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The socio-cultural dimension of the Southern Partnership: contingencies and prospects

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The socio-cultural dimension of the Southern Partnership: contingencies and prospects*

Abstract: This paper examines the socio-cultural dimension of the EU's policy towards countries in the Southern Mediterranean (SEM) region. It dwells on the specific provisions of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) as well as the most recent programmes. From this perspective those programmes' relevance and effectiveness are discussed.

Keywords: Southern Mediterranean (SEM), EU, ENP, EMP

Introduction

A short glimpse at the priorities of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) reveals that the socio-cultural¹ dimension has never been a priority. It is not a priority in the bilateral Action Plans either. The latter focus on economic, trade and security relations rather than on socio-cultural cooperation. Still, the socio-cultural dimension of cooperation across the Mediterranean is an important field in that it re-

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1 Theoretically, every aspect of human life concerns culture, which stands in clear opposition to nature and covers everything that does not belong to nature. In practical terms, however, the socio-cultural dimension is often conceived as a separate entity opposed to the economic or political dimensions of social life. In this paper, the cultural dimension will be understood not only as cultural production (visual, audio, written) but also as cultural exchange in terms of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The social dimension refers to soft aspects of human life quality such as access to basic services (education, health, social protection), as well as civic freedoms and human rights (with the accompanying aspects related to the rule of law and good governance).

fers to people, their needs, values and ideas. This is particularly true given the fact that Europe's influence on cultural and social life in the Middle East has been growing since the late 18th century. From a different angle, the 'Southern Flank' of the European Union (EU), as the region of south-eastern Mediterranean tends to be referred to, creates a multitude of potential fields of cooperation. These could lead not only to better mutual understanding but also to manifold interactions across the Mediterranean, thus adding to the overall efficiency of the EU policy goals towards this region. Unfortunately, as the discussion in this paper demonstrates, this aspect of cooperation has been neglected in the Southern Dimension of the ENP. The argument is structured as follows. First, an overview of the existing initiatives in the socio-cultural area within the ENP is provided. In the next step, it is emphasised that while some of them have been developed within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and are still active, others were designed as a part of the bilateral Action Plans adapted within the ENP. As the socio-political situation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) began to change rapidly in 2011, new instruments were implemented. Conclusions follow.

1 The legacy of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

1. Back in 1995, when the Barcelona Process was initiated and the EMP was launched, the socio-cultural dimension of cooperation, referred to as *Social, Cultural and Human Partnership* constituted one of the three major working areas that defined the EMP. It targeted the human dimension of mutual cooperation in the framework of the ENP, including intercultural and interreligious dialogue, exchange between civil society groups and citizens, especially women and youth.² The focus on culture and dialogue was reflected in a number of initiatives and programmes that were launched under the aegis of the EMP. However, their implementation was not particularly efficient. For instance, this was the case of the Euro-Mediterranean Culture Strategy. Agreed upon in 2008, its goal was to strengthen cultural policy and

2 *The Barcelona Process*, European Union. External Action, http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/barcelona_en.htm [2015-12-01].

intercultural dialogue.³ The idea was to establish a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Scientific Research Area.⁴ There were also several one-off projects such as *Europe for Mediterranean Journalist*. This programme started in 2007 and lasted 18 months. It targeted journalists and media organizations from the Mediterranean region. The idea behind the project was for the journalists to be given training and incentives to produce high quality reporting on the EMP and the EU in general.⁵ In this way, respective societies' attitudes toward the EMP and the overall idea of intra- and inter-regional collaboration could improve, therefore adding to the EMP's efficiency.

Positive examples of sustainable cooperation abound as well, e.g. funding-schemes for cultural projects launched under the EMP umbrella in the early 2000's. Each of the funding programmes covered a different area of culture-related activities and targeted a different social group. The beneficiaries originated from both sides of the Mediterranean, even though some programmes targeted the SEM countries in particular. These programmes included:

- EuromedAudiovisual Programme – launched in 2000, aimed at promoting intercultural exchange and capacity building among professionals in film and audio-visual sectors. In the third phase of the programme (2011-2014) six projects were financed with the total budget of 11 million euro.⁶
- Euromed Heritage – launched in 1998 and aimed at fostering cooperation between heritage and conservation institutions in the Mediterranean region. The last, fourth phase of the project ended in 2012.
- Euro-Med Youth Programme – it is a platform that funds project proposals of young people (both youth groups as well as NGOs) from the Euro-Mediterranean region. It has three

3 *Agreed Conclusions of the third Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Culture, Athens, 29-30 May 2008*, no. 139/08, 30 May 2008.

4 *Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education & Research Area. First Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on higher Education and Scientific Research (Cairo Declaration – 18 June 2007)*, 18 June 2007.

5 *Europe for Mediterranean Journalists*, <http://www.eu4medjournalists.eu/index.php/project/about/index.html> [2015-12-01].

6 The list of the projects is available here: *EuromedAudiovisual: Grant projects*, <http://euromedaudiovisuel.net/p.aspx?t=general&mid=122&l=en> [2015-12-01].

working areas: Euro-Med Youth Exchanges (it facilitates bilateral and multilateral youth exchanges across the Mediterranean), Euro-Med Youth Voluntary Service (opportunities for voluntary service in an NGO from the region) and Euro-Med Youth Training and Networking (including contact making seminars, study visits, trainings etc.). Currently the fourth phase of the programme is being implemented. Comparing to the two previous programmes, EMYP is decentralised and covers a wide range of projects with the help of National Youth Authorities.⁷

On the institutional level, the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures was established in 2005. It is an umbrella organisation of civil society organisations from both sides of the Mediterranean. It is co-financed by 42 countries cooperating in the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the European Commission. It is governed by a board of governors from all 42 countries. In this sense, the Anna Lindh Foundation represents a network of networks as it comprises around four thousand organisations (half of which are NGOs), which are gathered under national networks, e.g. the Polish one is headed by the International Cultural Centre in Cracow. The Foundation's activities focus on the following areas: Education and Youth, Culture and Artistic Mobility, Media and Public Opinion, Migration and Citizenship, Culture of Peace, Religion and Spirituality, and Academic Cooperation. It provides grants for civil society organisations, as well as training resources. Some projects became the flagship initiatives of the Foundation. This included grants (e.g. 1001 Actions for Dialogue Campaign), awards (e.g. Anna Lindh Journalist Award), and programmes (e.g. Children's Literature Programme, or the regional initiative Restore Trust, Rebuild Bridges as a response to the war in Gaza).⁸

Overall, the initiatives launched in the framework of the EMP were designed with an impetus as regards their scopes and long-term goals.

7 *About EuroMed Youth Program*, <http://www.euromedyouth.net/About-EuroMed-Youth-Program,51.html> [2015-12-01].

8 *The Anna Lindh Review, 2005-2015*, Anna Lindh Foundation, http://www.annalindhfoundation.org/sites/annalindh.org/files/documents/page/interno_alf_review.pdf [2015-12-01].

They were aimed at fulfilling a dream of a long-lasting and universal understanding that would be established by means of a respectful dialogue between the North (i.e. the EU) and the South (i.e. the Mediterranean countries). While these aims might sound promising they also seemed to be too idyllic. What is more, significant overlaps existed among the initiatives, especially the Anna Lindh Foundation with the Euro-Mediterranean funding-schemes. This affected the effectiveness of the initiatives in the field of social and cultural cooperation. From a different angle, however, it needs to be stressed that those initiatives did provide a very much needed space for young people, artists and non-governmental actors to fulfil their goals through capacity-building or project-funding. As a result of those programmes, networks of professionals and eventually friends were established; definitely one of the greatest benefits of these initiatives.

2. The socio-cultural dimension in the ENP

Several criticisms have been voiced towards the EMP. One of the most significant points was that its relevance and potential have been over-estimated. It was stressed that “the Euro-Mediterranean partnership project was presented in the official discourses by politicians and diplomats as the ultimate solution for helping the countries south of the Mediterranean to evolve in a positive manner...”⁹

Compared to the EMP, the ENP has provided a more tailored and therefore a more diversified approach to the SEM partner-countries.¹⁰ This new approach is reflected in bilateral association agreements signed with the Palestinian Authority (1997), Tunisia (1998), Israel and Morocco (2000), Jordan (2002), Egypt (2004), Algeria (2005) and Lebanon (2006). A further step was to prepare and implement bilateral Action Plans, aimed at economic and political reforms in the SEM partner-countries. The agenda is supposed to reflect the priorities of

9 S. Amin, A. El Kenz, *Europe and the Arab world. Patterns and prospects for the new relationship*, London: Zed Books, 2005, pp. 83-86.

10 E.g. A. Eralp, Ç. Üstün, 'Introduction', in: M. Comelli, A. Eralp, Ç. Üstün (eds), *The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Southern Mediterranean. Drawing from the Lessons of Enlargement*, Ankara: METU Press, 2009, p. 2.

the EU and respective countries. Currently, all but three SEM countries, incl. Algeria, Libya and Syria, have an Action Plan.¹¹

Neither the ENP nor the Action Plans define the socio-cultural dimension of mutual relations. In fact, references to those issues are scarce in the Action Plans. Specifically, in the case of Egypt the prospects of gradual opening of collaboration opportunities in programmes promoting cultural and educational links are mentioned.¹² One of the priorities is the protection of human rights, improvement of intercultural and interreligious dialogue and combating all forms of discrimination.¹³ There is also a practical-oriented priority on poverty reduction and social development (especially education and social protection, but also sport), as well as another one on management of migration flows¹⁴, combating terrorism and human trafficking.

In the case of Israel, the gradual opening or reinforcing of collaboration in the field of culture, science and education is mentioned.¹⁵ Among the priorities for action there are anti-terrorist activities, improvement of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, combating discrimination, as well as cooperation in migration-related issues and fight with organised crime.¹⁶ When it comes to Jordan, human rights as well as civic and media freedom are mentioned among the key priorities¹⁷; other socio-cultural issues are mentioned in terms of concrete actions¹⁸. Lebanese priorities for action include human rights and media freedom, cross-cultural dialogue, and fighting terrorism.¹⁹ In Morocco, the priority actions include legislative reform of human rights provisions, combating terrorism, and support of education and

11 P. Hakala, *Southern Partners*, European Parliament, April 2014, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/displayFtu.html?ftuid=FTU_6.5.6.html [2015-12-01].

12 *EU-Egypt Action Plan*, European External Action Service, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/egypt_enp_ap_final_en.pdf [2015-12-01], p. 3.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

15 *EU-Israel Action Plan*, European External Action Service, https://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/action_plans/israel_enp_ap_final_en.pdf [2015-12-01], p. 2.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

17 *European Neighbourhood Policy. EU-Jordan Action Plan*, European External Action Service, https://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/action_plans/2013_jordan_action_plan_en.pdf [2015-12-01], p. 3.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *European Neighbourhood Policy. EU-Lebanon Action Plan*, European External Action Service, https://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/lebanon_enp_ap_final_en.pdf [2015-12-01], p. 3.

science.²⁰ In the case of the Palestinian Authority, the focus is placed on the protection of civil rights, human rights and fundamental freedoms.²¹ There are also instances related to social protection, health and education, as well as a separate point on the rights of Palestinians in East Jerusalem.²² This Action Plan differs from others as it is very concrete, has clearly specified objectives, indicators and the EU's role. For Tunisia, the priorities were set as follows: dialogue and cooperation with regard to human rights, scientific research, education, and social policy.²³

The Action Plans are tailored to the socio-political and economic situation of the SEM partner-countries. For instance, the EU-Israeli Action Plan elaborates on Holocaust education, though Islamophobia is also mentioned. On the other hand, in the case of Lebanon, only cross-cultural dialogue is mentioned and the religious component of the dialogue is omitted. The North African countries, such as Morocco or Egypt have more elaborated parts on managing migration flows. Countries with weaker socio-economic indicators, such as Egypt, have extended provisions dealing with basic indicators of the quality of life, such as education (including vocational training), social protection, or health. Developed countries (e.g. Israel) put more effort on the challenges of post-industrial societies or enhancing information society.

3. The financial input

It is difficult to estimate the financial support of the EU for the SEM partner-countries in the socio-cultural dimension of cooperation. Data for two types of financial support can be extracted. The major funding channel is the European Neighbouring and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), while the priorities are set in European Commission assistance programming documents, i.e. National Indicative

20 *EU-Morocco Action Plan*, European External Action Service, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/burkina-faso/8398/-enp-action-plans_en [2015-12-01], p. 3.

21 *European Union-Palestinian Authority Action Plan. Political Chapeau*, European External Action Service, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/pa_enp_ap_final_en.pdf [2015-12-01], p. 5.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *EU-Tunisia Action Plan*, European External Action Service, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/tunisia_enp_ap_final_en.pdf [2015-12-01], p. 3.

Programmes (NIP). The second type is the support under thematic instruments and the SPRING programme.²⁴

While the thematic instruments are clearly defined, the NIP lists tend to have a wider scope. For instance, 172 million EUR was foreseen for Algeria under the NIP 2011-2013, out of which more than a half was allocated to “sustainable development and culture”. In Egypt, the total amount committed was 449.3 million EUR of which 11% was planned for “support for reform in democracy, human rights and justice”. Interestingly, the actual disbursement rate was none, although in the previous NIP (2007-2010) around 7% of the total 558 million EUR was successfully spent. Jordan obtained 265 million EUR for its NIP of 2007-2010, of which around 6% was designed to support political reform, human rights, justice and cooperation on security and fight against extremism. The following NIP (2011-2013) had a budget of 223 million EUR, out of which 20.2% was devoted to “supporting Jordan’s reform in democracy, human rights, media, and justice”. Eventually, the sources channelled for the implementation of that goal reached 34.1% of the total. In the case of Lebanon, 46% of the 187 million EUR obtained in 2007-2010 and 60% of 150 million EUR in the next phase (with actual spending lower at 46%) were designed to offer support to social and economic reform. Morocco received 654 million EUR for its NIP of 2007-2010, of which 45% went for the social sector and further 4.3% for governance and human rights. The next phase had a budget of 580.5 million EUR, of which 20% was to be spend on social issues and 15% on governance and human rights. With regard to Syria, under the first NIP for Morocco, 23% of the 130 million EUR committed was allocated for support of social reform. The second phase of the NIP was suspended due to the ongoing conflict. In its place, other special measures designed to assist the Syrian population in the war zone and Syrian refugees were adopted. As regards

24 The SPRING Programme (The Support to Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth) was launched in September 2011 as the EU’s response to the socio-political changes in the Middle East and North Africa called as the ‘Arab Spring’. It had a budget of 350 million EUR available through the ENPI budget. SPRING aimed at achieving democratic transition and sustainable and inclusive growth – European Commission, *EU response to the Arab Spring: the SPRING Programme*, Memo/11/636, 27 September 2011, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-636_en.htm [2015-12-01].

Tunisia, in NIP 2011-2013 around 20% of the 240 million EUR was committed to employment and social protection.²⁵

No explicit socio-cultural actions were funded from funds allocated to the Israeli NIP. In the case of Libya, there was no NIP for the time period 2007-2010, but 18 million EUR was committed to the fields of HIV/AIDS and migration. Although it was possible to sign a NIP for the following years, the NIP's priorities had to be shifted due to the political and human turmoil in that country. As a result, a total of 60 million EUR was disbursed as a means of supporting the transition process, improving the quality of human capital, increasing the sustainability of economic and social development and addressing jointly the challenge of managing migration. With regard to Palestine, there is no mention of any explicit social actions, even though this country received the biggest total and average support from the EU out of all countries included in the ENPI framework.²⁶

While the general data makes it difficult to estimate the significance of the socio-cultural dimension in the ENP, it is possible to obtain a clearer picture of the developments in that field. Six countries were covered by the SPRING programme, out of which four received around 100 million EUR. The SPRING programme covered countries that were affected by the Arab Spring in different ways, i.e. countries in which the president was overthrown and (in theory) political transformation was begun (Egypt, Tunisia); countries 'gate keepers' which manage migrants' flow to the EU (Morocco, Tunisia); countries with no significant demonstrations within the Arab Spring framework but vulnerable politically (Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan); countries affected by severe social conflicts (Libya) or refugee flows (Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia). Table 1 beneath offers an overview of the funds allocated to those countries.

25 European Commission, *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Statistical Annex*, SWD (2014) 98 final, Brussels, 27 March 2014, pp. 51-70.

26 Ibid.

Table 1. Additional support from the SPRING programme for 2011-2013

Country	Specifics	million EUR
Egypt	Social-economic development and civil society	90
Jordan	Education reform, support to electoral system, justice preparatory project, support to enterprise and export development, good governance and development contract, support to host communities	101
Lebanon	Reinforcing human rights and democracy, top-up support security and rule of law, top-up support to the reform of the judiciary, support to electoral reform, infrastructure for Palestine refugees, Solid Waste Management Capacities, recovery of local economies	51
Libya	Support to civil society and media, support to the constitutional process	5
Morocco	Support to National Council and Inter-Ministerial Delegation of Human Rights, support to SMEs and job creation, Agricultural Strategy Council, literacy programme, top up support to health sector reform programme, top up Hakama, support to the Moroccan Parliament, support to the implementation of the Mobility Partnership	128
Tunisia	Top-up programmes of economic recovery, support to the Association Agreement and to the transition, civil society capacity building programme, programme of support to the justice sector, programme of support to the integration of popular neighbourhoods, ENPARD	155

Source: European Commission, *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Statistical Annex*, SWD (2014) 98 final, Brussels, 27 March 2014.

Apart from the ENPI, other funding mechanisms exist that have enabled allocation of funds for specific projects in the SEM region. A vast majority of funding was distributed by means of the Instrument for Stability. It enabled financing projects aimed at crisis response. In the case of Libya, significant funding was provided in the form of humanitarian aid. Table 2 beneath offers an overview of the allocation of funding for selected programmes under that funding scheme.

Table 2. Support to civil society and under thematic instruments, total for 2011-2013, million EUR

	Civil Society Facility	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights	Non-state Actors and Local Authorities	Instrument for Stability	Other
Algeria	1.4	2.2	1.3	–	1.9*
Egypt	2.7	4.8	2.8	–	2.0*
Israel	1.5	3.6	0.3	–	0.3**
Jordan	0.8	2.7	0.7	22.9	
Lebanon	1.0	1.8	1.0	47.0	

	Civil Society Facility	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights	Non-state Actors and Local Authorities	Instrument for Stability	Other
Libya	1.2	5.0	7.0	19.8	7.6* + 80.5***
Morocco	1.8	3.4	1.5	–	7.47*
Palestine	1.8	4.5	7.2	13.0	3.6**
Syria	–	8.0	0.3	27.2	0.4**
Tunisia	2.4	7.2	1.5	2.3	1.5*

* Migration and asylum

** Investing in People/Gender

*** Humanitarian aid

Source: The authors' own calculation based on: European Commission, *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Statistical Annex, SWD (2014) 98 final*, Brussels, 27 March 2014.

Conclusions

The objective of the initiatives that had been launched within the EMP framework was to address such issues as arts, cultural heritage, and religion. Emphasis was placed on the need of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. Although it is rational, the so defined objectives proved to be built on overly idealistic assumptions about the reality of the SEM region. In this sense, it was futile to expect that their respective objectives would be attained.²⁷ The SEM partner-countries were included in specific EMP programmes randomly, their political realities frequently ignored, and hence those programmes' inefficiency aggravated. Specifically, taking into account the political reality of the SEM region, one can hardly imagine that the idea of the six Arab countries (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestinian Authority and Jordan) cooperating with Israel on an identical or similar basis was a feasible one. Israel is a Western country with a different culture and political orientation. Certainly, it is an excellent idea to shun contentious political considerations and include Israel in regional cooperation schemes in the SEM region as a means of promoting good cultural contacts between the SEM region and the EU. It is striking, however, that while Israel has been included, some Arab countries have been excluded from those programmes, for instance Syria and Libya. Of course, politics plays a role here.

27 More on this issue, see, e.g. Amin and El Kenz, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

Compared to the EMP, the ENP brought a significant shift in the paradigm of cooperation between the EU and the SEM region. Firstly, instead of the 'one-size-fits-all' policy approach, the ENP encouraged a tailor-cut approach, so that the needs and priorities of each of the SEM partner-countries can be addressed in a more accurate manner. Secondly, the human dimension has taken a more pragmatic form in the ENP framework. That is, the pompous declarations of mutual respect and the need of intercultural understanding and dialogue so common in the EMP-era hardly exist today. The word dialogue is still used in the Action Plans but it refers to enhancing political dialogue and dialogue on security issues (even if intercultural dialogue is also mentioned), rather than to some undefined grandiose statements. Still, Action Plans remain vague. It is feasible that it is intentional though, i.e. to endow those programmes with flexibility, while at the same time not allowing the political particularities of the SEM region to affect them. This notwithstanding, there is a space of manoeuvre for the Action Plans to be improved. For instance, a common programme of translating literary heritage or of studying civilizational interaction of both sides of the Mediterranean would qualify.

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