

# THE EU'S VANISHING IMPACT AND VISIBILITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

## POL MORILLAS

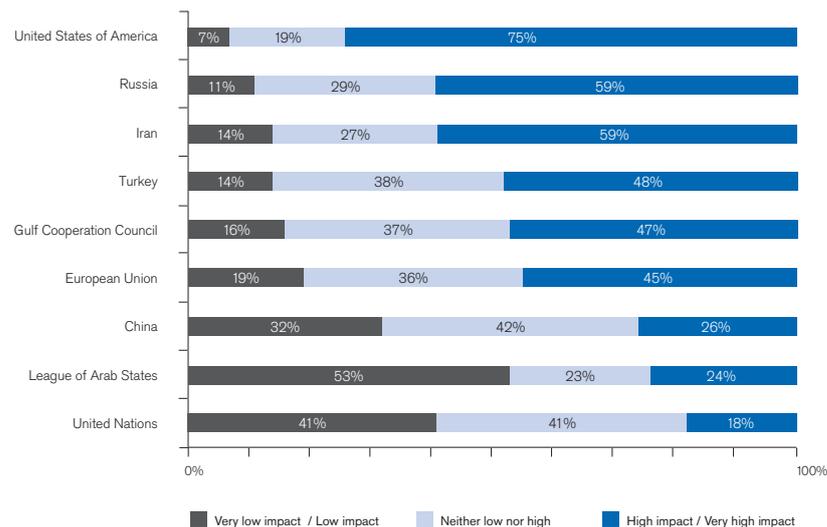
Head of the Euro-Mediterranean Policies Department, IEMed

**Despite a dense network of cooperation with its Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs), the EU drags behind other external actors of the Mediterranean region.**

The EU does quite a lot in its southern neighbourhood but receives little credit for it. This could be the headline of the results of the 5th Euromed Survey, which reveals that the EU's visibility and impact in the Mediterranean has eroded in recent years. Taking the Survey as a whole, the EU scores low compared to other external actors of the Mediterranean region, despite a dense network of cooperation with its Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs) dating back to at least 1995.

An optimist would highlight that the EU has a similar level of impact compared to the actor attracting most attention lately: the Gulf. They both score around 45% of high or very high impact in the region. But a less optimistic view would note that, despite its intense level of political, economic and social engagement, the EU still drags behind actors such as Russia (59% of responses signalling a high impact of its policies) or Iran (59% as well), with less comprehensive relations with MPCs (see graph 1).

**Graph 1: Assessing the impact of the following international players in the Southern Mediterranean countries** (ordered by % of "Very high priority" answers)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 5th Euromed Survey

Russian, Iranian and, to an extent, US influence in the region might reflect the centrality of the Syrian conflict in the geopolitics of the region. But one cannot forget that the EU still has a lot of room to increase the impact and visibility of its policies. In broad terms, one can argue that the EU scores low when it comes to political action, but high when its policies are assessed.

On the politics side, the Survey shows that the capacity of the EU to act as a peace broker is perceived as low (only 25% of the responses acknowledge that the EU can become an influential mediator and peace broker in the region). In contrast, on the policies side, the EU's influence as a major trading and economic partner for MPCs and as a driver of the rule of law and governance reform receive higher rates (67% and 39%, respectively).

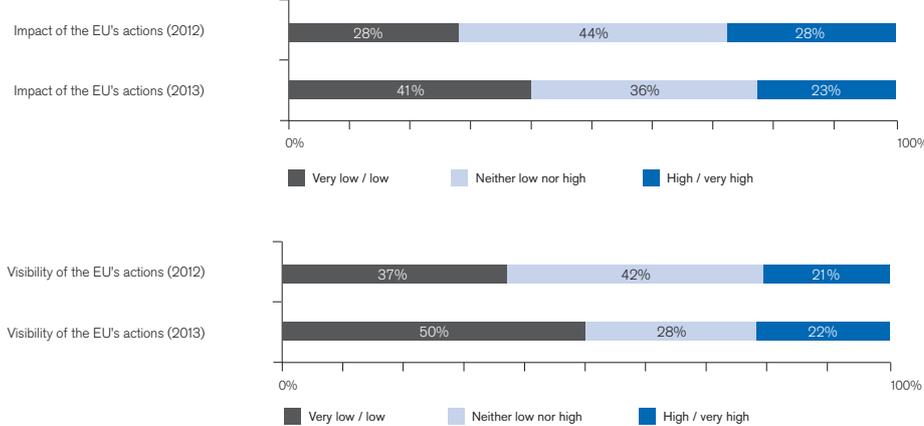
**The EU still has a lot of room to increase the impact and visibility of its policies.**

In other words, these figures reveal that, despite the remarkable efforts of the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and the European External Action Service (mostly through Bernardino León, Special Representative for the Mediterranean Region) to act as a decisive political mediator in countries such as Egypt, the EU is still most valued for its policy action, embodied in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). These policies have less chance to attract the headlines than mediation efforts. And this probably explains why the impact assessment of the EU's actions in the region, as can be seen in graph 2, has suffered a slight downturn in recent years (41% of very low impact in 2013), while there is also a negative assessment of the visibility of the EU (50% of respondents consider the EU's action to have a low visibility).

**Despite efforts to act as a decisive political mediator, the EU is still most valued for its policy action, embodied in the European Neighbourhood Policy.**

**Graph 2: Assessing the impact of the EU's actions in Mediterranean Partner Countries**

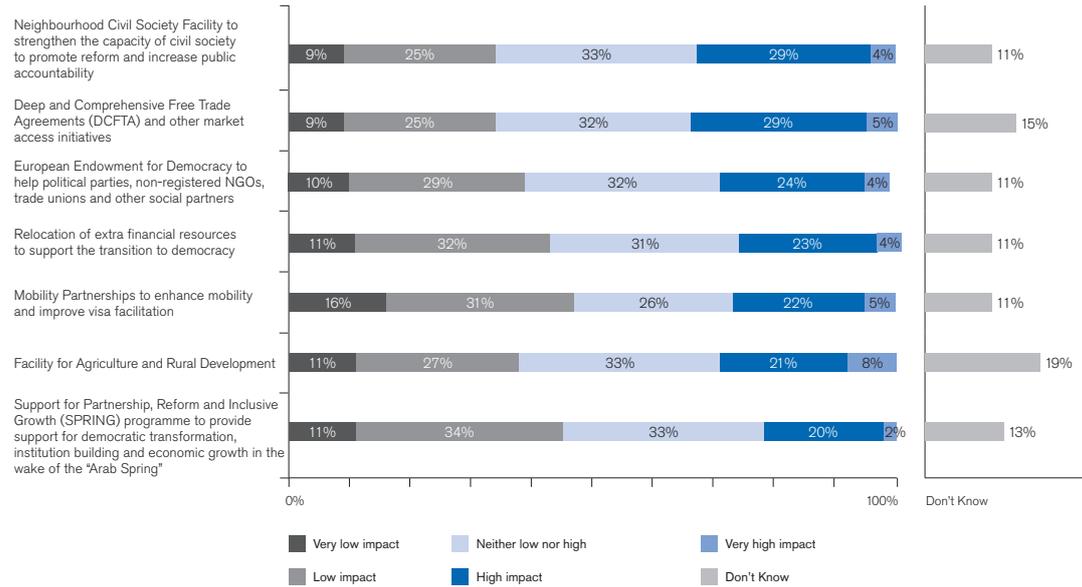
(comparing 2012 and 2013 results)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 4th and 5th Euromed Survey

However, the data provided by the Survey also shows that there is a generally positive perception of the EU's policies in the Mediterranean (see graph 3), particularly the ENP. In addition to the broad assessment of the role of the EU as a trading partner and driver of political reform, the Survey reveals that the ENP measures with the greatest impact are the Civil Society Facility and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (both with 35% of responses considering that their impact on MPCs is high or very high). At the other end, the Mobility Partnerships and the SPRING Programme are considered to have a lower level of impact (with 47% and 45% of responses arguing that their impact is low or very low, respectively).

**Graph 3: Assessing the the impact of the following measures of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) on the Southern Mediterranean countries**



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 5th Euromed Survey

**The coordination between the European Commission, EEAS and EU Member States and a stronger focus on policy actions are the chief measures to increase the EU impact and visibility.**

Overall, the data presented in the Survey indicates that the EU needs to recalibrate its efforts in the Southern Mediterranean in order to increase its impact and visibility. Chief among these measures will be the coordination of the different set of policies of the EU, including the ENP, but also the projects of the Union for the Mediterranean, those of EU Member States and the political action of the EEAS.

Towards the end of 2014, the EU will be equipped with a new set of personalities at the top of its policy-making bodies. The new EU High Representative and European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy will be in charge of upgrading the set of tools to promote democratic reform in the Southern Mediterranean. On the one hand, the coordination between the EEAS, the European Commission and EU Member States will be of paramount importance. On the other, a stronger focus on policy actions – rather than extenuating efforts towards obtaining high-profile political results – might also be a path worth pursuing.