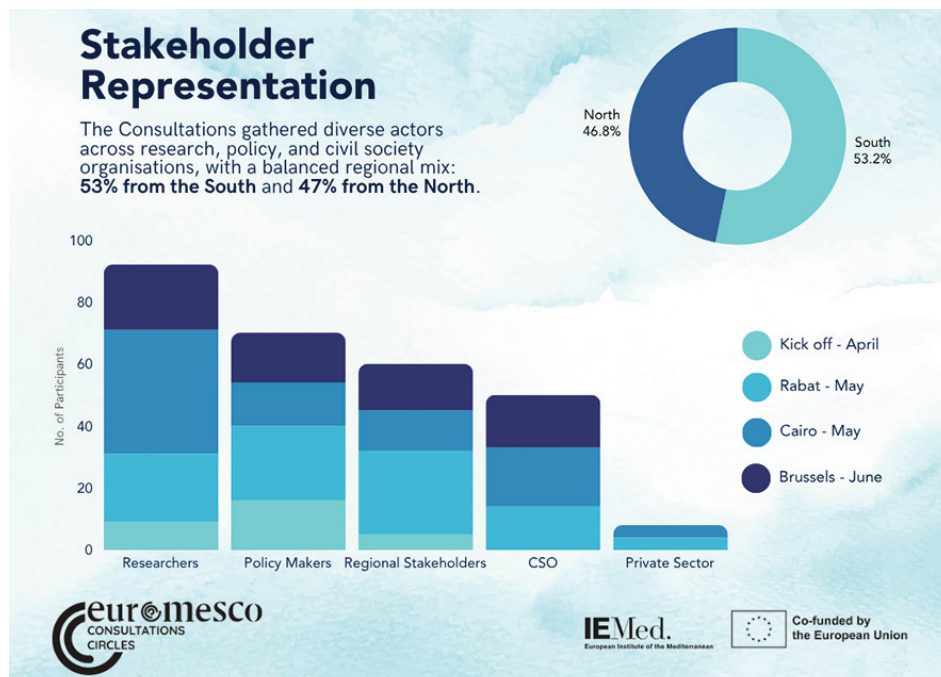
The Consultation Circles were **formally launched on 8 April 2025 in Brussels during a high-level kick-off chaired by the EU Commissioner for the Mediterranean, Dubravka Šuica**. The event gathered top-tier researchers from the EuroMeSCo network and Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf (DG MENA) directors to discuss the blueprints of the Pact and expectations for the consultations, marking the beginning of the cycle of regional dialogues in the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

This report presents the **key insights and cross-cutting recommendations** that emerged from the consultation phase. It captures the **voices of nearly 1 000 experts, policymakers, youth, civil society actors, and business leaders** from across the Euro-Mediterranean region—contributing to make the New Pact for the Mediterranean more inclusive, grounded, and future-ready.

Participation was balanced, with equitable engagement from North-South, and with a strong gender parity and youth participation, **ensuring inclusivity and representativeness in the process**.

- **Over 700 respondents** to the region-wide Euromed Survey. In terms of geographical origin, **53% of participants were from the EU, while 44% were from Southern Mediterranean countries. 42% of respondents were women**. Disaggregating respondents by age groups, more than 20% of participants were under 35. Compared to their EU counterparts, respondents from Southern Neighbourhood countries were somewhat younger, with a higher share aged 18–35 and a smaller share aged 65 and over.
- **3 consultation events in Brussels, Rabat and Cairo** gathering almost **300 participants**. Involvement was evenly distributed, with **53%** of participants representing **Southern Mediterranean countries**, and **47%** identifying as women. A fourth (25%) of participants was 18-35 years old.





Cross-cutting Recommendations for the New Pact for the Mediterranean

Integrated insights from the EuroMeSCo Consultation Circles and EuroMed Survey

“The Pact should aim at strengthening partner countries through promoting a bottom-up approach where local authorities, communities and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) can share their local know-how and co-create mechanisms that will better withstand shocks, face adversity and allow for quicker recovery”

– A respondent to the Survey

Many recommendations emerged from the EuroMeSCo Consultation Circles. This chapter summarises the main cross-cutting recommendations for the New Pact for the Mediterranean, focusing on its structure, core priorities, implementation strategies, and insights into how the EU can rebuild trust and credibility with Southern Mediterranean countries.



Structure of the Pact

- **Ensure Southern partners co-create the Pact’s priorities from the outset, not just implement them.**

This means involving partners early in agenda-setting, ensuring ownership of objectives, and avoiding top-down frameworks that lack regional legitimacy.

- **Design multi-actor governance frameworks including governments, CSOs, youth, academia, private sector, and local authorities.**

A diverse and representative governance model is essential to build legitimacy, share responsibility, and ensure that Pact initiatives reflect lived realities.

- Build mechanisms that enhance the lead role of other levels of governance, especially the local and regional level (LRAs)

- **Replace conditionality with shared incentives built around mutual benefits and regional stability.**

Cooperation should be based on balanced interests rather than rigid preconditions, fostering trust and long-term collaboration.

- **Adopt a Team Europe approach across board: align donors, and programmes across EU institutions, member states, and implementing partners.**

Team Europe has been cited in every sector and by all actors as a best practice to enlarge and replicate.

- **Align EU instruments such as the Global Gateway, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), and Team Europe Initiatives (TEI) with regional frameworks like the UfM to reduce duplication and enhance delivery.**

Streamlining initiatives under unified strategic goals can improve resource use and increase the credibility of EU engagement.

- **Strengthen the Union for the Mediterranean's (UfM) mandate and coordination role, especially as a bridge to Gulf, Sub-Saharan, and neighbouring regions.**

A reformed UfM can anchor regional integration, enable policy coherence, and expand the Pact's reach beyond the Mediterranean basin.

- **Encourage multi-bilateral approaches: allow clusters of Southern partners to coordinate within a wider regional framework.**

Flexible groupings can accelerate cooperation among countries with shared priorities, while still linking to broader EU frameworks.

- **Emphasise the EU's comparative advantages—predictability, values-based engagement, long-term commitment, and shared prosperity.**

The EU should reinforce what distinguishes it from other powers: consistent, value-based engagement that delivers real, inclusive outcomes.

- **Develop triangular and Afro-Mediterranean cooperation, involving Gulf states, the African Union, and diaspora communities.**

Broadening partnerships will diversify financing, enhance legitimacy, and reflect the region's evolving geopolitical context.

- **Where interests align, engage pragmatically with Türkiye and China, while offering clear value alternatives based on democratic governance and sustainability.**

Cooperation should be strategic but principled, allowing for flexible engagement without compromising core EU values.



Focus: Investments Dedicated to Skills and Climate Action

- Use the Global Gateway as the Pact's flagship investment channel, with a targeted focus on:
 - ▷ **Job creation linked to green and digital transitions.**
Funding should target sectors that offer high employment potential for youth and underrepresented groups, and invest in skills development to prepare for them.
 - ▷ **Scalable green infrastructure and regional innovation hubs.**
Investment in energy, water, and clean technologies will drive sustainability and competitiveness.

▷ **Digital connectivity and cross-Mediterranean transport corridors.**

These are essential to improve trade, mobility, and regional economic integration.

- **Place skills development and talent retention at the core of all investment strategies.**

Projects should embed vocational training, digital literacy, and green skills components to address chronic mismatches between education and labour markets.

- **Establish dedicated regional funding for talent and innovation ecosystems.**

Support for youth-led start-ups, university-business collaboration, and mobility schemes (e.g. Skills Passport, Talent Partnerships) will strengthen human capital as a competitive regional asset.

- **Embed talent and skills outcomes into all large-scale infrastructure and economic projects.**

Every Pact-funded investment, whether in transport, green energy, or logistics, should include local hiring, upskilling, and youth inclusion as core deliverables.

- **Prioritise climate adaptation through localised, job-generating projects.**

Fund nature-based solutions, sustainable agriculture, and urban resilience initiatives that simultaneously reduce climate risk and create employment—particularly in vulnerable communities.

- **Support infrastructure that enables both climate goals and economic diversification.**

Invest in cross-border energy interconnections, renewable grids, smart mobility systems, and water efficiency, hard infrastructure to environmental and social outcomes.

- **Scale up blended finance and guarantee instruments to unlock capital for climate-smart and inclusive ventures.**

Focus on underfinanced sectors like climate adaptation, education tech, and rural development by reducing investor risk and catalysing public–private partnerships.

- **Promote equitable access to investment opportunities across regions and populations.**

Special attention should be given to underserved territories, women-led enterprises, and informal sectors with high potential for formalisation and scaling.

- **Ensure local co-ownership and alignment with national development strategies.**

Projects must be demand-driven, visibly rooted in local needs, and coordinated with national and regional actors to ensure continuity and political traction.

Implementation: Monitoring, Accountability, and Inclusion

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

- **Develop a unified Pact-wide M&E framework, with shared Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and regional benchmarks.**

A joint monitoring system will track impact and guide improvements across thematic areas and countries.

- **Create thematic monitoring tools, including a Mediterranean Skills Observatory, a Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems (WEFE) Nexus Monitoring System, and Green Investment Impact Tracker.**

These instruments can generate actionable data for policy refinement and transparent evaluation.

- **Link funding and implementation to performance-based outcomes and transparent reporting.**

Results-based mechanisms improve efficiency and ensure accountability to both funders and beneficiaries.

Civil society engagement

- **Establish a formal Civil Society Advisory Mechanism linked to the Pact's governance.**

CSOs must be given structured channels to contribute to strategy, implementation, and oversight.

- **Provide core funding to support long-term civic engagement, social innovation, and watchdog functions.**

Sustainable funding will enable CSOs to play independent, constructive roles beyond short-term project cycles.

- **Involve CSOs in Pact implementation, especially in conflict mediation, accountability, and community resilience.**

Civil society actors bring trust, proximity, and flexibility to work where institutions are less effective.

Youth inclusion

- **Institutionalise youth roles in the Pact decision-making, governance, and project evaluation.**

Youth representation must be built into formal mechanisms, not confined to one-off consultations.

- **Scale flagship youth instruments like the Mediterranean Skills Passport, Youth Guarantee, and Green Jobs Facility.**

These initiatives tackle unemployment, skills mismatch, and regional mobility barriers with practical solutions.

- **Expand South–South and intra-Mediterranean mobility through a fast-track Euromed Visa and reformed Erasmus+ programmes.**

Mobility must be reciprocal, inclusive, and linked to labour market needs across the region.

Rebuilding Trust and Credibility

- **Align EU policy with its declared values in the region, particularly on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.**

Prioritising recognition of the Palestinian State and supporting human capacity reconstruction in Gaza are pre-conditions to restore trust.

- **Support inclusive regional diplomacy and a people-centred approach to peacebuilding.**

The EU's credibility depends on its consistency in promoting rights, dignity, and inclusive governance.

- **Reframe regional security cooperation** as a shared responsibility rooted in mutual interdependence, treating Southern Neighbourhood countries as **equal security partners** and aligning with **regional initiatives led by those actors.**

- **Establish a coherent EU-wide regional security framework that integrates military, civilian, and governance efforts, promoting relational trust** between states and citizens and ensuring **long-term, consistent engagement.**



- **Formalise and empower civil society through a Security Advisory Mechanism** with regular dialogue and access, providing resources for **security sector reform (SSR)**, conflict prevention, and radicalisation mitigation, while promoting **community-based and grassroots approaches**, especially those involving **youth, women, and minorities**.
- **Prioritise inclusive governance and structural reforms** over short-term “train and equip” models, linking security assistance to **reform commitments**, and replicating effective SSR programmes like **PARMSS** in other contexts.
- **Use EU instruments strategically to promote rights-based cooperation**, applying **conditionality** in cases of systemic human rights abuses while maintaining **flexible pathways for re-engagement**.
- **Build relational trust through long-term, visible, and people-focused co-operation.**
Sustained partnerships that deliver tangible results are the best antidote to skepticism and geopolitical competition.
- **Develop a clear, emotionally resonant narrative focused on shared values, partnership, and regional identity.**
Messaging should move beyond technical language to speak to aspirations, solidarity, and co-creation.

- **Create a Mediterranean Communication Taskforce to coordinate narratives across EU institutions and Southern partners.**

Unified messaging will ensure consistency, reduce confusion, and build shared ownership of the Pact.

- **Promote visibility through flagship initiatives such as EU Jeel Connector, Day of the Mediterranean, and Mediterranean Capitals of Culture.**

These initiatives offer symbolic and practical value in connecting citizens and showcasing regional cooperation.

- **Focus communication on concrete, relatable success stories—digital hubs, green jobs, local climate action, youth entrepreneurship.**

Highlighting impact builds public support and reinforces the Pact's relevance.

- **Engage trusted messengers—diasporas, youth leaders, city mayors, and independent media—tailored to specific audiences and channels.**

Effective communication depends on local voices and credible advocates who resonate with target communities.

- **Invest in content creation and capacity-building for local media and story-tellers.**

Empowering regional voices ensures authenticity, relevance, and reach.

Further details and actionable insights related to each of these recommendations can be found in the reports of the consultation circles and focus groups. These are organised around three key cross-cutting clusters:

- **Empowering the next generation:** aligning education, skills, and mobility with labour market needs and youth aspirations.
- **Driving growth through investment and private sector engagement:** unlocking inclusive economic opportunities and supporting enterprise-led development.
- **Ecosystems of change:** advancing decarbonised, climate-resilient approaches to food, water, and environmental governance for a sustainable future.

Rabat Consultation Circle

13 – 14 May 2025 | Rabat, Morocco

In partnership with Policy Center for the New South



Introduction

In May 2025, the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), with the support of the European Union, launched a series of high-level consultation events with stakeholders from Southern Neighbourhood countries. Organised under the framework of the project *Support to Reflection and Consultations on the Pact for the Mediterranean*, the first of the **EuroMeSCo Consultation Circles: Consulting Southern Partners** was held in **Rabat (13 – 14 May)**, in partnership with the Policy Center for the New South (PCNS).

The consultations aimed to provide a structured platform for dialogue between policymakers, researchers, civil society actors, and private sector representatives from the Southern Mediterranean and European institutions. The focus was on collecting regional input and policy recommendations to help shape the forthcoming New Pact for the Mediterranean—the EU's main strategic vision for renewed cooperation with its Southern Neighbourhood.

The Consultation Circle in Rabat brought together over 90 experts, policymakers, private sector leaders, and civil society representatives from North Africa (*please see the list of represented institutions at the end of this chapter*), and was structured through two main sessions, Interactive Consultation Circles and Focus Groups, each centred around three priority dimensions:

1. Fostering economic growth and private sector engagement;
2. Empowering the next generation through skills, mobility, and inclusion;
3. Promoting sustainable transformation and green partnerships.

The **Interactive Circles** allowed participants to rotate between thematic tables every 30 minutes, ensuring exposure to a diversity of perspectives and promoting cross-sectoral dialogue on all three dimensions. The **Focus Groups**, by contrast, were in-depth thematic sessions where participants were selected based on their specific expertise, with the objective of formulating actionable proposals and extracting the most relevant insights for policy development.

This report presents a detailed account of the discussions, conclusions, and key recommendations emerging from each session, offering a comparative view of the priorities and perspectives shared by Southern partners to ensure that the Pact is informed by the realities, aspirations, and expertise of stakeholders on both shores of the Mediterranean.

13 May 2025

Introduction to the New Pact for the Mediterranean

Speakers

Karim El Aynaoui, Executive President, Policy Center for the New South (PCNS)

Senén Florensa, Executive President, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)

Stefano Sannino, Director General for the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf, European Commission (DG MENA)

Welcoming addresses were delivered by Executive President Karim El Aynaoui (PCNS) and Executive President Senén Florensa (IEMed), followed by a keynote presentation from Stefano Sannino, Director General for the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf at the European Commission.



Karim El Aynaoui opened the event by emphasising the significance of the consultation process as an opportunity to reimagine EU–Southern Mediterranean relations. He noted a growing appetite for strategic dialogue across the region and called for meaningful spaces where such exchanges can take place. He stressed that “politics is back” and that think tanks have a critical role to play in shaping the future through informed debate and collaboration.

Senén Florensa followed by underlining the long-standing contribution of the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) to fostering structured dialogue and research cooperation across the region. He presented early findings from the latest EuroMed Survey, revealing that 80% of respondents from the Southern Neighbour-

hood see the EU as the region's principal actor. Ambassador Florensa stressed the urgency and potential of the Pact, particularly in the current geopolitical climate and on the 30th anniversary of the Barcelona Process. He highlighted the need for an inclusive, participatory, and forward-looking Pact built in dialogue with Southern actors and grounded in their realities.

Stefano Sannino then introduced the New Pact for the Mediterranean, framing it as a next step building on the 2021 Agenda for the Mediterranean. He explained that the Pact would not be a single policy document but a flexible and evolving operational tool, aimed at delivering concrete impact. Director General Sannino emphasised that the Pact will focus on fostering tangible results in key areas such as energy, youth empowerment, culture, and employment—based on co-creation, not prescription. He noted that the process would be inclusive and interactive, with consultations preceding any drafting, and involving governments, civil society, and private sector actors.



In the subsequent **Q&A discussion**, participants asked how the EU plans to redefine its engagement role without imposing models; what the timeline and implementation framework of the Pact will look like; how to move from policy to action; what role youth will play in shaping the Pact; and how to build inclusive partnerships amid rising protectionism. Other questions addressed the EU's communication challenges, energy cooperation frameworks, and the meaning of integration in a fragmented regional context.

Director General Sannino responded by reiterating that the Pact will have no fixed timeline or financial envelope, and that it will rely on existing tools and platforms. He affirmed that the EU does not intend to impose models but rather to support flexible cooperation adapted to local needs. He also emphasised youth participation, not just as recipients but as co-creators of change. Regarding protectionism, he acknowledged the shifting global context and stressed the importance of resilience and diversification in partnerships. On energy and mobility, he noted that many decisions rest with Member States, but the EU is working to provide enabling frameworks.

The session concluded with a shared understanding of the need for a practical, inclusive, and results-driven Pact, anchored in regional realities and open to a broad range of stakeholders.

Interactive Consultation Circles

Three parallel thematic sessions were held to explore key drivers of regional cooperation and integration:

Circle 1: Lessons, Gaps and Opportunities to Build the Mediterranean of Tomorrow

Circle 2: The Private Sector's Role in Regional Integration

Circle 3: Triangular Cooperation Models: Expanding Strategic Trade and Investment Partnerships

Each circle was led by a dedicated facilitator and documented by a rapporteur. Participants were divided into rotating groups and spent approximately 30 minutes at each thematic table, allowing all attendees to engage with the three topics in succession. This dynamic format ensured that diverse perspectives were shared, and cross-cutting insights emerged across all thematic areas.

Circle 1

Lessons, Gaps and Opportunities to Build the Mediterranean of Tomorrow

Facilitator

Mounia Boucetta, Senior Fellow, Policy Center for the New South

Rapporteur

Abdessalam Jaldi, Senior International Relations Specialist, Policy Center for the New South

This interactive session focused on evaluating the progress and shortcomings of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation since the Barcelona Process, with a view to shaping a more effective and equitable New Pact for the Mediterranean. Participants offered a critical review of key institutional innovations, structural limitations, and future prospects for regional cooperation and integration.

Several milestones were acknowledged as **achievements**, including the Euro-Mediterranean University of Fes (UEMF), advancements in academic mobility, and the signing of Association Agreements, particularly the EU-Morocco model, which reflects a maturing partnership rooted in democratic, economic, and societal reforms. The Union for the Mediterranean was noted for its symbolic and dialogic value but critiqued for its limited institutional capacity, particularly in times of geopolitical tension.

Participants also stressed the need for a **new paradigm of integration** that is less fragmented and more strategic. There was broad agreement on the importance of **negotiating regionally**, rather than through disjointed bilateral deals, with proposals for a potential Southern Mediterranean Common Market.

The discussion further explored the declining **monopoly of EU influence**, challenged by actors such as China, Turkey, India, and Russia, underscoring the need for the EU to reassert its value through co-development and inclusion.



Critiques of current EU financial instruments highlighted the rigidity and excessive conditionality of aid mechanisms. Participants called for flexible, context-sensitive financing that includes support for civil society and SMEs, and that encourages long-term capacity-building rather than short-term project cycles.

The session also examined **the Israel-Palestine conflict** as a recurring barrier to regional consensus. Functionalist approaches to engage Israel selectively in non-political sectors—such as climate action and water management—were cautiously proposed.

In terms of **recommendations**, the group advocated for:

- Policy integration and coordination to avoid sectoral silos.
- Locally co-developing monitoring frameworks for enhanced accountability.
- Flexible and content-sensitive investing in sustainable, replicable project designs, with potential for regional scale-up that support local civil society and SMEs.
- Multi-bilateralism as a means to balance realism with integration goals, exemplified by successful Association Agreements such as the EU-Morocco model.
- Migration policy framed around partnership, talent circulation, and diaspora engagement, such as the Euro-Mediterranean University of Fes (UEMF).
- Cultural diplomacy as a tool for trust-building and soft power projection.
- Strengthening institutional capacities and regional bodies, such as the UfM.

The conversation concluded with calls to reinvigorate the UfM with concrete mandates and resources, and to embed Southern partners in European value chains, especially in green energy and tech innovation. A more balanced, inclusive approach—designed with and for the South—was deemed essential to the success of the New Pact for the Mediterranean.

Circle 2

The Private Sector's Role in Regional Integration

Facilitator

Mohammed El Razzaz, Head of Sector, Economic Development and Employment, Union for the Mediterranean

Rapporteur

Saloi El Yamani, Economist, Policy Center for the New South

This consultation circle addressed how the private sector can be meaningfully engaged in the New Pact for the Mediterranean and how regional frameworks can be reshaped to support private-sector-driven integration. The discussion was contextualised within a macroeconomic environment marked by low regional integration, skewed trade flows, youth unemployment, and regulatory barriers.

Participants agreed that the divide between public and private sectors is artificial—as both must collaborate closely. Governments provide the regulatory framework, but the private sector is key to driving integration and inclusive growth. They acknowledged that effective engagement requires strong public-private synergies, supportive policies, and democratic participation.

Major barriers include fragmented markets, regulatory complexity, high transaction costs, and limited access to finance and market data. A lack of trust between businesses, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions, and academia also hinders collaboration. MSMEs were identified as central to employment and innovation, with calls to close the gender gap and expand inclusive entrepreneurship through blended financing.



Concerns were raised over state dominance in key sectors, which can stifle private initiative. A more decentralised, inclusive approach—engaging youth, women, and underserved groups—was strongly encouraged.

Examples of successful initiatives included the ELMED electricity link, Medusa Submarine Cable, Blue Mediterranean Partnership, JESSICA urban investment scheme, the UEMF, and the Invest in Med programme.

In terms of **recommendations**, the group advocated for:

- **Recognise the diversity of the private sector:** The Pact should acknowledge that the private sector is not monolithic across the region and adapt strategies accordingly.
- **Avoid excessive bureaucracy:** Past EU development programmes have been undermined by rigid, top-down procedures that deter private engagement.
- **Promote democratisation of access:** Skills, technology, finance, and market data must be more widely accessible to ensure inclusive participation.
- **Adopt a bottom-up and inclusive approach:** Youth, women, and vulnerable groups should be empowered as co-designers and co-implementers of Pact-related initiatives.
- **Base policies on data and evidence:** A data-driven approach is necessary to tailor solutions to local realities and needs.
- **Strengthen institutional harmonisation and capacities:** Policy predictability, regional convergence, and capacity-building — for both public and private actors — are essential for long-term impact.

Circle 3

Triangular Cooperation Models: Expanding Strategic Trade and Investment Partnerships

Facilitator

Caterina Roggero, Senior Associate Research Fellow, ISPI – Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale

Rapporteur

Oumaya Amghar, Technical Advisor, European Institute of the Mediterranean

This session explored how triangular cooperation—collaboration among the EU, a beneficiary country, and a third partner—can serve as a strategic vehicle to advance trade, investment, and resilience across the Mediterranean. The discussion emphasised that triangular models allow for more inclusive, flexible, and context-sensitive partnerships, particularly valuable in a region marked by complexity and asymmetry.

Participants underscored the **need to tailor such cooperation to Mediterranean realities**, building on global experiences but creating new frameworks that respond to regional priorities. Initiatives such as Horizon and Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) were noted as **useful precedents**, though lacking full Mediterranean regional focus—pointing to an opportunity for the Pact.

Six **priority areas for investment** emerged:

1. Education and research, as a foundation for development and empowerment
2. Employment, especially vocational training and digital skills
3. Youth initiatives, including entrepreneurship and university-business linkages
4. Infrastructure and interconnection, critical for economic and social cohesion
5. Security and inclusive governance, to address cross-border risks
6. Start-ups and innovation, as engines of economic transformation

Triangular cooperation was also seen as a means to engage with a broader set of partners beyond the traditional EU–Southern Neighbourhood framework. These include Gulf states (as financial partners), China (for training and infrastructure), sub-Saharan Africa (for deeper Afro-Mediterranean integration), and the diaspora (as development actors).

Participants called for re-imagining the Mediterranean not as a geopolitical fault line but as a space of interdependence and complementarity. A new, integrated Afro-Mediterranean vision could overcome outdated binaries and foster South-South and South-North-South synergies. By broadening its network of collaborators and focusing on inclusive implementation, the New Pact for the Mediterranean can serve as a blueprint for integrated and sustainable regional development.



Several **examples of successful or promising initiatives** were cited during the discussion. The Blue Mediterranean Partnership was highlighted as a model for triangular cooperation, with Gulf countries offering grant-based support for sustainable development. The Medusa Submarine Cable System was presented as a key project to expand digital infrastructure and connectivity across the region. Participants also referenced Atlantic Initiatives as potential frameworks to be adapted or expanded to include Mediterranean stakeholders. Finally, green mobility models from Colombia were mentioned as innovative practices that could inspire similar approaches in the Mediterranean context.

The group presented the following **recommendations**:

What to invest in:

- Education and research systems tailored to green and digital transitions
- Labor mobility, reskilling, and job creation
- Youth-led innovation and entrepreneurship
- Regional infrastructure and energy connectivity
- Conflict-sensitive, inclusive governance mechanisms
- Start-up ecosystems and innovation platforms

With whom to cooperate:

- Gulf countries
- China
- African Union and sub-Saharan states
- Diaspora networks
- NGOs and the private sector
- Southern partners like South American countries with transferable expertise

How to implement triangular cooperation:

- Launching digital skills and training programs
- Strategic talent management across sectors
- Enhancing regional trade frameworks (e.g. Agadir Agreement)
- Promoting academic incubators for innovation transfer
- Removing trade/investment barriers that limit Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) participation

14 May 2025

Focus Group Discussions

The morning was dedicated to three parallel thematic Focus Group Discussions, each designed to address a key dimension of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation:

1. *Skills for the future* – Aligning youth training with market demands
2. *Mobility and talent circulation* – Strengthening EU–South cooperation through people flows
3. *Sustainable growth ecosystems* – Advancing climate resilience and green partnerships

Each focus group brought together a carefully selected group of participants based on their thematic expertise, institutional role, or policy engagement in the respective field. This format enabled in-depth, targeted discussions aimed at generating actionable policy recommendations rooted in real-world practice and strategic vision, the identification of concrete challenges and solutions, and the articulation of proposals that can feed directly into the development and implementation of the New Pact for the Mediterranean.

Group 1

Skills for the Future – Preparing Youth for a Changing Mediterranean

Facilitator

Abdelaziz Jaouani, Senior Human Capital Development Expert, European Training Foundation

Rapporteur

Tayeb Ghazi, Senior Economist, Policy Center for the New South

This focus group examined how future-oriented skills development can act as a lever for resilience, inclusion, and sustainable growth in the Southern Mediterranean. Framed around labour market challenges and transitions affecting youth, the discussion emphasised the strategic role of skills as a connector across sectors, generations, and borders.

Participants highlighted that the Mediterranean is undergoing simultaneous **technological, environmental, and demographic transitions**, with education and training systems lagging behind these changes. There was broad agreement that public-private partnerships are essential for aligning education outcomes with labour market needs, and for improving the efficiency and agility of training delivery.

The **Team Europe Initiative (TEI)** was referenced as a valuable coordination platform whose approaches should be reinforced through the Pact. Participants advocated for scaling up and embedding successful national reforms into a coherent regional framework.

Participants identified several **structural challenges** to effective skills development in the region. High NEET (persons not in employment, education, or training) rates and low female labour participation reflect persistent exclusion from economic activity. A skills mismatch between education systems and market needs was widely noted, alongside the limited role of the private sector in shaping training. Barriers to cross-border mobility, particularly in the recognition of qualifications, and the region's lagging digital readiness amid green and Artificial Intelligence (AI) transitions, further underscore the need for urgent, coordinated reforms.



The group proposed several **regional initiatives** to address such challenges:

- **Context-sensitive Youth Guarantee:** A regional scheme to ensure youth access to employment, education, or training post-graduation, adapted to national socio-economic realities.
- **Mediterranean Skills Passport:** A regional recognition system aligned with international standards, e.g. European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), facilitating mobility and employability across borders.
- **Erasmus+ Regional Coordination Mechanism:** A steering body to align mobility programs with priority skill gaps and shared regional goals.
- **AI and digital skills for the Mediterranean:** Joint programmes to expand digital and AI-related competencies through public-private partnerships and pilot initiatives.

- **Green Job Facility:** A donor-coordinated platform to finance green skills development, aligning labour markets with environmental objectives.
- **Mediterranean Skills Observatory:** A regional data and analysis platform to support policy-making, monitoring, and peer learning in skills development.
- **Innovative financing models:** Engagement of the private sector and development finance institutions in blended schemes and training levies to diversify funding.
- **Comprehensive lifelong learning systems:** Integration of upskilling, re-skilling, career guidance, and flexible pathways for continuous learning.
- **Public-Private skills alignment:** A structured mechanism to foster public-private partnerships that align education outcomes with labour market needs.
- **Reinforce Team Europe Initiative (TEI):** Building on the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) as a coordination platform, with strengthened approaches and synergies under the Pact to maximise collective impact and resource mobilisation.

Participants stressed that meeting the region's skills challenge requires not only national reforms but also regional alignment, multilevel coordination, and inclusive governance. Emphasis was placed on lifelong learning systems, digital inclusion, and green transitions, with an urgent call for co-designed, scalable initiatives that involve the private sector, social partners, and civil society.

Group 2

Enhancing EU–Southern Cooperation through Mobility and Talent Circulation

Facilitator

Iván Martín, Senior Fellow, Policy Center for the New South

Rapporteur

Bilal Mahli, International Relations Specialist, Policy Center for the New South

This focus group explored how mobility and talent circulation can evolve from narrowly managed migration channels into strategic instruments for regional development. Participants stressed that **mobility must lie at the heart of the Pact**, not as a risk to be mitigated, but as a catalyst for skills development, innovation, and balanced cooperation.

Participants called for a shift from a containment logic toward a **co-development paradigm**, based on fairness, reciprocity, and shared benefit. This requires reimagining mobility governance beyond restrictive frameworks, and instead promoting accessibility, mutual recognition, and inclusive engagement.



Participants raised **concerns** over restrictive visa procedures, calling for a fast-track “Euromed visa” and greater mobility for Northern students in Southern institutions to address the current mobility imbalance. South-South mobility remains limited and needs targeted support. The diaspora was highlighted as a strategic asset for investment and innovation, not just remittances. To **avoid brain drain**, participants prompted calls for knowledge-sharing and temporary return schemes. Finally, the asymmetry of readmission agreements and use of visa policy as pressure were criticised, with calls for fairer, rights-based cooperation frameworks.

The group proposed several **strategic measures** to enhance mobility and talent circulation in the region:

- **Euromed Visa:** A fast-track visa for Erasmus and cooperation programme participants, with a long-term goal of introducing an Electronic Travel Authorization and, eventually, regional free movement.
- **Reform Erasmus+:** Increase funding for the Southern Mediterranean, integrate South–South mobility, and allow full membership for partner countries (e.g. Türkiye model).
- **Mediterranean Mobility Mechanism:** Establish a scholarship scheme aligned with regional needs and institutional reforms.
- **Talent partnerships:** Scale beyond pilots to serve both EU and partner countries’ green and digital transition needs.
- **Diaspora engagement:** Expand initiatives like the **ANIMA network**, create in-

vestment funds, enable temporary academic return, and collect detailed diaspora data.

- **Skills intelligence:** Build labour market forecasting tools to guide mobility policy, leveraging the work of the European Training Foundation.

Participants urged the EU to reconceptualise mobility not as a challenge, but as an opportunity to build a more equal and resilient Mediterranean partnership. Talent circulation, if governed fairly and inclusively, can enhance skills ecosystems, empower youth, and reconnect diasporas with development at home. The session's tone was one of ambition: mobility must become a pillar of the New Pact for the Mediterranean, grounded in respect, reciprocity, and regional solidarity.

Group 3

Ecosystems of Change: Promoting a Sustainable Model of Growth

Facilitator

Yeganeh Forouheshfar, Senior Researcher, Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association

Rapporteur

Boutaina Lmasrar, Junior Economist, Policy Center for the New South

This session explored how to reframe economic growth in the Mediterranean through sustainability, calling for a shift from extractive models to **regenerative, inclusive ecosystems**. Participants stressed embedding environmental resilience and social inclusion into national and regional economic strategies.

Despite rising funding and global commitments, **key challenges** such as weak governance, poor coordination, and a lack of bankable projects continue to hinder progress. Additional concerns include legal uncertainty, fragmented regulation, and insufficient technical capacity, all of which deter private investment in green sectors. Persistent blockers include fossil fuel subsidies, lagging energy transitions (e.g. Tunisia), and underdeveloped Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) frameworks and environmental, social and governance (ESG) systems.

The group emphasised **using metrics beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**, boosting blended finance, and ensuring private sector participation backed by clear rules and robust impact monitoring. The dominance of **bilateral deals** was seen as limiting; stronger roles were advocated for regional frameworks like the UfM to drive alignment.



Innovation drivers such as circular economies, carbon markets, and inclusive models involving youth, women, and local actors were seen as essential for building resilient growth. PRIMA and the European Innovation Council were cited as good practice in this sector, improving significantly time to market and effectively moving from research to impact on the ground.

The group put forward a series of **proposals for the Pact:**

- **Capacity building for bankable projects** - Train public and local actors to design scalable, investment-ready green projects (through notably technical assistance).
- **Leverage the Global Gateway** - Deploy EU instruments to finance regional green and digital infrastructure.
- **Empower youth innovation** - Scale university incubators and support networks for youth-led sustainability ventures involving women and local actors. PRIMA and the European Innovation Council were cited as strong models to follow.
- **Teaming-up** – Moving from bilateral partnerships to integrated coordination platforms, in line with **Team Europe Initiative models**.
- **Harmonise MRV frameworks** - Create a shared system to **standardise sustainability indicators and improve national data tracking**.
- **Strengthening regional frameworks** – Reinforce regional frameworks such as the UfM to drive alignment and cooperation, over limiting bilateral deals.

Participants called for the Pact to **move beyond donor–beneficiary relationships** and toward **co-created portfolios of mutual interest**. They reiterated that sustain-

ability must be embedded into economic planning as a driver—not a constraint—for regional development. With the right governance, financing, and data systems, the Mediterranean can become a model for green, inclusive transformation grounded in shared ownership and regional solidarity.

Conclusions

A number of recurrent and cross-cutting recommendations emerged from the thematic consultation circles and focus group discussions held during the conference. These reflect a strong convergence of priorities and strategic insights across key sectors—including skills and mobility, private sector development, sustainability, and governance.

Together, they form a coherent set of pillars that can guide the development of a renewed, integrated, and inclusive Euro-Mediterranean partnership under the Pact.

a. Coherence and coordination

- Overarching consensus that regional frameworks and policies remain fragmented.
- Participants repeatedly called for:
 - ▷ Greater alignment across EU, UfM, bilateral, and multilateral agendas.
 - ▷ Stronger horizontal coordination mechanisms to replace siloed, project-based approaches.
 - ▷ A shift from bilateralism to coordinated regional strategies, including concepts like a Southern Mediterranean common market or shared mobility and skills frameworks.

b. Local ownership and co-design

- A clear, cross-cutting call to move from top-down models to co-developed frameworks.
- In all groups, there was strong emphasis on:
 - ▷ Involving local actors—governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector—as co-designers, not just implementers.
 - ▷ Tailoring policies and financing tools to regional and local realities, moving away from excessive conditionality.
 - ▷ Trust-building through inclusive governance.

c. The private sector as a central actor

- Strong agreement that economic integration cannot happen without the private sector.

- Noted across circles:
 - ▷ MSMEs, youth- and women-led businesses, and entrepreneurs must be empowered.
 - ▷ Need for blended financing, simplified regulation, and investment-ready ecosystems.
 - ▷ Public–private–academic collaboration is essential for both growth and skills development.

d. Youth, skills, and mobility as structural priorities

- Nearly all groups emphasised:
 - ▷ The urgency of addressing youth unemployment, skills mismatch, and brain drain (support to initiatives like the UEMF).
 - ▷ Mobility and skills development as strategic assets, not just social policy tools.
 - ▷ Proposals for regional mechanisms (e.g. a Mediterranean skills passport, Euromed visa, regional youth guarantee) were recurrent and widely supported.

e. Inclusive and sustainable growth models

- Sustainability was not treated as a separate domain, but as a foundational lens for development.
- Shared across sectors:
 - ▷ Green and digital transitions must be tied to job creation, investment, and capacity-building.
 - ▷ Call for regenerative and circular economic models, supported by harmonised monitoring systems and scalable pilot projects.
 - ▷ Strong link made between sustainability, innovation, and regional resilience.

f. Data, monitoring, and evidence-based policymaking

- All groups stressed the need for better data ecosystems to inform policies and track progress.
- Specific mentions included:
 - ▷ Regional observatories (e.g. skills observatory, MRV frameworks for sustainability).
 - ▷ Accountability mechanisms designed and monitored locally.
 - ▷ Mediterranean integrated regional data to connect regional policies across sectors (e.g. migration, education, labour markets).

g. Rethinking partnerships and power dynamics

- Recurrent critiques of the donor–beneficiary model and EU-centric frameworks.
- Broad agreement on:
 - ▷ Embracing triangular and South–South–North cooperation.
 - ▷ Engaging non-traditional partners (Gulf countries, China, African Union, diasporas).
 - ▷ Designing the Pact as a horizontal, reciprocal partnership rooted in mutual benefit and respect.



List of represented institutions in the Rabat Consultation Circle

Abdelmalek Essaâdi University	European Training Foundation (ETF)
Agence Française de Développement (AFD)	European Union Delegation to Morocco
ANIMA Investment Network	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – MENA Region
Businessmed	German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA)
Caisse de Dépôts et de Gestion (CDG)	Happy Smala
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)	HEM Business & Engineering School
Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf, European Commission (DG MENA)	Hitradio
Education for Employment – Maroc (EFE Maroc)	International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies – Zaragoza (CIHEAM Zaragoza)
Embassy of Croatia to Morocco	International Monetary Fund (IMF)
Embassy of Denmark to Morocco	Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI)
Embassy of Finland to Morocco	Klik Foundation – North Africa
Embassy of France to Morocco	Mediterranean Universities Union – UN-IMED
Embassy of Greece to Morocco	Mediterranean Youth Council
Embassy of Hungary to Morocco	Ministry of Economic Inclusion and Small Enterprises, Morocco
Embassy of Italy to Morocco	Ministry of Economy and Finances, Morocco
Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Morocco	Mohammed V University
Embassy of Portugal to Morocco	Moroccan Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research
Embassy of Romania to Morocco	Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis (MIPA)
Embassy of Spain to Morocco	Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Service of Multilateral Cooperation
Erasmus+ Morocco Office	Policy Center for the New South (PCNS)
Erasmus Morocco Network	Positive Agenda Advisory
EU-Jeel Connectors (EU)	Réseau des Associations des Écoles de la Deuxième Chance – Maroc
Euromed University – EMUNI	SNRT – Société Nationale de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision
Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA)	South South Partners
European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM)	UNDP Morocco Office
European Diversity and Migration Programme, European Policy Centre (EPC)	UNEP Copenhagen Climate Centre
European External Action Service (EEAS)	Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)
European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)	
European Investment Bank (EIB)	
European Policy Centre (EPC)	

Cairo Consultation Circle

27 – 28 May 2025 | Cairo, Egypt

In partnership with Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS)
and the American University in Cairo (AUC)



Introduction

The second **EuroMeSCo Consultation Circle: Consulting Southern Partners** on the New Pact for the Mediterranean was held in **Cairo on 27–28 May 2025**, gathering over 80 policymakers, researchers, private sector actors, and civil society representatives from across the Euro-Mediterranean region. **Organised in partnership with the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS) and hosted by the American University in Cairo (AUC)**, the event provided a dynamic platform to advance dialogue on shared regional priorities and deepen cooperation between the EU and Southern Neighbourhood partners.

The event particularly delved into issues related to:

1. Research, Innovation & Technology Transfer for a Sustainable Mediterranean

- Exploring how to mobilise funding, strengthen innovation ecosystems, and scale research-based cooperation for sustainability, climate, and digital transformation.

2. Governing the WEF E Nexus (Water–Energy–Food–Ecosystems)

- Addressing trade-offs and synergies across water, energy, food, and ecosystem management to achieve resource efficiency, climate resilience, and equitable access.

3. Unlocking the Private Sector’s Role in the Green-Digital Transition

- Identifying regulatory, legal, and financial enablers—including circular economy models, green finance, and incentives—to empower businesses to lead in sustainability and digital innovation.

Structured over two days, the event combined institutional addresses, parallel focus group discussions, and interactive consultation circles. The format fostered cross-sectoral exchanges and enabled participants to co-develop policy insights and actionable recommendations across core areas of the Pact.

27 May _____

Session 1 - Opening session

Speakers

Ibrahim Awad, Director, Centre for Migration and Refugee Studies, School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, The American University in Cairo (AUC)

Dr Hanaa Ebeid, Deputy Director, Al-Ahram Centre for Political & Strategic Studies

Roger Albinyana, Managing Director, European Institute of the Mediterranean
Angelina Eichhorst, Head of the European Union Delegation to Egypt

Designed to set the tone for the two-day consultation, the session included institutional remarks by all speakers, followed by an open Q&A discussion with Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst. It outlined the Pact's priorities—fostering inclusive growth, promoting stability, and enabling just green and digital transitions—while providing context on the broader political ambition behind the EU's renewed engagement in the region.

Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst introduced the rationale and ambitions underpinning the New Pact for the Mediterranean. Recalling key milestones in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation—from the Barcelona Process through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), Agenda 2021 and the Global Gateway—**Ambassador Eichhorst invited participants to assess what has worked, what has not, and what can now be done differently to deliver meaningful impact.**



She underlined that the current multipolar world demands renewed cooperation, particularly at the people-to-people level, and called for a practical approach focused on ownership, mutual respect, inclusivity, and partnership between equals. While institutions remain important, **she emphasised that genuine progress must place people at the centre, with the Pact building on local agency and shared priorities.**

A central message of the opening remarks **was the need for a Pact built around shared resilience, not as an abstract notion but as a regional approach to climate emergencies, mobility challenges, economic pressures, and energy transitions.** The goal, Ambassador Eichhorst stressed, is not for the EU to dictate direction but

to co-create a living partnership guided by Southern and Northern inputs alike. She encouraged participants to go beyond broad challenges and identify concrete gaps and proposals, offering tangible initiatives with real, scalable impact.

In the subsequent discussion, moderated by Roger Albinyana, **participants** raised a wide range of questions and reflections:

- Representatives stressed the importance of moving beyond general frameworks towards operational regional strategies that unify efforts across the Mediterranean.
- Several speakers highlighted the centrality of capacity-building and vocational training, particularly in agriculture and energy, as replicable best practices.
- Some questioned whether the Pact would be primarily political or technical, and whether it would introduce new conditionalities.
- Concerns were raised regarding the short timeframe for consultations and the importance of ensuring Southern ownership and credibility.
- Others reflected on the Pact's framing: is the Mediterranean seen as a bridge or a barrier, and is it viewed as a source of risk or opportunity by the EU?



In response, **Ambassador Eichhorst** reiterated that the Pact aims to foster a win-win partnership, with the EU facilitating a framework built together with Southern neighbours. She acknowledged that more could have been achieved in the last thirty years but called on participants to identify where and how to do better. She reaffirmed that **flexibility, local leadership, and cross-actor coordination**—including civil society, academia, and municipalities—will be essential. **Climate action, she noted, must be mainstreamed across the entire Pact, not treated as a stand-alone pillar.**

She concluded by inviting all stakeholders to contribute actively to shaping a dynamic Pact that reflects the region's diversity, builds shared resilience, and moves beyond fragmentation towards integrated and impactful solutions.

These were the **key points** addressed by **Ambassador Eichhorst**:

- The New Pact for the Mediterranean should be co-developed through inclusive regional dialogue, building on mutual trust, shared priorities, and practical co-operation.
- Shared resilience must be a guiding principle, offering a common framework to tackle climate, mobility, economic, and social challenges.
- Effective implementation will depend on concrete, scalable initiatives grounded in the realities of local actors and institutions.
- The EU's role is to support, not impose—ensuring the Pact delivers real benefits across the Mediterranean through equal partnership.

Focus Group Discussions

The afternoon was dedicated to **three parallel thematic Focus Group Discussions, each structured to explore a critical dimension of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the Southern Neighbourhood**:

1. *Research, Innovation & Technology Transfer* – Bridging sustainability with economic growth
2. *Governing the WEF Nexus* – Balancing water, energy, food, and ecosystem priorities
3. *Unlocking the Private Sector's Potential* – Driving sustainable and inclusive growth

Each focus group convened a carefully selected group of participants based on their sectoral expertise, institutional affiliation, or engagement in the relevant policy domain. This format enabled deep, targeted exchanges aimed at surfacing practical policy insights, identifying shared challenges, and formulating actionable proposals to inform the design and implementation of the New Pact for the Mediterranean.

Group 1

Research, innovation & technology transfer for a sustainable Mediterranean

Facilitator

Octavi Quintana, Director, PRIMA Foundation

Rapporteur

Yasmine Ahmed Abdelmawgoud, Research Assistant, Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS)

The focus group's discussion was framed by the recognition that climate change, economic disparity, and demographic shifts require cross-border scientific collaboration, capacity building, and stronger South-South knowledge partnerships. The session identified concrete policy solutions and tools to integrate innovation into the broader framework of the New Pact for the Mediterranean.

Participants agreed **that climate change presents one of the most urgent and complex challenges for the Mediterranean**. The region suffers from water scarcity, agricultural vulnerability, and the underuse of its rich natural and human resources. While the EU has established strong institutional frameworks for research and innovation, Southern Mediterranean countries face challenges related to weak governance structures, limited access to funding, and the underutilisation of existing knowledge.



A recurring **concern** was the **disconnect between research outputs and policy implementation**. Although high-quality research exists, it often fails to reach or influence decision-makers. Participants also emphasised the need for greater inclusivity, moving beyond a donor-recipient dynamic to build more balanced, co-owned frameworks for cooperation. Enhancing South-South collaboration and ensuring equal partnership with the EU were seen as key priorities. The discussion also stressed the need to

better commercialise innovation, especially among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and to leverage the region's youthful demographic to bridge the EU's labour gap. Concerns around brain drain highlighted the importance of fostering brain circulation models that allow for remote collaboration.

The participants put forward the following **recommendations**:

1. Research, Knowledge Sharing & Data Access

- Develop open access and institutionally hosted databases to enable shared research and knowledge across the region.
- Prioritise policy dissemination, high-quality research production, and data accessibility.
- Revive ERANET-style networks to co-design research agendas with Southern partners and restore participatory, capacity-building mechanisms.

2. Funding, Collaboration & Policy Impact

- Strengthen funding for research and policy reports, and support platforms that connect researchers to policymakers (e.g., Economic Research Forum (ERF), Public Policy Hubs).
- Expand regional programmes such as PRIMA including local partnerships and thematic diversification.

3. Innovation, Technology & Knowledge Transfer

- Invest in national innovation systems and knowledge transfer mechanisms to support technology adoption and cooperation with the EU.
- Transfer technological solutions for irrigation and climate adaptation from Europe to the South.
- Involve policymakers directly in innovation, migration, and education strategies.

4. Education, Skills & Labour Market Integration

- Equip the South's youth with skills and training to contribute to EU labour market needs.
- Link academia, labour markets, and innovation ecosystems, with a focus on SMEs in Southern Mediterranean countries.
- Promote the use of digital tools for improved education and capacity building.

5. Mobility, Diaspora & Capacity Building

- Encourage brain circulation by creating frameworks that connect diaspora researchers with home institutions.
- Provide structural support to build the institutional capacity of Southern governments.

6. Cross-Sectoral & Sustainable Development Approaches

- Apply interdisciplinary approaches around themes such as tourism that cut across health, employment, urban planning, and social science.
- Support urban planning reforms to ensure sustainability and resilience.
- Adopt poverty-reducing, climate-smart policies that also build wealth.

Group 2

Governing the WEFE nexus in the region – balancing water, energy, food & ecosystem priorities

Facilitator

Salsabeal Abo-Thrais, Specialist Research and Studies - Sustainable Development, WANA - Royal Scientific Society

Rapporteur

Lara AbdelRazik, Teaching Assistant, Future University in Egypt

This focus group addressed the urgent need to tackle interconnected challenges in the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) Nexus across the Mediterranean. It was organised around three key thematic areas: transboundary water and ecosystems, data governance and early warning systems, and decentralised WEFE solutions at the community level. The goal was to bridge policy and practice while promoting integrated and inclusive approaches.

Participants emphasised that achieving the long-term vision of the New Pact for the Mediterranean requires actionable and equitable policies that integrate all four sectors of the WEFE Nexus. A recurring theme was the importance of **shifting from isolated sectoral interventions to systemic, cross-sectoral governance**. Disparities in institutional capacity and resources between Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries emerged as a key concern, reinforcing the need for South-South and North-South cooperation.

The discussion also focused on the importance of **community-driven initiatives and bottom-up approaches**. Emphasis was placed on local ownership, the use of vocational education to build capacity, and recognition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as key actors in deploying solutions such as Community Nexus Labs. Additionally, the group discussed the need **for robust digital infrastructure for storing and sharing data, as well as the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean early warning agency**.

The participants brought up a number of **challenges**. Participants stressed that addressing the WEFE (Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem) Nexus requires integrated,

cross-sectoral strategies rather than siloed approaches. A major concern was the inequality in financial resources and institutional capacities between Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries, which limits full and equitable participation in regional initiatives. Data fragmentation also emerged as a challenge. While individual countries have early warning systems and databases, inconsistencies in quality, accessibility, and integration hinder cooperation. Participants called for the development of shared key performance indicators (KPIs) across all four Nexus sectors to measure impact, identify gaps, and ensure accountability. The group also warned that treating the sectors in isolation weakens long-term outcomes. Instead, a holistic, interconnected response is needed. Finally, they underlined the importance of inclusive engagement, with equal resource distribution and ownership across communities and countries.



The group developed the following **recommendations and initiatives**:

- Investing in the creation of a robust Euro-Mediterranean digital infrastructure focused on data-storing and data-sharing.
- Establish a Euro-Mediterranean early warning agency to facilitate real-time, regional responses using shared technology and data.
- Promote technological innovation and knowledge exchange through a new institutional framework to support cross-border WEFE governance.
- Strengthen vocational education and community-level engagement for greater inclusivity and ownership.
- Develop and replicate “Community Nexus Labs” as tailored, locally driven solutions, with NGOs integrated into national strategies and incentivised accordingly.

- Enhance regional business ecosystems to support sustainable development and green innovation.
- Introduce robust KPIs to monitor and evaluate Nexus interventions comprehensively.
- Ensure equal resource distribution and inclusive stakeholder participation in Nexus governance.

Group 3

Unlocking the full potential of the private sector for sustainable growth

Facilitator

Dr. Ahmad Kamaly, Associate Professor of Economics at the Business School of The American University in Cairo (AUC)

Rapporteur

Zakariah Stetieh, Business Development & Communication Officer, Business Development Centre of Jordan

This session explored how private enterprises across the Mediterranean can shift from merely complying with green and digital agendas to becoming frontrunners in sustainable innovation. Against the backdrop of climate vulnerability, social instability, and emerging digital demands, participants examined ways to empower the private sector as a key actor in driving inclusive and forward-looking development. The discussion addressed financial, institutional, and regulatory enablers — as well as persistent barriers — to private sector engagement.

Participants highlighted a range of interconnected challenges facing the private sector across the Mediterranean. SMEs often struggle with limited market access due to regulatory inconsistencies, monopolistic practices, and unequal information flows. Inadequate infrastructure—particularly in transport, energy, and digital connectivity—was identified as a major barrier to business scalability and innovation, especially in rural and underserved areas.

Weak governance, fragmented ecosystems, and limited transparency further erode investor confidence and hinder long-term private engagement. Access to finance remains a critical bottleneck, with green financing tools largely underutilised, particularly by SMEs and firms operating in fragile contexts. A widespread skills gap, coupled with underdeveloped vocational systems, prevents the workforce from meeting the demands of green and digital sectors.

Political and economic instability in parts of the region undermines policy continuity and deters investment in sustainable infrastructure. Lastly, low private investment in research and development reflects both limited incentives and a lack of capacity to adopt emerging technologies, leaving many innovation ecosystems underdeveloped.



Participants highlighted the need to pursue the following **strategic proposals and recommendations**:

- **Enhance Regional Integration:** Harmonise trade, mobility, and data-sharing across the Mediterranean; strengthen cooperation platforms for the green transition.
- **Facilitate Cross-Border Trade & Investment:** Align ESG standards with EU frameworks; simplify procedures for green enterprises.
- **Create Sector-Specific Digital Platforms:** Provide open data for agritech, renewables, and green logistics.
- **Boost Strategic Business Partnerships:** Promote North–South and South–South collaboration to transfer knowledge and integrate value chains.
- **Promote Demand-Driven Skills Development:** Involve the private sector in curriculum design and expand apprenticeships and on-the-job training.
- **Scale Blended Finance Mechanisms:** Use public funds to attract private capital for green innovation and infrastructure.
- **Expand Quality Infrastructure:** Improve access to sustainable energy, transport, and broadband, especially in underserved areas.
- **De-risk Innovation:** Support high-impact ventures through public–private partnerships and innovation guarantees.

Private sector incentives

- Targeted: Aligned with sectoral and innovation priorities
- Contextualised: Adapted to local market needs
- Diverse: Combining financial and non-financial tools

Effective measures

- Government-backed guarantees for infrastructure and Research and Development (R&D)
- Tax breaks for green startups and clean tech
- Fast-track approvals for sustainable infrastructure
- Co-financed training programmes
- Tailored support for enterprises of all sizes
- Open access to regulatory and market information

Recommendations for the New Pact for the Mediterranean

- Establish a Mediterranean Green & Digital Business Alliance to foster cross-border collaboration and policy dialogue.
- Launch a Regional Green Transition Guarantee Facility with EU and international financial institutions (IFI) backing.
- Develop a Harmonised Green Taxonomy to align ESG criteria and boost investment.
- Support Regional Innovation Labs in agritech, circular economy, and logistics.
- Introduce a Green–Digital Employer Incentive Scheme to match training with sustainability needs.
- Institutionalise Private Sector Dialogue within the Pact's governance framework.

28 May

Policy Deep Dive

Data Insights presentation on WEFE Nexus

Moderator

Ahmed Kandil, Senior Fellow and Head of the Energy Studies Program, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies

Speaker

Dr. Mohamed Abdrabo, Director, Alexandria Research Centre for Adaptation to Climate Change (ARCA), Alexandria University

The session opened with a data-driven presentation by Dr. Mohamed Abdrabo, who outlined the escalating impacts of climate and environmental change on the Mediterranean's coastal zones, with a particular focus on vulnerabilities across the Water–Energy–Food–Ecosystems (WEFE) nexus. His presentation provided a scientific foundation for the day's discussions, highlighting critical risks and adaptation needs facing the region.

Following the presentation, Ahmed Kandil moderated a Q&A session that allowed participants to delve deeper into the data insights, raise region-specific concerns, and connect climate evidence with policy needs and resilience-building strategies.



Interactive Consultation Circles

Three parallel thematic circles were held to explore key drivers of sustainable development and shared resilience in the Mediterranean:

Circle A: Cities at the Forefront – Climate adaptation, sustainability, and inclusive urban development

Circle B: Ensuring Social Justice & Inclusion – Making the green transition equitable and cooperative

Circle C: Envisioning Resilient Value Chains – Regional integration through sustainable logistics and trade

Each circle was guided by a dedicated facilitator and documented by a rapporteur. Participants were divided into rotating groups, spending around 30 minutes at each thematic table. This interactive format allowed all attendees to contribute to each topic, enabling the emergence of cross-cutting insights and integrated policy recommendations.

Circle A

Cities at the Forefront – Climate adaptation, sustainability, and inclusive urban development

Facilitator

Josep Canals, Secretary General, MedCities

Rapporteur

Paula Pazos Puig, Researcher, Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association

This interactive session focused on the central role of cities in driving climate resilience, sustainable development, and inclusive growth across the Euro-Mediterranean region. Participants emphasised that Mediterranean cities face a diverse set of challenges shaped by geography, governance structures, and socio-economic realities. Climate change acts as a crisis multiplier, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities and compounding issues such as pollution, poor mobility, limited public services, and social inequality—particularly in rapidly growing Southern cities.

Concerns were raised about uncoordinated urban expansion, poor land-use planning, lack of democratic participation, and overtourism. In addition, participants stressed the importance of linking environmental sustainability with cultural identity, equitable infrastructure, and rural–urban cohesion.

Cities were recognised as frontline actors in implementing climate policies and fostering community resilience, despite limited formal powers. Participants agreed on the need for multi-level governance, with central governments enabling and incentivising local innovation. Equally important was the call to invest in citizen engagement, participatory budgeting, and inclusive planning to ensure equitable access to urban resources.

Discussions also explored how green **reconstruction**—particularly in post-conflict zones like Syria, Gaza, and Lebanon—must be prioritised with a sustainability lens, offering both climate and socioeconomic benefits. Flagship regional initiatives, such as the TERA-Med plan for 1 TW of renewable capacity by 2030, were cited as important opportunities to integrate city-level action into broader Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.



Throughout the discussion, participants called on the EU and international institutions to strengthen financial and technical support for local governments, promote urban climate adaptation and mitigation, and ensure that the green transition is truly inclusive, equitable, and citizen-driven.

The participants proposed the following **key recommendations**:

- **Empower Cities as Climate and Development Actors:** Acknowledge the transformative capacity of cities to lead on climate adaptation, economic development, and social inclusion.
- **Promote Inclusive Urban Governance:** Mainstream democratic participation in local decision-making; ensure inclusion of rural communities, youth, women, and vulnerable groups; and adopt a gender-responsive approach.
- **Prioritise Green Reconstruction and Energy Resilience:** Support sustainable rebuilding in crisis-affected areas and invest in resilient urban infrastructure.
- **Enhance Financial and Technical Support:** Strengthen EU and IFI engagement at city level to support mitigation and adaptation planning, particularly in coastal areas at risk of sea-level rise.
- **Address the Impacts of Overtourism:** Develop balanced tourism strategies that protect local economies, cultural heritage, and ecosystems.

- **Strengthen City-to-City Cooperation:** Promote knowledge exchange and peer learning through twinning initiatives, city networks, and platforms such as Med-Cities and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Green Cities programme.
- **Support Holistic Urban Planning:** Encourage integrated planning approaches that prioritise public wellbeing, connectivity, and environmental sustainability from the outset.

Circle B

Ensuring Social Justice & Inclusion – Making the green transition equitable and cooperative

Facilitator

Marwa Hammad, Head of the Global Gender Strategy, Schneider Electric Foundation

Rapporteur

Lorena Stella Martini, Senior Policy Advisor, ECCO

This interactive consultation circle explored how the New Pact for the Mediterranean can ensure that green and ecological transitions are fair, inclusive, and socially just. The discussion focused on how to avoid replicating inequalities in the energy transition by engaging local communities and disadvantaged groups and enabling cooperation beyond aid-based models. Participants discussed the need to redefine EU–Southern Mediterranean relations away from an aid-based paradigm and towards balanced co-dependence. Southern partners expressed their desire to co-design the “table” of cooperation, rather than receive a pre-filled “plate.” This shift implies a more equitable and participatory framework for partnership.

A recurring **challenge** was how to translate national-level commitments on social justice into meaningful regional action. The lack of regional integration and the current focus on bilateralism were viewed as obstacles to shared governance and inclusive policy development. Participants stressed the need for the Pact to focus on collective Mediterranean challenges and to enable multilateral collaboration.

Specific **barriers** to a just green transition identified in the discussions included:

- The uneven impact of the ecological transition on rural, farming, and vulnerable communities.
- Limited equity in access to and governance of essential resources such as water and infrastructure.

- Inadequate training and employment schemes to prepare young people and underrepresented groups for green jobs.
- Disconnect between top-down policies and the needs and rights of local communities.
- The export focus of renewable energy investments, which risks overlooking domestic needs and benefits.
- Marginalisation of youth, especially from the South, in climate diplomacy and multilateral processes



Participants emphasised that social justice should not be treated as a “footnote,” but as a fundamental pillar of the Pact and of climate resilience in the region. Local voices must shape project design and implementation to avoid policy backlashes and deepen legitimacy.

The participants put forward the following **recommendations** for the Pact:

On cooperation models:

- Move beyond aid-based logic and structure mutually beneficial, co-dependent cooperation models.
- Replace “conditionality” with shared “incentives” designed to benefit communities, not just governments.
- Balance bilateral efforts with a strengthened regional dimension, addressing common Mediterranean challenges.

On education, skills, and employment:

- Establish a Euro-Mediterranean University Alliance to enhance regional academic cooperation and science diplomacy.

- Mainstream capacity-building for green and infrastructure-related skills, particularly through vocational training tailored to Southern Mediterranean labour markets.

On localised green value chains and inclusivity:

- Support the creation of local green value chains in the South, anchored in co-operation with the EU, with clear incentives to apply social inclusion standards.
- Provide funding and tools to scale up indigenous and local expertise, especially in agriculture and climate-sensitive sectors, to inform national and regional policy.

On community participation:

- Institutionalise multi-level dialogue with Southern partners, including local authorities and community representatives, to ensure policies reflect lived realities and support livelihoods.

On regional and global diplomacy:

- Promote Mediterranean representation in climate diplomacy, including the active participation of youth.
- Support regional dialogue platforms that address climate resilience, including in conflict-affected areas, and leverage initiatives such as the Mediterranean Pavilion at COP29.

Circle C

Envisioning Resilient Value Chains – Regional integration through sustainable logistics and trade

Facilitator

Dr. Bruce Byiers, Associate Director, Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Development Cluster, ECDPM

Rapporteur

Màriam Lutfi Royo, Policy Officer, Catalan Ministry for the European Union and Foreign Affairs

This consultation circle focused on how to strengthen Regional Value Chains (RVCs) and sustainable logistics—particularly through Short-Sea Shipping (SSS)—as pillars of a resilient, integrated Euro-Mediterranean economy. Set against a backdrop of geopolitical fragility, low regional integration, and untapped economic potential, the session explored how to turn logistical connectivity, industrial complementarity, and shared green ambitions into concrete opportunities for sustainable development and economic transformation.

Despite a significant €18 billion in untapped South–South **trade** potential, intra-Mediterranean trade remains fragmented and EU-centric. Many existing RVCs in the region (such as in textiles or basic electronics) generate minimal local value due to reliance on extractive or low-cost assembly models. The current model of fragmented bilateralism and regional competition—particularly in agrifood exports—further weakens resilience and undermines integration efforts.

Participants emphasised that **regional cooperation** must go beyond political declarations. There is an urgent need for strategic, multi-country coordination supported by sustainable infrastructure, efficient logistics, and harmonised regulation. Disruptions caused by climate change, pandemics, and geopolitical shocks have exposed the region’s vulnerability and underscored the need to localise value creation while building climate-resilient trade corridors.



Examples such as the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum and Egypt’s leadership in green hydrogen production (via H2Global) were cited as promising cases of regional cooperation and pragmatic value chain building. These models demonstrate how shared infrastructure, policy alignment, and co-investment frameworks can create win-win scenarios.

Still, participants warned against repeating **past mistakes**: over-reliance on foreign direct investment, extractive industrial practices, and limited attention to labour rights or community benefit. New EU regulations—like the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive—could offer tools to improve standards, provided they are paired with capacity-building and fair implementation. Youth, women, SMEs, and local authorities must be placed at the heart of Regional Value Content (RVC) strategies. Participants stressed the need for participatory governance and bottom-up approaches,

particularly in rural and coastal economies where value chains can have transformative impacts. Building on existing regional mechanisms, such as the UfM, was encouraged to avoid duplication and foster continuity.

Participants proposed a number of **recommendations**:

- **Scale proven regional value chains:** Replicate successful models such as the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, Morocco's automotive sector, and Egypt's agrifood and hydrogen clusters across sectors like clean energy and logistics.
- **Promote Multi-Country RVC frameworks:** Foster regional complementarity and integration—particularly in agrifood and green tech—through joint planning and shared governance by regional and local authorities.
- **Prioritise sustainable logistics:** Invest in efficient SSS, Roll-on/Roll-off (RoRo), and intermodal transport systems that connect producers to markets and enhance SME competitiveness.
- **Embed ESG Standards:** Align with the EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive by supporting technical assistance, supplier capacity-building, and equitable benefit-sharing.
- **Tie EU investment to local impact:** Condition support on demonstrable local benefits—especially in employment, green skills, and technology transfer—to ensure inclusive industrial development.
- **Harmonise regulations and boost infrastructure:** Streamline customs, reduce legal fragmentation, and upgrade logistics infrastructure with targeted support for cooperatives and SME networks.
- **Ensure inclusive governance:** Mainstream youth and gender inclusion in RVC planning, and support bottom-up projects led by local communities, particularly in coastal and agrifood sectors.
- **Build on what works:** Leverage successful sub-regional experiences where there is political and economic momentum to deepen Mediterranean value chain integration.

Conclusions

A number of recurrent and cross-cutting recommendations emerged from the thematic focus groups and consultation circles held during the Cairo Conference. These reflect a strong convergence of priorities and strategic insights across research, innovation, sustainable governance, private sector development, and inclusive regional integration.

Together, they form a coherent set of pillars that can guide the development of a renewed, integrated, and inclusive Euro-Mediterranean partnership under the Pact.

Rethinking partnership models and governance

Replace donor–recipient logic with co-dependent, horizontal partnerships

- Move from bilateralism to coordinated regional strategies
- Ensure southern actors lead in shaping the Pact, not just implementing it
- Promote governance structures that reflect shared ownership and accountability
- Diversify cooperation by engaging Gulf countries, African institutions, and diasporas
- Support regional dialogue platforms for climate diplomacy and inclusive decision-making

Strengthening regional value chains and logistics

- Develop multi-country frameworks to deepen regional value chain integration
- Invest in short-sea shipping, intermodal transport, and digital logistics
- Align trade and investment with ESG standards and social equity
- Tie EU funding to local job creation, skills development, and tech transfer
- Support regional innovation clusters in agrifood, hydrogen, and circular economy
- Reduce legal fragmentation and support SME networks in cross-border trade

Advancing research, innovation, and skills

- Align research with local policy needs and southern priorities
- Revive co-owned frameworks like ERANET to define joint research agendas
- Promote innovation ecosystems that serve both climate and economic goals
- Invest in youth skills for digital and green sectors
- Create brain circulation models and support diaspora knowledge sharing
- Connect academia, labour markets, and SMEs for stronger impact

Operationalising the WEF nexus through integrated governance

- Shift from sectoral to cross-sectoral policymaking around water, energy, food, and ecosystems
- Establish a euro-mediterranean early warning agency for climate and resource risks
- Promote “nexus labs” and local pilot projects with community engagement

- Ensure equal resource access and institutional capacity across the region
- Develop shared KPIs to monitor WEFE interventions
- Improve data infrastructure and regional coordination mechanisms

Empowering the private sector in the green and digital transition

- Recognise the private sector as a strategic actor, not just a beneficiary
- Harmonise ESG standards and align regulations with EU frameworks
- Create a mediterranean green & digital business alliance
- Scale blended finance to support green innovation and SME resilience
- Incentivise clean tech adoption through tax breaks, public–private partnerships, and data access
- Include private sector in pact design and monitoring structures

Positioning cities as frontline actors of resilience

- Support local governments with direct funding and technical capacity
- Prioritise sustainable urban development and green reconstruction
- Promote democratic and inclusive urban planning
- Address overtourism, pollution, and poor land use through integrated city strategies
- Enhance rural–urban cohesion and resilience in climate-vulnerable areas
- Foster city-to-city learning and replication through euro-med networks

Ensuring a just and inclusive green transition

- Embed social justice as a core principle, not an afterthought
- Replace top-down aid models with co-designed, locally anchored solutions
- Support regional vocational training and a euro-mediterranean university alliance
- Build local green value chains with clear inclusion and equity standards
- Ensure representation of youth, women, and vulnerable groups in transition planning
- Balance export-oriented green investment with domestic needs and benefits



List of represented organisations

ACPSS - Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies	Development Policy Management
AHK - German Arab Chamber of Industry and Commerce	ENPI CBC MED and ENI CBC MED Programmes
Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)	EU Delegation
Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS)	EcoPeace Middle East
AlAhram newspaper	Egyptian Foreign Ministry
Arab Forum for Alternatives	Embassy of Belgium in Egypt
Arab Network for NGOs	Embassy of Cyprus in Egypt
Arab Republic of Egypt	Embassy of Latvia in Egypt
British University in Egypt	Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association
Business Development Centre of Jordan	European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)
Cairo University	European Union Delegation to Egypt
Cairo University-Higher Council of Universities	European Union in Egypt
DXC Technology	FEMISE
Dialectic	Future University in Egypt
EBRD- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	GIZ Jordan
ECCO Think Tank	Generalitat de Catalunya
ECDPM - European Centre for Development	HUSS School, AUC - American University of Cairo
	IAI - Istituto Affari Internazionali
	IDOS - German Institute of Development

and Sustainability	nean
IDSC - Information and Decision Support Center	Proparco (AFD Group)
IMC - Industrial Modernization Centre	RAED - Arab Network for Environment and Development
International Water Management Institute	Sawiris Foundation for Social Development
Issam Fares Institute	Saxony Egypt University for Applied Science and Technology
LCF - Lebanese Citizen Foundation	Schneider Electric Foundation - Cairo University
MEDECC	Step2future Consulting
MIU	Ta'heal
MSA	The Senate of Egypt
MedCities	Track 3 Consulting
Ministry of Culture of Egypt	UNDP - United Nations Development Programme
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Egypt	Union for the Mediterranean
National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development (NIGSD)	WANA - Royal Scientific Society
Natural Resource Governance Institute	WANA - West Asia-North Africa Institute
Omran for Strategic Studies	step2future
PRIMA Foundation	
Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean	

Brussels - Closing the Circle

11-12 June 2025 | European Commission, Brussels

In partnership with the Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean (CSFM)



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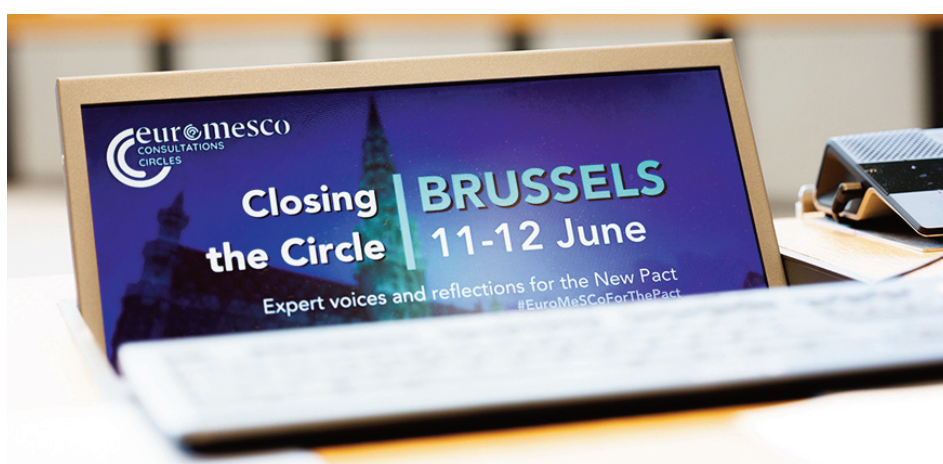
Introduction

The **final EuroMeSCo Consultation Circles meeting, *Closing the Circle*, held in Brussels on 11–12 June 2025**, marked the culmination of a series of structured expert consultations designed to inform the development of the New Pact for the Mediterranean. The consultations were launched in a high-level kick-off meeting with the Commissioner for the Mediterranean, Dubravka Šuica on 8 April 2025 in Brussels.

Designed as a final round of reflection and feedback, the Brussels event brought together key voices from across the Mediterranean to build on insights gathered during previous consultation circles held in Rabat and Cairo. Co-organised with the Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean (CSFM), **the two-day meeting was scheduled back-to-back with the Senior Officials Meeting of the Southern Neighbourhood**, held in Brussels on the afternoon of 12 June 2025, **to create synergies between expert discussions and high-level political dialogue.**

Day 1 of the Brussels Consultation Circles (11 June) was dedicated to thematic panels and in-depth exchanges with civil society experts and practitioners, in partnership with the CSFM. Discussions centred on how to strengthen the role of civil society in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and embed their contribution more effectively in the Pact's framework, and on strengthening security collaboration within the New Pact for the Mediterranean.

Day 2 (12 June) shifted the focus to the outcomes of the consultation process as a whole. It featured the presentation of consolidated findings from the Rabat and Cairo circles, a review of regional survey results (EuroMed Survey 15), and a forward-looking exchange on the future functioning of the New Pact for the Mediterranean. The event concluded with a high-level session on the regional dimension of the Pact.



11 June

Working Lunch

Shaping the EU's Narrative: Strategic Communication in the Mediterranean

Held as a closed-door session ahead of the Brussels Consultation Circle, the working lunch brought together fifteen strategic communication experts and stakeholders from across the Euro-Mediterranean region. The aim was to generate concrete recommendations to strengthen the EU's narrative and outreach in the Southern Neighbourhood, particularly in the context of the New Pact for the Mediterranean. Drawing on insights from the 15th EuroMed Survey, participants discussed how to make EU messaging more compelling, inclusive, and grounded in local realities.

The conversation highlighted the importance of structuring EU engagement around **three inter-linked phases—listening, adoption, implementation—with the last phase singled out as the true test of credibility and expectation-management**. Participants called for a decisive move from one-way messaging to sustained coordination **and joint ownership**, proposing a dedicated *communication-to-coordination taskforce* that would align Team Europe actors (EU institutions, member states, regions, parliaments, civil society) with Southern partners and Gulf stakeholders.

Youth featured prominently: **platforms such as the EU Jeel Connector and the successful “EU Neighbours South” programme** should anchor continuous engagement, complemented by **spaces for rolling brainstorming with students, alumni of EU schemes, independent media and diasporas**—natural bridges who can craft content that resonates emotionally. Trusted messengers must vary **“by level and by ground”**: city mayors, local CSO leaders, journalists flown to Brussels, and social-media creators can translate values into lived impact.

Communication, speakers agreed, must be **value-based and identity-affirming**, spotlighting **shared success stories, people-to-people exchange, best practices, digital jobs and post-crisis recovery** rather than portraying the EU as a distant institution. Flagship cultural initiatives—the *Day of the Mediterranean* and “Mediterranean Capitals of Culture” **promoted by the UfM**—illustrate how storytelling rooted in empathy, feelings and common heritage can reinforce a brand of **opportunity, empowerment and co-creation**, filling the aspirational space once occupied by the United States.

To sharpen that brand, contributors urged Brussels to **agree a clear topline narrative, emphasise that the Pact is not unilateral, and communicate consistently on high-salience issues such as Gaza**. They also called for **greater investment in independent media, coordinated content creation, and a focus on tangible, visible projects on the ground**—digital hubs, green-skills centres, renewable-energy start-ups—so that citizens see and feel the benefits of regional cooperation.

Session 1

Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean: Perspectives on the Pact

Speakers

Kamel Jendoubi, Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders

Wadih Al Asmar, EuroMed Rights

Francesca Annetti, Cooperation for the Development of Emerging Countries

Alessia Tibollo, Cooperation for the Development of Emerging Countries

Shaima Aly, Minority Rights Group International

Nadim Houry, Arab Reform Initiative

Sarine Karajerjian, Arab Reform Initiative

Rapporteur

Iyad Aljaber, Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean

Co-organised with the Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean (CSFM), this session was convened to explore how civil society engagement can be systematically embedded into the design and implementation of the New Pact for the Mediterranean. The discussion took place at a moment when questions of ownership, legitimacy, and impact are becoming central to EU-Southern Neighbourhood cooperation. Civil society actors, long sidelined or treated as auxiliary participants, were instead positioned in this session as institutional actors essential to ensuring that the Pact delivers on its stated ambitions.

Structured in **three parts**, the session began with the presentation of a joint position paper by the CSFM, followed by thematic contributions based on field experience in four core areas: human rights, sustainable development, mobility, and climate justice. A final segment focused on forward-looking ideas to strengthen partnerships between EU institutions and Mediterranean civil society, including diaspora networks. Across these discussions, participants rejected tokenistic consultation models and called for a structural shift toward inclusive, values-based governance.

A key message of the CSFM's position paper—presented in the opening segment—was the proposal of a multi-stage civil society engagement model. This model moves beyond one-off consultations to include civil society across all phases of co-operation: from agenda-setting and design to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It emphasises co-ownership, mutual accountability, and the creation of long-term enabling environments for civic participation.

Rooted in the realities on the ground, the paper outlines key recommendations to:

- Create an enabling environment for civil society organisations (CSOs)
- Ensure structured and sustained dialogue with institutions
- Invest in social innovation and civic engagement
- Promote sustainable regional partnerships
- Mediterranean civil society must be a strategic partner, not a side actor, in shaping the region's future.

The full paper can be found here: <https://meddialogue.eu/e-library/pact-for-the-mediterranean-a-common-civil-society-position/>



Speakers emphasised that achieving the EU's goals—whether in energy, mobility, development, or security—requires not a trade-off between values and interests, but their alignment. Several interventions warned that when civil society engagement is superficial or instrumentalised, the legitimacy and effectiveness of cooperation are undermined. Civil society, they argued, is not a mere observer or recipient but a co-producer of solutions.

Insights from the field

Concrete examples shared by speakers gave depth to the broader institutional reflections. In the **area of climate and energy transition**, **representatives of the Arab Reform Initiative** drew attention to the unintended consequences of EU-funded renewable energy projects that overlook local socio-political dynamics. Land access, community consent, and local benefit-sharing were often poorly addressed, leading to mistrust and resistance.

On **mobility**, speakers from **Minority Rights Group International** critiqued securitised policy frameworks that marginalise civil society voices, particularly those advocating for migrant rights and legal pathways. Instead of serving merely as outreach intermediaries, these organisations should be embedded in the co-design of mobility frameworks to ensure rights-based, inclusive outcomes.

In the domain of **development cooperation**, representatives from the **Cooperation for the Development of Emerging Countries** highlighted how liberalisation and investment initiatives frequently exclude marginalised communities from both decision-making and benefits. They stressed the importance of bottom-up monitoring mechanisms and long-term partnerships to ensure inclusive growth.

On **human rights**, contributions from **EuroMed Rights and the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation** underscored the importance of legal accountability frameworks. Civic actors have played a vital role in defending fundamental freedoms across the region but shrinking civic space and inconsistent EU stances have weakened their impact. More structured, consistent backing was urged.



These field-level observations consistently pointed to the same conclusion: civil society engagement, when meaningfully integrated, leads to better outcomes—whether in terms of community buy-in, policy relevance, or risk mitigation.

Practical recommendations and opportunities

Throughout the session, practical recommendations were offered to operationalise a more inclusive and participatory Pact framework. These included:

- Establishing a **standing civil society advisory mechanism** linked to the Pact's governance structure.
- Ensuring civil society **representation in EU Delegation missions**, project design teams, and steering committees.
- Creating dedicated **mechanisms for feedback, revision, and grievance redress**, particularly in investment-led cooperation.
- Including local and regional civil society organisations as **implementing and monitoring partners** in Pact-related initiatives.
- Supporting the **adaptation of successful engagement models** (e.g., from the Eastern Partnership or Global Gateway) to Southern Mediterranean contexts, taking into account local governance realities.
- Recognising and engaging with **diaspora civil society actors** as bridges between regions and repositories of hybrid expertise.

In addition, participants called for better coherence between rhetoric and funding practices, greater flexibility in funding modalities, and protection of civic space as a condition for effective cooperation.

From consultation to governance

The session closed with a strong call to move from dialogue to structural change. If the New Pact for the Mediterranean is to fulfil its promise, civil society must be institutionally recognised not just as a stakeholder, but as a co-governor. This means establishing predictable, well-resourced, and politically relevant mechanisms for engagement—far beyond symbolic events or consultative exercises.

Speakers stressed that civil society engagement must be treated as a long-term investment in governance legitimacy and policy resilience. The next phase of the Pact offers a narrow window to embed these principles before institutional inertia sets in. The Brussels session made it clear: inclusive governance is not a secondary issue—it is a precondition for delivering meaningful, durable cooperation.

Session 2

Regional Cooperation on Security: Working Towards Increased Stability

Moderator

Michael Koehler, Associate Fellow, European Institute of the Mediterranean
Rapporteur

Màriam Lutfi Royo, Policy Officer, Catalan Ministry for the European Union
and Foreign Affairs

Speakers

Nancy Ezzeddine, Research Associate, Clingendael Institute

Katarzyna Sidlo, Senior Policy Analyst for the Middle East and North Africa,
European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)

Erwin van Veen, Senior Research Fellow, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael
Institute

Contributor

Ayman Ayoub¹, Head of Middle East & North Africa, Geneva Centre for Se-
curity Sector Governance (DCAF)

This session addressed how the New Pact for the Mediterranean can support more stable and inclusive regional security frameworks. The session unfolded against the backdrop of growing regional instability—from Gaza and Sudan to the Sahel—and an urgent call to redefine what “security” means in an interconnected, politically fragile region.

Participants shared a strong consensus: **regional security** is not neutral, and not solely military. It is political, contested, and multifaceted—encompassing state integrity, societal trust, and the protection of civilians. Participants agreed on the need to evolve the EU’s understanding of security beyond traditional military defence, to include the defence of territory, prevention of displacement, and protection of civilians across fragile contexts such as Gaza, Sudan, and the Sahel. They advocated for a more inclusive, cooperative model grounded in mutual interdependence.

The discussion revealed widespread concern that **current security frameworks** too often treat Southern Mediterranean countries (SMCs) as buffers for European priorities rather than as equal co-owners of regional security strategies. They stressed that SMCs should be recognised as full security stakeholders—co-creators of a regional framework based on trust, shared priorities, and long-term stability.

¹ Although Ayman Ayoub was unable to attend the session due to unexpected flight delays, his preparatory notes and key ideas were integrated into the discussion by the other speakers, ensuring his contributions enriched the exchange.

The interlinkages between crises in Gaza, Sudan, and the Sahel were raised as clear reminders that regional insecurity knows no borders. This makes reactive, **bilateral responses insufficient**. Participants urged the EU to invest in multilateral, long-term strategies that strengthen institutions, support community resilience, and address the structural roots of conflict and displacement.



Key regional challenges discussed included post-conflict fragility (e.g. Lebanon, Gaza, Sahel), emerging cooperation needs with Syria, and the fragmentation of current EU security policy into disconnected technical and reform tracks. In this context, EU support to security actors—without parallel governance reform—was seen as problematic. Participants called for coherence between technical assistance and political accountability, warning that without it, the EU risks reinforcing dysfunctional power structures. Rather than equating stability with regime security, speakers argued for a **legitimacy-based approach**. Stability, they noted, emerges from inclusion, oversight, and citizen trust—not from militarised control. Civil society, municipalities, and community organisations must be formally integrated into security planning and oversight, not simply consulted. In fragile zones or areas where state presence is contested, bottom-up, community-based security initiatives—particularly those engaging women, youth, and minorities—were presented as key tools to rebuild trust and social cohesion.

The session underscored that **stability** must be rooted in public legitimacy and inclusive governance. **Civil society's role** should be institutionalised within strategic security dialogues, moving beyond consultation to participation and influence. **Empowering local actors**—municipalities, councils, community groups—was viewed as vital, particularly in fragile or post-conflict settings. A transformative approach to **security programming** was advocated, one that tackles underlying inequalities and promotes inclusive development.

Moreover, participants warned against policy approaches overly focused on migration control, which risk alienating partners and undermining trust. Issues such as elite capture, foreign interference, and the erosion of institutional legitimacy were identified as structural barriers to security.



Syria was frequently referenced as a test case for **applying people-centred security reform** in extremely complex environments. While acknowledging the significant obstacles, participants argued that the country should not be excluded from future co-operation frameworks. A phased approach was recommended—focusing first on local actors transitioning from protective to service delivery roles, accompanied by prison reform, transitional justice, and social inclusion measures. This, they argued, would lay the groundwork for longer-term stability.

Speakers called for a reassessment of the **EU's credibility as a security actor**, noting perceived double standards in its responses to crises such as **Gaza**. There was strong support for using existing legal and political instruments more assertively to uphold human rights and international law, including suspension clauses and targeted conditionality. Moreover, trade and energy policies should be harnessed to support good governance and security objectives.

Finally, the need for a coherent **EU-wide regional security framework** was emphasised. This would prevent fragmentation, ensure policy alignment across institutions and member states, and anchor the Pact's security strategies in inclusive, rights-based principles. The Pact must move away from short-term, containment-based strategies and invest in long-term, inclusive, and participatory security governance. Structural transformation—not merely capacity-building—is the way forward.

Key recommendations

- Recognise Southern Mediterranean Countries (SMCs) as full security stakeholders and co-create a regional framework based on trust, shared priorities, and long-term stability. Security cooperation should be re-defined as a shared regional responsibility based on mutual interdependence.
- Adopt a transformative approach to security that addresses root causes of instability, tackles structural inequalities, and links security programming to inclusive development and public legitimacy.
- Formalise civil society's role through a Security Advisory Mechanism with access and regular dialogue. Civil society should be equipped with resources for SSR, conflict prevention, and radicalisation mitigation.
- Ensure consistent, long-term engagement that integrates military, civilian, and governance efforts.
- Support community-based security approaches and empower local actors — municipalities, councils, and community groups— to lead community-based security efforts, especially in fragile and post-conflict contexts.
- Fund grassroots initiatives involving youth, women, and minorities.
- Prioritise structural reforms over short-term “train and equip” strategies.
- Link security aid to inclusive governance and reform commitments.
- Promote relational trust-building between states and citizens.
- Strategically deploy EU instruments to uphold rights-based cooperation.
- Apply conditionality in response to systemic rights abuses while maintaining pathways for re-engagement.
- Establish an EU-wide, coherent regional security framework.
- Ensure the Pact aligns with and supports regional initiatives, including those led by Southern Neighbourhood actors themselves.

12 June

Session 3

*The regional dimension of the New Pact for the Mediterranean:
Towards the 30th Anniversary of the Barcelona Process*

Moderator

Agustí Fernández de Losada Passols, Secretary for European and Multilateral Affairs and Development Cooperation, Generalitat de Catalunya

Rapporteur

Marco Lagae Novković, Project Officer, European Institute of the Mediterranean

Speakers

Abd Hakim Refaia, Deputy Head of the Permanent Representation to the EU, League of Arab States

Birgit Loeser, Head of Regional Affairs, Middle East and North Africa, European External Action Service

Christian Koch, Executive Manager, Gulf Research Center Foundation

This session examined how the Pact could build on and renew the principles of the Barcelona Process, strengthening regional cooperation and addressing shared challenges ahead of its 30th anniversary. Speakers discussed how to ensure coherence between the regional and bilateral dimensions of the Pact and its synergies with frameworks such as the UfM, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the League of Arab States (LAS), the African Union (AU) and the EU enlargement policy.

Agustí Fernández de Losada opened the session by underlining the importance of regional cooperation in areas such as energy transition, economic competitiveness, and youth engagement. He noted the erosion of multilateralism in the Euro-Mediterranean space and the shift toward bilateralism, stressing the need for clearer governance and coherence across initiatives—something the Pact could offer.

Birgit Loeser adopted an optimistic tone, arguing that 2025 presents a unique chance to establish a meaningful partnership. She acknowledged growing trust issues and polarisation in the region but emphasised existing frameworks such as the Barcelona Process, UfM, and EU–LAS Memoranda of Understanding. She made the case for building on these foundations, promoting multilateralism as a safer and more effective path than bilateral approaches. She proposed the concept of a “UfM 2.0” to adapt to new geopolitical realities, including stronger engagement with the Gulf and renewed cooperation with LAS.

Christian Koch stressed the importance of aligning the Pact with existing regional initiatives to maintain policy coherence. He welcomed the establishment of DG MENA+Gulf and advocated for enhanced EU–GCC collaboration. Drawing on findings from the Gulf Research Center, he highlighted overlapping priorities between Gulf and Mediterranean countries in areas such as energy, conflict resolution, and investment. He called for joint thematic commissions and the scaling up of effective, locally rooted projects rather than reinventing new frameworks.

Abd Hakim Refaia reflected on the challenges of Euro–Arab cooperation, expressing a blend of ambition and realism. He described past EU engagement as inconsistent and fragmented, with divisions emerging between Mediterranean, Gulf, and African approaches. Political issues, especially the unresolved Israel–Palestine conflict, were identified as key barriers to regional cooperation. He argued for more concrete sectoral initiatives and expressed hope for renewed EU–LAS collaboration grounded in political realities.



Further inputs from participants stressed the importance of civil society, youth engagement, and local authorities in shaping the Pact’s regional governance. **Xavier Bernard-Sans** (Euroregion Pyrénées Méditerranée) advocated drawing on civil society experience in North–South Mediterranean cooperation. James Moran proposed holding a new EU–LAS Summit. **Lidija Pavic-Rogosic** (Civil Society Organisations’ Group, European Economic and Social Committee) encouraged inclusion of youth and civil society in policy-making, while **Bruce Byiers** (European Centre for Development Policy Management) highlighted rising regional interdependence in energy and connectivity and called for greater EU engagement.

In their **final reflections**, the panellists reinforced the session’s key messages. **Abd Hakim Refaia** proposed the organisation of a new EU–LAS Summit, suggesting that the evolving political context—especially changes in EU policy toward Syria—makes this a timely and constructive opportunity. **Birgit Loeser** emphasised the im-

portance of rebuilding mutual trust between both shores of the Mediterranean, a prerequisite for any meaningful cooperation. **Christian Koch** concluded by calling on the EU to advance specific initiatives for triangular cooperation involving the Gulf Cooperation Council, underlining the added value of joint implementation and shared priorities.

Session 4

Concluding remarks and closing session

Speakers

Senén Florensa, Executive President, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)

Hélène Le Gal, Managing Director for the Middle East and North Africa, European External Action Service (EEAS)

Stefano Sannino, Director-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf, European Commission

Senén Florensa welcomed participants to the closing session, reflecting on the remarkable mobilisation of nearly 1,000 actors from across the Mediterranean who contributed to shaping a visionary and inclusive Pact. He praised the constructive and forward-looking spirit of the consultations, which brought together institutions, civil society, youth, and academia in a structured and inspiring dialogue. Emphasising two core messages—coherence and coordination across fragmented frameworks, and the need for local ownership and co-design—he urged that the Pact move beyond consultation to become a foundation for long-term, people-centred cooperation. His remarks were followed by interventions from Hélène Le Gal and Stefano Sannino.

Hélène Le Gal highlighted that the outcomes of the consultations would shape the final Pact. She pointed to the 30th anniversary of the Barcelona Process in autumn 2025 as a milestone moment to relaunch the partnership. Stressing the importance of a more strategic approach, she outlined EEAS priorities such as integrating a security dimension—including maritime, cyber, and counterterrorism—and strengthening strategic communication. She also encouraged expanding the Pact's reach through flexible geography and cooperation with 'neighbours of neighbours'.

Stefano Sannino reinforced the importance of co-design and co-creation, emphasising that the Pact is not a unilateral EU document but a shared framework. He noted that his visits to Southern Mediterranean countries revealed strong interest and valuable proposals from civil society and local actors. Sannino underlined that the Pact should remain an evolving process without a fixed deadline, sustained by effective governance, coherence with existing structures, and tangible impact on

the ground. He called for balancing interests through flexible multilateral agreements, scaling up existing initiatives, and aligning them with regional strategies.



He further outlined priority areas for early action, including youth skills, education, mobility, private sector investment, climate adaptation, food security, and renewable innovation. He noted that, while the final structure of the Pact will not be adopted until the autumn and discussions to develop it will continue, the contributions gathered so far have already helped identify **three broad pillars** that could shape the future partnership.

The first pillar focuses on investing in **human development** by enhancing essential skills, vocational and higher education, and creating better opportunities for mobility, especially for young people. The second pillar aims to unlock the region's economic potential by boosting trade and investment, expanding access to clean technology and renewable energy, and improving digital and transport connectivity to **build resilient and inclusive economies**. The third pillar addresses the need to strengthen resilience, **security**, and migration management, recognising that these challenges require shared solutions and long-term cooperation. Migration and mobility were highlighted as cross-cutting themes that must be co-managed between both shores to ensure mutual benefit and sustainability.

Both speakers confirmed that the Council of the EU is expected to conclude the consultation phase by 30 June, with hopes to endorse and officially present the Pact in autumn 2025.



List of represented organisations

African Institute for Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation
 Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie
 Arab Reform Initiative (ARI)
 Bertelsmann Stiftung
 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
 Centre Arabe de Recherches et d'Études Politiques (CAREP)
 Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)
 Clingendael Institute
 Committee of the Regions
 COSPE
 Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)
 DAI – DG MENA Contractor
 Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF)
 DG MENA - European Commission
 ECDPM (European Centre for Development Policy Management)
 EEAS (European External Action Service)

Embassy of Cyprus
 Embassy of Lithuania
 EU Neighbours South
 Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF)
 Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditerranée
 Euromed Rights
 European Commission
 European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)
 European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)
 European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)
 European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)
 German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)
 Government of Catalonia
 Gulf Research Center Foundation
 International Labour Organisation
 League of Arab States

Leiden University	nean (PAM)
L'Observatoire du Maghreb (IRIS)	Policy Center for the New South (PCNS)
Med Dialogue Facility – CSFM	Red Cross EU Office
Mission of Syria to the EU	Stockholm International Peace Research
Mitvim Institute MRG (Minority Rights Group)	Institute (SIPRI)
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)	UNHCR
Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean	Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)
	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

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Report

