

MAJALAT - Brussels Civil Society Forum CONCEPT NOTE & RECOMMENDATIONS *Economic development and social dialogue*

Economic policies and social dialogue are issues at the heart of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Several policies and instruments have been elaborated at European Union (EU) level through its external policy approach and commitment to the implementation of global agendas to address economic and social dialogue priorities and their implications for the Southern Neighbourhood, and on cooperation for development.

MAJALAT focused in 2019 on the analysis of these agendas based on the following policies and communiques of utmost relevance to the region: the Policy coherence for development document; Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements with a focus on the ongoing Tunisian negotiations and the Moroccan example; the European Investment Plan, and the EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in various Southern Neighborhood countries such as Palestine.

In order to achieve these goals, the cooperation with the Southern Neighborhood region should tackle all aspects of inequality: economic, social, gender, cultural and geographical hence the work on policies ensuring jobs creations, decent work and social protection, promoting youth entrepreneurship and a real partnership based on equality, transparency and mutual accountability. Therefore, it's important to think about how trade, investment and social policies should be designed and monitored in order to embed the human rights-based approach and promote inclusiveness, in line with these policies, and at the same time, reflect upon the mechanisms to ensure that the private sector plays its part as a key actor for development.

Since Economic development and social dialogue is a multi-faceted issue, 2 main entry points of discussion have been prioritized during 2019 activity cycle.

1. Role of the private sector
2. Trade and Investment Policies in the region

This concept note is the result of the discussions that took place during the thematic Workshop on Economic policies and Social Dialogue in the Southern Neighbourhood held in Beirut (Lebanon) in April 2019, the Youth workshop (Tunis) in April 2019 and, of the subsequent reflections resulted from the South Seminar held in Tunis, in September 2019. Then, in order to refine the recommendations resulted from the Majalat activity cycle, an independent expert active in the civil society sector in the Southern Neighbourhood countries, has been recruited. The main objective of the work done by the expert was to better specify and develop the recommendations using specific provisions, policies, EU instruments, mechanisms and actions in order to make the recommendations operationalizable and actionable specifying the targeted EU institution - and, therefore, place recommendations in perspective with EU policies in the specific thematic area discussed.

The content and political message of the report and the recommendations have not been altered. Additional points will be validated with the discussions with the participants during the Brussels Civil Forum.



Entry points

1. Role of private sector

The particular attention given to the role of the private sector in the framework of MAJALAT is due to its increasing role as a development actor and in particular in the EU foreign policy through tools like Public Private Partnerships and blending finance. Consequently, it is crucial to focus on the private sector accountability and transparency measures adopted in order to ensure full socioeconomic responsibility at all levels. In addition, the incentives given to the private sector in this context should not be at the expense of fiscal redistribution and social, labour and environmental rights.

On the EU level, discussions on business and human rights efforts and related binding mechanisms focus on a series of recommendations on civil and criminal liability for human rights violations by the private sector, in the framework of the European Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015-2019). However, it remains committed to a voluntary approach for corporate liability and a non-binding legal approach, despite its dedication to human rights and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Recommendations

1. Creating a mechanism to monitor and hold accountable existing and future business enterprises in conflict zones in the Southern Neighborhood under the reconstruction phase, such as Libya and Syria.

2. Working on promoting transparency and access to information mechanisms in partnership countries and on the level of EU components, to support a joint monitoring and accountability mechanism

2. Trade and Investment Policies in the region

Trade and Investment Policies in the region should be considered as vehicles for inclusive and sustainable development and redistribution, not only for growth, trade agreements should work on reinforcing productive sectors in countries of the Southern Neighbourhood and push for the creation of decent work, while being subject to monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure full transparency and the respect of core labour standards and human rights.

Recommendations

1. Expanding the dialogue between the European Union and Civil Society Organizations and other related parties around the assessment of the ongoing dialogue 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 Neighborhood. In addition, the creation of a structured mechanism to evaluate all agreements, with the participation of specialized technical committees and the adoption of a participatory mechanism to gather information from the early phases of the agreement.

2. Organizing a structured dialogue between the European Union and partner countries in the agreements from the region (currently Tunisia) and CSOs and trade unions on topics related to the priorities of these countries as an integral part of the agreement negotiation, such as sustainable



agriculture, development of industrial technics, issues related to food sovereignty and others. In addition to working on ex-ante impact assessment of trade agreements to evaluate its coherence with other European policies.

3. Supporting research and development programs for sustainable development in the countries of the Southern Neighborhood, based on the priorities identified by the region. In addition, supporting knowledge and technological exchange as part of the agreements.

4. Concerning the ongoing negotiations for the DCFTA with Tunisia, and expanding to other foreseen trade agreements with countries from the region:

- a- Avoiding removing tariff barriers on internally subsidized goods by the EU (such as red meat, dairy, and wheat) until the question of European internal support is decided in the WTO in light of the US-EU conflict over tariffs.
- b- For non-tariff barriers, avoiding using standards and quotas with protectionism objectives for goods that Tunisia is allowed to export (mainly agricultural and pharmaceutical products)
- c- Adopting international monitoring standards, the principle of equivalence of standards through mutual recognition agreements- similar to those between EU member states, while preserving standards assuring decent work.

5. Creating a binding multilateral mechanism involving civil society to monitor the impact of European private investment and European TNCs in Southern Neighborhood countries, with attention to adapting standards by types of companies, their size, and the sectors in which they invest.



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