



Report from the Launch of the Mutual Mentorship Program: “Strengthening EU-MENA Collaboration Across Regions and Generations”

On March 26th the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted an online session to launch its Mutual Mentorship Program (MMP) – *Between Europe and the MENA Regions and Across Generations*. In the session, the MMP was introduced, and the overarching theme of strengthening EU-MENA collaboration across regions and generations was explored.

Ann Måwe, Director of the Swedish Dialogue Institute, opened the session by highlighting the importance of people-to-people dialogue amid global and regional challenges and encouraged participants to engage actively, build trust, and foster mutual understanding. Program officer Aseel Sha’ban then introduced the concept of the program and briefed participants on its proceedings (see attachment 1).

Interactive activity

Two pairs were invited to share reflections on their first bilateral meeting. Following their deliberations, Deputy Director Martina Berglund led an interactive Mentimeter-activity where all participants were invited to reflect on how increased EU-MENA cooperation could benefit them in their private lives, in their sectors, and in their societies (see attachment 2). Two participants were invited to elaborate on each level. While multiple and diverse, the responses and elaborations showcased a common belief that EU-MENA cooperation could promote peaceful relations, new opportunities, and sustainable and cohesive societies.

Panel discussion

Diving deeper into the theme, the director moderated a panel discussion on “Reflections from Experts on EU-MENA relations”, which included four speakers:

- Dr. Nassif Hitti, former Foreign Minister of Lebanon.
- Dr Noha El-Mikawy, Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy (GAPP) at the American University in Cairo.
- Patrick Costello, Senior Advisor at Kofi Annan Foundation.

- Ellie Geranmayeh, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa programme at the European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR).

Each panelist shared their unique perspective on the three main challenges and three main opportunities in EU-MENA relations at present, providing insightful and frank analysis. The panellists also explored what could be done to advance EU-MENA dialogue and relations in the current context.

Key recommendations from the panel discussion

While approaching the subject from diverse perspectives, all panellists highlighted EU-MENA interdependence and called for increased cooperation between the regions. Key insights included (but were not limited to):

- **Recognise shared challenges and work jointly for solutions.** In a global and regional context of increasing uncertainties, the EU and the MENA regions had shared interests in upholding a rules based international order and the respect for international law.
- **Reexamine the EU-MENA relationship.** As both the MENA region and Europe were facing conflicts in their immediate neighbourhoods, there was a need to reexamine the relationship between the regions and to consider how to engage more efficiently, without US support, in line with their interests.
- **Develop exchanges between the regions on all levels,** not only government to government and between regional organisations, but also through people-to-people dialogue, youth programmes, trade and private sector, as well as university networks held vast potentials to bridge the regions and provide longevity in collaborations.

Open discussion

Following the panel, the floor was opened, and questions were posed to the panellists. The discussion tackled how to engage in dialogue within the context of uneven EU-MENA power structures, to which people-to-people dialogue was emphasized as a good practice, and generally held beliefs on EU-MENA power dynamics were critically scrutinized. Also brought to light was the geographical shifts in the peacebuilding field and their implications, to which it was underscored that the more populated peacebuilding field the better, and the EU was recommended to act according to its own values and principles rather than relying too heavily on the US.

Concluding remarks

Looking ahead, the next MMP online session will be held on April 15th at 13.00 (Amman time) with the theme of *Intergenerational Dialogue*. In advance, the pairs are requested to hold their second bilateral meeting. At this next online session further information about the in-person meeting in May will be provided.