



Report from dialogue session on MENA Regional Developments with EU's MENA experts from UN missions in New York

On April 8th, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa (SDI) hosted a panel discussion and reception on the occasion of the visit to Amman by MENA-responsible officers from EUD and EUMS representations in New York. The activity was organized at the request of the EU delegation in Jordan and was part of two-day field visit to Amman. The session aimed to enable frank and meaningful discussions on regional developments, focusing on Syria, Palestine, and Yemen, as well as regional asks from, and expectations on, the EU and the UN.

The panel was moderated by the SDI's Director, Ann Måwe, and featured four speakers with extensive expertise and perspectives rooted in situations on the ground:

- **Abir Hajibrahim** – Syria, *Women Peacebuilder and Co-Founder of Mobaderoon.*
- **Ibrahim Dalalsha** – Palestine, *Founder and Director, Horizon Center for Political Studies and Media Outreach.*
- **Yasameen Al-Nadheri** – Yemen, *Political Advisor, Dutch embassy to Yemen.*
- **Farah Bdour** – Regional perspective, *Senior Advisor, United States Institute of Peace.*

Måwe opened the session by highlighting the synergies between the SDI and the MENA-experts from EUD and EUMS representations in New York, both working on EU-MENA relations in a time where the cross-regional relations stand at a crossroad. The importance of understanding the situation on the ground while working in New York was underscored, and the visiting delegation were encouraged to take advantage of the expertise and experiences of the panellists.

The panel started by focusing on Syria. Abir Hajibrahim shared her view on the prospect for a Syrian-led, inclusive, and peaceful transitional process leading to reconciliation, elections, and new constitution. She urged the EU to lift sanctions, support the capacity building of the leadership in Syria, and to avoid mainstreaming peacebuilding and confidence building measures between different communities in Syria, instead it should be considered as a field and task in its own right.

On Palestine, Ibrahim Dalalsha analysed current developments in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as the road forward, affirming that the situation is at a crossroads with unprecedented extremism and polarization on both sides. He urged further action from the EU in counteracting increased violence, crimes against international law, and abuse of human rights. The EU was also encouraged to work actively and creatively around the two-state solution, as he observed that especially the younger generation was increasingly sceptical of the possibility of its actual implementation.

Yasameen Al-Nadheri reflected on the situation in Yemen considering developments in the region such as Israel/Palestine, inter Gulf-relations, and the role of the Trump administration. She called for greater coherence in international agendas on Yemen and pointed out that the EU holds an important role through its capacity to put pressure on Iran. Al-Nadheri urged the EU to support Yemen's government.

Bringing in a holistic regional perspective, Farah Bdour provided an analysis of the overall geopolitical trends in the MENA-region and the role played by regional and global powers in the region's conflicts. By outlining key developments in the region in 2024, Bdour stated that spaces for open communication with civil society are shrinking and concluded that 2025 will be a decisive year for all actors in the region.

Following the panellists' interventions, EU HoM in Jerusalem, ambassador Alexandre Stutzmann, was given the floor to share his reflections on the discussion. Stutzmann stated that EU MS have more in common in their stances on Israel/Palestine than what might be displayed. He pointed out that an important task for the EU was to support the Palestinian Authority at the same time as pushing for democratic reforms in the organisation to bring it closer to the Palestinian people.

During the Q&A session, questions spurred frank discussions on realistic best-case scenarios for the region, measures needed from the EU and the

UN, and what to expect from key actors going forward. Some concrete key pointers from the discussion include the encouragement of EU to 1) continue to actively support peacebuilding efforts in Syria, and for EU to lift sanctions, 2) not to forget about Yemen and act for more coherent approach, 3) to keep up a consistent approach and pressure on the respect for international and humanitarian law in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly in Gaza but also to prevent an escalation of the situation on the West Bank.