

# **EPP in the Mediterranean: Renewed partnership based on common interest and mutual trust.**



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## Renewed partnership based on common interest and mutual trust.

The Mediterranean is of great importance to the European Union, both historically and geographically. The EU has a direct and vital interest in the stability, security and economic growth of the Mediterranean basin as well as the wider Southern Neighbourhood including the Middle East. Regionally dynamics presented various challenges. The European Neighbourhood Policy was launched with the laudable goal of fostering stability, prosperity and good governance in the Southern Mediterranean. However, it is evident today that its instruments, objectives and principles are no longer aligned with the region's current realities. At the same time, the region hosts many opportunities of shared responsibility and mutual interest as well as underlying social, economic and security challenges.

As we focus on the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the EPP reemphasises its strong commitment to our partners in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the entire Mediterranean basin.

The European People's Party initiated at the Congress 2015 in Madrid the **EPP Partnership programme**, kick-starting a structured dialogue with parties from countries from the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). Our developed partnerships with our partner parties from Lebanon and Morocco are the current fundament of this dialogue which needs to be enhanced and enlarged.

Therefore, we, the EPP family, as the driving force for the Mediterranean, need to focus on the following:

- a. The EPP family will lead the way for **a new Pact for the Mediterranean**. This pact, with our dedicated **EPP European Commissioner for the Mediterranean** Dubravka Šuica, will upscale Europe's ambitions in the region and recognise the importance of the Mediterranean providing a concrete operational framework for a mutually beneficial cooperation, including **comprehensive and strategic partnerships**, focused on investment, economic stability, skills and jobs, energy, transport, security, migration, peer-to-peer activities in support of the local communities and other areas of mutual interest of the EU and its Mediterranean neighbourhood.

Our renewed and newly negotiated partnerships should include all strategic fields that matter to the EU, starting from migration, including preventing irregular migration, fighting smuggling, and enhancing returns, but also stands alongside shared interests and policies such as economic growth in North Africa, peace and security, energy, and critical raw materials as well as humanitarian and development policies.

This pact should strengthen the EU's diplomacy on the partnerships developed with Tunisia and Egypt, concluded in 2023 and 2024, to bring a positive momentum and tangible progress into our cooperation while at the same time underpinning that the respect for human rights and democratic principles represent unquestionable cornerstones for our European values. Within this frame, the EU should push for further and more tangible cooperation from its Mediterranean partners, especially in the field of migration and security. Such partnerships shall also be envisaged for further countries like Jordan, Morocco and Lebanon, bearing in mind their historical, cultural and socio-economic ties with Europe. The EPP seeks to move away from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach but instead proposes innovative Southern Neighbourhood instruments and solutions will need to be tailor-made to best align with the specific interests and priorities. Sustaining agreements between the EU and Southern countries will help to deepen the relationships based on common interest and mutual trust. While prioritising bilateral relations, the EU should also continue to foster regional cooperation through existing frameworks like the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). The latter offers a valuable platform for promoting dialogue and joint action on issues of common concern.

- b. We strongly believe in a deeper cooperation on **security**, fighting organised crime and terrorism as well as critical infrastructure protection. Particular emphasis should be put on the fight against terrorism and religious extremism, especially after the violent surge in the Middle East. The Mediterranean region is often origin, transit and target of **migration** through several routes. We are determined to guarantee control, in accordance with international law and in respect

of fundamental rights. The guiding principles of our migration policy are humanity and order. A whole-of-route approach needs to be strengthened considering the broader context and the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement taking into consideration the security, demographic and economic challenges that migration waves pose to buffer countries like Lebanon, Morocco or Tunisia.

We need to work on improving the humanitarian situation in Syria to address the root causes of this regional refugee crisis and work together with Lebanon towards the gradual return of Syrian migrants in areas where their return can be considered safe.

We keep on calling the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament to call for a new electoral session allowing Lebanese MPs to meet and elect a new President according to the Lebanese Constitution as quickly as possible, and we want to allow an independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the Beirut explosion within the framework of the United Nations. We underline the necessity to use Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/1277 of 30 July 2021 to impose sanctions against persons and entities who are responsible for undermining democracy or the rule of law in Lebanon, and in particular members of Hezbollah and their political allies in Lebanon.

It will be important to work on a tripartite collaboration between Europe, North Africa and the Sub-Sahara region to address the underlying sources of migration and improve living conditions for the populations to work on a prosperous future in their countries of origin.

Addressing migration requires legal pathways and combating human trafficking, and military protection is necessary to safeguard the Mediterranean trade. Furthermore, we need to continue and expand the cooperation under the EU-Türkiye statement.

- c. Our increased **economic involvement**, especially in North Africa, is key to develop a new partnership with the African continent and counter investments coming from China, Russia and Iran. Regional investment initiatives, notably in the energy and clean tech manufacturing sectors, with the help of a Trans-Mediterranean Energy and Clean Tech Cooperation Initiative, will increase renewable energy trading, notably through the Global Gateway. Economic regional integration projects shall promote sustainable integration between several countries of the region contributing to more stability, social development and economic interconnection. We need to invest in policies and tools that promote place-based entrepreneurship, self-employment, and alternative models of local business development in the Mediterranean region. In this respect, education and training shall play a pivotal role in cultivating those necessary skills and attributes for the development for a more sustainable economic environment.

We defend the fact that access to the internal market by third countries, development aid and the delivery of visas by Member States should be conditioned on full cooperation of these third countries in the field of returns and readmissions.

- d. We believe that a stronger relationship with the Southern Neighbourhood countries can be a real asset in tackling Europe's **energy** crisis. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has revealed the consequences of our energy dependency on Russia. Since then, our main objective has been to diversify our energy sources. However, in order to ensure energy security, competitiveness and sustainability targets, should create a trans-Mediterranean energy cooperation initiative. In order to have an equal relationship with the Southern Neighbourhood countries we need to:
- i. fill the gap observed today between the capillarity of energy infrastructures;
  - ii. leverage all domestic resources in the Southern Neighbourhood such as wind, solar, hydrogen, bioenergy and natural gas, which are of strategic importance for Europe;
  - iii. promote cross-border energy infrastructure maintaining a technology neutral approach: hydrogen, electricity and gas are all important;
  - iv. support the partner countries in decarbonising their current energy mix, including reducing methane emissions from their upstream gas operations. Producing green hydrogen with the support of our partners, particularly Morocco, which have ambitions to capitalise on sun and wind to accelerate our joint energy security and transition, should be given special attention.

- e. The level of instability in the Middle East is unprecedented. A reinforced **EU Middle East Strategy**, with a view to the day after the war in Gaza, will need to focus on promoting steps needed for a two-state solution strengthening partnerships with key regional stakeholders, with special focus on reinforcing our cooperation with Lebanon by ending the war in the region and helping Lebanon to rebuild their political system and reinstate the State's sole security control over its entire territory based on the UN resolutions 1701, 1559 and 1680. Support for Lebanon has to go hand in hand with necessary economic and judiciary reforms and efficient fight of corruption. Furthermore, we need to counter Iran's and Russia's engagement in the Middle East and to dismantle their proxies in the region with a unified European approach that reconsiders the status of these proxies vis-à-vis European law, especially after the recent attacks and aggressions by Hamas and Hezbollah.
- f. At the same time, no European security architecture shall be complete in a holistic approach as long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation. The EU should send a strong message of solidarity to Cyprus by assuming a more active role in trying to overcome the deadlock and resume the negotiations to end the 50-year-long occupation and reunify the island, in line with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, EU principles and the *acquis*. Turkey's insistence on a two-state solution does not constitute a constructive approach ahead of a possible resumption of Cyprus talks, threatens regional stability in an era of increased volatility, and further complicates EU-Turkey relations.
- g. Finally, we strongly believe in the need of **a communication strategy** to promote the EU's role in the Mediterranean highlighting our own contributions and countering anti-EU narratives, as especially China and Russia are imposing their own descriptions.

The European Union must enhance and move forward the political, economic and security development within the Mediterranean area, together with our regional and transatlantic partners, aided by an innovative, transparent and honest approach on an equal footing. We must nurture our partnership and elevate further the reputation and credibility of the EU as a reliable and essential partner. The engagement of **the youth**, including in rural areas, and talent partnerships, aimed at investing in skills, will have to be given a priority considering the demographic challenges, but also must address the talent exodus from Southern countries as they specifically need their talents to participate in the economic and social progress.



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