

## Introduction

### 1. Research motivation

Today, at the crossroads of the European, African, and Asian continents, the Mediterranean region is a scene of changing political, economic, and social realities—all occurring within a contested and conflictual geopolitical context. The region is now being challenged by the sheer complexity of forces shaping its territory and embroiled in the dynamics of migration influx, religious, and ethnic heterogeneity; prolonged authoritarian rule and weapon flow, among several others.

In light of the consequent regional emergencies, Euro–Mediterranean partnership does not seem to have lived up to the expectations of societies in the region, and thus, lost some of its drive. When looking back at the history of the European Union’s (EU) engagement with the Mediterranean—notably beginning from the 1995 Barcelona Process—the Union pursued foreign policy objectives to resolve inter-state conflicts in the region, like the Israeli–Palestinian issue. However, as the security concerns escalated, so did the problems

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1 This chapter incorporates relevant parts from two papers prepared for the MEDRESET project. See Zeynep Gülöz Bakır and Gülşah Dark, ‘Review of Surveys on Euro–Mediterranean Relations, and an Introduction to the Elite Survey in MEDRESET’, in *MEDRESET Methodology and Concept Papers*, No. 5 (July 2017), <http://www.medreset.eu/?p=13424>; and Gülşah Dark, ‘The EU Seen from the Outside: Local Elite Perceptions on the Role and Effectiveness of the EU in the Mediterranean Region’, in *MEDRESET Policy Papers*, No. 5 (November 2018), <http://www.medreset.eu/?p=13672>.

facing Mediterranean and European states in developing a sustainable partnership through mutual dialogue.

The 2011 period of Arab uprisings has thus been a notable case of how the EU acknowledged its *mea culpa* in its approach towards its southern neighbour, as frankly reflected in an early statement of Stefan Füle, former EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), accentuating EU's failure in not being 'vocal enough in defending human rights and local democratic forces in the region' and falling 'to the assumption that authoritarian regimes were a guarantee of stability in the region'.<sup>2</sup>

Against this backdrop, the MEDRESET project takes as its departure point the geopolitical developments urging a renewal of Euro-Mediterranean partnership, while most importantly, challenging the 'Eurocentric orientation' of EU policies—a critical factor as to why the EU has been unable to adjust its policies to the erratic status-quo in the Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> Adopting an exclusively European standpoint in defining actors, policy instruments, and issues, the EU approach has marginalized the perspectives and needs of regional states and subsequently, exacerbated this deficiency.<sup>4</sup>

Reviewing the existing academic literature briefly, more particularly the regional surveys, the perception of the EU being unable to respond to southern partners' expectations and that it should 'address security and

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2 Štefan Füle, *Speech on the Recent Events in North Africa*, Brussels, 28 February 2011, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-11-130\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-11-130_en.htm).

3 Nathalie Tocci, 'Can the EU Promote Democracy and Human Rights Through the ENP? The Case for Refocusing on the Rule of Law', in Marise Cremona and Gabriella Meloni (eds), 'The European Neighbourhood Policy: A Framework for Modernisation?', in *EUI Working Papers Law*, No. 2007/21 (2007), pp. 23-35, <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/6976>; Rosa Balfour, 'EU Conditionality after the Arab Spring', in *Papers IEMed/EuroMeSCo*, No. 16 (June 2012), <https://www.euromesco.net/publication/eu-conditionality-after-the-arab-spring>; Claire Spencer, 'Middle East: Western "Soft Power" Re-Visited', in *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2015*, pp. 217-219, <http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/historic-de-publicacions/anuari-de-la-mediterrania/sumaris/iemed-mediterranean-yearbook-2015>.

4 Daniela Huber and Maria Cristina Paciello, 'MEDRESET: A Comprehensive, Integrated, and Bottom-up Approach', in *MEDRESET Methodology and Concept Papers*, No. 1 (June 2016), p. 3, <http://www.medreset.eu/?p=13169>.

economic challenges more forcefully’ is shown in the results of the 6th Euromed Survey.<sup>5</sup> What stands out in the survey is that the respondents identified migration/mobility and addressing security threats as two priorities that should be addressed by the European Neighbourhood Policy framework. The majority of respondents (56 percent) have identified ‘working with partners on the prevention of radicalisation, the fight against terrorism and organised crime’ as the main areas to be further developed in addressing security threats.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, the 5th Euromed Survey carried out in 2014, with over 800 stakeholders from the Mediterranean, demonstrated that ‘the influence of the EU as a peace broker’ is considered low or very low.<sup>7</sup> The results indicate that the positive impact of the EU actions showed a slight downturn compared to 2012, while negative (low) impact increased by 13 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Starting from late 2010, the Arab uprisings formed a turning point for relations between the EU and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Measuring the political, economic, and social attitudes in six MENA countries including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya in the post-Arab Spring period, the ArabTrans survey identified a disconnection ‘between what the EU may believe it is achieving in the MENA region, and local perceptions of the failure of its influence and impact’.<sup>9</sup> As the project summary reports:

‘The research shows that it [the EU] has failed to respond to popular demands and has instead produced greater economic polarisation, ongoing political

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5 IEMed, ‘General Review of the ENP’, in *6th Euromed Survey of Experts and Actors*, Barcelona, IEMed, 2016, p. 86, <https://www.iemed.org/publicacions/historic-de-publicacions/enquesta-euromed/euromed-survey-2015/contents-of-the-6th-euromed-survey>.

6 IEMed, *Preliminary results of the 6th Euromed Survey*, Barcelona, IEMed, December 2015, <http://www.iemed.org/actualitat-en/noticies/avancament-de-resultats-de-la-sisena-edicio-de-lenquesta-euromed>.

7 IEMed, ‘Synthesis of Results’, in *5th Euromed Survey of Experts and Actors*, Barcelona, IEMed, 2014, p. 21, <https://www.iemed.org/publicacions/historic-de-publicacions/enquesta-euromed/euromed-survey-2013/euromed-survey-2013>.

8 Ibid, p. 22.

9 ArabTrans, *The Arab Transformations Project: Executive Summary*, 2016, p. 2, [http://arabtrans.eu/documents/ArabTrans\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://arabtrans.eu/documents/ArabTrans_Executive_Summary.pdf).

marginalisation and *de facto* support for authoritarian regimes. [...] These failures have been a deeper undermining of the EU's reputation as well as increasing pressures on migration.<sup>10</sup>

This criticism is further linked to the EU's security-centric approach in the migration crisis, where the focus is on border control, return, and re-admission instead of ensuring the practice of fundamental human rights. Also, on the EU's role on democratization, the findings of the earlier studies demonstrate that people in MENA 'have a low opinion of the EU's claims to be a "normative actor", to facilitate democratization and development, or even to be a force for stability in their region'.<sup>11</sup>

The ongoing challenges are apparently not limited to the problems in governance but extend to the social sphere, as reported by the region's youth. An annual youth survey exploring the attitudes of Arab youth in MENA countries reveals that 'confidence among Arab youth that the Arab Spring would bring positive change across the region is declining' and as a result, they 'are uncertain whether democracy could ever work in the Middle East'.<sup>12</sup> In the 2016 edition of the survey, the respondents singled out the biggest obstacles sweeping the region as unemployment, lack of democracy, rising cost of living, and civil unrest. A significant portion of the respondents want 'their leaders to do more to improve their personal freedom and human rights'.<sup>13</sup> The survey findings also suggest that the lack of jobs and opportunities is the main recruitment driver for terrorist groups like Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>14</sup>

These surveys subsequently suggest the need for a change in approach towards the varying interrelated threats in the region. There is an underlying assumption that the EU should be one of the international

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10 Ibid.

11 ArabTrans, 'What do "The People" Want? Citizens' Perceptions of Democracy, Development, and EU-MENA Relations in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, and Morocco in 2014', in *European Policy Briefs*, May 2016, p. 7, [http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy\\_briefs/arabtrans\\_pb\\_062016.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy_briefs/arabtrans_pb_062016.pdf).

12 ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, *Arab Youth Survey 2015*, Dubai, ASDA'A, 2015, p. 8, <http://arabyouthsurvey.com/pdf/whitepaper/en/2015-AYS-White-Paper.pdf>.

13 ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, *Arab Youth Survey 2016*, Dubai, ASDA'A, 2016, p. 29, <http://arabyouthsurvey.com/pdf/whitepaper/en/2016-AYS-White-Paper.pdf>.

14 Ibid, p. 13.

actors taking a better stance on regional security crises, migration, and preventing radicalization.

Thus, the MEDRESET project aims to study how the EU and South Mediterranean countries perceive each other, in an attempt to develop alternative visions for a new Euro–Mediterranean partnership and corresponding EU policies. The findings are investigated to design a future role for the EU to become an ‘inclusive, flexible and responsive actor’.<sup>15</sup>

This section lays the foundation of the project’s Elite Survey which fundamentally addresses the local stakeholders at the elite level in nine countries of concern<sup>16</sup>—Egypt, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Turkey—and their own understanding of the ‘Mediterranean region’ or the ‘Arab World’ as well as how they assess Euro–Mediterranean partnership and the impact of EU policies in the region. The following chapters present in-depth country reports on each country that the Elite Survey covered.

## 2. Research scope

In dedicating critical consideration to Euro–Mediterranean relations, the Elite Survey within the MEDRESET Project’s Work Package 3 (WP3) addresses three main sets of research questions:

- (1) Is the elite discourse in the MENA region resisting or reproducing the EU’s construction of the region? How do elites perceive European policies in the Mediterranean area? How has their perception towards the EU changed over the years?
- (2) How do elites perceive the Mediterranean region? Who are the most important stakeholders on the domestic, regional, and international levels? How are the ‘structure’ and nature of interactions changing in the region? What are the current main geopolitical challenges?

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15 Daniela Huber and Maria Cristina Paciello, ‘MEDRESET...’, cit., p. 3.

16 The countries were chosen based on their geographic and geopolitical relevance and the methodological categorization of the project.

- (3) What major policy issues do the elite deem most pressing? In which particular areas would substantial co-operation with the EU and/or other MENA countries prove beneficial? More broadly, in which policy areas would a regional/bilateral approach hinder/yield success?<sup>17</sup>

Through an investigative look at the region's geopolitical dynamics and how the EU responds to them, the Elite Survey focuses on five central themes. The first theme is security. The survey tries to answer how and to what extent the EU should handle the security crises and conflicts in the region through response mechanisms. The Elite Survey seeks to examine what kind of regional security architecture local experts envisage to manage the security threat facing the region. It also determines the extent to which the EU should intervene in domestic conflicts, and encourage further thoughts on policy design.

The second theme investigated by the Elite Survey is migration and mobility. As the previous studies suggest, the key drivers behind migration include concerns over economy and security. The EU's policies (the perceived lack of policies) on migration seem to be the main criticism directed at its foreign policy, which is perceived as mostly concerned with safeguarding its own national security. This is a good example of the side-effects of EU policies in the region which is examined throughout the Elite Survey interviews. The survey, therefore, seeks to offer a comprehensive insight into the EU's foreign policies in the region.

The third theme explores the debates on democratization; the interviews aim to introduce a detailed examination to understand how elites construct democracy and what they think of the challenges that need to be addressed from that perspective. Apart from the individual understanding of democratic values, in-depth interviews open space to assess the appeal of democracy at a country and regional level.

The fourth theme surveys local elites' expectations of further co-operation initiatives, described as crucial for the countries in the region. Trade partnerships, economic co-operation, and integration projects have all become essential for the progress and stability of the countries in the region, considering the slowing economic development and decrease

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17 Zeynep Gülöz Bakır and Gülşah Dark, 'Review of Surveys on Euro-Mediterranean Relations, cit., p. 4.

in foreign direct investment rates since 2011 due to ongoing migration crises, concerns over energy resources and environmental threats, as well as sectarian conflicts.

And finally, the fifth theme probes specific policy areas including energy/industry and agriculture/water through an integrated approach to generate data on issues that have been less examined in surveys, although covered to a certain extent.

In all cases, the survey implements an integrated approach, addressing each issue from the vantage point of varied social segments such as youth, migrants, and women through, as much as possible, a gender-balanced perspective.

### 3. Research methodology: Data collection and sampling

A review of the existing surveys and studies on Euro–Mediterranean relations reveals two major strands of research design. While one group of research relies on the data drawn from experts' views, either through in-depth interviews or structured questionnaires, another group aims to reach citizen-level data, mostly through quantitative opinion polls.

Fitting within the former strand, the Elite Survey is designed as a *qualitative* questionnaire that will allow the project researchers to carry out in-depth interviews. Compared to the previous surveys, this study attempts to provide new insights into the subject by referring to the assessments of selected interviewee profiles from the MENA region and inquiring about their expectations from the EU—something crucial for the policy-making process. The survey provides data at a regional and country level with an attempt to address certain policy issues like migration, mobility, and political ideas, as well as agriculture/water and energy/industry—which could be described as an added value of the project. In addition, the Elite Survey will further define the priority areas for near-future co-operation.

The survey utilized a semi-structured questionnaire format to generate detailed data. The researchers employed qualitative interviewing, which

is more appropriate for opinion surveys, as it makes it possible to acquire insights on future plans, expectations, and motives. The questionnaire format was largely the same for each country, to allow for comparisons between countries.

Within the research scope, local experts from varying political and social segments were targeted in each country to provide inclusive and qualitative assessment of perceptions. The research intended to cover a wide spectrum of opinions that goes beyond the official rhetoric in order to focus on domestic reflections of the EU policies, as well as the points of divergence in approaches towards the region.

Researchers from the Center for Public Policy and Democracy Studies (PODEM) in Turkey and Arab Studies Institute – Research and Education Methodologies (ASI-REM) in Lebanon—which are two member institutions for MEDRESET WP3—were involved in the Elite Survey detailed in Tables 1 and 2.<sup>18</sup> The researchers conducted qualitative and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with respondents in the aforementioned countries, except Saudi Arabia, where the Gulf crisis coupled with the turmoil in Saudi domestic politics necessitated cancelling a fieldtrip to the country. Instead, the researchers interviewed non-Saudi respondents in London and Brussels with specialization on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) or Saudi foreign/domestic affairs. It should be further noted that the data compilation phase in Iran was done in full anonymity due to the sensitivities there, and the interviews planned for the fieldwork were arranged as discussions—not in-depth interviews—with elite respondents.<sup>19</sup> Also, in Egypt, the researchers experienced difficulties in reaching out to relevant respondents, mostly due to their reluctance, which prolonged the duration of the fieldwork. Overall, the interviews conducted for the Elite Survey took place between July 2017 and May 2018; and a total of 169 respondents participated in the fieldwork.

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18 The in-depth interviews were carried out by 14 researchers in total. Among the researchers, 10 of 14 were involved in the report-writing phase. PODEM, as the leader of WP3, commissioned local experts when necessary for the fieldwork and the report-writing.

19 The researcher who prepared the report on Iran also referenced the insights of certain experts in Europe.

The preparations for the Elite Survey kicked off in spring 2017, and during summer 2017 the fieldwork in Lebanon and Egypt commenced, while preparations for the fieldwork in other countries continued. A mapping of relevant interlocutors was made through online and desk research as well as the institutional network of the involved researchers. A purposeful sampling method was incorporated in this research, meaning that selection of the interviewees depended upon (1) their influence over the social, political, and civil networks and (2) their experiences and/or current and past official roles, as well as (3) their accessibility.

*Table 1: Overview of interviewees*

Country	Male	Female	Total	Fieldwork period
Egypt	16	13	31*	August–November 2017
Iran	10	2	12	February–April 2018
Israel	10	10	20	February–May 2018
Lebanon	15	15	30	July–September 2017
Morocco	19	3	22	January–May 2018
Qatar	11	1	12	January 2018
Saudi Arabia	8	4	12	February–April 2018
Tunisia	9	2	11	February 2018
Turkey	15	4	19	November 2017–March 2018
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>169*</b>	<b>July 2017–May 2018</b>

Notes: \*Two unidentified / aged between 20-70.

*Table 2: Types of stakeholders*

Governmental actors/public institutions
Scholars/academia/experts
Media professionals
Civil society actors
Representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGO)
Business people
Graduate students

Prospective interviewees were first contacted via email or phone. The general level of responsiveness of interlocutors was satisfactory although the researchers came across instances of non-responsiveness or unavailability of potential interviewees. A good majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, except very few cases, which were conducted via phone or Skype. The duration of interviews ranged between 30 minutes and 1 hour. To obtain in-depth knowledge on specific issues, the researchers conducted follow-up interviews in certain cases as recorded during the Lebanon fieldwork.

The Elite Survey was designed through consultations among the researchers and the project co-ordinators. The questionnaire is comprised of three main sections: (1) questions on perceptions of the EU including its effectiveness at the state and civil society level, and co-operation at the country level; (2) questions on the Mediterranean addressing key stakeholders/actors; geopolitical challenges; and the EU's Mediterranean policies; and (3) country-specific questions to understand the internal dynamics of the target country as well as demands and future prospects—including those from the EU. Overall, the questionnaire includes a standard set of questions applicable to all target countries, along with particular questions pertinent to each country to capture the intricate context of the country in question.

Finally, on the representativeness of the survey sample, the sample size and the data retained from the interviews do not attempt to generalize the results for the overall target population, yet try to provide answers to the research questions given above and introduce main themes for discussion. In terms of gender representation, one main shortcoming is the smaller proportion of female respondents achieved in the sample size. The observation gained from the fieldwork demonstrated that male dominance is present notably among governmental actors and public institutions in the region.

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