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Table of Contents



1. Foreword	7
2. List of abbreviations	8
3. Background, methodology and participants	10
4. Introduction	14
5. The Opening session	16
6. Plenary session: Reality and dialogue of civil societies and social movements on both sides of the Mediterranean	18
7. Plenary session: The 5 themes of MAJALAT in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027: analysis of the civil society and the implications for the Southern Neighbourhood	21
8. Plenary session: Summary of recommendations from the 5 MAJALAT themes	24
9. Plenary session: Presentation of sub granting initiatives funded by MAJALAT and their contribution to structured dialogue	41
10. Plenary session: Presentation of conclusions by parallel discussion group	44
11. Plenary Session: How to strengthen the structured dialogue, ensure effective monitoring of joint commitments and sustain the process started	47
12. Plenary session: Closing remarks	50



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1. Foreword

For too long, the Southern Neighbourhood has been perceived as synonymous of political, economic and social instability. The post-revolutionary backlash in the Arab countries has replaced the fervour of the 2011 uprisings. However, protests and demonstrations are now, once again, underway. The central feature of the mobilisations now taking place, with varying intensity, in a growing number of countries of the region, is the huge public frustration with failed, corrupt, inefficient and authoritarian rulers who are incapable of guaranteeing decent levels of wellbeing and security for their citizens. Youth unemployment in the region, which was the highest in the world at the time of 2009 financial crisis and has grown over the past decade more than anywhere else - according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) - represents another important driver of the current protests.

The substantial difference with previous episodes of grassroots mobilisation, it that the more recent protest movements have been, and continue to be crosscutting, leaderless, young, spontaneous (emerging from civil society itself) and peaceful.

Following the societal awakening in the Arab world in 2011, the EU's strategic response to the momentous changes in the southern neighbourhood came with the strategic review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) released in May 2011. The revision, among other things, aimed at ensuring an increased involvement of civil society actors. 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 been recognized as having 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 and human rights respect. 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.

On the other hand, however, 2015 ENP revision represented a shift towards a more realist approach which led to a greater emphasis on stability and stabilization (in security and economic terms). Concerns have been raised about the diminished level of political priority and attention that the EU gives to Human Rights, democratisation and civil society space in the last ENP revision.

In order to strengthen the cooperation with civil society of the Southern Neighborhood countries, the EU has initiated a structured regional dialogue in 2014. 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. This second edition of the Brussels Civil Society Forum is the closing event of the MAJALAT activity cycle and represents an important moment for civil society actors to express themselves freely and to openly discuss current challenges and opportunities in the southern Mediterranean.

In the following pages, the main outcomes of the two-day discussions taking place in the framework of the Brussels Civil Society Forum.

2. List of abbreviations

ANHRI	Arab Network for Human Rights Information	EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ANND	Arab NGOs Network for Development	ECSFAP	European Commission Sustainable Finance Action Plan
ATUC	Arab Trade Union Confederation	EEAS	European External Action Service
CCERSS	Centre Chercheurs d'Etudes et de Recherches en Sciences Sociales	EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
CIHRS	Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies	EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development plus
CRMW	Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families	EIB	The European Investment Bank
CS	Civil society(ies)	EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
CSO	Civil society organisation	EMR	EuroMed Rights
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement	ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
DFI	Development Finance Institution	FMAS	Forum des Alternatives Maroc
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development	GNI	Gross National Income
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations	IcSP	Instrument contributing to stability and peace
		ILO	International Labour Organisation
		MDB	Multilateral Development Bank

MFF	Multiannual financial framework
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NS	Neighbourhood South
ODA	Official Development Aid
REF	Réseau Euromed France

SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SMPs	South Mediterranean Partners
TI	Transparency International
TW	Thematic Workshop
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WHO	World Health Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation





3. Background, methodology and participants

The MAJALAT initiative is part of an ongoing process of exchange and 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 and academics from both sides of the Mediterranean. This initiative, called Majalat, was launched in February 2018 for three years. Majalat is an Arabic word which refers to "spaces, opportunities, fields and domains". The uniqueness of this initiative lies in the fact that its main organizers are networks of civil society organizations from the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean.

The overall objective of the action is to reinforce regional dialogue between civil society organisations in the Southern Mediterranean Countries, but also between CSOs in the EU and the Neighbourhood South (NS) and to address key social and political challenges in the region and in EU-NS relations through engaging citizens, including young men and women, in policy-making processes relevant to civil society, EU institutions, regional entities and authorities.

Three specific objectives are to:

1. Facilitate knowledge and information transfer about EU policies to civil society in the NS, and to peers in the EU, by engaging in monitoring and review processes enhancing citizens' possibility for engagement and political participation in matters important to the EU and the NS.
2. Promote an enabling environment for civil society through establishing an inclusive, safe and multi-stakeholder dialogue of civil society organisations with a wider spectrum of EU interlocutors and other regional stakeholders integrating new social actors, social movements, youth and women groups in this dialogue.
3. Provide sustainable and interactive internet and face-to-face platforms that facilitate well-informed dialogue through learning, capacity building and information sharing regarding civil society policy, previous and ongoing initiatives, training opportunities, et.al.

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), Réseau Euromed France (REF), EuroMed Rights (EMR), Forum des Alternatives Maroc (FMAS) and SOLIDAR. Six other organizations are part of the project's advisory committee: the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), Transparency International (TI), Disabled People's International (Maghreb Office), the Arab Campaign for Education for All, the Maghreb Migration Observatory and the Syrian League for Citizenship.

3.1. Priority themes and activities

The priority themes covered by this initiative are: good governance and the rule of law, security and countering violence, migration and mobility, 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 Brussels Civil Society Forum.

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 taking place each year in a 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)

3.2. 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 are coming 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.

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 2019. Its objective was to collectively re-discuss and validate, alongside new CSOs, previous recommendations. Independent experts from the 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 is the closing event of the annual activity cycle. This second two-day event brings together around 180 representatives of CSOs and EU representatives. Participants had 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.

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. Among the 180 participants who participated to the Forum, 45% of them were women and the average age was around 42, with 37% of young participants with less than 35 years old.

3.3. The main objectives of the Forum

The objective of the Forum is 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.

Specific objectives of the 2019 Brussels Civil Society Forum include: the creation of a regional platform for exchange and networking for civil

society, the deepening of the discussion around the recommendations issued from the 2019 activity cycle and the identification of possible ways of implementation of the operationalizable recommendations.

During the Forum, EU officials and representatives of civil society had the opportunity to discuss the content and possible implementation of the recommendations resulting from the 2019 activity cycle.

3.4. Communication & visibility

As part of the communication strategy (validated by DG Near), trilingual communication tools were produced to reach out online platforms and traditional media (before, during and after the Forum). A social media package (hashtag, visuals, quote cards and video messages) was distributed in advance to partners to increase the Forum online visibility. It was used by some partners, including DG-Near communication service.

A fully refunded version of the Majalat website, with social media integration, was launched before the Forum. Offering regular and updated information about the Forum, Majalat video contest and other project-related events. It was presented at the Forum as the key comprehensive source of informative, didactic and sustainable content for boosting the exchange of information between concerned stakeholders and enlarging the target audiences in the future.

The Forum plenary sessions and the video contest award event were livestreamed (website and Facebook) and social media (Facebook, twitter, instagram) fed with information, quotes, pictures and stories. 7 very short professional video clips covering plenary and thematic sessions were produced and released immediately on social media. 2 longer videos, covering the Forum and the event, were also produced, as well a professional photo coverage, posted on the website.

To get around the difficulty of getting press coverage on the Forum itself, the Majalat video contest and the young laureate filmmakers were the indirect way to attract media outlets to cover the Forum, with at the same time a positive and creative focus on civil society field action. As expected, all media coverage (see press clipping doc...) focused on the video contest and the award winners to introduce the Forum.



4. Introduction

The following pages summarize the proceedings of the Brussels Civil Society Forum that took place on 2-3 December 2019 within the framework of the regional structured dialogue between the EU and civil society from the Southern Mediterranean region.

The meeting was the second since the EU handed over the organisation of the dialogue process to civil society organisations in early 2018. It gathered 180 CSO representatives, mostly from the Southern shores of the region, and 30 representatives of the EU Commission.

Every year, a cycle of national and regional workshops and seminars is completed. These discussed a range of issues and produced a number of recommendations to be fed into the dialogue with the EU under the five thematic headlines of Majalat: 'Good governance and rule of law'; 'security and the fight against violence'; 'migration and mobility'; 'economic development and social dialogue' and 'climate and social justice'.

The topics that participants dealt with during the discussions are complex and challenging in many political, economic, social and cultural ways. The region is the scene for cruel (civil) wars, situations of occupation and entrenchments of totalitarian States, while massive, peaceful and popular protest movements with yet unclear outcomes are giving hope for peaceful political transitions in other places.

This situation – but also the fact that the region has become a climate hot spot at risk of desertification and water shortage – largely shaped the discussions which were reflecting some of the most salient developments and civil society concerns in the region. Thus, main issues of the two days debates dealt with the continued and intensified occupation of the Palestinian Territory by Israel and the cruel (civil) wars in Syria and Libya respectively. The popular protest movements taking place in Algeria and Lebanon and in other parts of the Arab region, and worldwide, triggered reflections about the role of civil society in relation to social movements.

Closely related to the latter topic, there were discussions about the violations of economic and social rights in the region and the need to develop new economic models that ensure social protection and social justice. The need to fight economic and political corruption was also a recurrent theme of the debates.

The fact that the region is the scene of some of the world's largest forced migrant flows also largely impacted on the debates that revealed a deep concern about EU policies in this field and about restrictions in people's freedom of movement, in particular that of youth. The fact that EU and its member states' migration policies are largely handled from a security angle at the expense of human rights respect was a recurrent issue raised by participants at the Brussels Civil Society Forum.



But also, the shrinking spaces for civil society was an issue of high concern. In this connection, participants condemned the harassment of civil society activists working in solidarity with forced migrants and asylum seekers, and expressed concerns for the attacks against environmental activists, an emerging group of human rights defenders that struggle to promote stricter protection of the environment and to restrict exploitation by polluting extractive industries.

The Brussels Civil Society Forum took place in a context where the EU Commission is negotiating and finalising a new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) that merges a range of hitherto separate financial instruments into a large single one, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

The NDICI became another main topic of the Brussels Civil Society Forum raising questions about how to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of the MFF; but also, on how to ensure wide and open consultations with civil society in the final phases of MFF negotiations and when implementation starts in 2021.

The Brussels Civil Society Forum happened to take place at the exact same time when the new EU Commission took up office, a fact that was

seen by Brussels Civil Society Forum participants as a window of opportunities in particular when it comes to climate change issues and questions of job creation.

Therefore, the Brussels Civil Society Forum was followed-up by a meeting between Majalat board members and the new Commissioner for the Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi. The Majalat representatives informed the Commissioner about the outcomes of the Brussels Civil Society Forum, and he expressed his support for the current process on behalf of the new Commission and for the future of the structured dialogue between the civil society and the European Union.

What follows, is a report from the rich debates that took place during the Brussels Civil Society Forum, in a form that best can be characterised as a catalogue of opinions and recommendations taking the temperature of civil society concerns about the EU's Southern Neighbourhood during 2019.

The report highlights the main points raised during the debates and collects a series of recommendations brought forward during the meeting. These will feed into the 2020 Majalat cycle of meetings and help deepening the dialogue between civil society and the EU.



5. The Opening session

Opening session:

It has been suggested that Majalat should work to induce hope in a better future, which the citizens of the region deserve, rather than focusing exclusively on negative trends such as the rise of nationalism. Only hope for a better future can guarantee stability and counter politics of hate and violence that are spreading in the North and the South.

The role of youth has been emphasized: these should become an integral part of all Majalat activities. Young people should not be considered a separate category but as the real drivers of future change. Disregarding this fact would be to disconnect from reality.

The need to identify synergies and complementarities between civil society and the EU has been highlighted. Majalat should be an instrument to help civil society understand the strategies and actions of the EU, and to let CSO concerns and expectations become known to the institutions. In this way, the EU would also better understand the impact of its policies on the Southern neighbours, which may help it not to be perceived, as currently a supporter of the regimes in place.

CSOs ought to build their work on the same values of democracy and equality that they request from the authorities and they should ensure that mechanisms are in place to renew the leadership of their organisations. CSOs in the South should also develop synergies with civil society in Europe.

Finally, it has been recalled that young people in many countries of the Southern Mediterranean region are suffering from inequality, oppression and torture due to the colour of their skin, their sexual orientation, gender or religion. It is for these that Majalat meets to better protect them and to make their voices heard.

The Brussels Civil Society Forum was initiated by an opening session chaired by

- Ms Hala Qubbaj-Saleh, Program Director, Arab Campaign for Education.

Panellists included

- Mr Wadih Al-Asmar, EuroMed Rights President
- Mr Maciej Popowski, Deputy Director-General for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR)
- Ms Dilyana Slavova, President of the External Relation Section, European Economic and Social Committee

The opening remarks were followed by a presentation of the Majalat initiative, the Forum agenda and expected results by Mr Yon Janssen, MAJALAT Project Director, and a presentation of the Majalat digital platform by Ms Natacha David, MAJALAT Communication Coordinator, Arab Trade Union Confederation

The following pages summarise the opening speeches



European Commission intervention:

It has been noted that the Forum was perfectly timed to take place at the exact start of the working period for the new Commission.

Annual meetings such as the Majalat Brussels Civil Society Forum are therefore important events that really matter for the Commission and that the themes were well chosen.

The EU is concerned with the fact that spaces for civil society are shrinking in the region and noted that people are taking to the streets as in Egypt in September, in Lebanon, in Algeria but also further away in Iraq and Iran. These demonstrations are part of a global trend as people are also demonstrating in Hong Kong, South America, etc.

The EU believes that people should have the right to express their concerns in a peaceful matter, and that their expectations are legitimate. As such, the EU is trying to align with people's expectations in its bilateral relations with its South Mediterranean Partners (SMPs).

Priorities of the van der Leyen Commission have been highlighted, as well as its concerns for

anti-discrimination, equality and inclusion, and it has been mentioned that these are horizontal concerns that will be extended to EU external relation policies. The importance of having climate and social justice on the agenda has been recalled. The Mediterranean region is a climate hot spot, and this is a top priority for the EU. A green deal will be one of the first political initiative taken by van der Leyen in the coming weeks.

It has been recalled that messages coming out of the Brussels Civil Society Forum are welcomed in order to be shared with superiors and be further discussed.

In conclusion, EECS representative welcomed the participants to the premises of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Hosting Majalat has become a good tradition, in particular as the work of Majalat is very relevant to the EESC. The Committee is at all the times ready to host events with CSOs in the region. EECS representative emphasized the need to fight for more CSO spaces on both sides of the Mediterranean before wishing the participants fruitful debates over the coming days.

6. Plenary session: Reality and dialogue of civil societies and social movements on both sides of the Mediterranean

The second plenary session was moderated by:

• Ms Lilia Rebai, Director of Dialogue with Civil Society, EuroMed Rights
Speakers were:

- Mr Messaoud Romdhani, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
- Mr Conny Reuter, Secretary General, SOLIDAR
- Mr Nizar Hassan, Lebanese Activist and Researcher on Social Movements
- Ms Nathalie Mehdi, Program Officer, Réseau Euromed France
- Mr Ahmed Berkia, Disabled Peoples' International
- Ms Touriya Lahrech, Arab Trade Union Confederation

The Session aimed to provide a picture of the situation of civil societies (CS) on both side of the Mediterranean and in this way initiate the Majalat discussions about the main challenges and problems encountered by CSOs in the region - particularly the inclusion of young people, women and people with disabilities

During the opening remarks, the importance of recognizing the fact that civil societies face different situations in the region has been emphasized. Nevertheless, common negative trends in the region related to economic liberalization and security management of migration raised.

The strength of the CSOs, and the movements they represent, are because they bring all rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, into their activities. Finally, the importance of civil society groups, NGOs, trade unions and feminist groups joining efforts has been recognized. Moreover, promoting solidarity between CSOs in the region South-South and North South is fundamental for increasing their effectiveness.

Problems faced by civil society in Europe have been raised, in particular the weakening of the rule of law in Hungary and Poland and the criminalisation of migrant solidarity in Italy and France. There is a need to continuously fighting for the maintenance of civic and public spaces.

Concerns have been raised about growing inequalities within the EU as well and the importance of highlighting the indivisibility of rights. In this connection, it has been questioned whether civil society always represent progressive movements. Hence, the importance when dialoguing with the EU to clearly state that Majalat speaks from a position of rule of democratic law. Finally, it has been recommended to the Brussels Civil Society Forum to explore the windows of opportunities created by the fact that there is a new Commission in place.



Afterwards, recent social movements have been characterised as popular uprisings that include people who usually are not politically active. The movements are not only Southern phenomena but are effects of globalisation, inequality and poverty. It is important to bring economic affairs back to the public scene. Regrets have been expressed with respect to the fact that the EU sustains government policies that operate in support of the economic and political elite, i.e. in the opposite sense of people's demands.

The role of Trade Unions has been explored through the example of the Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC) that defends public service, socio-economic rights and members' access to decision-making. The cause of women is among its priorities including promoting women in decision-making positions. Broadening the public, political participation of women is crucial and ATUC works with CSOs on measures to combat harassment and violence against women. It also crucial to make women's networks and the work of female trade unionist more visible.

Youth's role has been evoked during this session. As a matter of fact, youth, in the North and the South, share common challenges. One of these is to involve youth in the shaping of EU policies and to give them the opportunity to present their recommendations to EU institutions.

The EU should be more aware about how youth is affected by a number of EU policies. Young people in fact should be in the forefront of mainstreaming youth matters into EU policies, in particular in the South where youth constitutes the by far largest population group. The challenge of Majalat is to identify youth specific priorities and relevant policymakers with whom to discuss these matters.

Subsequently, the Disabled People International has been presented. This organisation works for the promotion of People with disabilities' rights. In this framework, the World Health Organisation's (WHO) world report has been recalled for stating that people living with a handicap constitute the largest minority whose basic rights are the most abused. Hence, the importance to raise awareness that fundamental rights also apply to people with disabilities.

Marginalising people with disabilities and neglecting their productive capacity has negative effects on economic development. People with disabilities should be enabled to participate in societal dealings. This implies having access to education and to any policy dialogue. In particular, they should take part in defining the basic services they require. This would place them in a better position to play a role in society. Mainstreaming concerns of people with disabilities in the Arab region is a major cause.

Majalat should insist on the inclusion of people with disabilities in 2030 SDG plans and bi-lateral cooperation plans.

In the debates that followed the presentation several points were raised referring to the social movements in the region:

- People are demonstrating in the streets due to the crisis of democracy. In the South, there is a lack of democratic institutions while social movements in Europe contest the functioning of the democratic institutions. Citizens need ways to access a democratic dialogue. In this regard, there is a need to rethink the concept of classical civil society in relation to social movements.
- Majalat should discuss how the current social movements could bring real changes, as the movements are not necessarily progressive or pro-democracy. In this regard, there is a need to work against neo-liberal policies including their impact on the weakening of the State.
- Current grassroots movements in for example Algeria are asking for free and democratic elections. There is a need for regime changes, as the current political and economic models have brought no development at all. There is also a need for more interaction between North and South in this regard
- Social movements are different from traditional CSOs or Trade Unions and official institutions fail to grasp them. Hence, it is important to understand how to arrive at structured political dialogue with these and in this regard question the adequacy of political structures in countries of the region.

But a range of other topics were also raised:

- Despite the fact that each country in the region has its specificity, the countries also have issues in common such as the more or less same neo-patrimonial regimes. It is important to join forces to promote the rule of law and make the governments respect it.
- The region is facing social and cultural discrimination that leads to further migration. CSO activists face increased imprisonments and there is a need to make their voices heard in political decision-making.

- Lack of trust is pervading the societies, its youth and the CSOs. Hence, there is a need to draft new road maps on how to strengthen advocacy and networks in order to be in line with current changes.
- There is a need for CSOs and decision makers to recognise the major role played by independent trade unions and integrate these more in civil society dealings.
- As well as including people with disabilities people, it is crucial to work with LGBT people and their organisations. They are marginalised and criminalised in many parts of the region.
- There is a need to revisit how youth is apprehended today and why it is less inclined to take part in elections. Youth are at the heart of civil society, and drivers of political change, and should fully participate in the existing political structures and election.
- Youth and women were at the centre of the Arab Spring movements, and we should make sure that they are not marginalised. However, democracy is about much more than participating in elections. Women in countries like Tunisia are taking to the streets because they are afraid of going back to older times and afraid that the country drifts towards conservatism.
- Finally, participants emphasised the importance role of arts, cinema, painting and the need to make use of artists' creativity.

In conclusion, the moderator thanked the speakers and participants for their contributions and welcomed that the debates of the Brussels Civil Society Forum had started in a rich and diverse way reflecting the concerns and situation of CSOs in the region.

7. Plenary session: The 5 themes of MAJALAT in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027: analysis of the civil society and the implications for the Southern Neighbourhood

The session was moderated by

- Ms Cecilia Gondard, Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer, EURODAD

Speakers were:

- Ms Armelle Lidou, Head of Unit A.5. Multiannual Financial Framework, Programming and Evaluation, DG NEAR
- Ms Zuzanna Sladkova, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, CONCORD
- Ms Zahra Bazzi, Programs Manager, Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)

The purpose of this session was to identify challenges in the future EU financial programming related to the five themes of Majalat.



CONCORD intervention:

The session started with the presentation of the work that had been carried out by the EU Commission to merge a range of hitherto separate financial instruments into the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). The idea is to have one instrument that would give the EU Commission greater flexibility, and hence efficiency, to tackle challenges. In this sense, CSOs in the Southern Neighbourhood will also be benefitting from the instrument. The NDICI will have three main components. The geographic pillar will provide an allocation of €22 Billion for the neighbourhood policy. The thematic pillar will include the human rights and democracy programme, the CSO programme, as well as the instrument contributing to stability and peace (IcSP). Finally, there will be a rapid response pillar with no previous allocations.

Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) intervention:

Afterwards, it has been recalled by the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) that the region is plagued by conflicts within and surrounding the Southern Neighbourhood. The situation in some countries brings back memories of the Arab Spring revolutions of 2011, in particular the popular protest movements in Sudan, Algeria, Lebanon and Iraq. All these protests take place despite an overall context of increasingly shrinking civic spaces and extreme restrictions on freedoms and public liberties.

There is a need for change in policies and approaches to development. Business as usual by national authorities and international bodies is not an option any more as people are aspiring for a new social contract based on democratic and human rights-based values.

There is a need to initiate participatory processes that include civil society, social movements, youth groups, women groups in dialogues about pressing political, economic and social issues, and international partners, including the EU, should play a major role in supporting the transition processes.

The NDICI will fit the 5 themes of Majalat and currently the work is focused on preparing the pre-programming of the neighbourhood envelope.

Partnership with CSOs will be key when implementing the instrument. They will be consulted with regard to both the preparation of programming guidelines and the individual programming for a given country. The participants have been encouraged to take part in the consultation rounds that will start around February 2020 and in the second round of discussions in May 2020/early summer. The intervention has been concluded by stressing that the level of funding is comparable to the one under the Development Cooperation and that CSOs will be key for the implementation of the instrument starting in 2021.

On this background, whether the new multiannual financial framework presented by EU representative has been questioned as an appropriate instrument. In fact, spending on migration and borders will increase significantly in the MFF, as well as spending on security and youth.

Another aspect of the MFF is the increase in unallocated funds meant to boost budget flexibility. The increased flexibility will give more power to the European Commission as it can decide solely on spending. This begs the question whether the instrument will lead to an increase of spending on short-term goals instead of on long-term objectives. There is also the risk that the mechanism will undermine the democratic procedures of the Union as the European Parliament's role in overseeing budget spending will be reduced.

Concerns have been raised about the fact that the European Council Summit in June 2018 supported disembarkation platforms in the Southern Neighbourhood as a solution to

stop the flow of migrants. Focus should rather be on tackling root causes of migrations. A hard crack down on migrant smugglers might do more harm on the people desperately trying to reach European shores. Hence, it has been recommended that the EU should 1) work on the root causes of migration and go beyond short-sighted migration management while including policy interventions on sustainable development. 2) EU migration-related actions should be human rights-compliant. 3) EU funds should be allocated with no conditionality requiring partner countries to cooperate on migration management, including return schemes.

Concerns have been furthermore raised with regard to the fact that the amount for the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) has not been increased in the new budget, and that funds for stability and peace have decreased significantly. Also, the support to CSOs is not boosted. EU member States are supposed to cover the unallocated funds, but there is no guarantee that this will happen.

The private sector plays a growing role in EU foreign policy, and for the development of Agenda 2030 through tools like Public-Private-Partnerships and blended financing. There is a need to work on a legal framework for private sector accountability and responsibility. Private sector investments must not negatively affect local economic actors or increase inequalities.

It remains unclear what exactly the objectives of the EU in the region will be and that it is worrying that security dominates the discourse of the EU.

EU intervention:

An overview of the MFF process has been presented including key dates while emphasizing that 1 January 2021 is the start date for the new financial instrument. CSOs engagement in the final phases of elaborating the MFF both at central level in Brussels and in relation to the local EU delegations will be central. It has been pointed out that it is fundamental for the participants to work in coalitions, to contact relevant ministries, EU Delegation and EU member state embassies, and ask for attendance of consultations organised by the EU.

The MFF should set more ambitious and comprehensive 50% target for climate and environment relevant actions. At least 85% of Official Development Aid (ODA) funded programmes should have gender equality as a significant or principal objective.

Poverty eradication and sustainable development should be at the core of the NDICI. The criteria for the allocation of funds should be fair, objective and reflect the multidimensional causes of poverty while migration should be approached from a development perspective rather than from security concerns.

Interventions from the floor mainly dealt with the migration issue:

- Money originating from the EU was given to the Libyan mafia that puts migrants in jail to stop them from leaving Libya by boat. It is therefore crucial to establish secure legal migration routes.
- By providing funds to coastguards, the EU implements narrow sighted policies.
- Thousands have drowned at sea this year due to the EU closing of its borders. Repeated recommendations by CSOs have not led to real changes. EU policies contributed to build a fortress EU while the EU should be a beacon of hope.
- The Southern Mediterranean countries do not need development aid as such. The main problems stem from inequalities and from the fact that governments are not democratic.
- There is a need to reinforce peace and put an end to arms buying and smuggling.

In conclusion, it has been recalled that the EU regularly commission evaluations of its work. In February 2020 it will conduct an evaluation of its assistance to Tunisia and later to Morocco to look at the last ten years' EU cooperation with these countries. This is a useful exercise helping to make critical assessments and adjustments of

EU instruments and programmes. The findings will be used to strengthen the implementation of the NDICI.

Moreover, the financial balance between Southern and Eastern support will be kept at the current 2/3 to the Southern Neighbourhood and 1/3 to the Eastern. Funds related to migration will address root problems although the Commission had difficult conversation with the European Parliament and the Council that wish higher amounts are allocated to restricting migration.

The session has been closed by stressing the importance for civil society of discussing the MFF and the NDICI, also during the Brussels Civil Society Forum, and in the future be part of its set-up and implementation.

8. Plenary session: Summary of recommendations from the 5 MAJALAT themes

The session was moderated by:

- Ms Serena Abi Khalil, Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)
- Mr Sergio Bassoli, SOLIDAR

Presentations:

- Mr Marc Schade-Poulsen, Consultant and Researcher, Roskilde University
- Mr Robin Madoré, Youth Programs Officer, Réseau Euromed France (REF)

The purpose of the session was to prepare the work of the thematic working groups sessions of the following day, by providing the content of each theme and the 'entry points' of civil society recommendations into European policies.

The first presentation aimed at summarizing the debates that have taken place during Majalat meetings in 2019 in preparation of the dialogue between EU and civil society representatives at the Brussels Civil Society Forum . The debates had been rich and the recommendations numerous and diverse. Therefore, these had been merged into one synthesis of main concerns that came out of the debates, and the presentation of the detailed recommendations were left for the workshops.



It became clear from reading the outcomes of the 2019 regional workshops that civil society organisations operate in very difficult and volatile contexts. Therefore, they necessarily speak with many voices and engage in a variety of pressing and multifaceted issues at local and national level. CSO everyday priorities rarely seem to match or respond exactly to specific EU policies and programming exercises. Nor do they necessarily have time and resources to think about these and how they fit into a regional context.

Moreover, the EU defines the geographical framework of the dialogue. This geo-political entity, the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, does not necessarily match the geographies of the political, economic and social processes affecting people's lives.

It has been further argued that the dialogue between CSOs and the EU is asymmetrical as relatively small civil society groups face an intergovernmental union representing some of the most powerful and affluent societies in the world. Adding to this is the fact that the EU's political decision-making is complex, since it has to balance between a multitude of interests of EU member States, the EU Parliament, different directorates within the EU Commission, etc. In this set-up, the policies that



reach civil society groups are often the outcome of the lowest common denominators. Hence, EU policies become difficult to influence and the choice of recommendations targeting these are not obvious. This is further complicated by the fact that they have to address a regional context rather than those national or bi-lateral frameworks to which both the EU and civil society are more accustomed.

Nevertheless, the 2019 Majalat meetings had revealed a genuine commitment to the dialogue process by civil society and EU Commission representatives alike. This is a promising and a good starting point for this year's Brussels Civil Society Forum, where the outcomes of the 2019 workshops and South seminar will feed into the dialogue.

Subsequently, the report issued from the youth workshops¹ has been summarised. The Youth Workshops discussions aimed at feeding elements from this work into the debates of the Brussels Civil Society Forum

Life conditions of youth around the Mediterranean are not different from those of the rest of the population, they are rather indicative of these. Looking into the situation of youth hence amounts to inquire into the situation of the citizens of the region - they are not in a 'good health'.

According to the youth workshops organised within the framework of Majalat and according to different inquiries into the situation of youth in the region, it appears that their main concern revolves around the need for an economic and social dialogue, around security, mobility and migration and around more specific issues related to education, employment and health including reproductive health.

1. 'Make the Structured Dialogue meaningful for South-Mediterranean Youth - Opportunities and recommendations for addressing youth concerns in the field of Employment, Education, Migration, Mobility, Human Security, and Sexual and Reproductive rights' written by Marta Semplici.

Youth' general recommendations to relevant EU Commission bodies and to national authorities is to make policies addressing youth more effective comprising evaluating past initiatives and use of funds addressing youth. By extension, the EU should ensure a larger participation of youth in the development of policies targeting the South, including by strengthening youth advocacy capacities.

More specifically the EU bodies should reach out to broader groups and categories of youth such as informal groups and social movements. Financial and flexible support should be adapted to the new forms of youth mobilization.

Recommendations addressing the 5 themes of Majalat mentioned the need to 1) promote employment opportunities and professional training including for women and vulnerable groups; 2) act on formal and informal education of youth and to adapt these to the labour market. 3) Finally, youth should be included in the development of EU employment programs.

The EU and governments should recognize the importance sexual health for youth and address the question of sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, reproductive health, abortions, etc., that are key to promote young people's well-being.

There is also a need to adopt new approaches to the fight against all forms of violence that are caused by the absence of rule of law and by economic policies producing unemployment. Youth lack public spaces adapted to its needs and it lacks access to decision-making positions.

Free movement of young workers, students and people should be promoted when they wish to travel. The existence of specific programs as Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps and others are welcome, but they also increase brain drain and create inequalities while affecting the right to freedom of movement by blocking those whose applications are rejected. This again leads youth to choose irregular, dangerous migration routes that mainly benefits smugglers. Hence, while enlarging access to Erasmus+, the EU should focus on initiatives related to voluntary work, professional training, twinning of universities, cultural exchange and informal education that are easier to handle and comprehend by youth.

After these presentations the moderators clarified different aspects of the next days' thematic workshops and made sure that all participants were aware about how these would proceed.

8.a. Discussion group: Good governance and rule of law

Moderation: Lilia Rebaï, EuroMed Rights

Meetings that took place under the head line of Good governance and rule of law before the Brussels Civil Society Forum had focussed on civil society spaces and the fight against corruption. The meetings showed that previous years' concern for the situation of CSOs in the region did not diminish. On the contrary.

Spaces for civil society

2019 discussions revolved around the fact that in most countries on the Southern shores of the Mediterranean, CSOs are facing heavy restrictions of their spaces for action. These restrictions are caused by authoritarian regimes, counter-terrorism approaches, anti-migration measures, conflicts and war economies, funding restrictions, lack of dialogue with governments, etc. During the debates, specific concerns were raised about the lack of freedom of association, and of resources, of Palestinian and Syrian refugee groups in the Mashreq.



There were also concerns regarding the situation in the EU, as the past years witnessed growing attacks on civil society groups; in particular CSOs that work to protect migrant and refugee rights. But CSOs in Europe also faced attacks against their freedom of expression when criticizing Israel, restrictions stemming from state of emergency measures, and cuts in financial support.

Hence, a matter of debate for this forum became how to work jointly with the EU to make the Majalat process a safe place for civil society actors at risk, in fact, establishing a regional mechanism of support to these within Majalat that would add to other EU mechanisms such as the EU Guidelines for Human Rights Defenders.

Another matter that emerged during the 2019 meetings was the issue of GoNGOs, i.e. organisations that appear to be independent and non-partisan while they in fact are supported or even created by government authorities. These pose threats to the spaces of action of independent CSOs as they infiltrate their spaces, obstruct independent CSO actions - sometimes putting these at risk - and as they compete for funds that normally are allocated to independent organisations.

Hence, a point of concern became how to counter GoNGOs influence on civil society spaces and on EU policies both at regional and national level.

Fighting corruption

In 2019, the question of corruption became an issue of growing exposure in the region and hence also of debates within the Majalat process. Corruption has detrimental impact on human rights, democracy and civil society. Inquiries indicate that countries with the least protection for press and civil society tend to have the worst rates of corruption.

The main effects of corruption on human rights are unequal availability, quality and accessibility of goods and services, the malfunctioning of institutions and public services, and weak respect for the rule of law. In some cases, state officials use anti-corruption means to suppress their enemies in flagrant violation of civil and political rights; and individuals involved in the fight against corruption are at increased risk of human rights violations and require effective protection.

Hence, the issue of fighting corruption was on the agenda of this Forum and include the following questions: How to strengthen EU actions to prevent corruption in the region? How to work on asset recovery of funds illegally transferred to Europe? How to promote whistle blower protection and to deal with the question of Golden visa schemes, i.e. the fact that rich non- EU citizens can buy EU citizenships in some countries of the Union for reasons that are not transparent?

Based on the above concerns a series of recommendations were drafted and an independent expert, active in the civil society sector in the Southern Neighbourhood countries, was tasked with refining the recommendations without altering content and political message of the discussion outcomes.



Here follows a summary of the recommendations (more details can be found in the concept notes of the Brussels Civil Society Forum):

Shrinking spaces

- **On GONGOs:** The independent nature of CSOs is at the core of the EU Communication COM(2012) 492. Therefore, EU Delegations are asked to: – engage as soon as possible in discussions with genuine CSOs to find concrete mechanisms adapted to each national context to identify GoNGOs. Conclusions thereof should feed into an updated version of EU CSO Road Maps and other internal documents on civil society.
- **On funding to Palestinian and Syrian refugee organisations:** The EU must reinforce its efforts to provide access and funding to local CSOs in Palestine and in Palestinian and Syrian Refugee camps wherever they are, as funding for these is diminishing with detrimental effect.
- **On multiannual funding:** The EEAS and EU delegations, DG DEVCO and DG NEAR should systematically and periodically make available relevant and useful information to civil society about the process of programming – from initial reflections and analyses to final decision on each multiannual programme and its financing and development – e.g.: announce opportunities/venues for civil society to engage, in a timely manner.
- **The NDICI instrument:** Human rights, civil society participation and gender must be increasingly mainstreamed in each external instrument and priority of the EU under the new MFF. By extension, CSOs should be able to monitor the instruments and policies related to the fight against terrorism, security and export of weapons in the Neighbourhood South region on a regular and transparent basis.
- **On shrinking space:** Majalat proposes to look into the possibility of conducting a pilot project to assess the country by country situation regarding Shrinking Space or to develop a precise plan for a report to be drafted during a next phase of Majalat.
- **Crypto funding:** Majalat proposes that the EU considers and assess the feasibility of using crypto money in countries where access to funding by local CSOs is restricted due to legal provisions (especially in undemocratic context).
- **Fiscal standards:** The EU should apply the same fiscal standards for grants to governments and NGOs in relation to VAT.
- **On conditionality regarding human rights violations committed by public institutions and governments:** The EU is encouraged to use a progressive set of sanctions starting by a ‘less for less approach’ which includes to cut 10% of country envelopes as a political signal sent to the authorities before activating the more official ‘Human rights suspension clause’.

Combatting Corruption

- **On financial and audit controls:** The EU is asked to be more proactive in its financial and audit controls vis-à-vis public institutions in partner countries that channel funds from the EU. As soon as legitimate doubts exist on the side of the EU some fast control mechanism should be initiated.
- **Civil society monitoring of blended investments:** Budget support is increasingly oriented to blended investments. This approach is aligned with the domestic concept of “Green New Deal for European economies”. In this evolving context, Majalat calls the EEAS and DG NEAR to create an open space for CSOs to monitor these new modalities and concrete opportunities for civil society to take part in these mechanisms as important actors for social justice.
- **Transparency of programming:** The ongoing negotiations on instruments and next programming should be used by the EU to strengthen the implementation of monitoring tools of Neighbourhood South agreements with a specific attention to good governance of EU funds and fight against corruption through transparency vis-à-vis civil society CSOs and journalists.
- **Golden visas:** The High Representative of the EU is asked vis-à-vis its peers in the Commissioner College to push for increased good governance and transparency in the publication of the names of citizens who obtained golden visas.
- **Measures against individuals responsible for corruption:** The EEAS is invited to extend the recent EU mechanism against individuals responsible of human rights violations (which allow tracking and banning those individuals from Europe) to persons who escape their countries for corruption (once it is formally established by national authorities and justice).
- **Whistle blowers:** Contribution of civil society is fundamental in pushing governments to adopt laws to protect whistle blowers. The monitoring process of CSOs is fundamental to promote effective implementation. The EU is invited to support the work done by those organizations at national level. The new domestic EU directive on Whistle blowers provide an interesting momentum for EU Delegations to push for similar initiatives with partner countries.
- **Asset recovery:** The EU should provide technical support to partner countries when asset recovery is involved through a new EU initiative aiming at mobilizing best practices and norms existing at international level. This initiative should include standard procedures to be applied in different contexts.

The discussion group's concept note formed the basis of the discussions at the workshop that gave rise to the following comments:

- Participants provided several examples about shrinking spaces in countries like Jordan, Egypt and Algeria.
 - It was said that the recommendations are good on paper but need to be practice-oriented when being further discussed. Once agreed upon the EU should be held accountable for their implementation.
 - The question of corruption also concerns security forces, the military and Parliament. Citizens do not fully understand the notion of political corruption, hence, there needs to be a clear definition of corruption as it is a phenomenon affecting a wide range fundamental human rights.
 - Some governments use the fight against terrorism financing and money laundering to restrict the space for CSOs.
 - When it comes to shrinking space, it seems that there is a decrease in funding to safeguard human rights and democracy.
- More funds would be needed to sustain CSOs working in shrinking space contexts.
 - There is a lack of action coming from the EU about shrinking space and corruption within the EU such as in France, Poland and Hungary. This negatively affects EU relations with its neighbouring countries.
 - Majalat should become a mechanism where CSOs and the EU can find operational tools to create safe space for human rights defenders. This should be broadened to a wider range of civil society activists.
 - Whistle blowers that are persecuted and harassed should be considered human rights defenders and legislation should enforce their rights.

All in all, there was consensus about the recommendations and the points to be raised in the Plenary session of the Brussels Civil Society Forum for further debate in the continued Majalat process (see chapter 10).

8.b. Discussion group: Security and the fight against violence

Moderated by Michel Tubiana, French Human Rights League

Security and peace are crucial and constitutive for the wellbeing of citizens in the region as well as for the capacity of States to govern in the best possible way. Hence, this subject is a key point for the citizens, for CSOs and for the EU.

2019 debates about security within the framework of Majalat revealed that defining the scope of this theme is a contested matter. Therefore, the idea to use the Brussels Civil Society Forum to define points that could lead to a mutually beneficial dialogue for civil society and EU representatives.

It is tempting to reduce security dialogue to discussions of security sector reforms or initiatives aimed at addressing radicalization among youth alone. It is also tempting to understand the concept of security as embracing solely the question of military and police intervention by the state against an enemy.

Such an understanding may certainly have relevance for short-term acute actions to protect States and citizens against violent attacks. However, if the aim is to ensure the security of citizens in the mid- and long term, all aspects of human security should be addressed, i.e. how to arrive at a situation that enables people to contain or avert threats to their lives, livelihoods and human dignity.

In order to stimulate debates based on a broader understanding of what security entails the following entry points/ recommendations for the Brussels Civil Society Forum debates had been prepared:

- Promoting and developing **cultural exchanges** between all the actors of civil society and by extension favouring freedom of movement;
- The need to include **qualitative measures** for assessing quantitative support;
- The necessity to link any security collaboration with a requirement of **respect for fundamental rights**;
- Putting in place a policy and programmes to **fight against racism and discrimination** and for **freedom of conscience**;
- **Including youth in decision-making** related to security, and the fight against all forms of violence, when it comes to revise the EU Neighbourhood Policy;
- Increasing political and financial **support to youth-led initiatives** for the promotion of peace and the prevention of violent extremism.



During the introduction, it has been suggested to base the discussion on the concept note for the discussion group, and three entry points has been listed:

1. How human rights are dealt with in the association agreements and in bi-lateral partnerships: the role of civil society in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the programs of the EU and the respect for human rights in that regard.
2. Attacks on human security in the form of discrimination and violations of the rights to freedom of conscience as the situation in the South and North of the Mediterranean in this regard mirror one another
3. Addressing the role of women and youth in security policies

A main point of discussion between participants, Commission and EEAS representatives and CSOs thereafter became the understanding of what security entails.

- Participants asked to which extent the notion of human security is taken into consideration by the EU institutions. The European Neighbourhood Policy is anchored in Eurocentric notions of the need to support resilience or stabilization of the surrounding countries. These notions do not necessarily take security concerns of the citizens in these countries into account. The latter should be understood in the much broader sense of human security.
- The notion of resilience stems from psychology. Using it in the context of broader public policy making is a way of not addressing root causes of security challenges, as it leads to support people in adapting to their situations rather than looking for modes to change these.

EU officials mentioned that:

- There is a focus on the political aspect of security within the EEAS and the understanding that the security of one party may mean the insecurity of other parties. It is not only within civil society that the definition of security remains a contested issue.



- There is also an economic aspect to security, as raising a matter as a security concern may depend on the costs of doing so. It is necessary to agree on what the notion entails before deciding on what to spend on security.
- The human security concept remains marginal in EU institutions approach to security that is mainly concerned with the protection of human rights. Resilience is integrated into all EU programmes considering resilience to be closely related to trust building among people in local communities. However, no system is perfect, nor those of the EU, and the policies put in place are work-in-progress
- The Commission is careful in separating the migration item from the security item although there inevitably are common points of concern. Many suggestions by CSOs regard matters that are already in place including the concern for respect of human rights when dealing with security matters. Security remains a priority matter in the neighbourhood policy and is based on partnerships related to the fight against terrorism, conflict prevention, cyber security, i.e. a large range of fields in which civil society can and should play a role.

- Civil society actors and human rights defenders should be more actively included in questions related to the security sector. In this regard, protection of human rights defenders become key as local civil society remains one of the EU's main partners when it comes to fights violent extremism.

Participants added other items to the discussions such as

- Mentioning a successful French CSO initiative to prevent the French government from delivering 6 war vessels to Libya by bringing the matter to court.
- In Tunisia, the question of violent extremism is approached through a security angle and restrictions in people's freedoms. This leads to radicalization of groups that are subjects to these measures.
- It is important to analyse the elements of conflicts and identify key actors in these to be able to respond to the conflicts in a coordinated matter.
- The fight against discrimination and promotion of freedom of conscience are key for the promotion and protection of the security of citizens in the whole region, North and South, in particular for vulnerable groups.
- It is important to integrate the question of women rights in relation to UN resolution 13/25 that connects women with peace and security in the world.
- There is trend in North Africa towards social movements becoming less violent, i.e. a pacification of these. This may be the result of more efficient control of these by the governments.

In conclusion, three points were prioritised for further dialogue during the Brussels Civil Society Forum (see chapter 10).

8.c. Discussion group: Migration and Mobility

Moderation: Ramy Salhi, EuroMed Rights

The workshop on migration and mobility based its discussions on the outcomes of Majalat meetings in 2019. Participants in these had expressed serious concerns about EU migration policies, and a concern that EU's mode of tackling migration and refugee challenges weakens its capacity to be a lever for human rights and democracy promotion.

The EU's and the South Mediterranean countries' policies and actions are not firmly rooted in rights respect, and the Global Compact for Migration adopted in Marrakech in 2018 might represent a step-back from the provisions of the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (CRMW).

The meetings were occasions to discuss the EU's security approach and the current imbalance between security concerns and respect for human rights. This was exemplified by the significant upgrading of the Frontex Agency in the 2021-2027 MFF and the reinforcement of its border control practice and surveillance capacities. The debates further revolved around 1) the weak inclusion of civil society in the negotiations, implementation and evaluation of EU migration policies; 2) the fact that development assistance is conditioned by signing readmission agreements; and 3) the importance of including a gender dimension in all migratory policies.

Based on these talks the following recommendations had been prepared for the Brussels Civil Society Forum and the migration discussion group:

On social protection and migrant rights

- Implement the guidelines of the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CRMW).
- Revising the Global Compact on Migration (Marrakech Pact), however is needed where it represents a step back from the provisions of the 1990 UN CRMW. This applies in particular to women's rights, detention conditions of migrants and the possibility for States to refuse the application of certain measures.
- In terms of social protection and the fight against the exploitation of migrant workers: creation of mechanisms at EU level for the control and protection of seasonal workers working in Europe and the region.
- Accessing International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions, in particular ILO Convention No. 143 migrant worker's rights. In addition, review the EU's commitment to the climate conventions and their effective implementation (ensuring equal rights for migrants, refugees and nationals, guaranteeing renewal of the stay and modifying criteria of exceptional regulatory policies).

Engaging civil society in bilateral discussions

- Supporting cooperation programmes targeting: a) Alternative and traditional community media in the South and Europe to change perceptions about migration. b) Cultural programmes promoting the mobility of young people, artists and others.
- Re-launch the EuroMed tripartite dialogues between the European Union, the Southern Neighbourhood Governments and independent civil society in the region (including independent trade unions).
- Encourage member States to de-criminalise solidarity with, and the rescue of, migrants.
- Establish a trust fund addressing the protection of migrants and displaced persons based on rapid, integrated, flexible and short-term means, hence differing from the current approach of existing funds such as the Africa Fund or the MADAD Fund.
- Expand programmes facilitating the mobility of young people in the Southern Neighbourhood, and request for education and capacity building to include disadvantaged groups (such as women, rural residents and people with disabilities).
- Launch a dialogue on the role the EU could play in simplifying member state's visa procedures, e.g. establishing a legal basis for cooperation with visa processing companies.
- Evaluate the results of cooperation agreements in the field of migration.
- Support the creation of a committee at regional level on migration policies, that include civil society, to monitor the implementation of the recommendations adopted in this field



Based on these previous inputs:

The debates have been introduced by highlighting the fact that transit countries policies are coercive and security driven. Many countries witness a deterioration of migrant rights that has a particular negative effect on women and children. Meanwhile, only two European countries signed the CRMW. It has been mentioned the need to include migrants' organisations in all dealings touching upon the situation of migrants

Main points raised during the ensuing debate were that:

- CSOs are marginalised when bi-lateral agreements are negotiated. It is necessary to push for tripartite dialogues on migration and refugee issues between representatives of the EU, governments and civil society building on the Tunisian experience in this regard.
- It is important to create a mechanism with the participation of CSOs that engages both the EU and the South Mediterranean countries

in the monitoring and implementation of the international conventions on migrant rights such as the ILO Conventions 90, 143 and 202.

- It is a dangerous road to take to condition development aid by the receiving countries signing of readmission agreements. It runs counter to genuine responsibility sharing of a rights-based approach to migration management.
- The Global Compact represents a step back in terms of respect of migrants' rights. It sustains inequalities between those who can travel freely and those who are blocked from doing so.
- Countries on both sides of the Mediterranean should sign and ratify the CRMW. Also, the EU should sign the convention.
- EU member States should not only decriminalize rescue mission but also to set-up and increase these in the Mediterranean. Control mechanisms to monitor Frontex actions should be strengthened.
- Mobility programs or partnerships should take the situation of the most vulnerable groups into consideration. There is a need to establish procedures for urgent measures in case medical needs and needs of pregnant women; and to establish a fund that could support these measures.
- The current EU migration policies facilitate brain drain as migrants hesitate to return to their home country once they are allowed into Europe.
- Travel measures allowing access to the EU should be simplified, in particular those of youth that suffers from severe restrictions. Freedom of movement should be promoted by the issuing of short-term visas, allowing access for asylum requests and improving conditions for circular migration.
- Migrant organisations should be consulted when defining migration policies and measures.
- Awareness raising campaigns about the dangers of crossing the Mediterranean irregularly will only be effective if alternative travel routes are defined.
- CSOs in the Southern neighbourhood should increase engagement in migrant rights protection.

Commission representatives mentioned that:

- The migration theme politically is a difficult topic to deal with and welcomed Majalat participant's engagement therein. In general, it is important to distinguish between legal migrants, migrants with no authorisation to travel, and refugees. Each group has specific challenges.
- Legal ways of travelling already exist through visas and travel permits. Youth mobility and circular mobility have been discussed at length and most youth would be better protected if they remained in their countries and did not engage in dangerous travels. The EU Commission would, however, welcome more work on media perceptions of migrants and migration.
- It is key for the Commission is to balance between rights-based and a security approach such as in Libya and Morocco. Protection approaches are already part of EU policies through anti-trafficking programs.

Finally, the workshop defined avenues for further discussion at the Brussels Civil Society Forum (see chapter 10).

8.d. Discussion group: Climate and Social Justice

Moderation: Mr. Ayman Rabi, Palestinian Hydrologic Group

The 2019 Majalat discussions on climate and social justice revolved around the importance to link these issues to Agenda 2030 that offers opportunities for addressing core matters such as inequalities and the need to tackle social injustices, energy access and poverty - for example through promoting gender equality in climate action.

Currently, climate finance and ODAs are channelled through the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and there is a concern about the increasing trend in blending ODA with private finance. This can compromise climate and development outcomes as public-private financing schemes are not always aligned with climate and social justice.

It seems that climate and environmental action was compromised in the current spending period by a focus on security and stabilization, a concern that is linked to the fact that policy coherence for sustainable development has not been followed through effectively across instruments and investments. In addition, criticism was raised about the multiple international and development financial instruments that operate in the region and continue to fund fossil fuel projects. Policy making on corporate accountability has mostly been lax, due to expectations from the EU on business to self-regulate.

Hence, the following recommendations emerged from the 2019 Majalat process and was presented at the workshop:

- **Regarding the next EU budget 2021-27 and future NDICI** decision-makers should safeguard: Funding for Heading VI (external action) at least 10% of the overall budget; For the NDICI a 50% climate and environment spending target should be introduced ; 85% of programmes should have gender equality as one of their objectives; 20% ODA should be dedicated to human development and social inclusion; the migration spending target should be removed; allocate a higher share of funding for targeted thematic programmes.
- **All targets set in the NDICI should be duly reflected** in EU Commission programming at country and regional level. Programming needs to support countries' NDCs, SDG plans and National Adaptation Plans.
- The EU should take a **strong stance in UNFCCC negotiations to scale up future climate finance goals**, including a target for grants-based finance adaptation. The EU should adopt a definition of 'new and additional' climate finance as over and above 0.7% GNI commitments.
- Climate and SDG priorities, as well as provisions on encouraging financing for local actors, need to be rigorously reflected in the **governance of blending facilities**, the EFSD+ and external action guarantee, and all International and Development Finance Institution/ Multilateral Development Banks (MDB), along with social safeguards in line with international standards.
- **Specific investment windows in EFSD+** for sustainable energy and climate mitigation and adaptation projects should be introduced. Comprehensive extension of environmental screening and impact assessments must be ensured to cover climate mitigation and adaptation, and it should also be updated in the common standard of planning/programming and reporting on the EU's external funds and financial instruments.
- Regional and, where appropriate, thematic programmes should **embrace climate neutrality objectives** in the long-term.
- MDB/DFIs should urgently **phase out any finance for climate harmful activities**. EU representatives should work to influence the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and finance institutions which cooperate to phase out fossil fuel finance.
- **The European Investment Bank (EIB) and EBRD** need to take further steps to ensure an increasingly higher proportion of its portfolio supports climate action, ring fencing adaptation, with special provisions for community-based initiatives and land rights. Both need to develop investment strategies compatible with the 1.5°C goal. The banks should increase their co-financing of UNFCCC climate funds (GCF).
- **A corporate due diligence mechanism at EU level** is needed to ensure that corporations fulfil their responsibility and due diligence on human rights, labour rights, environmental rights and alignment with the Paris Agreement. The EU should also support the development of a UN binding treaty on transnational corporations and human rights.
- In fossil fuel-heavy regions, EU funding can support the just transition by **supporting efforts to develop low-carbon development transition plans**. The EIB and EBRD can dedicate a higher share of financing to the just transition.
- The European Commission Sustainable Finance Action Plan (ECSFAP) includes the **development of a taxonomy for labelling of 'green' financing options**, aimed at incentivising investment in green projects and companies. The taxonomy needs to be improved to totally exclude fossil fuels including gas from the 'green' labelling, and much more rigorous sustainability criteria are needed.
- EU delegations should conduct regular consultations **reaching out to a diverse range of civil society actors from grassroots, youth groups, regional networks**, including those with links to climate justice defenders from the beginning of the programming process. Consultations should include clear guidance and information and be transparent on expectations and outcomes; regular information about opportunities and process should be provided, building on the process of the joint programming tracker site.
- The CSO Roadmaps reviews should align better to climate and social justice CSO actors and priorities, and **build synergies to human rights country strategies, the Gender Action Plan, the Aarhus Convention** in each national context, with outreach to relevant stakeholders.
- The proposed Climate Pact under the proposed European Green Deal must **cement an international dimension into its structure to facilitate a multi-stakeholder committee**. This should include civil society from both the Southern Neighbourhood and the EU, and regional public and private actors in the fields of energy, environment and climate, to monitor progress on climate and social justice in EU external action, financing and investment.
- The EU should deepen its **support of CSOs focused on climate and environmental challenges at regional level** – for example through convening a Civil Society Forum South on this theme. Recognising existing networks (Climate Action Network - Arab World as an example), the EU Delegations.



In introduction to the subsequent discussion group's debates it was said that:

- The Brussels Civil Society Forum should send the message about the need to ensure climate justice principles. Those agents most responsible for gas emissions should act while those benefitting from these emissions should share these with less favoured countries. South-based countries should receive investments for mitigation plans, and the huge impact wars and occupation in the region have on climate change should be acknowledged. It is also key to institutionalise a participatory approach to ensure the protection of natural areas in the face of climate change and support the resistance and resilience of local populations through improving the livelihoods of these. The MFF 2021-2027 financial facility should shift ODA towards climate change and support the transition to new economies respectful of the climate. On this background, blending of finance could be envisioned if making sure that private companies act in compliance with Paris agreement and global commitments. Finally, EU delegations should ensure participation of CSOs on climate issues.

During the ensuing debates it was amongst other said that:

- There is a need to look into protracted conflicts and the displacement of people in a context of desertification of many areas
- Corporate social responsibility is key while avoiding greenwashing to the promotion of climate justice. Industries should be made accountable for gas emissions.
- Examples were provided from Egypt and Morocco about local communities that are excluded from decision making to say that it is important to consider local interest to make climate investments sustainable
- It is important to look at the cost of inaction and bring that into the debate
- An example was provided from Tunisia where the textile sector exports large quantities to the EU and receives investments from the EU having a negative environmental impact. The industry consumes much water and competes for water with agriculture. The use of water is not integrated in the price of textile products and the waste waters pollute the sea. Finally, workers are badly treated while fishermen cannot work anymore. This leads to migration.
- It is important to protect an emerging generation of environmental activists these are under attack (164 environmental activists killed worldwide in 2018).
- The EU should address private companies and CSOs that are against pro-climate efforts such as some trade unions. Climate justice is closely linked to development aid, social justice, labour market, trade, etc. There are many ways to work on this through awareness raising and campaigns.
- The question of water scarcity in Palestine was raised and the lack of access to water of Palestinians due to Israeli occupation.
- It is a positive sign that consumers are increasingly considering climate impact of products.

- One should think globally and act locally. There is a need to establish a civil society platform with EU support to identify sustainable environment alternatives. This 'observatory' could analyse the projects that are implemented by the countries in the region with EU support.
- Many infrastructures in the Southern countries are expensive though not operational due to local corruption. The role of local initiatives is key, but most money regrettably goes to large scale projects, in which CSOs are not involved. CS should at least be more involved in the governance structure of these major projects and help developing monitoring and evaluation tools.
- A main in the region issue is governmental suspicion towards CSOs because the latter say things that do not please the governments. A key item for further dialogue with the EU would address the question of how to reinforce the independent ecological movement, partner up with this and encourage laws to protect environment.

EU Commission representatives mentioned that

- Climate change is a top priority of the EU that is ready to answer to the concerns of the EU citizens and civil society elsewhere. The Paris Agreement has achievable goals and the new Commission President has indicated that the EU by 2050 should be carbon neutral. The external instruments and policies will include objectives for a low-carbon economy transition, and the Green Deal is a strategy for job creation. The Climate

Pact provides a platform for stakeholders to dialogue on climate change actions and here governments are on the driver's seat to bring in investors with a pro-climate approach.

- The EU is a leader when it comes to limiting global warming. However, there are risks of green grabbing, and it is also important to apply a 'do-not-harm' filter for all projects, since good intentions can lead to bad results.

The EU is ready to regroup CSOs and bring these into participation, consultation and talks on climate change. Next to that, it is important to work on awareness raising in particular among youth.

- The EU also looks at how to bring in the Green Deal to external policies, e.g. regarding high-energy consuming industries. It focusses on opportunities to promote economic growth and job creation in policy dialogue with third countries. The EU and member States financially supports company leaders that look more carefully at their resources, reinjecting energy savings in their systems and protect the environment.
- Regrettably only few environmental laws have been adopted and enforced by South Mediterranean partner countries. In this regard, it is important to stress that the EU trade framework is not just a framework of constraints but also of opportunities.

At the end of the debates, four points were prioritised for further discussion at the Brussels Civil Society Forum (see chapter 10).

8.e. Discussion group: Economic and Social Development

Moderation: Ms. Serena Abi Khalil, Arab NGO Network for Development

The 2019 debates on economic development and social dialogue discussed the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 (MFF), amongst other the risk that the democratic decision-making dynamics may be hurt by lumping together a number of previously independent budget lines into a single framework. It gives more leeway for action to the non-elected body of the EU, the EU Commission, at the expense of for example the European Parliament. It makes the decision-making process of funding allocation between the different items of the budget line less transparent and likely more difficult to influence.

The 2019 CSO debates of the Majalat also revealed a concern that the three major trading blocs are not able to handle distortion on the trade and financial markets nor to face the tremendous climate crisis. This translates into a concern about the lack of willingness for burden/responsibility sharing to reach the objectives of the Agenda 2030 including the lack of genuine political will to overcome the economic divide between the developed and the developing countries.

The 2019 meetings discussed the EU's investment policies and trade agreement negotiations in the light of recent negotiations between the EU and Southern Neighbourhood: i.e. the suspended negotiations with Morocco; the fourth round of negotiations with Tunisia on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA); as well as funds oriented to Lebanon in the context of CEDRE.

The discussions dealt with how to expand the dialogue between the European Union and CSOs, and other related parties, and assess the ongoing talks as well as previous policies and trade agreements. The debates furthermore touched upon 1) whether there were alternatives to current



trade agreements that would take inequality, social justice and development priorities into consideration; 2) the need to create a structured mechanism to evaluate all agreements plus mechanisms to disseminate information from the early negotiation phases of these.

Finally, it was emphasised that it is important to set-up ex-ante impact assessment of trade agreements to evaluate their coherence with other European policies. The experience of tripartite talks in Tunisia between the Tunisian government, Tunisian civil society and the EU was highlighted in this regard.

Based on the 2019 talks a number of recommendations were presented at the Brussels Civil Society Forum that are summarised below:



On the role of the private sector

- Creating a mechanism to monitor and hold accountable existing and future **business enterprises in conflict zones** in the Southern Neighbourhood under the reconstruction phase, such as Libya and Syria.
- Working on **promoting transparency and access to information** mechanisms in partnership countries and on the level of EU to support a joint monitoring and accountability mechanism

On Trade and Investment Policies in the region

- Expanding the dialogue between the EU and CSOs and other related parties around the **assessment of the ongoing trade talks and on previous policies and trade agreements** and their implications on development in order to propose specific alternatives that take into consideration equality, social justice and development priorities in the countries of the Southern Neighbourhood.
- Organising a **structured dialogue between the European Union, partner countries, CSOs and trade unions** on the agreements from the region (currently Tunisia) as an integral part of the agreement negotiations. In addition, working on ex-ante impact assessment of trade agreements to evaluate its coherence with other European policies.
- Supporting **research and development programs for sustainable development** in the countries of the Southern Neighbourhood. In addition, supporting knowledge and technological exchange as part of the agreements.
- Concerning the ongoing negotiations about the **DCFTA** with Tunisia, and other foreseen trade agreements: 1) Avoiding removing tariff barriers on internally subsidized goods until the question of European internal support is decided in the WTO considering the US-EU conflict over tariffs. 2) For non-tariff barriers, avoiding using standards and quotas with protectionism objectives for goods that Tunisia is allowed to export. 3) Adopting international monitoring standards similar to those between EU member States, while preserving standards assuring decent work.
- Creating a binding multilateral mechanism involving civil society to **monitor the impact of European private investment and European transnational corporation companies** in Southern Neighbourhood countries, with attention to adapting standards by types of companies, their size, and the sectors in which they invest

Based on these recommendations the following issues were raised from the side of EU representatives:

- EU representatives asked which macroeconomic model and impact assessments the recommendations referred to, ex ante impact assessment or ex post impact assessment? Many studies about the impact of the ALECA had already been done, so it was not clear why there still were needs for impact studies.
- The EU is not forcing anyone to engage in DCFTAs. The main role of these is to facilitate modernization of rules, regulations and attitudes regarding economic development. Trade agreement can help a country to modernise certain sectors of its economy like when a country like Georgia entered a DCFTA with the EU.
- It is inconceivable for the EU to lower its standards regarding nontariff obstacles to free trade of agricultural produces. The European consumer would not be ready to accept this. The EU is trying to upgrade standards and norms of all countries with whom it is negotiating trade deals in order to facilitate access of goods to Europe. It is ready to be flexible when discussing import tariffs.
- There are obvious financial costs for a country of not reaching an agreement. Currently, Tunisian exports are at the brink of collapsing. Without an agreement Tunisia is in a lose-lose situation and their products receive discriminatory treatment when exported to the EU.

From the floor it was said that:

- The recommendations were made without participation of representatives of the private sector and therefore gives a partial view of this field without recognizing the challenges faced by the private sector.
- Macroeconomic models should be criticized when they do not consider social criteria as for example labour standards and job creation. There is also a need to establish a social protection floor, social protection system and to involve trade unions in these matters.
- Impact assessment instruments are often made by private consultancy offices that are in favour of free trade deals. Often evaluation instruments are not well designed to measure social and economic impacts of these deals. Therefore, it is necessary to develop new mechanisms and processes to evaluate EU projects and bilateral agreements.
- There is a need to investigate the fact that millions of workers are employed in informal sectors without any social protection whatsoever.
- The second wave of Arab spring is even more based on economic and social concerns than the first wave. There is a need for radical changes in the countries of the South and until now European policies have been ineffective in this regard.
- In its trade dealings with Israel, the EU should continue to boycott agreements with companies that work in the illegal settlements. The EU Court of Justice ruling on settlement products is welcome and timely as well as policies to defend, respect and enhance Palestinian economy through trade.
- Corporate social responsibility is not a sufficient warrant for rights protection. Full human rights commitments should apply.

At the end of the debates, it was decided to move the following recommendations to the plenary



9. Plenary session: Presentation of sub granting initiatives funded by MAJALAT and their contribution to structured dialogue

The session was moderated by:

- Ms Isabel Fajardo Lopez, International Cooperation Officer, SOLIDAR
- Presentations:
- Mr Ibrahim Ali, Chairman of the Libyan Transparency Association
- Ms Hafsa El-Mesbahi Researcher and Coordinator of the Gender Research Department at CCERSS
- Mr Ali Issa Abakar Secretary General of the Organisation of Young Africans
- Mr Ayman Rabi, Executive Director of Palestinian Hydrology Group
- Mr Rabe Rana, Coordinator of Syrian Centre for Policy Research

The purpose of the session was to make participants aware of third-party funding initiatives in the MAJALAT framework

The sub-granting scheme has been presented. It has been mentioned that the sub-granting is worth a total of 40.000 Euros under Majalat and the selection criteria for project proposals had matched the specific themes discussed by Majalat in 2019.

Majalat received 58 applications coming from 10 countries in the MENA region (mostly from Palestine and Morocco). 5 projects were selected according to pre-established and transparent criteria and all 5 projects had thereafter been successfully implemented up to the Brussels Civil Society Forum.

The Libyan Transparency Association organized a workshop and Round Table on the Role of Institutions and Civil Society in Good Governance and Rule of Law on 29 and 30 October with 55 participants, members of the civil society, youth and universities.

The action increased awareness of the role of civil society and institutions in good governance and the rule of law. It promoted collective action to find solutions and proposals to reduce corruption and it urged that all institutions in the State of Libya implement the principles of governance. It also produced several recommendations to solve the problems of corruption and organized crime and strengthen the rule of law.

The Centre for Researchers and Research in Social Sciences organized 3 workshops in different cities of Morocco in October, and an international Forum in Agadir on the theme of Contributing to Security and Countering Violence.

The activities, that were attended by 139 people, fostered discussions focusing on strengthening public debate on governance, security and fight against violence; and on identifying instruments to involve civil society into the strengthening of security in the Moroccan society. The discussion saw the participation of civil society representatives, youth and researchers and culminated with the creation of various analytical documents. These documents, which took the finalized form of ad hoc policy papers, were then used to create a final detailed report and a list of recommendations. The latter developed a holistic and nuanced definition of violence that should be recognised and tackled in all relevant social and political areas.

The Organisation of Young Africans organised workshops under the theme of Protecting the Rights of Regular Migrants with 31 participants.

The workshops aimed at starting a debate and reflecting on the violation of the rights and the protection of regular migrants in Morocco with the involvement of civil society, student associations, youth, and public sector. The event was preceded by qualitative interviews with the migrants aimed at assessing their needs. One important output was the creation of a working group for the protection of the rights of regular migrants and for advocacy activities in Morocco.

Some of the challenges highlighted during the event concerned the poor respect of national laws resulting in arrests of, and violence against, in particular young, regular migrants. The final recommendations aimed at 1) pushing the local and national authorities to respect Moroccan legislation on the subject; 2) increasing the awareness of society about migrant rights; and 3) ensuring that the recommendations are presented in the Moroccan parliament.

The Palestinian Hydrology Group conducted a National Dialogue on the Impact of Climate Change on Water and Agriculture in Palestine in the West Bank with 103 participants.

The dialogue activities showed that the two most affected sectors from climate change in Palestine are the water and agriculture sectors. Moreover, farmers are the ones suffering the most from the change in seasons, reduction in rainfall and increase in temperature. Prolonged drought periods have created a reduction in quantity and quality of products as well as more and unusual crop diseases. This had a huge negative impact on farmers' coping ability and resulted in large losses of farming, agro biodiversity and hence livelihood.

The recommendations of the dialogue highlighted the need for harmonizing national policies and sectors, including education about environmental issues, and the proposal of creating an open platform for information and experience exchange including success stories on mitigation and adaptation.

The **Syrian Centre for Policy Research** organized a Dialogue Forum for Syrian 20 CSOs based in Lebanon.

The Forum was set up as a preliminary event prior to the larger International Forum of National NGO Platforms for Greater Impact on Public Body. The Forum discussed the post-war phase and the country's future. This greatly contributed to set up the tone and priorities of the larger forum via the creation of a 'preparatory committee' that will constitute the focal point of the international forum.

The needs that were highlighted helped to set the agenda of civil society for the future post-conflict Syria seeking to curb the effects of the socio-economic damages and of the violence caused by the war. The recommendations that were developed stressed the importance of building an effective role for Syria at the political level, supporting good governance, supporting refugees in a safer Syria, curbing the negative effects that the trade war against war lords and network of oppression has had on the civilians and their basic needs.

All the 5 actions' developed recommendations have been forwarded to Majalat as inputs to the debates of the Civil Forum.

10. Plenary session: Presentation of conclusions by parallel discussion group

Moderation

- Mr Michel Tubiana, French Human Rights League (LDH)

Rapporteurs:

Governance - Ms Marwa Fatafta, Transparency International (TI)

Security - Mr Xavier Guignard, Noria

Migration - Ms Sara Soujar, Groupe antiraciste d'accompagnement et de défense des étrangers et migrants (GADEM)

Climate Justice - Ms Essia Guezzi, Climate Action Network (CAN)

Economic and Social Development - Mr Adib Nehme, Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)

The floor was given to the rapporteurs of the 5 parallel thematic workshops who presented the main points that had been chosen to be taken forward by the Brussels Civil Society Forum

Good governance and the rule of law

Shrinking space:

- a. Time should be spent in the CSO-EU structured dialogue to find operational tools for the protection of HDRs including whistle-blowers.
- b. Human rights conditionality should be equally applied between EU partners specifically in relation to bilateral and multilateral relation.
- c. Access to information about all EU funding instrument should be strengthened.

Corruption:

- a. There is a need to strengthen access to information that can facilitate recovery of stolen assets.
- b. Extend current EU measures on human rights violations to corrupt cases.
- c. Address the Golden visas schemes so that these will not be used for impunity of corrupt people.

Security and the fight against violence

1. The need to prioritise human security as central concept to ensure the security of citizens in the region, and in this regard work on establishing a common policy understanding of what the notion entails.
2. Identify the best modes to ensure that civil society is included in security and security sector talks from the development and initiation of programs through their implementation and to their evaluation.
3. Make the fight against racism and discrimination in the North and the South a key element in EU security policies.

Migration and Mobility

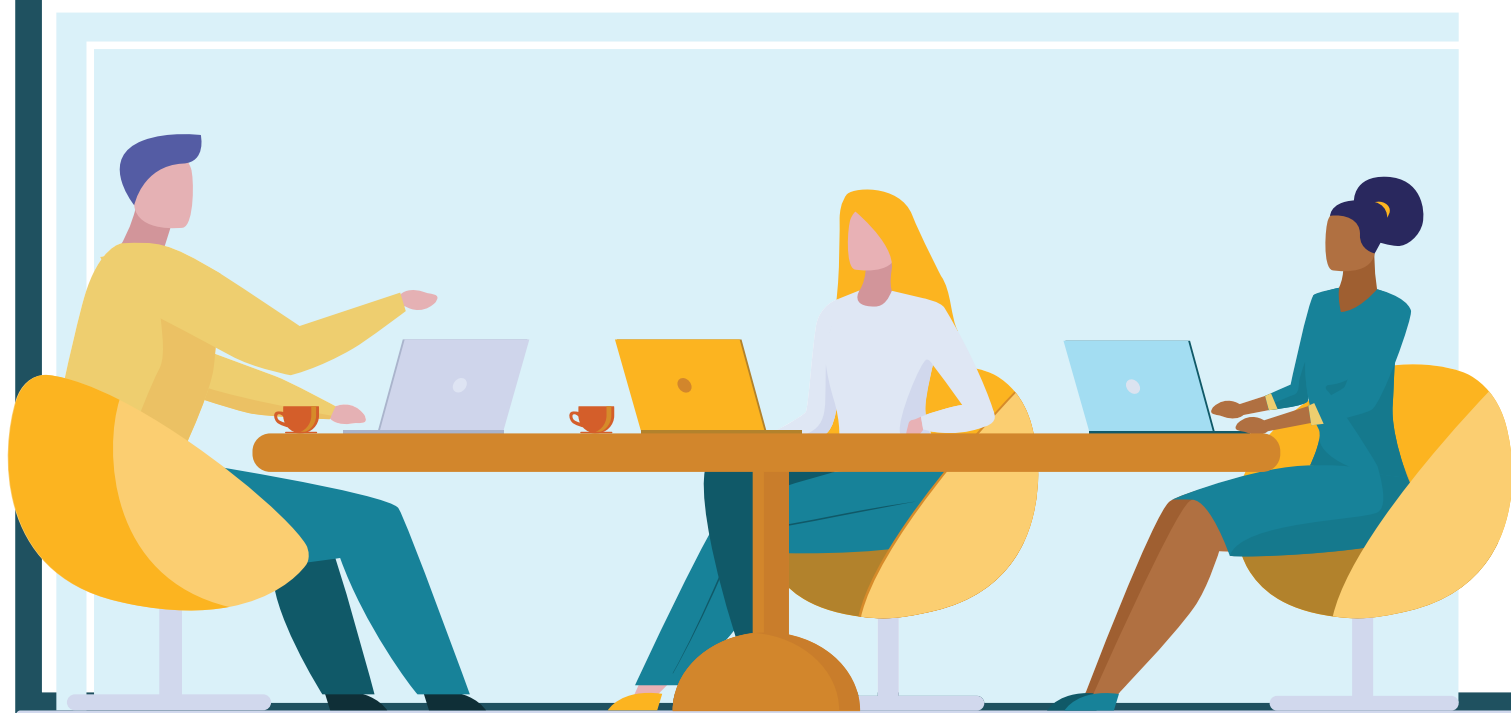
- EU member States should be called to ratify, respect and apply the CRMW to protect people on the move. They should respect the interrelation of the CRMW with other human rights and international conventions.
- All forms of solidarity and support should be decriminalised, in particular saving operations and activists engaged in these.
- Tripartite dialogue should be established between the EU, civil society and the government as well as other parties in the cooperation policies.
- Support to media campaigns in all countries of the region in order to change the perception of migration.
- Increase support to cultural and artistic events related to migration.


Climate and Social Justice

- Engage CSOs in the drafting of projects and policies and in all phases of implementation and evaluation.
- Strengthening the awareness of decision makers, the private sector and trade unions about the economic impact of climate.
- Balance between investments in large projects that are subject to corruption and smaller local projects that are locally sustainable in terms of fighting climate change.
- Protect environment activists against attacks and discrimination and ensure their right to protect the environment.

Economic and social development

- A more equitable dialogue between the two shores should take place regarding trade relations based on economic and social rights respect. Independent experts and CSOs should be involved in the dialogue.
- Social policies, equality and social justice should be at the heart of national and European policies, of fiscal policies and in the fight against poverty. Sound foundations should be established in EU-SMP relations to protect and promote social justice and decent working conditions.
- Mechanisms and laws that allow for transparency and access to information are key to enable CSOs to influence policies.
- Dialogue with the private sector should be strengthened including on mechanisms for companies operating in the South to promote and protect social and economic rights.





11. Plenary Session: How to strengthen the structured dialogue, ensure effective monitoring of joint commitments and sustain the process started

The session was moderated by:

- Ms Catherine Sophie Dimitroulias, President of the Association of Women of Southern Europe and delegate to the Council of Europe

Presentations were made by:

- Ms. Giovanna Tanzarella, Vice-President of Réseau Euromed France (REF)
- Mr. Maciej Popowski, Deputy Director-General for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR)
- Mr. Mustapha Tlili, Secretary General, Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC)
- Ms Serena Abi Khalil, Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)
- Ms. Rosamaria Gili, Head of Unit MENA.3 EEAS

The purpose of the session was to set the framework for future dialogue for the years to come

The session was opened by welcoming the fact that a woman is now presiding the EU Commission for the first time in history. It has been also highlighted that the new President's vision has been articulated around values of human rights, gender equality, social rights, and of putting economy at the service of the people.

Structured dialogue between civil society and the EU is key for the region both in the South and in the North and the EU can play a vital role in promoting human rights values, although the image of the EU is at stake when considering its handling of migration flows. It has been underlined that an important topic of Majalat should be the promotion of women's rights and combatting violence against women and the need to mainstream these aspects throughout the EU policies and programmes.

It has been recalled that the civil society dialogue with the EU began prior to the establishment of Majalat. In fact, the dialogue started in 1995 with the initiation of the Barcelona process. In 2004 civil societies put the establishment of a permanent mechanism of dialogue between the EU and Euro-Mediterranean civil societies on the agenda. Today, Majalat has become this space of exchange and dialogue. Majalat, though, is still new and progressing with regard to content and quality and it is yet early to see practical results.

The importance of this space for dialogue as the EU remains an area of rights and protection, and a main partner of Southern Mediterranean countries. It is important to have a dialogue at regional level due to the interdependence of the challenges' citizens face in the region such as conflicts and war, restrictions of liberties on both shores of the Mediterranean, attacks on human rights defenders, and the development of social movements on a background of lacking economic and social rights.

The EU is an ally of CSOs, trade unions and emerging youth initiatives of youth, which – in return – should be involved in policy making and in defining relevant instruments to implement these. A main goal of Majalat and the structured dialogue would be to defend the independence of CSOs against government sponsored NGOs that constantly emerge pretending to speak on behalf of society. Majalat should be as inclusive as possible and engage with new actors among European and Arab CSOs, independent media, the European Parliament, and EU Delegations based in the Southern Neighbourhood.

Moreover, it has been pointed out that Majalat, and civil society in general, is a strategic partner for the trade union movement that favours a stronger civil society in the South. There is still a lot to do for trade unions and civil society and a need for more coordination and networking between South-based organisations. If conditions are met civil society will be more active and productive. The debates of Majalat in Brussels could be replicated at local level and in this way reinforce a bottom-up approach such as the EU funded SOLID project gathering employers, workers, NGOs, local communities, that led to good results.

It has been mentioned that corruption and asset recovery, that brought people on the street in the region, had been a main theme of Majalat. The EU should place the fights against systematic corruption high on its agenda.

It is important to investigate trade and investments in EU relations with the Southern Neighbourhood that directly affect economic and social rights. There is a need for assessments of these relations and of related policies, in particular of trade agreement negotiations. Trade and inequality are interlinked. Therefore, the social dimensions of economies should be promoted through Majalat with a focus on inclusivity and participation.

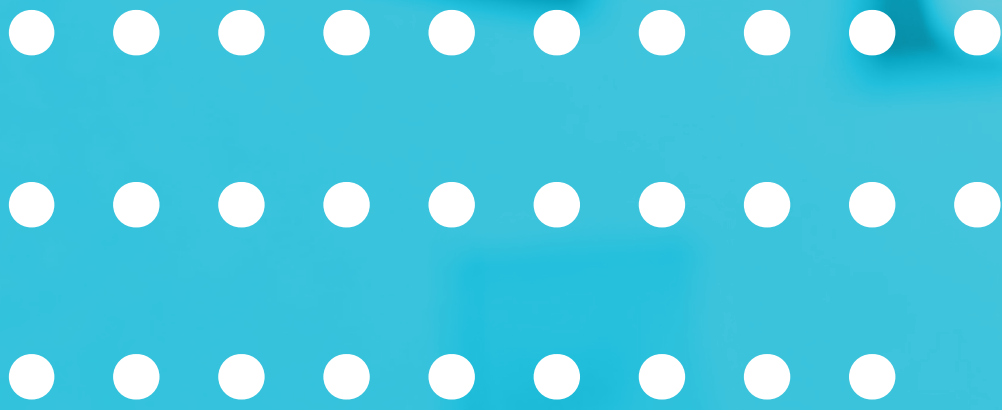
In the closing remarks, EU representatives explained that the European Commission and the EEAS want to use their convening power to bring people together to share views on different topics. The EU institutions are not knowledgeable about everything. That is why they want to go beyond relations with the government authorities and address civil society both within and outside the EU. In the view of the EU Commission, civil society is indispensable for making governments accountable.

In the future, the EC wish to keep the Majalat format since it has worked, but there may be a need for adjustments regarding certain policy areas. For example, the Green Deal is now a huge policy area for the EU. The Commission and the EU Delegations intend to involve CSOs more in the whole cycle of activities. In this regard, the upcoming meeting of Majalat representatives with Commissioner Várhelyi in charge of the Neighbourhood policy and enlargement has been welcomed.

The EU does find inspiration in civil society inputs when defining and implementing policy instruments, and it does take civil society viewpoints into account. A forum like Majalat eases the EU's tasks of receiving civil society inputs before discussing with the Southern Mediterranean countries since Majalat priorities are representative of civil society concerns.

Civil society counts more for the EU than activists may think of and the EU is the most vocal partner to support CSOs. The more realistic the recommendations are and the more civil society understands EU mechanisms, the better will the voice of CSOs be heard. The EU Delegations are supposed to be a privileged partner of CSOs, although it is not always easy in some countries where Heads of Delegation are criticised by the authorities in place for taking stances in favour of local CSOs. In any case, civil society can count on the Commission and the EEAS.

The session was concluded by congratulating Majalat for its work and the dense and diverse debates of the Brussels Civil Society Forum, while encouraging Majalat to continue along the lines that had been laid out.



12. Plenary session: Closing remarks



The organisers of the Forum have been thanked for successfully organising the event, and the EU Commission, as well as the Economic and Social Council, for their support to the regional structured dialogue aimed at advancing peace, prosperity, equality and democracy.

It has been recalled that the meeting takes place at a time when the Euro-Mediterranean geo-political entity appears more ambiguous than ever. The region has become fragmented by major challenges, one of these being the intensified Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, but also the increased asymmetric and unequal relations between the North and South. This situation is further aggravated the increased and hegemonic role of multinational companies, by corruption, by the destruction of natural resources, by racism, xenophobia and the rise of right-wing forces.

The closure of European border contributes to this fragmentation even though the major migratory trends are South-South.

The Brussels Civil Society Forum took place on the backdrop of protest and social movements that shakes the world and denounces corruption and social injustice while claiming a better protection of the environment.

Many governments have regretfully reacted to these demonstrations by using disproportionate, unjustified and hence illegal means violating human rights.

The main points that had united the participants in the two days debate have been summarised as follows:

- Giving priority to human rights in all dealing including the protection of human rights defenders, whistle blowers and journalists.
- Considering human rights in their indivisibility and universality including equality between men and women; individual rights and the rights to peaceful demonstration, of expression and association; the rights of the handicapped; the rights of children and cultural and linguistic rights.
- The right to freedom of movement and the protection of the rights of migrants as well as condemning racism and xenophobia.
- Promoting good governance and fighting corruption which implies free, fair and transparent elections and a strong participation of women and youth in the handling of public affairs
- Promoting a new economic model that ensures social protection and social justice, the fight against unemployment, equal distribution of wealth with measures promoting social economies and solidarity
- A strict control of the environment and of natural resources and restricting exploitation of polluting, extractive industries.
- Ensuring the protection of citizens against violence, be it by state or non-state actors, and fighting terrorism that in no way can be accepted.

In conclusion, it has been emphasised the urgency and importance for the EU to support the immediate release from jail of peaceful demonstrators, journalists, bloggers that have been arrested in Palestine by the Israeli authorities, in Lebanon, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco and everywhere in the world.

