

**Euro-Mediterranean integration:  
The role of regional and local authorities**

This report was prepared by rapporteur Jihad Khair, Mayor of Beit Sahour, Palestine, and adopted by consensus at the 11<sup>th</sup> ARLEM plenary session in Barcelona on 23 January 2020.

## **Introduction**

This report covers Euro-Mediterranean regional integration and the role of local and regional authorities (LRAs) in helping to stimulate it in a tangible way by promoting decentralised cooperation and territorial diplomacy.

The common framework for action at all levels of government is the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, the implementation of which depends largely on the action of local and regional authorities. Working towards ending poverty, protecting the planet from degradation, laying the foundations for prosperity and promoting peaceful societies will also foster regional integration in the Mediterranean region.

The report begins by explaining the current global and regional geopolitical context to show how it affects the Euro-Mediterranean integration process. Then, it outlines the overall institutional framework of Euro-Mediterranean integration in order to identify the position given to decentralised cooperation and to place ARLEM in its role of mediation in synergy with the Euro-Mediterranean institutions and in particular the UfM.

This report advocates the Social and Solidary Economy (SSE) as well as climate action at local and regional level as promising paths for action, within the framework of decentralised cooperation by LRAs.

We will explain why they have been chosen as courses of action with an operational scope, and propose recommendations that can help achieve the common objectives.

### **I. The global and regional geopolitical context and its impact on Euro-Mediterranean Integration**

The modern world is facing multiple challenges, such as violent conflicts, wars, terrorism, climate change, new forms of security threats such as cyber-attacks and manipulation of public opinion, gender inequalities, human rights violations, the increasing gap between rich and poor, etc.

The Mediterranean region is at the heart of major global and regional geopolitical turbulence. Middle East conflicts remain the thorns standing in the way of integration. Wars and occupation have played a major role in causing life to come to a halt in several countries, as world powers are not contributing as much as they should in these regions to find solutions.

Today, the European integration project is experiencing obvious difficulties that may threaten its future and thus hinder progress towards Euro-Mediterranean integration. The rise of populism, rising inequalities on new dimensions and the different approaches to migration are all elements that pose a risk to the European integration project, the cohesion of the EU and its readiness to bring its influence to bear at global and regional level. By the same token, they

also run counter to neighbourly relations, including with the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries (SEMCs).

## **II. The institutional framework for Euro-Mediterranean integration**

Euro-Mediterranean relations are governed by several institutional frameworks:

- The Euro Med or Barcelona process initiated in 1995 and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) set up in 2008;
- The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) created in 2004 and revised in 2015<sup>1</sup>.

Although, overall, they pursue similar objectives of making the Mediterranean an area of peace, security and shared prosperity, they are different in terms of institutional structures. The Euro-Med partnership is an EU partnership with 14 SEMCs; this led to the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean as an intergovernmental organisation of 43 countries. The ENP is a unilateral EU policy towards its neighbourhood.

Euro-Mediterranean integration is based on variable geometry and the degree of integration depends on each country. The structures and forms of integration can be improved and are open to review, but they have still led to some achievements. They remain below what has been envisaged since the launch of the Barcelona process in 1995, but they still continue to provide hope for Euro-Mediterranean countries to consider jointly balanced reciprocal commitments, with a shared responsibility for the relaunch of the Euro-Mediterranean regional integration project.

It is precisely here that local and regional authorities as well as civil society must play an active role in contributing to peace, dialogue and co-development, complementing the efforts of governmental or intergovernmental actors. Local and regional authorities have the freedom to encourage and boost decentralised cooperation and territorial diplomacy through a number of joint operations and operational projects in many important areas and thus to contribute to Euro-Mediterranean regional integration<sup>2</sup>.

In this context, local and regional authorities are important stakeholders in the Regional Integration Progress report that the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, in

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, infra-regional and variable geometry initiatives such as the 5+5 Dialogue and the Agadir Agreement for an Arab-Mediterranean free trade area must be recognised as milestones on the path towards wider regional integration.

<sup>2</sup> In this framework, the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance has been launched by five relevant regional, subregional and local Mediterranean networks – including CPMR's Intermediterranean Commission, the Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditerranée, MedCities, Latin Arc, and the Adriatic-Ionian Euroregion -, with the support of UfM. This territorial alliance aims to develop a long-term strategy to build a sustainable future for all citizens in the Mediterranean. It will work hard towards the implementation and integration of emerging sea basin, macro-regional strategies and other connected initiatives and cooperation instruments, so as to build a common, more cohesive sustainable and co-owned Mediterranean macro-region involving all the territorial actors.

cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), has been tasked to conduct by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the UfM.

### **III. Decentralised cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region, an asset for regional integration: local governance and priority areas**

Euro-Mediterranean regional and local cooperation is admittedly influenced by obstacles at the macro level, but it is also, to a large extent, dependent on the level of decentralisation and local and regional governance (transparency, autonomy, accountability) achieved by the various partners.

Decentralised or sub-national cooperation presupposes a certain degree of politico-institutional decentralisation, giving LRAs room for manoeuvre and scope for non-formal but effective autonomy, in order to be able to undertake bilateral or multilateral international diplomacy. However, it must be recognised that situations vary among European countries themselves, and even more so among the SEMCs, where the processes of decentralisation and governance based on the principles of accountability and transparency have advanced to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the country<sup>3</sup>.

ARLEM wants to strengthen the role of local self-government in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and give a territorial dimension to the UfM, providing a framework for cooperation on issues of common interest and operational projects in the region. Among ARLEM's priority areas of interest, and for which LRAs have a potential and favourable comparative advantage over central public authorities in contributing to Euro-Mediterranean integration, we have identified two key areas:

- Unemployment, the informal economy and migration, with the social and solidarity-based economy as an important lever for community and local development.
- Climate change.

### **IV. Priority areas**

#### **1. Unemployment, informality and migration: The social and solidarity-based economy is an asset for decentralised cooperation and Euro-Mediterranean integration**

By virtue of its history, and because of the current economic situation and future challenges, migration is one of the key dimensions of cooperation/integration in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The Arab Spring and the refugee crisis following the Syrian, Libyan and other conflicts have exacerbated existing tensions in the management of migration flows and their

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<sup>3</sup> For an overview of how competences are allocated across governance levels in both the EU Member States and in SEMCs, please refer to the CoR's "Division of Powers" analysis (<https://cor.europa.eu/divisionofpowers.go>).

control around the Mediterranean. As a result of public opinion becoming more and more receptive to populist arguments and far-right movements, European countries have been forced to change their migration policies (even if they are imbued with human values and fully support the rights of migrants). Although they are not yet harmonised, even within the framework of the European Union, these policies now seem to put more restrictions on and obstacles to the reception of migrants, even if they are genuine humanitarian refugees. There is a need to encourage activities and projects of cooperation and experience sharing in view of enhancing the integration of migrants.

These imbalances and the differences in living standards between the north and the south are inevitably a major reason for human displacement to areas of prosperity and can hardly be tackled by drastic approaches focused on security and regulation alone. The only alternative remaining is to organise these flows and to act on their structural causes through a voluntary cooperation policy which can put into practice the common wishes expressed in Barcelona through co-development, with a view to shared prosperity. Special focus should be put on border regions and communities receiving many migrants in order to offer a human, fair and adequate response to the migrant flows in the Mediterranean.

The security approach to migration cannot be the only alternative: A narrative and policy shift is needed to frame migration through a rights-based approach and as an opportunity. Indeed, foresight studies show that Europe, as a result of its demographic deficit, will need millions of foreign workers in the coming decades to ensure the balance of its labour market, particularly for highly skilled workers in several areas, including the most advanced. It will be able to support them only by means of a contribution from workers outside the EU.

Free movement of people is one of the basic foundations of regional integration. Although often separated from the implementation of other freedoms (exchange of goods, services and capital), the fact remains that it constitutes the bond linking the building blocks of regional groupings and reinforces the links of solidarity and social cohesion in those groupings.

As a result, cooperation between cities and local authorities, particularly those in regions experiencing a high propensity to migrate and those with a high immigration burden, is therefore more than necessary. With this in mind, it is proposed to promote economic projects to create jobs and income sources in regions with a high propensity for migration, with a view to creating dynamic local and community development<sup>4</sup>. The encouragement and promotion of the social and solidarity economy would be the appropriate way of establishing such projects.

Combating unemployment and poverty and gradually formalising economy by boosting economic activity and contributing to the creation of income sources in poor and marginalised

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<sup>4</sup> Keeping in mind that poverty and unemployment disproportionately affect women and girls, a gendered approach is needed.

regions, in particular through social and solidarity-based economy initiatives, are a powerful alternative, which is more efficient, fairer and more humane than approaches limited to security and coercion. In this way, the tendency to migrate can be reduced and the causes of migration can be tackled. That is why we believe that cooperation in this field is a key lever for the economic and social development of regions with high migratory pressure, and for reducing the tensions that hinder regional integration processes.

Further, ARLEM recommends exchanging experiences and best practices on agro-ecology, blue and ecotourism, and preservation of ancestral techniques, controlled designations of origin and rational exploitation of natural resources in farming and rural areas, through representatives of local organisations and communities of farmers, fishermen and craftsmen. Women's communities could be the priority beneficiaries. These proposals should be put in place together with other economic initiatives of extreme relevance for the Mediterranean communities such as blue economy.

Initiatives for the exchange of young people and volunteering for cultural or environmental activities must be developed as they are likely to strengthen direct relationships and synergies between youth associations with a view to promoting values of tolerance, mutual assistance and solidarity. The preservation of shared civilizational heritage or the safeguarding of the environment, in particular our common sea, could be a focal point.

## **2. Climate change and the role of LRAs**

Recent studies on the challenges of climate change in the Mediterranean<sup>5</sup> showed that the Mediterranean basin is warming 20% faster than the rest of the world. If current policies are continued, temperatures are expected to increase by 2.2°C by 2040. The Mediterranean is thus considered one of the 25 climate change hotspots in the world. The increase in temperature, the corresponding disruptions in rainfall and hydrological cycles as well as the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, will affect coastal zones in particular (hosting 33% of the total population), but also hydrological basins (hosting 50 % of the total population). Water plays a pivotal role in the Mediterranean; a water resilient perspective must urgently be developed and specific attention paid to water issues at a local and regional level,

While European (Mediterranean) territories in general benefit from an advanced and structured legal framework with many media sources, support tools and funding tools, there are significant disparities between the commitments of European cities and communities. However, the gap between the framework and the means in the territories at European level, and those of the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, is even more significant.

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<sup>5</sup> See "Risks associated to climate and environmental changes in the Mediterranean region. A preliminary assessment by the MedECC Network Science-policy interface – 2019", and "ENERGIES 2050", FEMISE — INSTITUT DE LA MÉDITERRANÉE 2018.

Thus, decentralised Euro-Mediterranean cooperation has a potentially significant role to play in supporting the transition of the territories on the southern and eastern shores, reducing disparities rapidly and establishing solidarity between Mediterranean territories<sup>6</sup>. This is where LRAs' role appears to be essential in initiating or strengthening joint actions that contribute to regional integration.

Indeed, there are a number of specific, noteworthy Euro-Mediterranean mechanisms related to climate issues that directly affect Euro-Mediterranean territories, such as the Covenant of Mayors and specific climate-related EU projects addressing the local and regional level. Indeed, the Covenant of Mayors is a prime example of local action to achieve universal goals, thus localising the Sustainable Development Goals, that provide an overarching framework towards low-carbon societies in a just and equitable manner.

We therefore recommend:

- a. Enhancing knowledge and understanding of the climate/development challenges, both of citizens and of local representatives and staff;
- b. Enhancing technical expertise at the level of cities and regions for project implementation and monitoring;
- c. Mobilising the financial sector towards climate actions and projects, supporting initiatives for the development of sustainable energy (solar, wind, marine), low-carbon economies and the greening of traditional Mediterranean sectors such as fishery and tourism;
- d. Facilitating access of local and regional authorities to international climate funds, with a view to financing their mitigation and adaptation activities.

Overall, the further rollout and development of useful tools, such as cross-border cooperation programmes and the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, would provide good prospects for further integration. Cross-border projects should be fostered that reinforce the relations among regions from the three sides of the Mediterranean: Through them, an added value will be brought forth to reply to global problems with a local perspective. Existing multilateral fora should be strengthened in which all the aspects linked to the Mediterranean cohesion are addressed, such as culture, common values and best practices<sup>7</sup>. In addition, political and operational coordination initiatives between local and regional authorities should be supported; networking and sharing good practices will be more and more relevant for a successful integration.

ARLEM can contribute to the emergence of a shared vision and stands ready to provide political support for joint initiatives in these priority areas.

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<sup>6</sup> See “The Euro-Med governments in the fight against climate change”, ENERGIE 2015, FEMISE — INSTITUT DE LA MEDITERRANÉE 2018

<sup>7</sup> One example is the Three Cultures of the Mediterranean Foundation.