

CONTEXT, PATTERNS AND NUANCES IN MONITORING THE PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP (EMP) IN 2011

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Introduction

As with every survey, the socio-political background within which answers to questions are given and articulated matters. Although apparently far from over, the events of 2011 constituted a particularly challenging period for the Mediterranean. The strong wind of societal pressure for regime change blowing and affecting many countries across the southern Mediterranean, in close proximity to the European Union, has impacted significantly in many respects and challenged a number of myths: the myth of security and stability versus democracy and human rights, the myth that the “Arab world is immune to democracy” and, last but not least, the myth of Arab women being restricted to the walls of their houses. Evidence suggests though that the demise of the old regime is only the first step on a long and difficult journey towards freedom and a better life to which people aspire. In the northern Mediterranean a soaring public debt has given rise to questions about the viability of the Eurozone and the state of their economies. Overshadowing more or less all other matters, austerity packages have sparked waves of social protest and also, in some cases, political realignment. Given these contextual parameters, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), and more specifically the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and the southern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) have inevitably suffered.

Taking a further step back, however, problems started earlier than 2011. A great deal of the current pessimism and disappointment about the EU’s Mediterranean policy initiatives are deeply rooted in these initiatives’ very nature and beginning, while others constitute political traits of the project that are more recent but still prior to 2011. As Bicchi (2011) suggested “the UfM was launched because a very small group cajoled an uninterested majority into yet another initiative for the Mediterranean,” while the “Arab-Israeli conflict has politicized and disrupted the agenda of the UfM, as national interests have come to the fore and democracy and human rights have receded.” In addition, the EU’s glorious announcements of a new era of Euro-Mediterranean relations became more sporadic, the language of important politicians on immigration became more strict and provocative and hands-on activity has decreased throughout the past years albeit with a more significant drop arriving in 2011.

Therefore, the overall gloomy picture that can be drawn from the results of the first six questions of the 2011 EuroMed Survey (variations notwithstanding) can be easily rationalized with reference to context – regional, international, political, economic, electoral – and structure. But, while the more specific results must not detract from this general reality, they do raise

some more nuanced points. These concern both the architecture and underlying factors of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the decisions and actions of given countries and EU institutions. In this paper we consider them in some depth.

A Comment on Aspects of the Gloomy Picture

Overall, the level of disenchantment with various aspects of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is very high. The overall picture drawn from the responses in the Survey can be justifiably called gloomy in a triple sense:

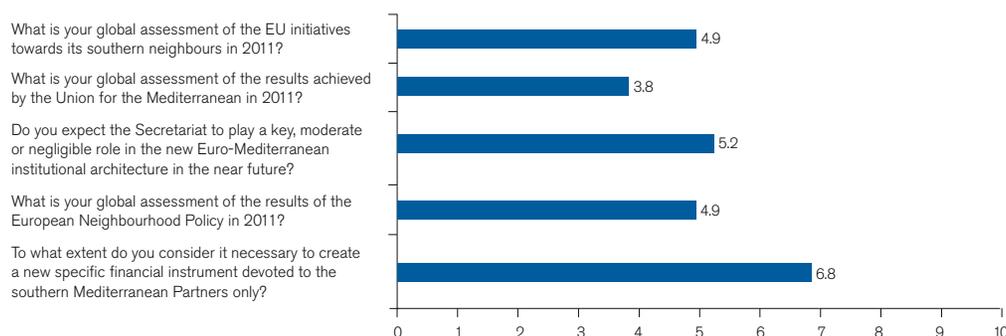
- 1) Substantively, since the grades are low (slightly below or above 5/10), with the exception of the question regarding the potential creation of a new financial instrument devoted to the southern Mediterranean partners only;
- 2) Relatively, since the grades are lower than in the previous two Surveys;
- 3) Distribution-wise, since negative grades have a more or less equal territorial distribution. Importantly, negative responses do not only come, and not even mostly, from the southern Mediterranean.

Initiatives towards the South

The global assessment of Euro-Mediterranean policies is low and lower compared to the last Survey (4.89 on average on a scale from 0 to 10). Respondents also give the UfM a very low grade based on the progress achieved in 2011 (3.8 on average on a scale from 0 to 10 – 0 being the lowest grade). Compared to the previous Survey (2010), the number of disappointing responses has increased, whereas positive responses have decreased. Noteworthy is that grades for Q2 (regarding the UfM) are lower than those for Q1 (regarding the EMP) across the board. This implies that the UfM is seen as the weakest link in the EU's overall strategy towards the South, although judging from the answers to the open questions the UfM has also been the initiative with higher expectations, thus partly explaining the higher negativity.

Graph 1: Monitoring the Progress and Achievements of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership/Union for the Mediterranean and of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2011

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for highly inadequate, and 10 for highly adequate)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

In terms of geographical distribution, there are no substantial differences between the North and the South, or between the EU average and that of non-EU countries. In other words, disappointment is not a matter of area, but cuts across areas, as well as professions. The small increase of the average grade in the assessments of respondents from Israel (the only case where there has been an increase since 2010) may be due to: i) the fact that traditionally much less resistance to EU norms and methods of governance has been expressed in that part of the southern Mediterranean; ii) the fact that no real compromises have been forced on Israel by the EU.

The EMP confirms, perhaps more than other EU policy initiatives, that policy-making in the EU has multiple drivers, among which the inter-governmental is still crucially important. In the EMP, the credibility of the EU as a collective entity has been undermined due to a number of actualities, including the attitudes and interests of the individual member states. The expectations-assessment gap must relate at least in part to the evolution of the EU's own strategy towards the southern Mediterranean partners, which gradually became less and less salient, less and less active, less and less coordinated. That the northern and eastern European countries have other priorities may at times make it easier to achieve results, because less veto points exist, but less participation on their behalf also means less willingness and need to participate, as well as lower socialization potential, which translates into a distanced, unengaged and thus colder stance.

Nevertheless, the problem with the UfM is more than simply an insufficient sharing initiative. More importantly, when events as politically and diplomatically determinant of bilateral country relations happened in the form of the Arab Spring, the responses of individual member states to them naturally gave precedence to national interest, at the expense of the logic and appeal of the EMP. This inevitably gave rise to a dissonance between what the EU did and what each of the member states did, as well as between the former and what the Mediterranean member states did. A distinction between initiative and implementation can be useful in shedding further light on this dissonance. At the level of initiative, despite a still persisting diversity, the EU did manage to proclaim unity in promoting ambitious and diverse political and policy goals regarding the Mediterranean, yet every time that these initiatives have to adjust on the ground in the face of new developments, this is done by paying little attention to the previously decided and collectively envisaged result. As a consequence, in 2011 the implementation of UfM programmes has been particularly slow.

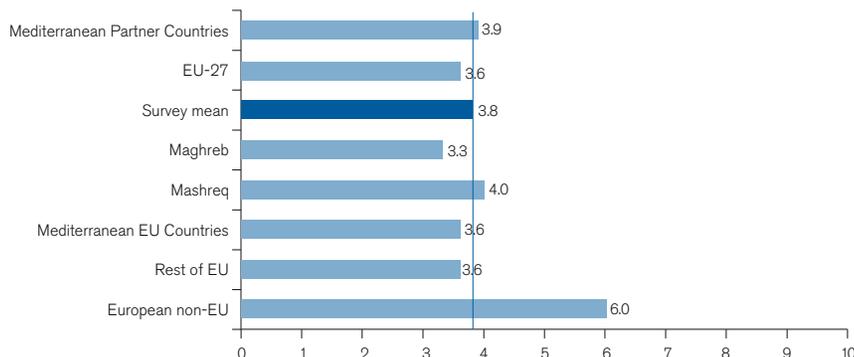
Pessimism can be causally linked to the conviction that the current state of affairs is and will probably remain too inter-governmental and interest-driven. This becomes obvious when considering the Survey responses on the issue of the expected role of the UfM Secretariat. Although respondents still expect the UfM Secretariat to play a certain role in the years to come (5.2 on average, on a scale from 0 to 10), 5.2 is a low grade and also lower than in the previous Surveys (6.1 in 2009 and 6 in 2010). A number of potential explanations have to be assembled in order to account for this. For one, the past few years and especially 2011 have brought to the surface the multi-headed nature of EU external relations. Even the reinforcement of the CFSP has not managed to disperse doubts over intra-EU conflicts in the field of foreign policy. Secondly, the Secretariat was for two years essentially non-operational, its remit is still unclear today (with some insisting until recently on a political role, in addition to that of the implementer) and its structure is cumbersome (Aliboni, 2009).

The ENP in 2011

The assessment of the UfM is worse than that of the ENP (3.8 out of ten compared to 4.9).

Graph 2: Assessing the results achieved by the Union for the Mediterranean in 2011

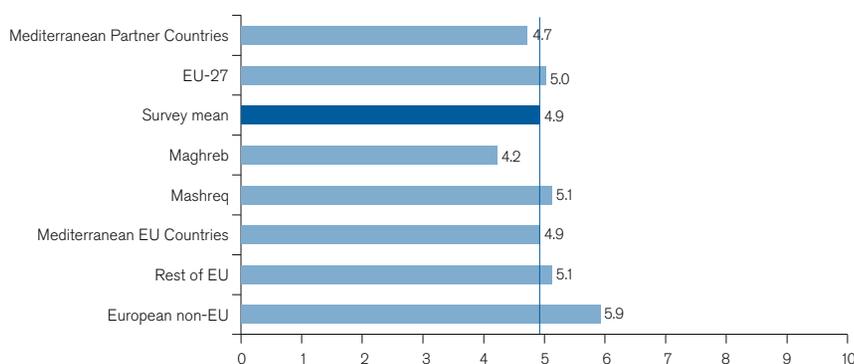
(average on a scale of 0-10)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

Graph 3: Assessment of the results of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2011

(average on a scale of 0-10)



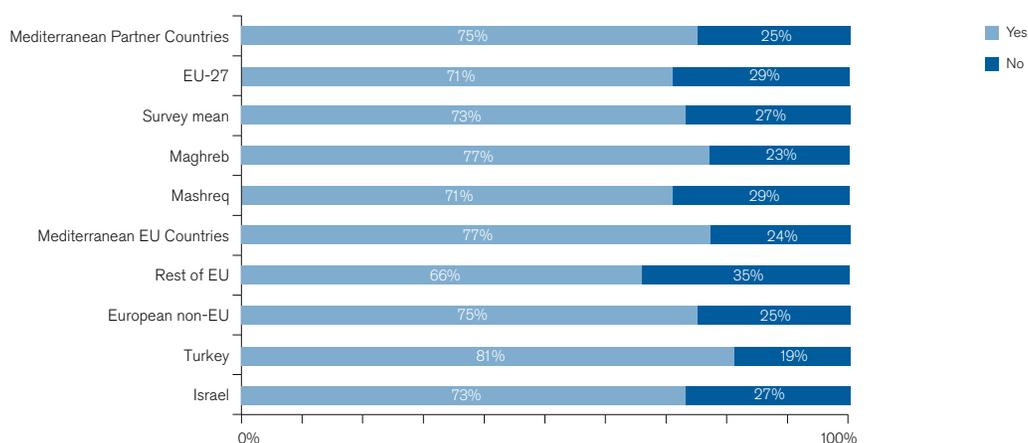
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

Already knowing a great deal about the ENP from past research, we can hypothesize that a reason for this is the realization of concrete results within the context of the ENP that have not been achieved within the UfM. While the promotion of EU-style democracy has consistently ranked high among the EU priorities towards the southern Mediterranean, little has been achieved within the context of the UfM. Indeed, achieving little on this front remains in the interests of the EU, which prefers stable authoritarian regimes with a western orientation to the uncertainty of true electoral competition, whereby political and social groups that are more hostile to the EU could gain power (Schimmelfennig, 2012: 19-20). Still, the effect of the UfM on the overall EMP can be quite disorienting. As Schimmelfennig (2012: 19) put it, "the EU's consistent application of political conditionality in this region [Mediterranean] is further undermined by its efforts to build a multilateral partnership in the southern Mediterranean and to promote peace in the Middle East..."

The divergence in the evaluations of the UfM, on the one hand, and of the ENP on the other, can be to a certain extent understood by drawing on the distinction between bilateral and multilateral approaches. Certainly, neither the UfM nor the ENP have managed to pin down the complementarity in fields such as education, demography and agriculture, because the former is “multilateralism *a la carte*” and the latter is “narrowly bilateral” (Khader, 2010: 215). But within the context of bilateralism, incentives are more tangible and officials from the southern Mediterranean partners can make a more short-term assessment of interest satisfaction given that they have one main interlocutor and negotiator opposite them. At the least, it is now time to put on the table and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each approach both across sectors and on a sector-by-sector basis. Complementing rather than displacing bilateral initiatives may have been one of the official goals of the UfM, but it now seems that it was inevitable that the “conceptual underpinnings” of the EMP and ENP would be further “eroded” by a new different project in terms of organization (Balfour, 2009: 105).

These results should be viewed in tandem with the belief by an overwhelming majority of respondents (72.7%) that the EU should assume the northern co-presidency of the UfM, which matches the current system. Respondents’ grades range from 66% (rest of the EU) to 81% (Turkey), with those from Mediterranean EU countries (77%), Maghreb (77%) and Mashreq (71%) having little numerical difference between them.

Graph 4: EU institutions should assume the northern co-presidency of the UfM, instead of the current system (one Member State from the North) (%)



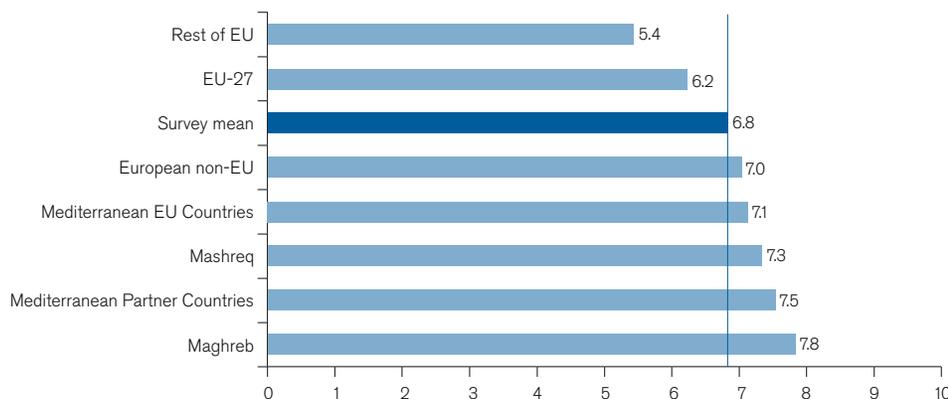
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

The collapse of a joint strategy on Water, still fresh in many people's and officials' mind, due to disagreement over the label to describe the Palestinian territories (“occupied”, or “under occupation”), proves that the UfM's main problems are of a political kind and that they coincide with those faced by the projects and organizational structures that preceded it. It further shows that the UfM does not exist in a vacuum, but in an international and regional context where superpowers from other continents are also active, interested and influential in the Mediterranean and in its countries. In the light of this complex reality, it seems unlikely that any kind of unidimensional restructuring such as the EU assuming the northern co-presidency of the UfM would be both a necessary and sufficient condition for stalled projects to take off.

On Money

A majority of respondents support the creation of a new instrument devoted to the southern Mediterranean partners only (though less so in the case of non-Mediterranean EU countries).

Graph 5: Need to create a new specific financial instrument devoted to the southern Mediterranean Partners only (average on a scale of 0-10)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

It must be remembered that the Mediterranean partners are mainly market economies with little exposure to international competition. If they are to remain market economies, as their economic elites desire, then either more financial aid or more equal access to EU trade must ensue. With the second option, the issue of inter-governmentalism emerges again: France has different trade interests than Spain, Greece specializes in different products than Italy, and so on. To put it simply, even among the southern member states, there is a certain degree of incongruence in terms of desired trade relations. But neither do things look any brighter in regard to aid. When the UfM's Secretary General Ahmad Masa'deh resigned over a lack of financial resources to carry out projects, it was revealed again that the problem began at the level of the member states, some of which did not meet their financial pledges (EMWIS, 2011). With the advent of the northern Mediterranean countries' financial turmoil, the momentum to collect money for the implementation of UfM programmes has waned incredibly.

Unsurprisingly, the most positive response on this issue came from the Maghreb (7.82) and the Mashreq (7.29) followed by the EU Mediterranean countries (7.05). The average grade from the Rest of the EU is 5.35, which is the lowest, but it is still higher than 5 and is also higher than the grades of this group's responses to the other questions in the Survey. We are thus led to believe that the issue of money may be determinant of the overall opinions on the EU's initiatives towards the South. The analysis of the open questions seems to confirm this conclusion: as one answer from Italy succinctly put it, "the different economic and political situations of the southern Mediterranean partners demand specific financial instruments to cope with the specific Mediterranean challenges." But political implications also accrue from this perception. If we take as a given that respondents are aware that a more targeted financial instrument for the southern Mediterranean partners (or even a more active role on behalf of the existing ENPI) will inevitably lead to more hands-on involvement by the EU in the domestic affairs of these countries, then an overall positive response to this last question we are dealing with can be seen as also implying a desire for the EU to export its political recipes as well. It is precisely here, on the balance between financial assistance and political intervention, that great attention is required. The EU's past record has shown that channelling money alone is not enough but, at the same time, offering political support to segments of these countries' political and social communities, especially in the area of democratization, can be paralyzed easily by even the slightest whiff of disagreement within the European Council.

Something that would warrant even more attention towards the decision to devote a separate financial instrument to the southern Mediterranean countries is that breaking financing into two can potentially: i) decrease the political significance on the EU's policy agenda of each of these regions, thus leading to less interest on behalf of individual member states and subsequently to less aid; ii) weaken the political commitment of EU institutions and thus undermine implementation (Sadowski, 2010: 11). All in all, while certain proposals may at first seem straightforwardly more generous and attentive towards the southern Mediterranean neighbourhood, their true prospects become more ambivalent when analysed through the lenses of the EU realpolitik.

Conclusion

The gloomy picture of the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey and the credibility gap that the EMP is suffering can be attributed to both contextual and structural factors. There is an urgent need to work on these factors in parallel. There are few options the EU could choose to prevent the further deterioration of the situation. One is to acknowledge the shortcomings and inconsistencies of its policy, the inherently fragile balance of such initiatives and the need for more coherence. It also needs to address the gap between words and deeds, both in political and financial terms. Opening up to and reaching various segments of Arab civil society, addressing the new generation's problems and challenges and channelling the various approaches of its member states towards a more equal partnership can only help at this point in time. The extent to which it can achieve this within the constraints of its own systemic logic of operation is of course open to theorizing and will partly be subject to developments occurring beyond its own sphere of influence. On the other hand, in the renewed neighbourhood policy Arab regimes need to adopt the basics of "good governance"; that is, to ensure the rule of law and promote the freedom and better life people are calling for. As ever, this will be partly determined by the nature and intensity of class-based divisions and, by extension, it will depend on whether economic development in the southern Mediterranean will be able to serve first and foremost the interests of its own people rather than prioritise those of EU and European elites.

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