



Regional Workshop for Civil Society Organizations in the Arab Countries

“Bridging the gap between the Euromed civil society and the EU: a Euromed civil society-led initiative on Structured Dialogue”

Beirut - 11-12 December 2016

1. Setting the framework: the EU-Southern Mediterranean civil society relation

For more than two decades now and starting with the Barcelona process in 1995 the recognition of the growing role of civil society in the EU-Arab relations became undeniable. At the beginning of the ripening process, the partners of the both shores of the Mediterranean agreed to lay the groundwork for a greater partnership, in order to ensure a strengthened role of the civil society in the process that would lead to enhance the relations with regard to political, social, economic and cultural issues.

The need for a better involvement of the civil society in the EU policy dialogue also came up in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings. Although the EU has a long-standing history of supporting the civil society by developing policies and projects and establishing new instruments, the Arab uprisings vindicated a recalibration of the relations with the EU: henceforth, policies were renewed; new instruments created, and programs adjusted¹.

The EU willingness to take into account the demands of the region has been transposed in various ways whether internally or externally. Into this framework fit for example the communication “The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe’s engagement with Civil Society in external relations» and the ENP review of 2015. In view of the CSOs’ shrinking space, the main purpose of these different scales initiatives was to strengthen the role of CSOs in building democracy, peace and defending human rights. In his speech delivered on 24 January 2012, the former Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle stated that the Union had to “associate better civil society to EU policy dialogue with the partner countries and in the preparation of EU programs and interventions”². The purpose of such a partnership was two-fold: benefiting

¹ Report of the third edition of the Civil Society Forum-Neighborhood South, p. 3: available online:

² Speech available online: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-12-33_en.htm?locale=en



from the civil society expertise and helping raise awareness of the EU activities and interventions³.

In a similar vein, the EU also took the decision to create CSO roadmaps with the EU Delegations, which aims to strengthen the strategic engagement of civil society in 10 countries namely: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia and, as of now, these roadmaps have been developed in 8 countries of the South Neighborhood. However, the outcome of such roadmaps can be misleading to the extent that the process, which has led to its establishment and the results, could have been flawed. Indeed, it seems appropriate to recall the unbalanced nature of the consultations, since the vast majority of the CSOs that took part to the creation of the roadmaps were either partners of the EU, or of a small scale institutional framework with limited experience and funding. The demands with regard to accountability and aid effectiveness for instance have been drowned out by the claims of CSOs whose independence can be questionable. Thus, such roadmaps should be more of an indicative character rather than a tool of selection.

Internally, the creation of the Inter-Institutional Steering Group marks the desire of improving relations with civil society in the neighborhood south⁴.

While it is recognized that the Euro-Med Partnership takes on a multilateral dimension and that the ENP is of a bilateral aspect, both of them managed to involve changes with reference to the role of CSOs. Nevertheless, it is generally acknowledged that the latter has been confined to the monitoring of commitments made by national Governments in the south and implementing the National Action Plans. Moreover, the reviewed ENP did not provide an essential review of the strategic and political choices made by the former ENP on the political and socio-economic levels and the security-based approach deepened the crisis and the social gaps among citizens, shrinking public freedoms space and civil society enabling environment⁵. It is worth noting in this regard that the National Action Plans were designed by the national actors but tailored according the “partnership” requirements. In this sense, few or no significant progress towards policy formulation, advocacy, lobbying and process institutionalization (i.e. consultations, policy design, implementation, evaluation) were observed⁶. The CSOs still seem to be confronted to several inherent

³ Z. Abdel Samad. “EU Arab Relations, Evolving relations and an evolving role for civil society: From Barcelona Process to revised European Neighborhood Policy”, p. 1

⁴ Report of the third edition of the Civil Society Forum-Neighborhood South, p. 3

⁵ ANND Statement on ENP review document, p. 1.

⁶ Op. cit. p. 4

challenges such as the shrinking space, the mobilization of sustainable resources, the access to information etc.

2. Recent developments that are for importance to us

The workshop has a strategic aspect since it comes within a wider context. Indeed, several developments are corollary to each other and thus, the dialogue has to be understood as an attempt not only to bridge the gap with the EU but also to connect the different developments to each other and adapt our resources.

Among these developments, one can list the following:

- *the Consensus on Development*

A public consultation on revising the European Consensus on Development in light of the adoption of the Agenda 2030 was carried out from May 30 to August 21, 2016. All citizens and organizations were welcomed to contribute to this consultation. The objective of the consultation was to use the contributions to redefine the development policy in the context of EU external action in a fast changing world. By holding these consultations, the EU showed the concern about the development policy approach and this for the need to change it.

- *the EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy*

The document, entitled "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy" was presented during the EU Summit on June 28th-29th 2016. It sets out the main principles of EU foreign policy.

This document is relevant for us, since it does not only reflect the strategic vision for the EU's global role, but also highlights common ground and presents a common way forward. Among the key priorities that are of concern to us: Resilience involving a more effective migration policy focusing on origin and transit countries of migrants and refugees; Integrated EU approach to conflicts and crises founded on pre-emptive peace, stabilization, conflict settlement and the political economy of peace; Partnering: "The EU will invest in pivotal non-state actors. We will sharpen the means to protect and empower civic actors, notably human rights defenders, sustaining a vibrant civil society worldwide⁷". However, the document remains substantially vague in some of its prescriptions, for instance on the

⁷ "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe", p. 43, available online: https://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf



expected revitalization of its struggling enlargement and neighborhood policies. It is highly Eurocentric by putting the emphasis on the EU's security, focusing on security and defense policies, counter-terrorism, cyber and energy security, and strategic communications.

- *The European External Investment Plan*

The European Commission has proposed on September 14, a new European External Investment Plan (EEIP) which aims at – inter alia - encouraging investments in the EU Neighborhood and Africa, and strengthening its partnerships and contributing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and contributing to address the root causes of migration and strengthen our partnerships in Africa and the Neighborhood⁸. It is worth noting that the main challenge identified is to improve infrastructure and services in the host countries or the countries of origin thus investments should be mainly targeting them.

- *The Migration Partnership Framework*

A new Migration Partnership Framework in June 2016 that fully integrates migration in the EU foreign policy. The Framework includes a mix of short and long-term actions which aim at: saving lives at sea, increasing return, enabling migrants and refugees to stay closer to home, addressing the root causes of irregular migration and supporting the countries in their political, social and economic development.

- *The regional hub*

Following-up on the letter sent to the High Representative Federica Mogherini and the Commissioner Johannes Hahn on May 18th, an answer in the affirmative has been given by the Commission and the EEAS services. They reaffirmed their strong commitment in the preparations in advancing to set up a “regional dialogue hub”. The question remains of how it will be managed, what its role, function and structure will be, and what budget will be available.

Having set this framework, it should be noted that the overlapping context, future prospects, and issues that flow from it require some coherence and shared vision from the stakeholders (EU and South neighborhood countries).

⁸ European Commission, State of the Union 2016, EIP Factsheet



3. The workshop and participants

Up to now, three annual editions of the Southern Neighborhood Civil Society Forum have been held. They also have been preceded by regional seminars with CSOs-only. We believe that all these dialogues were informative but not engaging. Indeed, the very essence of the Structured Dialogue has been undermined since the CSOs of the South shore of the Mediterranean discussed all the post-decision impacts of the EU policies. Today's initiative aims to improve the efficiency of CSOs' participation in the Structured Dialogue process and in European cooperation, both as development actors and key stakeholders in the public policy process. Our aim is to weigh up the forthcoming EU decisions, in particular when it comes to the shrinking space that has two components: one on a national level, and a more global one which deals with the shrinking of the EU policies in the Arab region. It is the latter that is of more significance to us.

The workshop is relevant to active CSOs in the Euromed region since the Euromed partnership plays an important role in the process of elaborating developmental policies in the Southern Neighborhood with regards to security, economic, social, cultural, and legal fields. In this respect, we consider the Structured Dialogue with the European institutions a vital channel for participation, in order to influence the decision-making process and to promote alternative visions based on human rights and equality principles.

This event is innovative because we are taking the initiative to propose a more efficient formula of the Structured Dialogue with the European institutions. It is necessary to unblock and revitalize the process. It seeks to reactivate and to create momentum in the dialogue. Furthermore, it aims to reduce the control of the EU institutions, and to strengthen and diversify the engagement of southern neighborhood countries CSOs, in order to give them more space. The effective engagement of CSOs requires:

- a- Their involvement in the selection of participants in the dialogue in order to diversify and improve their representation
- b- Their involvement in the different aspects of the European policy and thus their involvement in the design of dialogue's agendas
- c- To conduct an effective dialogue on the various aspects of European policies in order to take into account various stakeholders' views and concerns.



These are the key steps for the foundation of a structured and effective dialogue. This cannot be met if the European institutions, directly involved in European policies, manage the dialogue unilaterally.

Objectives: The workshop aims to contribute to the achievement of the following objectives:

- Strengthen and diversify the involvement of CSOs in the Structured Dialogue process with the EU
- Increase the influence of CSOs in the decision-making process and promote alternatives based on the principles of human rights and equality
- Discuss the modalities of the potential bid tender that will be launched by the EU as broached during the last meeting in Brussels. Indeed, the next step is to decide whether we want to respond to the bid, and in case the latter is suitable, we will have to agree on the implementing rules (the creation of a consortium, the nomination of a lead partner, setting up the activities etc.).