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Civil Society and Social Movements in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

The focus of this year's Euromed Survey emerged from our assessment at the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) that the human dimension must be (re)placed centre-stage of Euro-Mediterranean relations. More generally, this premise is also driving our reflection ahead of the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration later this year. Civil society is a key dimension in this regard, and its role and potential are addressed in this survey. The scope of the survey also extends to social movements that have shaped to a large extent the political agenda over the last years, both in the North and in the South of the Mediterranean.

With the objective to explore perceptions related to civil society and social movements, a first set of questions relates to the very concept, role, mission, means and focus of civil society and social movements. The second set of questions focuses on the policy environment in which civil society operates, the role of foreign entities vis-à-vis civil society organisations and, in particular, how the EU engages with civil society in southern and eastern Mediterranean (SEM) countries. Finally, the questions of the third block relate mostly to connections between civil societies on both sides of the Mediterranean, the existing Euro-Mediterranean frameworks offering some space for civil society's inclusion, and the potential for civil society in boosting Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and integration.

This publication contains six analytical articles that echo some specific results of the Survey. **Intissar Kherigi** analyses the role of civil society in the context of the Tunisian transition, presenting a stimulating case study of the changing role of civil society organisations in the region. Another case study is presented in the contribution from **Aziza Moneer** who examines the issue of environmental activism in the Post-Arab Spring years. In a systematic manner, **Richard Youngs** looks closer into the reshaped civic politics in the region and its impact on Euro-Mediterranean relations. **Jerzy Pomianowski** offers an analysis of the challenges media face in the southern neighbourhood and calls for a re-set in crafting donor support to media in the EU neighbourhood. **Itxaso Domínguez** draws a critical assessment of EU's engagement with civil society, while **Zaid Eyadat** evaluates the effects of foreign support to civil society, identifying the trend towards professionalized NGOs and the need to focus more on small and local social movements.

While the complete set of results can be accessed online, this publication also contains a descriptive report that provides an overall picture of the main results. In general terms, respondents are rather positive. Sharp criticism is expressed in open comments rather than transpire from the quantitative results. More than half of respondents consider for instance that the Partnership Priorities jointly defined by the EU and its partner countries as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) reflect the main concerns of the civil society. It is striking that European respondents to the Survey are consistently more critical than SEM respondents in many respects, including concerning the role of the EU as supporter to civil society and its capacity to include their concerns when defining joint partnership priorities with their partners. Another consistent finding across the survey is that answers from Tunisian respondents across the survey show distinct features from other respondents in the Southern Mediterranean, with a very acute awareness of the importance of civil society in their country and acute sense that Tunisia offers an enabling environment for civil society. Apart from these three general trends, let me highlight seven main take-away points:

- 1- What civil society is there for? Monitoring policies and watchdogging rights rather than substituting government and providing services not provided adequately otherwise.
- 2- Climate change should be the main priority of civil society in Europe (that should also keep human rights, democracy and the rule of law on its radar though). In South and East Mediterranean countries, human rights, democracy and rule of law come first in respondents' answers.
- 3- Public mobilisations remain the most efficient mean for civil society to achieve its objectives.
- 4- Where is civil society facing the biggest obstacles? Syria, Egypt, Libya and Turkey. How about Europe? Hungary, Poland and Romania.
- 5- The EU is the number one source of foreign support to civil society in SEM countries. Its role in this regard is assessed positively. It should support civil society in Egypt, Palestine and Syria as a matter of priority.
- 6- Foreign support to civil society can be counterproductive in South Mediterranean countries.
- 7- Euro-Mediterranean civil society networks and subnational cooperation (rather than civil society cooperation mechanisms promoted by governmental institutions) are the most relevant frameworks.