



EUROMED RIGHTS: 25 YEARS IN ACTION, STILL GAINING TRACTION



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FOREWORD

A MILESTONE ANNIVERSARY. LET'S CELEBRATE!

In 2022, EuroMed Rights celebrates its 25th anniversary! Since its inception in 1997, two years after the adoption of the Barcelona Declaration, EuroMed Rights has become one of the most prominent and most active actors in the Euro-Mediterranean region on human rights protection and democracy promotion. In 25 years, its membership has grown and its structure has been consolidated. Today, the network represents 68 organisations active in 30 countries, with offices in Copenhagen (headquarters), Brussels, Tunisia and presence in Morocco.

Driven by a clear vision to promote human rights and democracy for all in the Euro-Mediterranean region, EuroMed Rights has successfully pursued its mission to strengthen the collaboration between human rights organisations from the South, the East and the North of the Mediterranean, and to increase their influence at home and abroad.

The organisation still stands by universal human rights principles and believes in the value of cooperation and dialogue across and within borders. As such, the network pursues its mission through networking and exchange between its members and partners, capacity building as a way to improve their skills, monitoring and documenting human rights violations and abuses, and advocacy work. Along the way, evaluation of its work has shown that EuroMed Rights has managed to remain highly effective in the face of a particularly unstable geopolitical context, as well as in relation to the needs of civil society actors in the field.

This booklet, published on the occasion of this milestone anniversary, aims to provide food for thought on the future of the Euro-Mediterranean region, and the relationships between the two shores. But, first and foremost, to mobilise and energise our member and partner organisations to take an active role and collectively address the challenges faced by this troubled region, through the implementation of EuroMed Rights' brand new strategy "[Improve and Advance](#)" for the years 2022-2027.

Enjoy the reading, and let's take action... together!



Wadih Al-Asmar
President



Rasmus Alenius Boserup
Executive Director

MEMBERS SPEAK UP!

“WHAT A JOURNEY IT HAS BEEN SINCE THE NETWORK WAS FOUNDED IN 1997!”



Kamel Jendoubi (Tunisia), Former President of EuroMed Rights

After the 2011 Revolution, Kamel Jendoubi returned to Tunisia after 16 years of exile in France. He was then elected Chair of the Independent High Authority for Elections in charge of organising and supervising elections and referendums in Tunisia. In 2015 and 2016, he served as Minister in charge of Relations with Constitutional Institutions and Civil Society, and Human Rights. Between 2017 and 2021, Kamel Jendoubi was leading the UN Group of Eminent Experts to investigate human rights violations in Yemen.

“I’m honoured to celebrate the 25th anniversary of EuroMed Rights. What a journey it has been since the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network was founded in 1997! After the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the initiators of the network felt that creating some sort of platform that would bring together civil societies from the South and North of the Mediterranean to monitor the Barcelona Process would enhance human rights work significantly.”

How did the idea of the network emerge?

The idea of an NGO network emerged pretty quickly, and the first assembly took place in Copenhagen in 1997, with the objective to set up a North/South interface as well as a forum with regional civil society actors to work on human rights and on cross-cutting and specific issues in the region. Of course, back in the days, some tensions erupted since the situations in the ‘liberal North’ and in the ‘repressive South’ were so obviously different. The question of Palestine was also central to the regional equation: we were still excited by the Oslo Agreement and moving toward the construction of a Palestinian State, and it was clear then that the EuroMed Rights network would have to make it a work priority.

*In terms of methodology, we defined three main lines of work: **thematic priorities** (women’s rights, migration, justice, freedom of association and peaceful assembly/civil society, and a working group on Israel/Palestine), **country priorities** (“closed countries” where civil society was completely stifled, “semi-closed countries” where some work could be done under dire conditions, and the “open countries”, i.e Jordan and Morocco, where EuroMed Rights opened country programmes, respectively on women and migration), and **regional priorities** with the aim to follow the civil forums in the framework of the Euro-Med Partnership, to encourage partnerships with international NGOs and unions, and to develop advocacy activities toward the EU with the opening of an office in Brussels.*

What vision did you promote as President?

I was elected President of the Executive Committee in 2004, almost ten years into the Barcelona Process. The 9/11 attacks of 2001 had shifted the global agenda towards the fight against terrorism, with terrible impacts on fundamental freedoms and on human rights defenders, especially in the Arab world. The need for greater protection of human rights defenders became a core priority of my mandate.

How could we better support defenders who were already operating in hostile environments, under extremely difficult conditions? How could we help them fundraise even though they had no legal status? We had the idea of establishing the EuroMed Foundation for the Protection of human rights defenders in Copenhagen, which still exists today and operates as an independent entity.

When the Revolution started in Tunisia at the end of 2010, I was honorary Chair of EuroMed Rights but still very much involved when I returned to my country after 16 years in exile.

What situation did you find in Tunisia when you returned?

The main question then was again “How could we best support and accompany civil society actors” after the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime? We conducted experimental work somehow, with the establishment of an office that was an interface between the Tunisian civil society organisations (CSOs), EuroMed Rights and the European institutions. We had no specific program at the beginning, but we were pushing for an inclusive associative dynamic that would include cross-cutting themes and local needs of members and non-members.

In 2015, as I was Minister in charge of the relations with civil society, the concept of a tripartite dialogue between EuroMed Rights and CSOs, Tunisia and the EU was further developed, and it was great to see how EuroMed Rights and its network of local organisations had become key partners and stakeholders in the relations between Tunisia and the EU.

The situation in the region has not improved though...

The European dimension has changed tremendously over the years: the EU went from 15 to 27 member-states, the fight against terrorism, the issue of migration and the non-resolution of the Israel/Palestinian conflict have locked up the partnership. Then the Union for the Mediterranean has buried it by focusing mostly on trade, security and migration...The beautiful and generous idea of Barcelona has disappeared. The European Neighbourhood Policy has greatly weakened the regional dimension, the borders have closed, and the Mediterranean has become a graveyard.

Our action should always be evaluated in light of the institutional policies, which are governed by states' concerns, and in my view, EuroMed Rights' main priorities of work, such as freedom of association and assembly, women's rights and migration remain important and should be pursued, especially since all this work has brought out new themes such as equality between women and men, individual freedoms etc. and has produced a substantial literature to build on.

When it comes to solidarity and support, needless to say that members and partners in Syria, Egypt or Algeria need platforms like the EuroMed Rights' network more than ever!”

1997-2022: A FRUITFUL EURO-MEDITERRANEAN RELATIONSHIP?

As highlighted above by Kamel Jendoubi, the relations between the European Union (EU) and its neighbours from the South and East of the Mediterranean have evolved significantly over the last 25 years, as much as they have been impacted by the historical events and turmoils in the region and beyond. Moreover, the shifting priorities of the EU Member States and partners have moved these relations further away from the original spirit of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration.

FROM BARCELONA TO THE EU'S NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY: THE "GOLDEN AGE"?

In 1995, the Barcelona Declaration launched a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) between the EU and 12 countries from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), an unprecedented and ambitious foreign policy initiative that marked a turning point around three main objectives:

1. The definition of a common area of peace and stability through the reinforcement of political and security dialogue.
2. The construction of a zone of shared prosperity through an economic and financial partnership.
3. The rapprochement between peoples through a social, cultural and human partnership aimed at encouraging understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies.

Great optimism at the outset

The EMP was launched at a moment of great optimism over the future of the Southern Mediterranean that followed the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the prospects for peace, stability and security in the region. In the Barcelona Process, the EU saw a unique opportunity to address common objectives and common interests in a spirit of co-responsibility.

As a consequence, the partnership was articulated around a bilateral framework, through the Association Agreements between the EU and each of the Southern Mediterranean countries involved, and a regional framework through dialogue.

Much was done in the first 5-7 years of the partnership to achieve Euro-Mediterranean objectives. Negotiations for Agreements were soon concluded with Tunisia (1995), Israel (1995), Morocco (1996), Jordan (1997), the PLO (1997) and Algeria (2002).

The ultimate goal to develop free and flourishing civil societies somehow reached its objective: a second generation of vivid human rights organisations emerged from the partnership, with increased capacities in monitoring and reporting human rights violations, in advocating for institutional and democratic reforms as well as for the promotion and protection of human rights, including in the implementation of the partnership agreements.

The boat starts to rock

Despite these positive achievements, in the early 2000s, there was a general agreement that the EMP had failed to meet the main Barcelona Declaration objectives and to adapt to changes strategically. Various factors were at work, from the lack of will of Arab countries, the competition between the EU

and the United States in the region, the ambivalence of the EU Member States, or the revival of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the second Intifada.

However, calls for reforms to address some of the critical challenges facing the Arab world kept emanating both from a striving civil society in the region, and externally.

From 2004, the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) that followed the enlargement of the EU towards the East, revamped the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and reinforced its bilateral framework. Accordingly, Action Plans that were negotiated offered Southern Mediterranean countries a closer link with the EU in exchange for more progress in their institutional reforms.

“In 25 years, EuroMed Rights has succeeded in explaining to many organisations in the North and South of the Mediterranean how the European Union works and how to influence its decisions.”

Wadih Al-Asmar, EuroMed Rights President

NGO disillusionions

But by then, civil society in MENA was no longer under any illusions about the political will of Southern Mediterranean countries to conduct genuine reforms. Even though the ENP did provide new instruments and technical possibilities to promote human rights, most of the regional and national strategy plans brought comfort to the regimes then in place, rather than acknowledging the discrepancies between their commitments to human rights and democratic principles and their practice.

When it comes to the EU, although its institutions and Member States kept standing up for good governance, the ENP put again the emphasis on stability and security, economic development and migration management, gradually downscaling the human rights-based approach.

For many observers, this revised partnership laid the foundations for what came to be the Union for the Mediterranean.

THE UNION FOR MEDITERRANEAN: THE SACRIFICE OF IDEALS?

In the aftermaths of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the prospects for democratic reforms died out in the region, and civil society at large was increasingly caught up in geopolitical tensions beyond its reach. The increasingly securitised answer to terrorism and violent extremism allowed most regimes to consolidate at the expense of democracy and human rights, let alone the wars in Iraq and Lebanon, the Second Intifada and the ever-worsening situation in Palestine that brought more despair and anger.

In addition, on the other side of the Mediterranean, the EU, faced with a growing flow of migrants and refugees, increasingly encouraged its Member States to circumvent their own responsibilities by externalising border control and interceptions, thus exerting more pressure on their Southern neighbours and putting more migrants and refugees at risk.

The new motto: no more controversy!

In the late 2000s, as its own economic crisis hit hard, the EU in need for buoyant export markets began to give greater priority to rising economies in Asia. The MENA region slipped down the list of priorities. In parallel, the Euro-Med Partnership shifted its focus to very practical areas of cooperation. The French Presidency of the EU proposed the creation of a new Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008, whose secretariat was set up in Barcelona, dedicated to funding joint development projects in the Southern Mediterranean, mostly in the fields of energy and energy security, the environment, civil protection, transport and education. The aim was clearly to focus on uncontroversial areas of cooperation and take politics out of the policy equation.

For many, the UfM, which barely related to human rights, marked the end of the Barcelona Process and led the institutional stakeholders to miss the growing social upheavals that would soon turn into revolutions, a major turning point in the History of the region.

2011 ARAB UPRISINGS FALL SHORT

Soon after the Arab popular uprisings in 2011, the EU recognised its own failure to engage in favour of human rights and civil society by making its neighbourhood policy more “human rights friendly”. The region-wide geopolitical changes gave birth to a more pluralist set of European approaches in the Southern Mediterranean, as many European governments shifted their priority to bilateral, national foreign policy action and some Member States contributed to the “Arab Spring” more than others.

“That EuroMed Rights managed to stay relevant over the last 25 years in spite of the many evolutions of the EU partnerships as well as the tremendous changes in the MENA region is a highlight in itself!”

Tony Daly, EuroMed Rights Executive Committee member

Yet, in 2015, the EU again revised its neighbourhood policy, moving away from the idea that neighbouring countries should transform themselves into liberal democracies in the EU’s image. According to EU officials at the time, neighbouring countries wanted the ENP to be “more focused, more flexible, less bureaucratic, and more political,” and it was understood that there should be one policy framework that combines the EU’s foreign and security policy, development aid, migration policy, justice and home affairs, and that more money should be put on the table.

Back to the ‘bad old days’

As a result, European interests, especially regional stability, security and controlled migration, were outlined much more explicitly than before, and mutual interests in trade, investment and energy cooperation have become highly prominent. Though the ENP was never backed by sufficient financial support or other incentives, such as Schengen visas, to have any leverage with Southern Mediterranean governments, the EU stuck to a pragmatic approach in order to intensify its close cooperation with neighbours on policing, border security and counterterrorism to the detriment of more politically sensitive issues related to conditionality and cooperation with authoritarian regimes.

Sadly, the Arab popular uprisings of 2011 have not led to the expected democratic transition processes. On the contrary, ten years on, most of the countries involved in the Euro-Med Partnership are experiencing a growing sectarian violence, political instability, deteriorating economic and social conditions, shrinking civic space and in some instances, a quasi-systematic repression of freedom of association and freedom of expression, all the more so since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, a solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict has never felt so out of reach and ongoing processes of normalisation of Israel's relations with more Arab States is often perceived as being at the expense of the rights of the Palestinian people.

Who's responsible?

Most Southern Mediterranean countries had a vested interest in blocking the implementation of a genuine human rights and pro-democracy approach, so as to protect their political and economic interests and keep controlling their populations by increasing repression domestically, while showing a nicer face externally. They succeeded in pushing the EU to adopt their narrative of a 'patronising' ENP that would have not promoted mutual ownership, but rather conditionalised EU support to human rights records (the "more for more" policy, more support for the countries implementing more democratic reforms).

The ENP failure on human rights also lies with the EU's increased focus - promoted by certain Member States - on security issues related to the fight against terrorism and on the control of migration flows, and its inability to adjust to the great challenges that the MENA region has been facing over the last two decades. In its ENP assessment in 2018, EuroMed Rights called on the EU to implement fully-fledged, visible engagement with independent civil society, and to send signals that lack of respect for human would have an impact on the existing partnerships. Yet, Egypt was a counterexample of this: the EU renewed its commitments towards the Egyptian government in 2017 while the latter was carrying out an unprecedented crackdown on civil society and human rights defenders.

THE NEW EU AGENDA: A NEW HOPE?

Almost thirty years on, the Euro-Mediterranean region is facing a number of governance, socio-economic, environmental and security challenges, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In December 2020, the European Council highlighted the need to develop a new Agenda for the Southern neighbourhood.

The new Agenda, launched in February 2021, is based on the conviction that "by working together and in a spirit of partnership, common challenges can be turned into opportunities, in the mutual interest of the EU and its Southern neighbours". This agenda is meant to send a strong message on how important and strategic the Southern neighbourhood remains to the EU and its rhetoric could remind us of the initial partnership born in Barcelona - except that respect of human rights and support to democratic reforms are no longer stated as main objectives but rather diluted into the five following areas, in line with the EU Member States' current priorities:

1. **Human development, good governance and the rule of law:** Renew the shared commitment to democracy, the rule of law, human rights and accountable governance;
2. **Resilience, prosperity and digital transition:** Support resilient, inclusive, sustainable and connected economies that create opportunities for all, especially women and youth;
3. **Peace and security:** Provide support to countries to address security challenges and find solutions to ongoing conflicts,
4. **Migration and mobility:** Jointly address the challenges of forced displacement and irregular migration and facilitate safe and legal pathways for migration and mobility,
5. **Green transition: climate resilience, energy, and environment:** Taking advantage of the potential of a low-carbon future, protect the region's natural resources and generate green growth.

The war on Ukraine launched by Russia in February 2022 and its economic and security impact over the EU has further tightened the priorities around energy and food security, a common European defence, the enlargement and a new budget framework.

“It is feared that the Partnership priorities with Algeria wipe out any human rights concerns in a context where natural gas may be used as a bargaining chip by Algeria – with Russia threatening to shut off its gas taps, and the EU trying to find alternative suppliers”.

Vincent Forest, EuroMed Rights Outreach Director & Head of Brussels Office

This EU Agenda for the Mediterranean is supposed to “inform the preparation of bilateral political frameworks,” which can be Joint documents, Partnership priorities or equivalent, “establishing jointly agreed political and economic reform agendas and related implementing tools”. Let’s see what they bring to the human rights situation in the region...

MEMBERS SPEAK UP!

“IT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO MAKE THE VOICE OF THE NETWORK HEARD”



Catherine Teule (France)

Catherine Teule is the former Vice-President of the European Association for the Defence of Human Rights (AEDH), and former Vice-President of the French League of Human Rights (LDH). She also sat in EuroMed Rights Executive Committee from 2015 to 2021, first as a member and then as Vice-President. Catherine is particularly interested in issues related to migration and the right of asylum. She has authored many articles and briefings on these themes and provided training sessions at community and trade union levels.

“I joined EuroMed Rights via AEDH, where I was following closely the European migration policies. We always tried to bring a certain dimension on European issues, to analyse them from a different perspective. It was not that easy at the beginning as for many members and partners, any bad step or negative development was to blame on "Europe's fault". It was therefore necessary to make them admit that the Southern Mediterranean countries had serious problems too, and that this should be denounced in the same way. It worked and that shows how important and impactful the work of the EuroMed Rights network can be!

What role has EuroMed Rights played on migration issues?

The Mediterranean is a common space that belongs to all of us, from North and South, and that should be totally open. In that respect, our Working Group on Migration has definitely been a constitutive element of a network with a common vision of the issues pertaining to the rights of migrants and asylum seekers. We have always tried to carry out a consistent and coherent work by mobilising and involving the members of the network, from the north and the south, even if it is true that they are more numerous in the South... The support to civil society organisations in the South is key in EuroMed Rights' work, including on migration issues. We have succeeded in creating sub-regional networks for the Maghreb and Mashrek, so that members work together on common issues, with the support and coordination of EuroMed Rights' staff who have played an important role in strengthening these sub-regional groups!

Another strength of the network that we can be proud of, is its capacity to develop and conduct high-level advocacy activities which have made EuroMed Rights a reliable and trusted partner on migration issues with EU officials and Member States. It is fundamental to make the voice of the network heard by the EU institutions.

Any examples or suggestions?

We have secured an open channel for discussions and exchange with the European Parliament (EP) in particular, MEPs intervene in the Working Group on Migration, the Working Group is invited to participate in hearings at the European Parliament. The network is better known, more often solicited but still, there's more we can do to feed the discussions and challenge some policies at the EP level, including on the issue of migrant women or family reunification. More regular contacts are needed between EuroMed Rights and the EP. I believe EuroMed Rights should work on the development of a systematic consultation by the EP when key documents are being prepared for example. This is definitely something to pursue!"

THE ACHIEVEMENTS WE ARE PROUD OF

25 YEARS OF PROTECTING DEFENDERS AND CIVIC SPACE

EuroMed Rights' main objective has always been to promote human rights, protect human rights defenders that were operating under authoritarian regimes, and strengthen freedom of association and civic space in the MENA region. In that respect, a lot has been done since 1997, making EuroMed Rights a successful regional focal point for human rights NGOs and a reliable counterpart at the highest levels of the Euro-Med Partnership (EMP).

The establishment in 2004 of the EuroMed Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), a sister organisation now fully independent from EuroMed Rights, marked a major milestone in standing in solidarity with, and protecting human rights defenders. The Foundation has contributed to save many lives over the years.

Stronger together, speaking as one voice

As the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) became weaker as a norm-setting framework, and after the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) further marginalised civil society, EuroMed Rights kept documenting the impact of security policies on human rights defenders in target countries, and publicly supported its members and other civil society organisations and HRDs (and especially women HRDs) under attack in the region due to repressive legislations or policies.

In return, the EU and Member States paid more attention to its work on shrinking space, a notion that has been included as a main point of concern in the EU regional dialogue with civil society. In 2018, by taking the lead of the structured dialogue between the EU and civil society based in the South Mediterranean (also called the **Majalat** project), EuroMed Rights pursued its effort to connect all relevant stakeholders through workshops, seminars and forums at the national, regional and European levels, as well as through a digital platform gathering more than 500 CSOs. This process gave civil society an invaluable opportunity to engage with EU representatives and influence future policy initiatives.

Standing in solidarity

EuroMed Rights' international work to promote human rights and democratic change is based on a firm belief in equality. The near equal distribution of members from the South and North of the Mediterranean - and an equal number of women and men in governing bodies - is an illustration of how the network promotes this view in practice and its representation across the region. Since 1997, EuroMed Rights has been one of the few platforms in the region where organisations from the North and South can meet on an equal basis to exchange and carry out joint policy actions.

“The psychological support the network provides is of utmost importance. The protection provided to the members and to other human rights defenders not only helps them maintain their stamina, but it also demonstrates the international solidarity that lies behind such support.”

Niras Indevelop Evaluation Report, 2017

As most human rights defenders are operating in increasingly hostile environments, networking and solidarity actions remain at the core of EuroMed Rights' activities. The added value lies in the fact that the network complements the work of its members and partners on the ground by bringing them together for networking opportunities, not the least when these are either scarce or exceptionally strained.

An example of this is EuroMed Right's work current work on Egypt. In the last few years, the massive repression of civil society and continued criminalisation of human rights defenders' activities have pushed many activists, including some of EuroMed Rights' members and partners, to leave **Egypt**. As they relocated abroad, the network launched the Egypt programme to mobilise public support, and called for an end to all forms of harassment against HRDs and activists in Egypt.

That programme strengthened cooperation between Egyptian human rights organisations and increased their capacity to conduct joint actions at national and international levels. Advocacy efforts towards the EU, Member States and UN officials ensured that human rights remained an important issue on the international agenda. A key result was the adoption by the European Parliament of urgency resolutions on Egypt, notably the situation of HRDs, which contributed to influencing the EU-Egypt Association Council of 20 December 2018, when the EU raised human rights abuses with the Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

"The Egypt Solidarity Group, bringing together defenders from Egypt, regional and international NGOs, think tanks, academics, is about helping Egyptian defenders inside and outside of the country to pursue resilience and keep the human rights movement alive."

Moataz El Fegjery, EuroMed Rights' Executive Committee member

The creation of the **Algeria** Solidarity Group, composed of Algerian and European associations, trade unions and lawyers, is another good example of the importance of solidarity when civil society is stifled and needs support from the outside. In February 2022, the group decided to launch a campaign for the liberation of the activists from the *Hirak* movement. It remains active in advocacy efforts at the UN, by coordinating civil society's contribution to the Universal Periodic Review of Algeria for example, and at the EU, with advocacy missions in Brussels to meet with officials from the European Parliament, the Commission and the External Action Service.

Human rights education and capacity-building

It is no coincidence that the first working group established by EuroMed Rights was dedicated to human rights education. That working group does no longer exist, but capacity-building has remained a core priority for the network, as shown in the work in solidarity with HRDs from **Syria**. Very early on after the uprisings in Syria in 2011, the network decided to open a programme aiming at promoting and protecting a vibrant human rights movement in Syria capable of influencing national human rights agendas and combating impunity.

The work took the form of advocacy missions at UN and EU levels, coordination and capacity-building on documentation of human rights violations, on litigation and universal jurisdiction, helping members become a reliable counterpart of the International Independent Investigative Mechanism on Syria.

This strong mobilisation of the network in solidarity with Syrian members and partners contributed to the successful organisation, in 2017, of the civil society conference and the plenary session of the EU on the future of Syria, with the participation of 50 representatives of the Syrian civil society.

25 YEARS OF REGIONAL NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION

Thanks to its longstanding networking approach, mainly implemented through regular thematic working group meetings for activists and CSOs, EuroMed Rights enables its members to meet with their peers and with other stakeholders to exchange ideas, receive training, make joint action plans, and take joint decisions.

“Yes, our network is succeeding and that makes me rather optimistic for the future! We are stronger together and we’ve shown on many occasions that speaking with one voice has made it easier to get our message heard.”

Catherine Teule, former Vice-President of the Executive Committee.

Migrants’ and refugees’ rights: “United we stand, divided we fall”

Faithful to the vision of an open Mediterranean space, migration and asylum rights have been at the core of the network’s priorities. The Migration and Asylum Working Group has become a resource hub for implementing as well as providing strategic, technical and professional input into EU migration policies. It also keeps connecting civil society organisations across the Mediterranean, and contributes to amplify their voices with decision-makers and media.

Lately, EuroMed Rights has seized the opportunity of the New EU Pact on Migration and Asylum (2020) to speak as one voice on the necessity to shift from the current EU migration and asylum policies - based on increased securitisation, outsourced responsibility and shrinking asylum and solidarity space - to develop a human rights-based approach that ensures systematic compliance with fundamental rights and international and EU law. In that regard, EuroMed Rights produced in-depth and factual analyses on the new Pact and raised concerns over the human rights violations that this Pact would entail across the region.

“From EU partners the Southern Mediterranean countries have become prison guards!”

Kamel Jendoubi, Former EuroMed Rights President

The quest for justice, a core priority

Very early on, justice has been set as a core priority in EuroMed Rights’ work. Prior to the Arab uprisings, EuroMed Rights aimed at improving access of citizens to justice, promoting fair trials and supporting institutional judicial reforms towards independent judiciaries.

Since 2011, civic space in the Euro-Mediterranean region has steadily declined, as has access to justice and accountability for citizens in the South. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to provide opportunities for authoritarian governments to accelerate the extension of state power at the expense of independent civil society, accountability, and justice. Nowhere in the region is justice

served or accountability upheld, a situation worsened by the endemic corruption. In order to stay relevant, the mandate on justice was expanded to accountability and space for civil society, with a mainstreaming approach across the network. Since the inception of the network, this thematic has produced the highest number of publications.

Along with its work on Egypt and Syria on fair trial standards, arbitrary detention and accountability, EuroMed Rights has launched a project in **Turkey** to map trial monitoring initiatives, enhance the capacity of civil society actors to document judicial harassment, and develop recommendations for advocacy towards national and international authorities, including the EU and the Council of Europe.

Economic and social rights on the forefront

Years after the popular uprisings that largely denounced the dire economic and social conditions, the realisation of economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) has not improved in the South and East Mediterranean, and the region remains one of the most unequal in the world. Women, youth, the elderly, vulnerable groups, and minorities are particularly exposed to these inequalities.

“Twenty-five years later, EuroMed Rights has become a force of change, of political transformation in the entire region. I hope we are much stronger in the future in Europe.”

Rasmus Alenius Boserup, EuroMed Rights Executive Director

The Working Group on Economic and Social Rights is the latest addition to the structure of EuroMed Rights. Since 2019, it has gathered 30 members and key associations to work on issues such as the role and responsibilities of the state in this regard; the impact of macro-economic and fiscal policies, as well as EU trade policies on economic and social rights. In 2021, EuroMed Rights established a new work track focused on supporting social movements. Beyond these activities, the working group continues its networking and communication activities, through joint data collection exercises like, for example, the work done with Turkish and Moroccan members together with EuroMed Rights on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October).

25 YEARS OF INFLUENCING AND “CO-CREATION”

EuroMed Rights influences and reaches out to decision-makers, policymakers and the broader public through its advocacy and communication work. It does so in close collaboration with its members and partners. Advocacy actions target the EU institutions, and to a lesser extent the UN, as well as national governments in Europe and in the South Mediterranean.

Since its inception and based on the collaborative work of monitoring and analysis produced through the working groups, EuroMed Rights has conducted hundreds of advocacy missions throughout the region and in Brussels. At national and regional levels, EuroMed Rights often reaches beyond the civil society sector to engage and mobilise national and international state actors and institutions.

Tripartite dialogue, a successful pilot projet

In the aftermath of the Revolution, **Tunisia's** relations with the EU were revived through the conclusion of a “Privileged Partnership”, which explicitly included a commitment to strengthen the involvement and capacities of civil society. It is within this framework that the project of a Tripartite Dialogue between the civil society, Tunisia and the EU led by EuroMed Rights was born in 2014.

The project brought together representatives of Tunisian associations, as well as experts and academics, to work on women's rights/equality between women and men, justice reform, the rights of migrants and refugees, and economic and social rights. In concrete terms, the project has contributed to building a culture of mobilisation and monitoring of both state policies on human rights and Tunisia-EU relations, as well as legislative processes at the national level. It has also contributed to training and building capacities of new NGOs, mainly among the youth and those based in remote regions.

“Thanks to the tripartite dialogue, we have acted upstream by involving local officials and EU officials. This process of co-creation has allowed civil society to be a force of proposal.”

Lilia Rebai, EuroMed Rights Director of Civil Society Dialogue Programmes

Indeed, EuroMed Rights’ strength lies on a vast local network of local civil society at large, from NGOs to Unions, to academics and journalists, in order to bring up concerns and suggestions related to regional specificities and make sure that they are included into final recommendations for advocacy purposes. The physical presence of EuroMed Rights in Tunisia has allowed the network to pursue and reinforce advocacy activities at the national level, which resulted for example, in the adoption by the Tunisian government of the decree to establish a National Commission for Combating Racial Discrimination in Tunisia, a major step in a years-long process that EuroMed Rights and its partners had advocated intensively for. Another significant result is the decision by all national authorities to agree on elaborating communication strategies combating violence against women, coordinated by EuroMed Rights.

“The Mobility Agreement is on hold thanks to the continued mobilisation of civil society in the face of four successive governments! Same thing on the Free Trade Agreement, we will continue to decline the proposal until the EU comes up with a better offer.”

Ramy Salhi, Director of EuroMed Rights Maghreb Office

In the last five years, the network has also consolidated its position as an actor for change in **Morocco**. EuroMed Rights has a physical presence in the country to coordinate the Moroccan civil society's efforts to push for the establishment of a structured Tripartite dialogue with the government and the EU Delegation in Rabat, particularly on the issues of justice reform, the rights of migrants and refugees, and women’s rights and gender equality. Three dedicated working groups have gradually managed to bring forward joint recommendations and gain the attention of the authorities. A number of exchange visits between EuroMed Rights' members and partners from Morocco and Tunisia have also taken place to draw on Tunisia's experience of the Tripartite dialogue.

The interaction between local and regional working groups has amplified the work done on economic and social rights, but also on cross-cutting issues such as farm workers through the Working Group on Migration and the Working Group on Women's Rights. Since 2021, in an effort to ensure better intersectional and youth representation, EuroMed Rights has extended its reach by including two emerging youth LGBTQ+ collectives in its working groups.

Israel and Palestine: the Gordian Knot

EuroMed Rights was founded only a few years after the 1993 Oslo Agreement, at a time when the construction of Palestinian statehood was taking shape with the support of the EU, and it has remained very active on this situation, in particular to influence the EU's foreign policy and bilateral relations with Israel and the Palestinian leadership.

For two decades now, EuroMed Rights has constantly highlighted the pervasive system of control administered by Israel over Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), while denying them their right to self-determination and controlling virtually all aspects of their lives without giving them any say.

EuroMed Rights, together with its members and partners, has relentlessly advocated towards the EU and its Member States, based on research and evidence-based advocacy, to support the opening of an investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC), which finally became a reality in March 2021.

25 YEARS IN SEARCH OF GENDER EQUALITY

Since the establishment of the network, women's rights have been a priority as a means to contribute to gender equality. This approach is still true today, as discrimination against women, including unequal status and opportunities and widespread violence against women are prevalent phenomena in the Euro- Mediterranean region.

Following the 2011 Arab uprisings, EuroMed Rights served as an important forum to discuss women's marginalisation in the transition processes, and for strategising on how to counteract this development. Already in 2008, the network had started to conduct and implement gender audits. It then decided to take it to the next level by nominating Gender Focal Points within each working group and coaching the staff. In addition, it developed Gender Mainstreaming Packs that are very detailed and user-friendly. These packs are meant to foster gender mainstreaming with practical tools.

"I would like to see EuroMed Rights even stronger to support human rights, including women's and refugee's rights, for all people in need in each and every country across the EuroMed region."

Lubna Dawany, EuroMed Rights Executive Committee member

For the members of the Working Group on Migration and Asylum for example, having an intersectional approach to migration is particularly important, since it feeds the strategic thinking over future programs on migrant women, or family reunification. The gender dimension has also been integrated into the thinking on shrinking space, as reflected in a research on the rise and impact of Government-Organized Non- Governmental Organisations (GoNGOs), with case studies on how they contribute to shrinking civic space and how this affects women's rights organisations and their activities specifically.

“Young feminist collectives, LGBTI groups, young people challenging stereotypes and using new means of action, can change the dynamics of our working groups. That's why we really want to make sure that young people are interested in our network and can influence the way we work.”

Marit Flø Jorgensen, EuroMed Rights Programme Director

MEMBERS SPEAK UP!

“SHARING OUR EXPERIENCE GIVES US ENERGY, IT KEEPS US UP AND RUNNING!”



Eva Abu Halaweh (Jordan)

Eva Abu Halaweh is a lawyer. She is a co-founding member and the Executive Director of Mizan Law Group for Human Rights. She has been campaigning against honour killings and focuses her work on protecting women at risk and the vulnerable, and on eliminating torture and abuse in the Jordanian prison system and police stations. She won the Franco-German award for Human Rights and the International Women of Courage Award presented by the US Department of State.

“Mizan has been a member of EuroMed Rights for a long time and what drove us to be part of the network was its strong support to the rights of Palestinians as well as its solidarity with human rights activists. It's so important to be able to take position with EuroMed Rights for others and for us!

What are the benefits of being a member?

I think the greatest benefit of being is the exchange of experience with other human rights activists, including from the North, as I was very eager in the beginning to learn from best practices. We also learned a lot by interacting with colleagues from other countries on similar issues. Being a human rights defender is tough and we may find solace in sharing our experience and our highs and lows, it gives us energy, it keeps us up and running!

Solidarity and support is sometimes very much needed when we struggle to get funding or when the space for civil society keeps shrinking, and EuroMed Rights has been helpful in giving us access to institutional interlocutors in Brussels for example.

Do you see the European Union as a partner?

As a reliable and trusted partner when it comes to human rights and democracy? Yes and no. Human rights activism is facing more challenges, human rights are no longer on the top agenda for so many countries and the EU is not using its power to stand against violations. We expect more pressure to end the occupation of Palestine in the first place. The fact that there is no more pressure from international partners is the most negative evolution, and it's embarrassing for us too actually because when we meet people in the field, they ask us about the position of European states who promote human rights and practice double standards when it comes to the rights of Palestinians.

And today we're facing the same questions with the consequences of the war in Ukraine and the refugees that are welcome in the EU... What kind of message do you send when you don't respect the rights that you're promoting?

What should be EuroMed Rights' top priority?

I think EuroMed Rights' first priority should remain freedom of association and freedom of expression because without these two, there's nothing we can do. Today, the greatest attention must be paid to the shrinking space for civil society and the increasing number of GONGOs all around!

I also think that EuroMed Rights took a very good decision to focus on economic and social rights and climate change. These are collective rights which require a lot of collective efforts. They also require capacity building among our members because most of them are used to working on political and civil rights, mainly. We need a new regional assessment research on economic and social rights based on what the members have collected."

A BRAND NEW STRATEGY TO “IMPROVE AND ADVANCE”

As detailed above, EuroMed Rights' history has been marked by several key moments, with a first decade of flourishing consolidation of the network with the establishment of working groups on priority areas. The second decade was characterised by the diversification of its programming, and the opening of a strong local presence in Tunisia. The last five years have seen the emergence of a new leadership, both at the Executive Committee and Director levels, as well as the design of a brand new strategy following an unprecedented consultation with the membership.

“In the future, EuroMed Rights will continue its role in providing the space for dialogue, maintaining the attention needed on human rights and the rule of Law, promoting accountability and democratic institutions.”

Theodora Christou, EuroMed Rights Vice-President

As it celebrates its 25th anniversary, EuroMed Rights remains a highly relevant and positive actor in the region, thanks to:

- Its capacity to understand the geopolitical challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean region and to adapt to opportunities offered by the context,
- The fact that its members gain knowledge and skills, and their visibility is enhanced,
- Its high level of effectiveness in achieving a large number of outcomes,
- Its impact in terms of influence on policymakers and legal frameworks, mostly due to the efficient combination of a skilled staff, a solid advocacy network, the production of effective documents for advocacy, as well as the combination of country-specific and regional approaches.

The new strategic plan adopted for 2022-2027 sets out ten goals to be achieved, with a view to first consolidating the current positions in the South and East of the Mediterranean before further expanding in Europe.

“In the Middle East and North Africa, EuroMed Rights really has a big impact. I hope we can come to the same conclusion in 25 years from now, to be an actor for change, for the better, in Eastern Europe. The mandate and ambition are there!”

Rasmus Alenius Boserup, EuroMed Rights Executive Director

The five political goals are that:

1. Migration and asylum rights are better protected,
2. Gender equality is advanced,
3. Accountability, justice, and the space available for civil society is increased,
4. Democracy and fundamental freedoms are strengthened,
5. Economic, social, and cultural rights are enhanced.

The five organisational goals are that:

1. Member base is energized and mobilised,
2. Visibility and impact is increased,
3. Carbon footprint is reduced,
4. Financial sustainability and diversification are improved,
5. Internal learning is improved.

There are few reasons to believe that in the next years, the Euro-Mediterranean space will be exempt of more turmoil and chaotic changes, in the South as well as in the North. In many parts of Europe and the South and East Mediterranean, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated already existing challenges. Gender inequalities have risen, authoritarian and illiberal governance patterns have consolidated, socio-economic marginalisation remains high, and the repression of civil society organisations and fundamental rights and freedoms has increased in the whole region.

In these ever-evolutive contexts, the main challenges for EuroMed Rights are to find the best ways to remain relevant to its members and interlocutors and to keep influencing positively the EU as well as Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, in order to restore a human rights and democracy dimension in bilateral and regional exchanges.

“There is a constant need for strategic exchanges in these complicated times, especially with regard to the EU's bilateral support to certain Southern States that continue to flout human rights and where human rights defenders are completely muzzled. This is where we need strong political advocacy from EuroMed Rights.”

EU official

The need for international collaboration on promoting and protecting human rights and democracy is stronger than ever. There are some encouraging openings: new and powerful movements and organisations keep emerging and reinventing the fight for human rights, and powerful allies continue to fight for the international promotion of liberal democracy and human rights in some of the world's most powerful states and multilateral institutions.

These new movements represent a third generation of human rights activists that offers new opportunities for EuroMed Rights to regenerate itself, and reflect the views and expectations of new, younger members or staffers from member organisations. These come from a different background and their priorities, at least for some of them, may go beyond EU policies and advocacy, but have more to do with global challenges and citizenship.

“We are human rights defenders, but we shouldn't forget that we are activists as well!”

Wadih Al Asmar, EuroMed Rights President

MEMBERS SPEAK UP!

“EUROMED RIGHTS IS MORE THAN A TALKING SHOP, IT'S A PRACTICE SHOP”



Tony Daly (Ireland)

Co-ordinator of the NGO '80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World' based in Ireland, program manager of the developmenteducation.ie consortium and board member of Fairtrade Ireland. Tony Daly teaches and supports popular education on human development, human rights and active citizenship. He was elected a member of EuroMed Rights' Executive Committee in 2021.

“We may be a small organisation in Western Ireland, but we're not stuck on an island, as our mission can only be fulfilled by working in solidarity with human rights defenders, trainers, academics, here and abroad, and this is what being part of EuroMed Rights means for us: we joined the network to collaborate, to get inspiration from and energise each other. It's more than a forum, it's become a community of practice.”

How do you see EuroMed Rights as a network?

This is a network of people and not just a network of good intentions. It's about understanding and feeling what a denial of human rights means in people's lives, so we can do something about it together. Very few networks in the world offer this kind of activities.

80:20 first got involved with EuroMed Rights' Working Group on Human Rights Education, which no longer exists. It was a real opportunity for activists from the North to meet others from the MENA region. On a personal level, I got to know the network through my work on education, and then I got involved in the Working Group on Women's Rights and Gender, where I was the only male at first, so I decided to use it to be more vocal on the necessity for men to get mobilised on the defence of women's rights.

What about its work?

The many task forces, working groups, sub-regional and local working groups are the essence of the work done by EuroMed Rights and opportunities for its members and partners, especially small ones, to share information, collect material, ask for advice and explore new partnerships. They also allow for the opening of new spaces for discussion: for example, the joint task force between the Working Group on Women's Rights and the Working Group on Economic and Social Rights.

This meaningful, collegial, supportive way of working is hugely valuable, it has changed us as an organisation, and it has changed what we can do. It's more than a talking shop, it's a practice shop, a real and tangible space that has been very beneficial to us.

What are you also proud of?

I'm also proud that when it comes to gender mainstreaming, EuroMed Rights is leading by example. Opening up spaces on different issues to include a gender dimension is a signal of success. I'm confident that with time, the same can be done on climate justice for example.

We have managed to remain relevant, but we must make sure that our membership evolves, and that the democratic nature of our internal governance is reinforced, especially as we are all operating in increasingly hostile environments, globally. There is a lot EuroMed Rights can do to keep supporting the culture of human rights and respond to the ambitious expectations of civil society. Living human rights is essential!"