INTRODUCTION

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The Mediterranean region is confronted with various forms of migration challenges, instability and deepening socio-economic cleavages. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, drastically curtailing mobility and endangering the region’s fragile economic foundations. In light of this, devising comprehensive cooperation frameworks which genuinely build on the specific aspirations of each country and their populations should be a priority for the region. This ambition is reflected in the EU’s proposal to forge what may become “mutually beneficial and sustainable” partnerships with partner countries in the framework of the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum¹.

Ran jointly under the EUROMED Migration V (EMM5) and “EuroMeSco: Connecting the Dots” projects, the survey “Towards sustainable and mutually beneficial migration partnerships in the South Mediterranean” aims at reflecting on migration partnerships between the EU and Southern Mediterranean countries. This report analyses the main results from this exercise, which was conducted amongst experts on migration from the EU’s South Partner Countries (SPCs) in June and July 2021. It provides new evidence on each country’s understanding on how migration partnerships should be achieved in view to advance cooperation for the benefit of migrants and all communities involved in the process.

A prevailing view throughout the survey is that migration is inexorably linked to countries’ broader socio-economic trajectories. Accordingly, it reminds us that migration cannot be effectively tackled in isolation from other areas of joint engagement. In the fast-changing context of the South Mediterranean, this assessment lends support to calls for partnerships in the region that are more ambitious in scope and holistic in nature.

In general terms, the survey indicates that, amongst the five cooperation areas outlined in the Pact, building economic opportunities and addressing root causes of irregular migration, together with countering smuggling and trafficking of human beings, are viewed as the most influential policy areas for SPCs when cooperating with the EU or EU Member States. Additionally, these two policy areas are also considered utmost priorities when engaging countries further upstream on the migration routes, as in Sub-Saharan Africa for example. This consensus on overarching policy objectives raises hopes for the future of regional cooperation between the EU and its partners.

Significantly, the survey also brings to light a distinctive regional cleavage in the assessment of the current state of cooperation with the EU. Respondents from Maghreb and Mashrek countries tend to perceive cooperation with the EU quite differently, reflecting of course widely different ground realities but also an equivocal impact of the EU’s policy toolbox. Throughout the survey, respondents from the Mashrek (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine) assess EU cooperation rather positively,

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¹ Communication from the Commission on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM(2020) 609.
whereas answers from the Maghreb (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia) tend to be more sceptical or even negative. More than anything, these findings show that the current frameworks for governing migration still fall short of meeting expectations for many of the region’s inhabitants.

To shed light and help explain these nuances in opinion, the report is accompanied by a series of expert articles. Sara Benjelloun invites crossing North and South perspectives to overcome divergent priorities on migration and cooperation in the Mediterranean. Matteo Villa’s analysis suggests avenues to revamp partnerships on irregular migration across the Mediterranean. In her article, Gabriella Sánchez makes a compelling case for rethinking narratives around migrant smuggling in the region as a pre-requisite to effectively uphold fundamental rights. Taking a historical approach, Sandra Lavenex looks closer at EU external migration policy towards the Southern Mediterranean and analyses how contextual developments in the region have shaped EU policy in the area. Agnieszka Kulesa offers an analysis on the challenges in developing pathways for legal migration to Europe in the near future.

Four additional articles adopt a country or sub-regional focus. Shaza Al Jondi and Meredith Byrne offer an analysis on employment and social cohesion in the context of forced displacement in Jordan and Lebanon. Nabil Ferdaoussi focuses on the present state of EU-Moroccan cooperation. Kheira Arrouche provides an assessment of the current migratory framework of Algeria, analysing the country’s challenges, interests and future prospects. Finally, Pauline Veron’s analysis focuses on striking the right balance for cooperation gains amid the precarious political situation in Tunisia.

With the new Pact on Migration and Asylum, the EU has created the necessary space to reflect on partner countries’ key interests in the process of defining migration partnerships. This welcome development is expected to set a more balanced and pragmatic policy course which responds effectively to communities’ needs around the region, in countries of origin, transit and destination. This is essential to achieve substantial progress on the region’s intertwined challenges: reducing incentives for irregular migration, providing adequate protection for displaced populations and tackling root causes in a conducive manner.

In this respect, it is the responsibility of policy-makers from both sides of the Mediterranean to capitalise on this opportunity and keep investing in channels for exchange and fruitful crossing of perspectives. By throwing light on partner countries’ considerations, this survey makes a timely contribution towards grappling with migration-related priorities in a horizontal manner. The responses provide a robust reference framework to contextualise further action and guide, in an evidence-based way, the establishment of migration partnerships that are genuinely rooted in a spirit of mutual benefits.
We hope you will find in this most interesting read a useful source of information and look forward to accompany the next steps of international cooperation on migration in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

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