

Fourth Annual Interactive Conference of the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa

Shaping Shared Futures: Inclusive Peace and Sustainable Development between Europe and the MENA-region

Date: Wednesday and Thursday (end by noon), November 26-27, 2025

Location: Amman, Jordan at Fairmont Hotel

Language: English and Arabic

Concept Note and Programme

Purpose and Expected Outcome

The purpose of the conference is to discuss shared challenges, identify practical and creative solutions, and strengthen partnerships across Europe and the MENA region that contribute to a more inclusive, peaceful, and sustainable future for both regions. The conference will bring together approximately 150 participants from Europe and the MENA region for highly interactive discussions in plenary and break-out sessions. Participants are invited to share their knowledge, and to engage on new issues outside their specific areas of expertise. Discussions will take place under the Chatham House Rule. The conference will result in a comprehensive report outlining key takeaways and recommendations from each session.

Context

The relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region stands at a pivotal moment as both regions face interconnected challenges and security concerns. Bound by deep historical ties, geographic proximity, and enduring interdependence, our partnership is once again in sharp focus. The 30th anniversary of the Barcelona Process in 2025 offers a timely opportunity to reflect on the evolution of EU–MENA relations and assess the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for collaboration. In this context, the proposed Pact for the Mediterranean signals a renewed political commitment to deepen cooperation, which can hopefully help bridge some of the trust gaps created by recent turbulence across the region and beyond. The catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza continued to deteriorate throughout the year, with far-reaching ramifications for both regional and global politics. The current fragile ceasefire and the associated peace initiative may allow for much-needed civilian relief. Ensuring the sustained implementation of agreed-upon measures, in line with international law, will remain high on the agenda in both intergovernmental and people-to-people relations.

Despite vested efforts by the international community to uphold humanitarian law, the politicisation of aid has become an ever more prominent feature of contemporary conflict, forcing humanitarian diplomacy to reinvent itself. This development reflected a broader trend globally where failures to uphold the rules-based international order put unprecedented strain on multilateral collaboration and frameworks. This global shift not only impacts, but risks exacerbating challenges that necessitate cross-border solutions, including issues of good governance, emerging technologies, and environmental degradation.

In Syria, the collapse of the Assad regime put an end to five decades of dictatorship, but exposed Damascus to the underlying grievances of a war-torn society, compounded by regional interferences and nationwide recovery needs. Almost a year into the transition, a rising number of Syrians are further voicing their concerns over participation in the emerging political structures. These looming realities are unfolding while European and regional host-countries of Syrian diaspora communities are looking for ways to facilitate their return, adding more pressure on the new interim government to swiftly deliver on promises of stability, security and an inclusive process going forward.

The overall precarious security situation in the MENA-region, and in Europe following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, is compelling countries across these regions to rapidly boost their defence spending. These imminent security needs are driving competition over new technologies and superior AI-systems, in turn raising new concerns over regulation, accountability and ethical use. At the same time, if managed responsibly, new technologies could contribute to supporting efforts to predict and monitor conflict and manage post-conflict reconstruction. This will be a joint task for both public and private sector actors.

What happens in one region inevitably reverberates in the other, underscoring the interdependence of Europe and the MENA-region. Strengthening dialogue & institutional cooperation between stakeholders from these regions is essential — not only to address the aforementioned challenges, but in order to prevent polarization and inflammatory narratives that risk spurring violence in regions already caught up in uncertainty and volatility. Intercultural dialogue can contribute to this end.

The emergence of new challenges adds to longer standing challenges across Europe and the MENA-region. This includes the issue of climate change where governments and communities across the region are facing mounting pressure to address and mitigate its consequences. In order to meet these challenges, enhanced and joint efforts are needed urgently by governments, the private sector, academia and civil society in a coordinated contribution towards the green transition.

Conference Themes

The conference will revolve around issues of shared interest and concern for Europe and the MENA-region. In particular, the sessions will cover issues *of EU-MENA relations, AI and new technologies in peace and conflict, international humanitarian law, inclusive governance in Syria, and the green transition. The conference will also incorporate elements of intercultural dialogue.*

Participants

The conference will bring together approximately 150 participants from Europe and the MENA-region, including experts, representatives of civil society and the private sector, civil servants and academia. Diversity in gender, age, background, and expertise will be actively sought.

About the Swedish Dialogue Institute (SDI)

SDI is a Swedish, Amman-based, diplomatic mission that serves a platform for contacts and dialogue between on the one hand Sweden and the countries of the EU and Europe, and on the other hand the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. SDI addresses issues that are of shared interest and concern for these regions, and that promote political, economic and social development, as well as intercultural understanding. The *Fourth Annual Conference* builds on the dialogues and activities undertaken by SDI throughout the year, reflecting the foreign policy priorities of the Swedish government.



Programme

Day one, 26 November

08:30 ***Registration & Coffee***

09:00 **Opening Session**

H.E Ann Mâwe, *Director of the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa*

Recorded Message to the Conference

HRH Princess Rym Ali, *President of the Anna Lindb Foundation*

Keynote Addresses

H.E Dr. Nassif Hitti, *Former Foreign Minister of Lebanon and Chairman of Swedish Dialogue Institute's Advisory Committee*

H.E Pierre-Christophe Chatzisavas, *Ambassador of the European Union*

10:00 **Plenary Session on EU-MENA relations: A reflection on security and institutional developments amidst geopolitical turmoil**

Moderator: Dr. Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary of the *Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)*

Panellists

- **Ambassador Patrick Simonnet**, EU Ambassador to Yemen & former EU Special Envoy for the Mediterranean
- **Fotini Zarogianni**, Research Officer, *the Anna Lindb Foundation*
- **Farah Bdour**, Political analyst and conflict-resolution specialist., Former senior advisor at *United States Institute of Peace (USIP)*
- **Noha al-Mikawy**, Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, *AUC*

12:00 ***Lunch***

13:00 **Plenary Session on AI & Peacebuilding**

Moderator: Laura Bruun, Researcher, *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*

Panellists

- **Dr. Mona Demaidi**, Entrepreneur, AI Expert and Women's Right, *Arab American University*



- **Maha Bouzeid**, International Executive Leader, Board Member and Investor, *Energysave*
- **Adan Anwar**, Doctoral Researcher in Psychological Warfare & Diplomacy, *the Swedish Defence University and KTH Royal Institute of Technology*
- **Dr. Adel Bibi**, Senior Researcher in Machine Learning, *University of Oxford* and R&D Distinguished Advisor, *Softserve*

14:30 *Coffee Break*

15:00 **Interactive Activity: Cross-Sectoral Pairs to discuss EU-MENA and AI**

16:00 **Reports from Pairs and Wrap Up**

16:30 **End of Day 1**

19:00 **Gala Dinner & Intercultural Evening**

Dr. Azza Karam, President and CEO of Lead Integrity

Diploma Distribution for Mutual Mentorship Program 2025-2026

Entertainment by Ali Wassouf

Day two, 27 November

09:00 **Opening of Day 2**

09:30 **Parallel Sessions**

Humanitarian Diplomacy in the MENA-Region: The Role of States and Non-State Actors

Moderator: Charles Petrie, *Human Securities Consultant*

Panellists

- **Dr. Ghassan Elkahlout**, Director, *Doha Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies*
- **Fredrick Lee-Ohlsson**, Director for Humanitarian Diplomacy, *The World Food Programme*
- **Peter Lundberg**, Executive Director, *Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law*
- **Basel Hourania**, Humanitarian Diplomacy Senior Advisor, *Syrian Arab Red Crescent*

Comparative Transitions: Different Starting Points, Common Challenges for a Greener Future

Moderator: Mattias Goldmann, CEO, *Swedish 2030 Secretariat*



Panellists

- **Moustafa Bayoumi**, Research Fellow, Energy, Climate Change, and Sustainable Development, *Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy*
- **Kristijan Jordanov**, Founder & CEO, *Net Zero Build*
- **Aia Abul Haj**, Founder, *SOLVillion*
- **Kareem Nour**, Chemical Environmental Engineer

A year after the fall: Prospects for an Inclusive Transition in Syria

Moderator: Leila Hilal, Senior Programme Officer and Managing Editor, *Security in Context*

Panellists

- **Roger Asfar**, Syria Country Director, *Adyan Foundation*
- **Maen Tallaa**, Research Director, *Omran Center for Strategic Studies*
- **Kelly Petillo**, MENA Programme Manager, *European Council on Foreign Relations*
- **Sawsan Abou Zainedin**, Chief Executive Director, *Madaniya*
- **Dr. Ahmad Sager**, Vice President, *Gulf Research Center*

Intercultural Dialogue; the Role of Museums, Films, and Community Heritage

Moderator: Dr. Mohamed Abdel Dayem, Founder, Creative People Consulting

Panellists

- **Manal Ataya**, Museums Advisor, *Sharjah Museums Authority*
- **Hadeer S. Dahab**, Community Architect, Cultural Heritage Specialist and Founder, *Makanuna*
- **Linda Mutawi**, Film Producer, *Fikera*
- **Brian Palmer**, Social Anthropologist, *Uppsala University*

11:30 **Reports and Reflections from Parallel Sessions**

12:30 **Closing remarks**

12:45 **End of conference**

13:00 ***Optional Lunch***