PERCEPTIONS OF THE MIGRATION AND REFUGEE SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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In this contribution, our first aim is to analyse the Survey participants' perceptions of the migration and refugee situation in the Mediterranean, looking at common elements and discrepancies. Therefore, we will situate these insights in the broader framework of the mobility context. Our goal is to understand which elements seem to have a deeper influence on participants and which seem to be overlooked.

Only by disentangling structural elements from temporary elements conditioning the perceptions of human movements is it possible to identify and define possible solutions.

At first glance, there is a need to differentiate between structural elements – associated with long or mid-term paths of mobility, political and economic relations and demographic imbalances in the region – and temporary elements – linked to recent evolutions in this area (Arab Spring, conflict in Syria, destabilisation of Libya, etc.) – and beyond (post-war instability in Iraq and Afghanistan, the situation in Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan, among others). Only by disentangling these two different elements conditioning the perceptions is it possible to identify and define possible solutions.

The combination of the results of the first three questions[1] shows at least three important elements concerning respondents' perceptions of mobility in the Mediterranean. First, structural migratory flows persist beyond the refugee crisis; second, perceptions of migration and refugee flows are significantly conditioned by the country of residence; and, third, refugee, migratory and transit flows are increasingly overlapped.

Structural Migratory Flows Persist Beyond the Refugee Crisis

The main elements explaining the present situation are mainly linked to the existing war in Syria. However, beyond the refugee crisis, there is an important migratory system in the Mediterranean, which follows a deeply rooted historical path and has specific structural causes. Henceforth, this migratory system constitutes a structural feature of human mobility landscape in the region.

The fact that many respondents emphasise the importance of the lack of sustainable livelihoods in origin countries as a cause of flows confirms the need to take these root causes effectively into account (see Graph 1).

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1. Questions were focused on perceptions, namely on the causes explaining the present situation (Q1), on the mid- to long-term drivers of migratory and refugee movements (Q2) and the perception of how respondent's own country has been affected (Q3).

Graph 1: The migration and refugee situation in the Mediterranean is unprecedented.
To what extent do the following elements explain this situation? Respondents by group of countries.
(The graph below shows the % of high and very high extent)
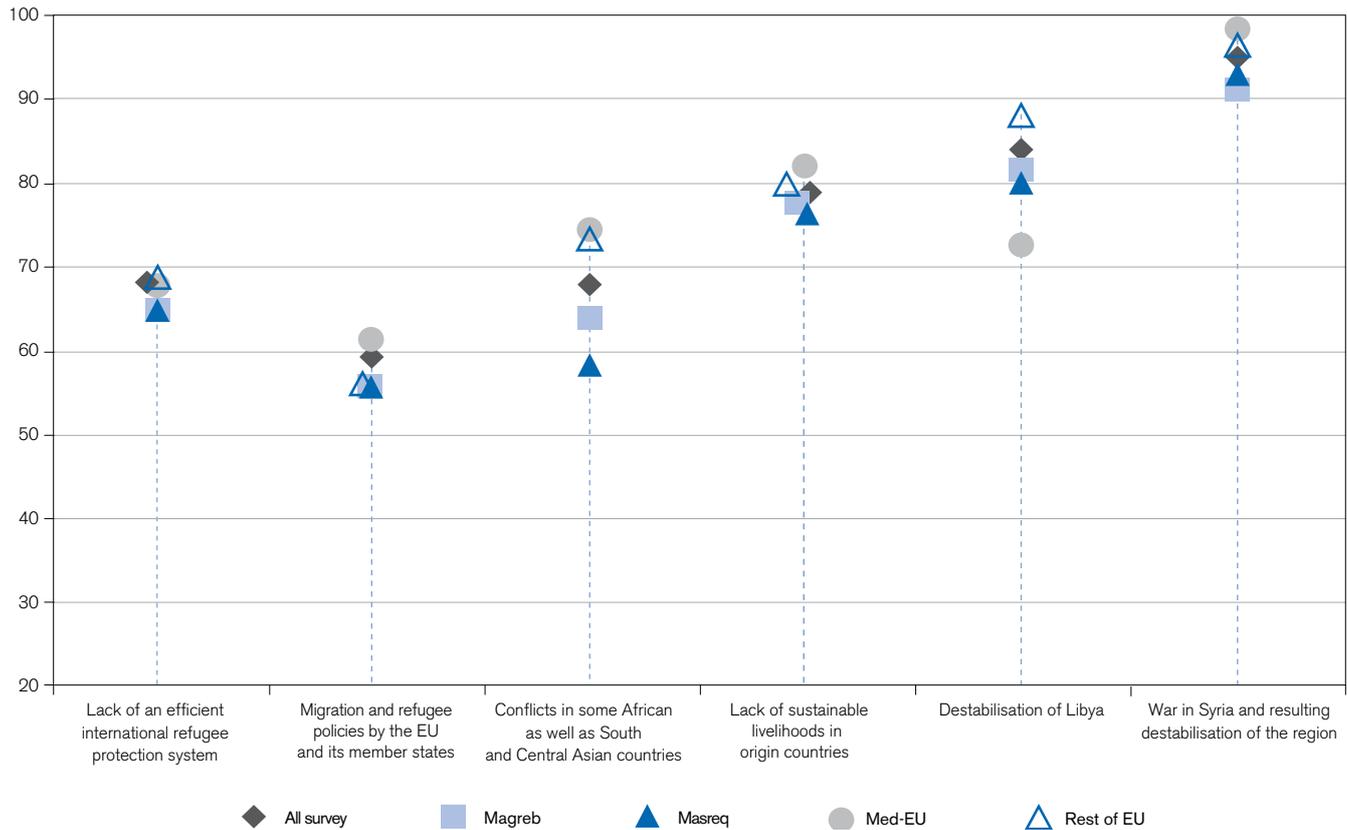
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 7th Euromed Survey/Question 1

In this respect, the Emergency Trust Fund[2] launched in November 2015 at the Valletta Summit on Migration indicates that the EU would be taking root causes more into consideration. However, official statements and effective projects so far selected for funding seem discordant if we look at their objectives. EU projects are more often focused on control of flows and borders than on fostering societal development and promoting deeper democratic governance (Gabrielli, 2016). A similar remark can be made about the case of the EU migration partnership frameworks with Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Mali and Ethiopia, among others. Moreover, a long-term or mid-term approach should be at the core of the action on root causes of migration, through development instruments, and not short-term oriented measures on buffering migrants.

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2. Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa. This Fund, launched by the European Commission, is made up of €1.8 billion from the EU budget and European Development Fund, combined with contributions from EU member states and other donors. The Trust Fund targets a wide range of countries across Africa, encompassing the main African migration routes to Europe, and "aims to help foster stability in the regions (...) and to contribute to better migration management." More specifically, it aims to "address the root causes of destabilisation, forced displacement and irregular migration, by promoting economic and equal opportunities, security and development." See http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/africa/eu-emergency-trust-fund-africa_en.

The destabilisation of Libya is also indirectly related to structural causes of migration. In the last decades, Libya has had a specific role as destination and transit country, and as a partner of Europe in controlling mobility.

Furthermore, respondents' perceptions about the importance of the destabilisation of Libya as a key cause of the actual situation (see Graph 1) are also indirectly related to structural causes of migration. In recent decades, Libya has had a specific role, first as an important destination of immigrant workers from Sub-Saharan countries and, secondly, as a transit country and thus as a partner of Europe in controlling mobility.[3] In the case of Libya, similar to other North African countries, the European externalisation of mobility control toward third countries has transformed the neighbours into key pieces of the buffering systems of mobility (Gabrielli, 2016). When a regime change occurs, as in the case of Tunisia after the Jasmine revolution, instability increases in these countries, the existing cooperation framework collapses, mobility controls relax or disappear and suddenly flows reappear. Moreover, according to a report of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNSML & OHCHR, 2016), the present situation of refugees and migrants in the country constitutes a "human rights crisis", where human rights violation, arbitrary detention, abuses, torture, sexual exploitation, unlawful killings and other ill-treatment are commonplace.

In these contexts, the idea of supplying Libya through funding, equipment and training, introduced during the informal EU Council meeting held on 3 February 2017 in Malta, can be seen as an important threat to the rights and physical integrity of migrants and refugees in the country, as it is known that "migrants are held arbitrarily in detention centres run mostly by the Department for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM)" (UNSML & OHCHR, 2016).

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It is important to consider the issue of sustainable livelihoods in origin countries in relation with the existing external dimension of European migration policies. Democracy, respect for human and civil rights, as well as of national minorities and foreigners in these countries, has to be considered as a key element of sustainable livelihoods. However, cooperation on migration control and readmission with illiberal or "not-so liberal" regimes in the region is characterised by an increasingly extensive use of "migratory conditionality", namely a subordination of development aid concessions to cooperation on migration issues (Gabrielli, 2016). These practices can then be questioned firstly in normative and ethical terms, as they entail a serious degradation of human security (Zapata-Barrero & Gabrielli, 2017). Secondly, these practices can also be questioned in terms of worsening conditions of sustainable livelihoods, both for nationals and foreigners (Carrera et al., 2016; HRW, 2014) and then acting perversely as a driver of mobility.

At the same time, the fact that many respondents emphasise the role of conflict in the current situation of mobility in the Mediterranean underlines once more that the EU also has to develop a stronger and more unitary conflict prevention strategy in the Mediterranean as the main tool to prevent forced movements in the region. Therefore, it could be positive to include this in the "integrated approach to conflicts" when implementing the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy.[4]

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3. In 2013, the EU established the Integrated Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM Libya). The official idea behind EUBAM, working closely together with the EU's Frontex agency, is to motivate Libya toward regional and international cooperation, but it also indirectly expresses the European strategic interest in controlling the migration phenomenon (Seeberg, 2014).

4. Within the five EU External Action priorities of the European Union Global Strategy there is the will to expand the scope of the "comprehensive approach". Thus "the EU will act at all stages of the conflict cycle, acting promptly on prevention, responding responsibly and decisively to crises, investing in stabilisation, and avoiding premature disengagement when a new crisis erupts" (EUGS, EEAS 2016).

Other causes of the current situation in the Mediterranean related to the international refugee protection system and European migration policy appear as less relevant to respondents. However, Spijkerboer (2016), among other scholars, signals that the serious underfunding for hosting refugees in the region – depending on both international donors and the EU –, the minimal resettlement of refugees, and the "ripple effect" of visa requirements for Syrians have played a major role in this situation.

Another element that shows signs of the importance of the structural dimension can be seen when the Survey specifically asks about migration drivers for the next ten years on the different Mediterranean routes (see Graph 2). These results link to the need for differentiated policy responses (Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean), and to develop them according to the main drivers affecting human movements and the mid-term estimates.

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Graph 2: Ranking key possible drivers of migratory movements for the next ten years in the Euro-Mediterranean region.
(Answers as most important element in % by corridor)
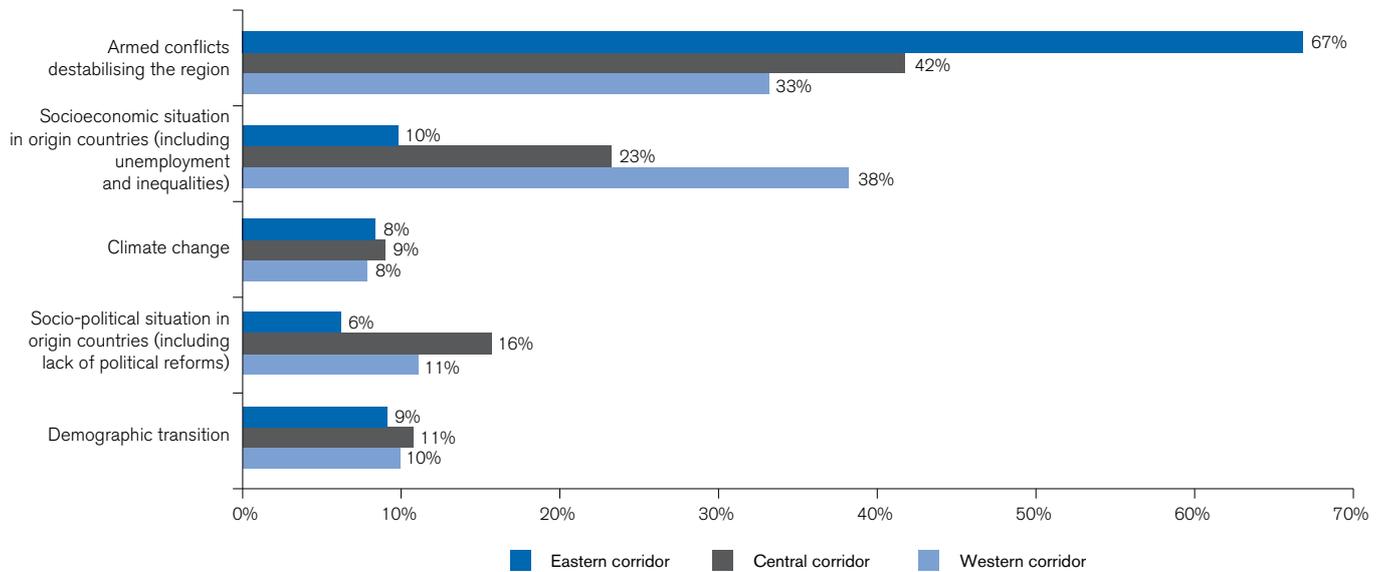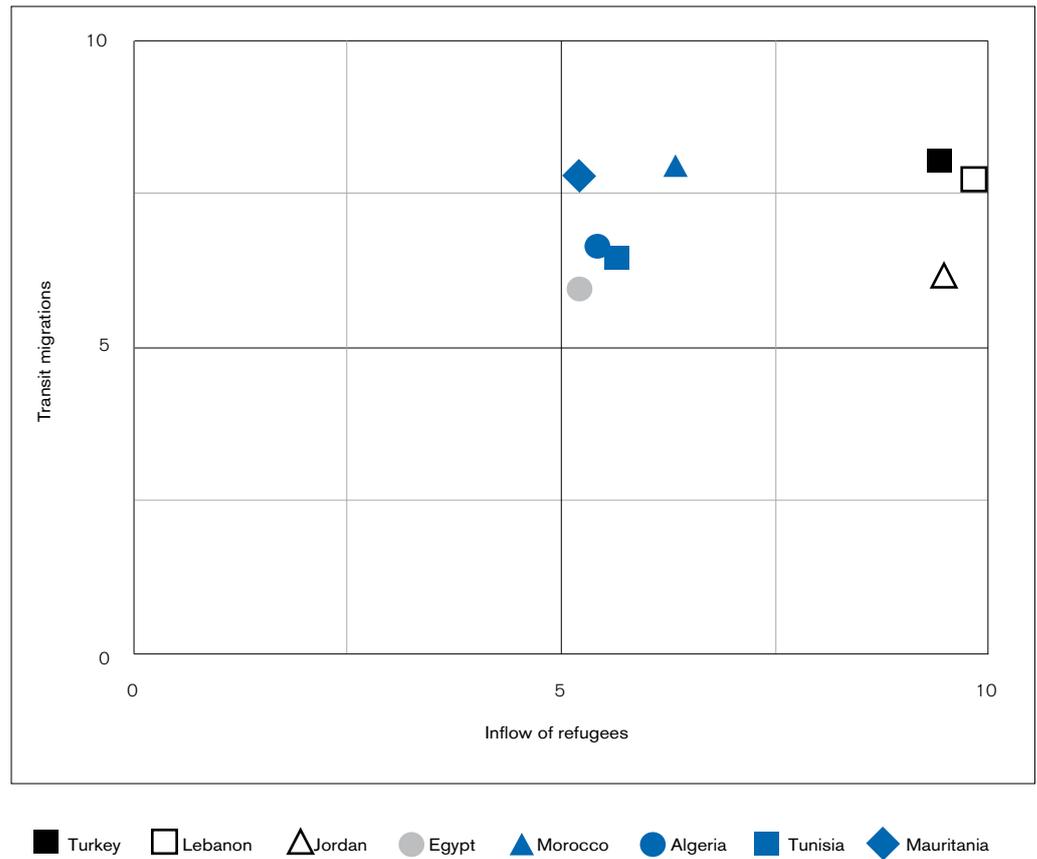

Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 7th Euromed Survey/Question 2

The European tailor-made approach is already set up through the model of EU "migration partnership frameworks" with selected third countries. Nevertheless, there are at least two main limitations to the existing differentiated policy framework on mobility in the Mediterranean. First, there is a lack of a real peer relationship with partners, in the sense that priorities of non-EU countries are not effectively taken into account, beyond the rhetorical level (Limam & Del Sarto, 2015). Secondly, this unilateralism in agenda setting generally results in short-term and security-inspired measures addressed at containing flows that finally produce a differentiation of negotiation tool but not a differentiation in measures.

The need for differentiated policy responses can also be seen when Survey participants are asked to assess their own country situation. The results for Maghreb countries on transit migration, which is more important than the inflow of refugees (see Graph 3), reinforces the need for a differentiated geographical approach when analysing present migratory and refugee movements in the region, and can also be seen as an indicator of the persistence of structural migratory flows in the Mediterranean simultaneously to the refugee crisis.

Answers on the situation of the respondent's own countries show that much of the Mediterranean structural migratory flows persist simultaneously to the refugee crisis.

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Graph 3: To what extent is your country affected by the following human movements?
(Mean 0 – very low to 10 – very high)

Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 7th Euromed Survey/Question 3

Perceptions of Migration and Refugee Flows are Significantly Conditioned by the Country of Residence

In implementing the relocation process, each country follows its own timing and political agenda and some countries even refuse to implement it, as can be seen in the "flexible solidarity" that came out of the Bratislava Declaration.

The Survey shows how perceptions about the present situation vary depending on the country's position in the human movement geography of the Mediterranean region. This has already had an impact on policy-making, as the EU has been unable to implement the already limited quotas of the relocation process. Moreover, each country follows its own timing and political agenda and some countries even refuse to implement it, as can be seen in the "flexible solidarity" concept after the Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap, by which member states can decide on the form of contribution to the distribution mechanism. This voluntary non-mandatory character contradicts the relocation decision of 2015 made by a qualified majority in the European Council against the opposition of Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and the Czech Republic.
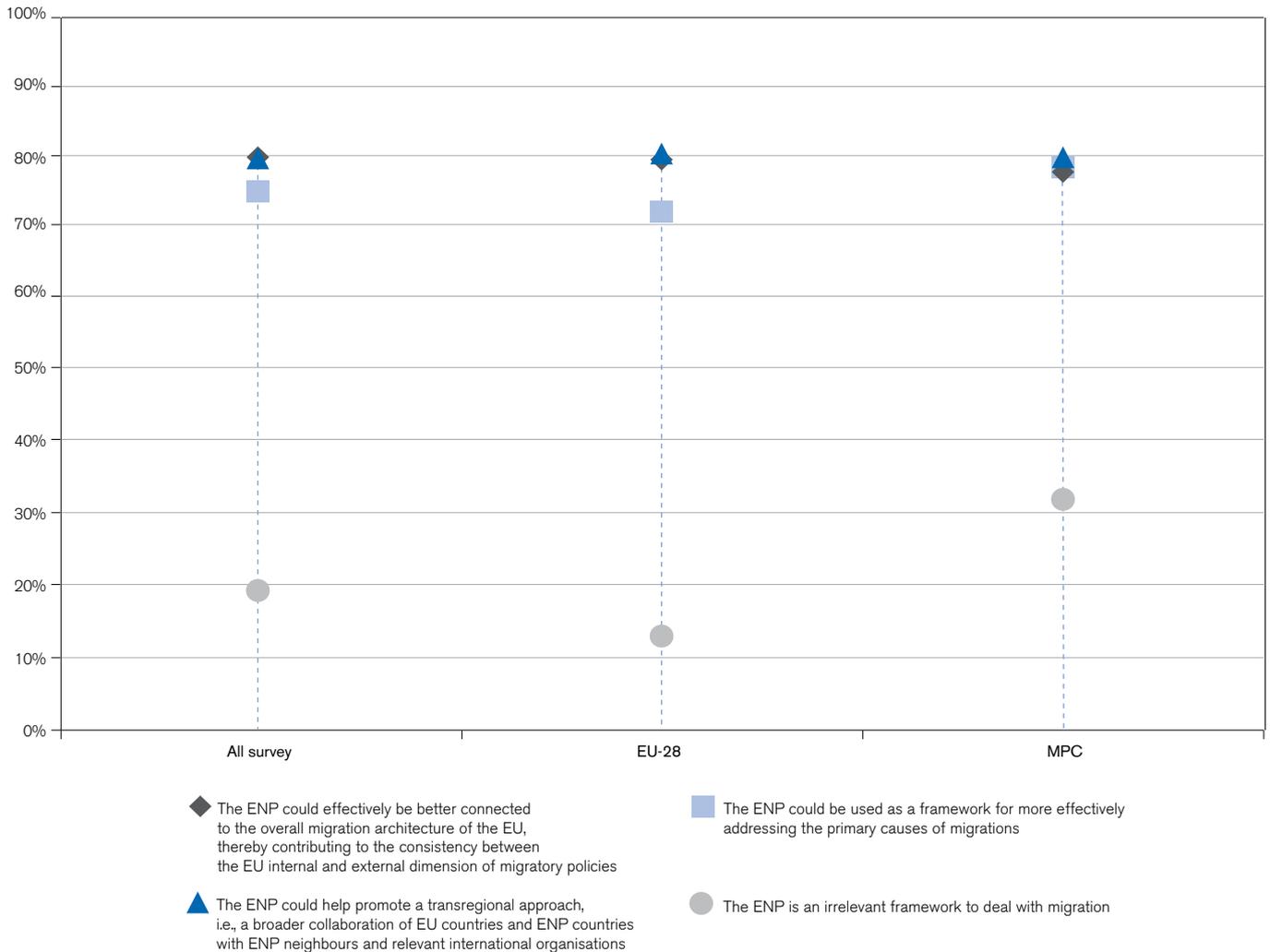
These national biases concerning perceptions are surely related to the diverse mobility situations of the countries around the Mediterranean, but they are probably also linked to the different frameworks established by political discourses and debates in each country, as well as by media coverage and approach. Indeed, the present debate is making a very confused and confusing use of terminology: migrants and refugees are often used as synonyms, migrant stocks and migrant flows are frequently mixed up, and the management of culturally diverse societies is increasingly confused with the policy needed to effectively manage the arrival of refugees.

Furthermore, there is also a growing risk of losing a regional perspective, where member states make it difficult for the EU to develop a common regional approach, and in their turn Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries prefer to use bilateral instruments in order to regulate migration and refugee movements. This can lead to ineffective policies since action is needed in all countries given that today the Mediterranean shares areas of origin, reception and transit of human movements.

This can be contrasted with the results for Q25 on the role of the ENP, which show that there is room (particularly for the Southern neighbourhood) for a regional perspective and a broad format of collaboration with all countries. Results show (see Graph 4) that the Southern and Southeast Mediterranean does not rely on the ENP on the same terms as the EU countries. The most preferred option for both North and South is the one that sees the ENP enhancing a broader collaboration of EU and ENP countries with ENP neighbours (that is, neighbours of neighbours) as well as relevant international organisations.

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Graph 4: One of the thematic priorities of the ENP review is to offer an intensified cooperation on both regular and irregular migration. Do you agree with the following statements? Respondents by group of countries.
(The graph below shows the % of agree and completely agree answers)

◆ The ENP could effectively be better connected to the overall migration architecture of the EU, thereby contributing to the consistency between the EU internal and external dimension of migratory policies

▲ The ENP could help promote a transregional approach, i.e., a broader collaboration of EU countries and ENP countries with ENP neighbours and relevant international organisations

■ The ENP could be used as a framework for more effectively addressing the primary causes of migrations

● The ENP is an irrelevant framework to deal with migration

Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 7th Euromed Survey/Question 25

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Refugee, Migratory and Transit Flows Increasingly Overlap

The growing overlapping in the Mediterranean of different typologies of mobility, such as refugees and migratory flows, is a phenomenon reflected in the Survey responses. This fact, also underlined by scholars, reinforces the need to take it into account at the political level, and particularly to tackle the phenomenon in a differentiated way. Today, international and regional structures have been unable to develop a really comprehensive and coherent response to manage this.

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In Europe, the prevalence of externalisation tendencies toward Southern Mediterranean countries has produced an indiscriminate impact on all the different flows, considering the impossibility of defining who is effectively a "transit migrant" ex ante; that is, before that migrant has last attempted to leave the transit countries (Collyer, Duvell & De Haas, 2012). This has serious consequences for refugee's access to asylum and more broadly on human rights of people on the move (Amnesty International, 2014; HRW, 2014 and 2009; UNHCR, 2015) and, at the same time, EU countries and institutions have serious responsibility for it (McNamara, 2013).

Moreover, non-EU Mediterranean countries need to prove to European partners their willingness and engagement in effectively controlling mobility and accepting readmission. On certain occasions, this can result in a "number policy" *(politique du chiffre)* pushing states to operate indiscriminate expulsions of foreigners, generally from Sub-Saharan Africa, regardless of their condition as UNCHR-based refugees, as long-term immigrants or students in the country, or as supposedly "transit migrants" (Gabrielli, 2011). The most recent example of this is Algeria, which at the end of 2016 organised indiscriminate expulsions of black Africans[5] (REF).

With more specific reference to the issue of refugees, these practices underline the primacy of border control and state-oriented security strategies over human security and asylum seeker protection (Zapata-Barrero & Gabrielli, 2017). This should be taken into the account, and particularly at a time when EU policies to manage migration (European Agenda on Migration) and refugees (Common European Asylum System – Dublin IV) are under construction or reform. First drafts unfortunately seem to reinforce the current trends.

Conclusion. Towards a Necessary Ground-Breaking New Agenda for the Future of the Mediterranean

It is necessary to consider mobility in the Mediterranean beyond the framework of crisis, bearing in mind that crisis related to mobility has become a structural feature of the Mediterranean.

Firstly, a strong need for a political turnaround in approaching mobility in the Mediterranean emerges both from the Survey results and from existing literature on the topic. Nevertheless, this ground-breaking turnaround in mobility policies must go beyond rhetoric and discursive formulations and reach the measures implemented in order to solve the various existing issues related to human security of peoples on the move, as well as human and asylum rights.

This new agenda has to take in account "innovative" solutions to the current situation, such as the establishment of humanitarian corridors for refugees and formal channels of labour mobility, both low- and high-skilled. These measures will be beneficial in order to drastically reduce the number of people who died in the attempt to enter the EU and find asylum, but will also be very effective tools to fight against smugglers and traffickers by restricting their markets (Heaven et al., 2016: 65-ff).

5. See Jeune Afrique, "Algérie: une « chasse à l'homme noir » qui fait scandale", 7th December 2016, http://www.jeuneafrique.com/381265/politique/algerie-chasse-a-lhomme-noir-scandale/ [last visited: 10th February 2016].

Secondly, there is also a need for a genuinely balanced political framework in the region taking into account the needs and proposals of non-EU Mediterranean countries, not only in the agenda but also in political agreements. Moreover, there is also a need to seriously consider the sustainability of developed patterns in the region – both at general and environmental level – in order to prevent more sources of displacements in the mid-term.

Thirdly, coherence between the different European policies aimed at the Mediterranean is needed. If mobility is really a key priority for European countries, this has to be considered as the main element on which to build the coherence of other foreign policy dimensions (Heaven et al., 2016; Cosgrave et al., 2016).

To summarise, it is necessary to consider mobility in the Mediterranean beyond the framework of crisis, bearing in mind that crisis related to mobility has become a structural feature of the Mediterranean (Gabrielli, 2015). On the one hand, there is a need for a deep and pragmatic rethinking of the policy framework to consider mobility, and particularly irregular migration in the region, as a structural feature of the Mediterranean and to apply more pragmatic policies. Therefore, the need emerges to finally open some formal channels of mobility, an immigration policy tool that has been practically abandoned in Europe since the oil crisis of the mid-1970s, with the partial exception of the not very successful experiment of the "blue card". On the other hand, all crisis-related and unexpected flows of refugees and migrants have to be addressed through a rights-based framework.

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