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Middle East Studies Center



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PROMOTE DIALOGUE BETWEEN ACADEMIC SCHOLARS AND
POLICY PROFESSIONALS IN EGYPT AND EUROPE

Enhancing Euro-Med Security Cooperation

WORKSHOP SUMMARY REPORT

Dr Robert Mason

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Preamble

The purpose of this initiative is for the Middle East Studies Center (referred to hereinafter as “MESOC”) at the American University in Cairo (AUC) to build bridges between the academic and policy communities in Cairo and Brussels and between Egypt and EU member states. MESOC believes that AUC offers a logical platform to engage in such activity: an independent and esteemed scholarly institution now celebrating 100 years of activity; a centrally located and easily accessible venue in the Tahrir Square campus; a network of contacts in Euro-Med studies through MESOC, the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy and the political science department; and access to a multitude of Egyptian experts and contacts who can contribute and enrich the debate. In February 2017 three AUC community members were appointed as Egyptian ministers, including the new minister of education.

Global Objective

The Middle East Studies Center has been awarded a €32,000 grant from the European Union to create a new unique platform for young Egyptian scholars to engage with European policymakers and academic experts.

The action will enhance the teaching and research capabilities on this theme at AUC as well as at a number of other public and private universities in Egypt. First, it will enable faculty, students and members of the public to engage with Euro-Med Studies, Euro-Med politics, and thematically related areas such as migration, energy, and multiculturalism during a regular public lecture series. Second, the funding will attract a Visiting Professor to conduct research on a Euro-Med topic at the Middle East Studies Center and enrich the student experience. Third, a roundtable discussion will take place at the Middle East Studies Center on a related topic which is of direct relevance to Egypt, the MENA region, and the EU. An associated publication will provide a tangible legacy for this one year project.

MESOC believes that Cairo has hitherto lacked the space for discussion in a multitude of areas of common interest and that AUC offers a unique platform for young Egyptian scholars to engage with European policymakers and academic experts and debate (new) issues which are vitally important to the Egypt, the wider region, and to enhancing cooperation between Europe and the Middle East.

Specific Objective

The project includes a number of deliverables, including a workshop.

Enhancing Euro-Med Security Cooperation (Workshop)

The Euro-Mediterranean region has experienced a series of tremendous shocks over the past few years, including the onset of a migration and refugee crisis, the Arab uprisings and conditions of instability and in security which have allowed trafficking and organized crime to flourish. The EU has also witnessed the Trump administration's unique policymaking on Israel and withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, right wing populism in Europe and Brexit.

The EU has created a "New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood" and a Global Strategy and yet uncertainty remains in terms of which narratives are prized the most and which Middle East and North African (MENA) states are most willing to engage and on what terms. For the EU and Middle Eastern societies, the stakes of not achieving closer cooperation and detente in political relations are extremely high. There has yet to be a Euro-Arab summit and this could be a valuable first step. The common agenda should include:

- Euro-Mediterranean refugee crisis and coherent responses
- EU trade and assistance in the fields of agriculture, water and rural development
- EU - MENA role in ending the Syria conflict
- Moving towards shared prosperity across the neighbourhood
- A joint and balanced approach to support a two-state solution, with an unrelenting focus on Palestinian economic development and coordination with the US where possible
- A reconceptualisation of EU engagement in the MENA region which recognises the broader transnational dynamics at play, from the inter-regionalization of the Iranian and Saudi proxy battles to push back against Qatari and Turkish influence, to the long term effects from poverty and human insecurity in Africa
- Reconsidering and rebalancing EU engagement with MENA states which encourages economic and security partnerships without jettisoning core principles such as pluralism and the rule of law
- A common approach to engage with Russia and China in a way which enhances the national security of EU and MENA states with the establishment and maintenance of a stable balance of power in the region

The one day workshop drew together a range of experts covering various themes of direct relevance to the existing (in) security complex, including presentations from analysts and academics from Russia, Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

It focused on emerging security threats and responses in the first session, and on the adequacy of institutional frameworks to effect positive change in addressing those threats. The event was highly policy relevant. All academic scholars present at the event will contribute to an edited volume.

The event covered specific questions such as:

1. What are the main and emerging security threats in the Mediterranean region?
2. Can lessons be learned from existing counterterrorism cooperation?
3. What are the ideal areas for multilateral engagement, especially with regard to existing structures and establishing the fundamentals of human security?

Below are some of the main points that were raised during the event:

Institutionalization

The make up of the EU, its bureaucratic characteristics (including diverse national interests, changing leadership and soft power focus) and the mis-conceptualization of the Euro-Mediterranean region has direct consequences when addressing key aspects of in security such as refugee flows, smuggling networks, violent extremism and other threats.

Securitization

The securitization of the region has taken place due to domestic and foreign actor (mis) perceptions and policy choices, but the EU's security response (e.g. from conditionality to taking the path of least resistance in cooperation agreements) and follow through (e.g. willing to engage in state building after the NATO intervention in Libya) has been insufficient to meet contemporary security challenges.

Fast Paced Events

The EU is being challenged by fast moving events on the ground in the Middle East and Africa, including weak or unstable authoritarian regimes. The responses and separate bilateral actions and trends within the EU bloc and member states and across international affairs more broadly have a major effect. This is especially the case in maintaining transatlantic relations during the Trump administration and managing US foreign policies concerning the Mediterranean.

The Complexity of the MENA Region

Poverty, corruption, legislative and bureaucratic insufficiencies, and a lack of Security Sector Reform (SSR) all affect prospects for transformative change on the ground in the MENA region.

Threat Perception and Alliances

Threat perception and alliances ebb and flow. There is an element of "you broke it, you mend it" in some of the perspectives of the MENA elite and fears of neo-colonialism, mistrust and normative behaviour. All these challenge MENA engagement with European allies.

The Complication of Non-State Actors

Non-state actors such as Tuareg and Kurds seek to enhance their nation-building activities and establish states of their own.

New Actors and Sources of Leverage

New actors or sources of leverage are presenting themselves in the Middle East (.e.g Russia in Syria and its growing energy network more broadly) and emerging threats and tensions (e.g. escalation between Israel and Iran).

The Need to Recognize Trans-national Linkages

The Levant and Gulf (and beyond) have become linked security zones in the Saudi - Iranian Cold War.

Bilateralism

The triumph of bilateralism has been apparent for various reasons including historic and current connections (with UK, US and France in particular), the greater efficacy of this channel, and the rise of important external state actors (such as Russia and China, and maybe Germany).

Stability First Approach

Stability and opportunity seem more appealing/useful than values and even resilience which appear either disconnected from reality or too ambitious given many of the local contexts.

To read more about these topics in our upcoming volume please email us at mesc@aucegypt.edu to register your interest and to join our mailing list.

Participants in the workshop included:

Professor Martin Beck, University of Southern Denmark

Dr. Max Suchkov, Nonresident expert at Valdai Club and at the Russian International Affairs Council, editor of Al-Monitor Russia-Mideast coverage

Ms. Francesca Fabbri, Junior Policy Analyst, Europe in the World Programme, European Policy Center

Dr. Vincent Durac, Lecturer, University College Dublin

Ms. Annelies Pauwels, Analyst, European Union Institute for Security Studies

Ambassador Aly Erfan, Professor of Practice, American University in Cairo

Ambassador Karim Haggag, Professor of Practice, American University in Cairo

Dr. Robert Mason, Director, Middle East Studies Center, American University in Cairo

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