

## MAJALAT - Brussels Civil Society Forum GENERAL CONCEPT NOTE

The European Union and its southern neighborhood share a destiny linked to geographical proximity, to today's common challenges, to economic and political cooperation, carried out on many fronts, but also to a long history of human and cultural exchanges, which have shaped their common heritage, their history and their values. In 2004, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was launched with the commitment to work together in key areas, including the promotion of democracy, rule of law, equality between women and men, respect for human rights and social cohesion. The revised ENP in 2015 aims to build more effective partnerships between the EU and its neighbors in order to create a more stable political, socio-economic and security European neighborhood. The paradigm towards a stabilization-based environment has been favoured by the EU. This approach, which emphasizes resilience and to a large extent security, is considered a regressive measure for the achievement of prosperity and peace in the region based on the primacy of respect for human rights and democratization

### The role attributed to civil society

Strengthening the "dimension of civil society" within the ENP has been reaffirmed by the Commission, the Council and Parliament. The need for a stronger and more structured involvement of civil society in the political dialogue with the EU emerged as a result of the 2011 uprisings and new priorities in the region. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have a valuable role to play in identifying priorities for action and in promoting and monitoring the implementation of the ENP in the region. They are indeed considered as key actors in the promotion of good governance. The EU's willingness to take into account the demands of civil society in the region has been transposed in different ways into its internal and external policies. Despite all the initiatives, relations between the EU and the South still face serious challenges in most countries in the region.

### MAJALAT: a space for structured dialogue between the EU and civil society

In this context, the EU has initiated a structured dialogue with civil society of the Southern Neighborhood countries in order to strengthen the cooperation in the political decision-making process in a consultative manner. In particular, the process of structured dialogue between the EU and the civil society of the southern Mediterranean began in Brussels in 2014 with the first edition of the structured dialogue called Southern Neighborhood Civil Society Forum. The dialogue was organized for 4 years by the European Union. Nevertheless, one of the main recommendations of the last civil society dialogue held in 2017 was to advocate for the creation of a regional hub for a structured dialogue organised by and for civil society itself - while ensuring coordination with the EU institutions. The result took the form of a civil society initiative - co-financed by the European Commission (DG NEAR) - aimed at creating spaces for constructive dialogue between civil society organisations, trade unions, social movements, academics from both sides of the Mediterranean. This initiative, called MAJALAT, was launched in February 2018 for three years. Majalat's uniqueness lies in the fact that its main organizers are networks of civil society organizations from the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean.

### Who we are



The Consortium carrying the initiative is composed of six regional networks of civil society: the Arab NGOs Network for Development (ANND), the Arab Confederation of Trade Unions (ATUC), the Euromed France Network (REF), EuroMed Rights (EMR), Forum des Alternatives Maroc (FMAS) and SOLIDAR. Six other organizations in the network are part of the project's advisory committee: the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), Transparency International (TI), Disabled People's International, the Arab Campaign for Education for All, the Maghreb Migration Observatory and the League for Citizenship.

## 2019 activity cycle

Majalat's activities are conceived as a participatory and inclusive bottom-up process that, through an annual cycle of activities, integrates CSO policy analysis and recommendations into political dialogues with the European institutions that take place each year in the regional civil society forum: the Brussels Civil Society Forum.

The cycle of activities for this second year of implementation began with the organization of thematic workshops (TW) and a youth workshop:

- Migration, Social and Climate Justice and Security in Casablanca (March 29, 2019)
- Economic and social rights in Beirut (6-7 April 2019)
- Youth in Tunis (April 24, 2019)
- Good governance and the rule of law in Lecce (16-17 May 2019)
- South Seminar in Tunis (3-4 September 2019)

Whether during the thematic workshops, first recommendations addressed to the EU were developed, the youth workshop highlighted thematic sub-priorities and recommendations from young people. Subsequently, a "South Seminar" was held in Tunis on 3 and 4 September. Its objective was to collectively re-discuss and validate, alongside new CSOs, previous recommendations. Independent experts from civil society then provided analytical work to make these recommendations more operational and applicable. Between October and November, national workshops were organised by CSOs and funded following a call for projects. The results and priorities from the activity cycle were used to prepare the Brussels Civil Society Forum.

## The Brussels Civil Society Forum

The Brussels Civil Society Forum is the closing event of the annual business cycle. This second two-day event brings together around 180 representatives of CSOs and EU representatives. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss the results of previous activities, focusing on the implementation of the recommendations made during the 2019 activities, and discussing their feasibility in the framework of external European policies and mechanisms.

## The participants

The majority of participants represent CSOs from the Southern Neighbourhood countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Egypt), CSO representatives based in Europe who work in the region or on issues that have an impact on the region. Representatives of the European Union, EU Member States and the European Parliament as well as other relevant regional stakeholders were also invited, depending on the topics to be discussed.



In particular, nearly 50 % of the participants present at the Forum already attended at least one Majalat activity. About 40 participants come from European organisations working on the same themes in both Europe and the Mediterranean. The profile of participants from civil society is varied: grassroots activists, trade unions representatives, human rights defenders, social movement activists, EU policy experts. Many representatives of the European institutions are also invited to the Forum. Particular attention is paid to gender parity, as well as the presence of young people (under 35 years of age) and people from vulnerable groups.

### Priority themes

The priority themes covered by this initiative are: good governance and the rule of law, security and countering violence, migration, social and climate justice, economic development and social dialogue and, as a cross-cutting thematic, youth. Each year, for each theme, one or more entry points are identified. The discussions and recommendations are therefore focused on the specific entry points chosen. It should be noted that youth priorities in the sub-themes and their recommendations will need to be brought forward and discussed at the Forum.

### Themes and Entry Points for the 2019 Cycle

- **Good governance and the rule of law**
  - a) Fighting corruption
  - b) Shrinking space for civil society
  
- **Security and countering violence**
  - a) how are human rights addressed in association and partnership agreements: the role of civil society in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in EU programs / policies and the respect for human rights
  - b) breaches of human security, discrimination / violation of freedom of conscience
  - c) the role of women and youth in security policies
  
- **Migration**
  - a) Social Protection and Migrants' Rights
  - b) The level of engagement of the civil society in bilateral discussions on the issue
  
- **Justice sociale et climatique**
  - a) Defining a policy approach to be adopted by civil society
    - Correlation between climate and social justice
    - Aid and Climate change
    - Trade & Investment and climate change
    - The need for a coherent Legal Framework
    - The importance of Civil Society engagement in the sector.
  
- **Economic development and social dialogue**
  - a) Private sector role
  - b) Trade agreements and investment plans



➤ **Youth**

- a) Promotion of freedom of movement for young people (workers, students, travelers)
- b) Focus on mobility programs for young people
- c) Support employment and vocational training
- d) Focus on education
- e) Social protection of vulnerable groups, particularly with regard to sexual and reproductive health

*For more information on priority themes and entry points, please refer to the thematic concept notes.*

### The main objectives of the Forum

The Brussels Civil Society Forum aims to contribute to the creation of a forum for exchange between civil society organizations and EU representatives on issues that are essential for South-South civil society and for the EU. Ensuring a safe space for participants to express themselves freely and to openly discuss current challenges and opportunities in the southern Mediterranean is at the heart of this initiative. During the Forum, EU officials and representatives of civil society will have the opportunity to discuss the content and possible implementation of the recommendations resulting from the 2019 business cycle.



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