

MANIFESTO

FOR A GENUINE POLITICAL DIALOGUE BASED ON
EQUALITY, SHARED VALUES, AND ACCOUNTABILITY
BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND CIVIL
SOCIETY IN THE MENA REGION

June 2024



1. Renewing a Political Dialogue with CSOs Founded on Universal Values

From the Barcelona Process through the 2007 Lisbon Treaty to the European Neighbourhood Policy, New Agenda for the Mediterranean and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, the EU has consistently affirmed its commitment to promoting democratisation and engaging with civil society around the world. We, the undersigned CSOs, are not only policy advocates for human rights and hold duty bearers accountable, but also essential implementing partners, who provide services to the most vulnerable of the population, especially where the duty bearers do not fulfil this role adequately or violate human rights.

We demand a fundamental shift in the EU-CSO partnership that is grounded in equality, shared values, accountability and political dialogue. The incoming Parliament and Commission must better recognize, protect and engage with CSOs, and use all available tools at their disposal to promote genuine political dialogue that respects the independence of CSOs. This should include regular and predictable consultations, information sharing, clear mandates and mechanisms that are adequately resourced.

We ask the upcoming European Parliament and Commission to:

1.1. Ensure strong engagement with civil society in the MENA region, providing them with due access to Parliament members and groups for effective monitoring and consultation on EU foreign policies, programs and funding, including Bilateral Agreements, the revision of the New Agenda for the Mediterranean and the Multiannual Financial Framework. The EU should also fund the monitoring of ENP Action Plans by CSOs across the Southern Neighborhood.

1.2. Mainstream dialogue processes in all policy approaches and thematic frameworks (Gender, Digital, Global Gateway), and establish permanent and robust civil society structures within EU institutions, including the European Council and the MaMa Group, to enhance transparency and inclusivity in decision-making processes, with active participation from civil society representatives.

1.3. Develop systematic and transparent mechanisms for CSO involvement in Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives to strengthen their impact on the ground and enhance collaboration with EU-funded projects and programs.

1.4. Advocate for and publicly champion human rights and civil dialogue standards during high-level visits to Southern Mediterranean countries by European Parliament members and/or other EU officials, ensuring active information sharing and engagement with local CSOs.

1.5. Strengthen oversight and accountability mechanisms within the European Parliament to exercise its scrutiny function to monitor the negotiation and implementation of international agreements and any direct budget support to third countries. Ensure budgetary control and coherence of EU policies towards its Southern Neighborhood, emphasizing the "more for more" approach which must promote human rights, gender equality and climate and social justice, by putting in place clear human rights benchmarks and conditionality measures.

1.6. Reject informal, non-binding and opaque instruments agreements such as MoUs, which fall outside the Team Europe approach and weaken the EU constitutional framework. Ensure that all agreements with third countries adhere to established adoption procedures and accountability and transparency measures, thereby maintaining the EU's credibility as an international actor and preventing the EU from directly or indirectly contributing to the degradation of human rights.

1.7. Foster the inclusion of CSOs in the EU-partner countries dialogue and policy processes, monitoring their situation in partner countries, paying increased attention to the regulatory framework and effectively applying targeted conditionality and human rights primacy.

1.8. Ensure the formal inclusion of the Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean as a consultative body within the European Neighborhood Policy.

2. Committing to Sustainable & Unconditional Funding for Independent Civil Society

Since 2012, the EU has pledged support for CSOs, including through flexible funding. However, recent changes in EU cooperation programs have led to a reduction in the distribution and diversity of funding opportunities for CSOs, jeopardizing their long-term sustainability. These shifts have particularly impacted partnership practices and funding mechanisms under the NDICI-GE, hindering the sector's resilience and diversity. Currently, funding for CSOs and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in the MENA region falls short, despite their critical contributions and the challenging environments they operate in. Sustainable, adequate and predictable funding is essential for CSOs to carry out their vital functions effectively, including policy monitoring, advocacy, service delivery, and holding duty bearers accountable.

We urge the EU to elevate civil society to partner status under EU assistance, promoting their access to sufficient and adequate funding without using it as a tool for coercion or political pressure. This approach enables CSOs to operate independently, uphold their principles, and represent the diverse voices and interests of communities they serve, contributing positively to democratic processes and social progress.

We ask the upcoming European Parliament and Commission to:

2.1. Ensure multi-year, transparent, and predictable core funding for CSOs operating in MENA countries where civic space is threatened, allocating earmarked budgets across all NDICI-Global Europe programs for CSOs to ensure sustained support for their vital work.

2.2. Advocate against any suspension or revision of funding to independent civil society and reject any measures tying funding with conditionality, safeguarding their freedom of expression and autonomy.

2.3. Foster active and quality participation of CSOs in program design, implementation and evaluation at regional and national levels, including Multiannual Indicative Plans (MIPs) and Annual Action Plans (AAP).

2.4. Establish mechanisms for continuous, transparent dialogue, including regular exchanges with CSOs during NDICI-Global Europe projects, and provide CSOs with feedback on the influence of their inputs, systematically involving them in Global Gateway and Team Europe Initiatives. Recognize the diversity of CSO expertise and operational capacity and enable them to contribute to the implementation of all programs.

2.5. Establish a whistleblowing mechanism to avoid any EU funding contributing to the degradation of human rights and the environment.

2.6. Improve the accessibility of calls for proposals for CSOs by simplifying application procedures, providing comprehensive information, accepting submissions in multiple languages and adjusting administrative requirements according to grant size. Additionally, offer capacity-building initiatives, particularly for small and local CSOs, to enhance their ability to access NDICI-Global Europe funding and become implementing partners. Ensure that training materials and information sessions are available in multiple languages, widely published, and include mandatory sessions by EUD or EC Headquarters during call launches.

2.7. Implement flexible and diverse funding mechanisms, available to different groups including non-registered groups, with a focus on supporting small grassroots organizations to enhance their capacity and reach.

2.8. Allocate adequate resources and capacity to EU Delegations (EUDs) to effectively implement the 'geographisation' principle to ensure meaningful engagement with CSOs.

2.9. Apply the same fiscal standards for governments and CSOs in relation to VAT, enhance financial support for local CSOs while broadening assistance for civil society in partner countries, and simplify administrative requirements.

3. Fighting Shrinking Space & Protecting Human Rights Defenders

Despite amplifying the voices of marginalized populations, civil society across Southern Neighborhood countries faces mounting challenges as restrictions on freedom of association, expression, and assembly proliferate. HRDs are frequently subjected to surveillance, intimidation, and violence by authorities and regimes, particularly amid shrinking space for dissent. They often lack adequate protection in host countries, especially when foreign policy considerations are at play. Urgent transnational strategies are needed to defend civic space and protect those defending human rights.

It is imperative for all States to support and respect the rights of civil society in the face of escalating targeting and repression. **We call on the European Parliament and Commission to take concrete steps during the next five years to better recognize, protect, strengthen, and engage independent civil society from the Euro-Mediterranean region at all decision-making levels.**

We ask the upcoming European Parliament and Commission to:

3.1. Raise the cases of at-risk HRDs during high-level visits, dialogue and missions, addressing the impunity in cases of violations against HRDs.

3.2. Establish an interinstitutional task force on HRDs to coordinate European efforts on priority cases involving HRDs, journalists, or other vulnerable groups.

3.3. Call for urgent action from Member States and other EU services when the Parliamentary groups and commissions are restricted from entering a country, which indicates severe anti-democratic values and shrinking civic space.

3.4. Reject the use of the term ‘safe country’ for any of the countries in the MENA region and the consequences of this categorisation, such as the rejection of asylum applications and returns to these countries.

3.5. Urge the Vice-President of the European Commission to adopt an annual list of focus countries of serious concern in relation to the plight of HRDs and activists which would allow for more coordinated EU practical response on the ground.

3.6. Develop a comprehensive and evidence-based EU strategy addressing shrinking civic space, with clear commitments mainstreamed across policy agreements and backed by adequate funding.

3.7. Denounce the spread and misuse of anti-terrorist and anti-cybercrimes laws in MENA countries, particularly when they contribute to online repression and surveillance mechanisms against civil society, activists, and HRDs. Advocate for legal reforms that protect fundamental rights and freedoms.

3.8. Denounce the misuse of anti-terrorist and anti-antisemitism measures in the EU to crackdown on solidarity pro-Palestine solidarity. Enhance protection of free speech of civil society and HRDs advocating on behalf of Southern countries in EU Member States.

3.9. Monitor closely the implementation of any EU funding programs, particularly the Global Gateway, particularly in countries where civic space is under threat.

4. Ensuring a Just Green Transition in the MENA Region

The MENA region’s environmental challenges are deteriorating, leading to increased pollution, depletion of resources, and heightened carbon emissions. The pivotal role of civil society in amplifying awareness about the profound impacts of climate change and exerting pressure on governments and corporations cannot be overstated.

However, the EU also has a crucial role to play, especially as it continues to advance energy agreements with its Southern Neighbours. **It is imperative that the EU's climate diplomacy remains steadfast in upholding the primacy of human rights.** Given its prominent position as a global leader in the fight against climate change, **the EU must champion inclusive solutions prioritizing a sustainable and just environmental transition that benefits all in the Euro-mediterranean region.**

We ask the upcoming European Parliament and Commission to:

4.1. Review EU foreign and trade policy to align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 2015 Paris Agreement and its Green Deal.

4.2. Create synergies between the EU environmental and migration policies policy with particular reference to the Green Deal and the New Pact on Migration and Asylum for enhanced policy coherence.

4.3. Advocate for renewable energy policies and energy diversification efforts to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, mitigate carbon emissions, and promote sustainable development. Additionally, the EU must act more firmly on technology transfer, particularly in transition sectors critical for a rapid and ambitious energy transition.

4.4. In line with its historical responsibility and capability the EU must implement the Polluter Pays Principle and increase climate action financing in the form of grants, allocating a higher share of finance to adaptation and loss and damage in Southern Neighborhood countries. The EU should use its weight in international governance structures such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (around 30% of voting rights) to contribute to debt cancellation and reform these structures to make them more democratic so that they are converted into climate projects.

Advocate against Member States from blocking the UN taxation treaty development.

4.5. Propose legislation to halt EU support for intensive agriculture in the Southern Neighborhood, acknowledging its dramatic local consequences such as water scarcity, disruption of local markets, and harmful effects on rural populations. Promote greater coherence between EU priorities on water stress, agriculture and hydrogen.

4.6. Declare a climate emergency in the Mediterranean region due to heightened climate warming, which should drive more ambitious and urgent climate action grounded in principles of a just transition and respect for human rights.

4.7. Engage in transparent and inclusive dialogue with CSOs to address climate justice concerns, exploring alternative energy sources, such as Africa, to promote regional stability and sustainability. Consider establishing an Observatory for Ecological Transition in the Southern Neighborhood, comprising civil society and academia, tasked with assessing project impacts within the ecological transition framework.

4.8. Assist civil society in Southern Neighborhood countries to promote participatory water governance, leveraging successful European initiatives on communalizing water resources. Additionally, support the strengthening of local capacities, focusing on viable solutions such as desalination, especially for coastal countries.

4.9. Adopt stricter legislation on corporate due diligence, including financial institutions, and their downstream value chains, notably those operating in the MENA countries. Ensure transparent information accessibility to local civil society regarding the implications of the [EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive](#) (when approved) on the obligations of European companies and the rights now enjoyed by stakeholders along the value chains.

4.10. Address the immediate environmental impacts of the Israel/Palestine conflict, such as pollution from bombings and the use of banned phosphorus, which disrupt ecosystems and endanger human health. Collaborate with local CSOs to manage waste and debris resulting from conflict, facilitating environmental recovery and resilience-building initiatives.

5. Protecting International Law, Rule of Law, Justice Transparency & Accountability in the MENA region

In light of the EU's principled actions in the case of the war in Ukraine, the double standards in the application of international law in the ongoing war in Palestine/Israel is deeply concerning and negatively affecting the trustworthiness, reputation, and standing of the EU in the Southern Mediterranean societies.

As Human Rights organizations, we unwaveringly call for accountability for all crimes committed by all parties under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) in Israel, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). We firmly condemn the EU and its Member States for failing to protect and promote the rights of all populations affected by current and past waves of violence in the OPT, and for disregarding the root causes of occupation, settler colonialism, and Israel's systemic oppression of Palestinians. We express our disappointment with the failure of international institutions, both the United Nations and the EU, to intervene effectively to protect the rights of Palestinian people and cease the genocide against them.

We ask the upcoming European Parliament and Commission to:

5.1. Enforce the non-derogable obligation of EU Member States to prohibit genocide by taking all measures necessary to prevent and punish the commission of any act prohibited [under Articles 2 and 3 of the Genocide Convention](#), including complicity with genocide, in Gaza.

5.2. Use every diplomatic means at its disposal to press for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and to end the total siege by Israel on Gaza.

5.3. Guarantee the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid to effectively reach all Gazans in need. Advocate for the unconditional opening of all crossings into Gaza and ensuring the Palestinians' right to movement and access to food, medical aid, shelter, water, and any other means deemed necessary for survival, without any constraints.

5.4. Ensure Israel's compliance with the International Court of Justice's Orders of [26 January 2024](#), [28 March 2024](#), and of [24 May 2024](#), imposing provisional measures in the lawsuit brought by South Africa against Israel for its violation of the Genocide Convention.

5.5. Impose an arms embargo and other political and economic sanctions on Israel and Israeli officials in order to exert pressure to comply with ICJ orders and to put an end to the on-going commission of acts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, including starvation, and to uphold human rights and international law.

5.6. Ensure accountability of the Israeli occupation authorities, their military forces and all other perpetrators for acts of genocide and other severe breaches of the [Rome Statute](#) and [Geneva Conventions](#), including the crimes of aggression, starvation, crimes against humanity, forcible displacement of Palestinians, and grave violations of IHRL and IHL. Support a thorough and independent investigations of all violations of international law committed by all perpetrators, including the investigations of the [Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#), including East Jerusalem, and Israel and the [Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court](#).

5.7. Provide international guarantees and protection to uphold the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and put an end to the prolonged illegal Israeli occupation of the OPT, including the removal of illegal settlements in the West Bank, and strictly reject unconditional political and financial support for the Israeli occupation authorities, its armed forces and settlers.

5.8. Ensure the continuous and increased funding of UNRWA and reject collective punishment policies resulting in UNRWA funding, which impact vulnerable communities both in the OPT territories and neighbouring countries, such as Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Increase support to Palestinian CSOs, and advocate for removing restrictions on their rights and freedoms.

5.9. Undertake a thorough review of the 2000 [EU-Israel Association Agreement](#) in light of severe breaches of international law and the humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict.

5.10. Address the future European Neighbourhood Policy/Agenda for the Mediterranean's shortcomings by systematically considering prolonged conflicts, occupation and oppression in the region. Ensure a comprehensive approach that confronts Israel's violations of IHL and IHRL in the OPT.

5.11. Call on initiation of funding to rebuild Gaza, following the massive destructions of residential units, educational facilities, hospitals, [places of worship](#), and [infrastructure](#).

6. Advancing Women's Rights and Gender Justice

Although substantial progress has been made, the EU's ambition to be a leader on feminist foreign policy will not be fully met without the involvement of organisations on the ground which are directly affected by its decisions. We support an implementation of the [EU Gender Action Plan III \(GAP III\)](#) that includes meaningful participation of feminist, women's rights and LGBTQI+ rights organisations at all policy-making levels (identification, implementation, monitoring, evaluation).

We urge the EU to take concrete steps to address the challenges standing in the way of a more transformative impact by increasing access to funding, meaningful engagement with local women’s rights organisations (WROs), internal expertise and capacity in EUDs, and gender mainstreaming across all EU external action areas.

The European Parliament and Commission must ensure adequate funding, as well as meaningful, safe and inclusive participation of and dialogue with MENA women’s rights organizations while addressing the impact of growing trend of anti-gender organizations.

We ask the upcoming European Parliament and Commission to:

6.1. Include women’s rights organisations as a priority during the planning, monitoring, evaluation and drafting of GAP II, and ensure the inclusion of a wide range of women’s rights organisations and networks, as well as grassroots movements to enhance the relevance of actions planned for groups of women facing multiple forms of discrimination.

6.2. Increase awareness within all EU institutions on the rise of anti-gender organisations and the dangers that strengthening GONGOs represent in shrinking the space available to women’s rights organizations.

6.3. Prioritize gender mainstreaming in EU external action, particularly in sectors of significant investment and impact, such digitalisation, the green transition, and infrastructure. The EU institutions, including EUDs, should actively engage in political dialogues with partner governments to address gender issues comprehensively This includes advocating for human rights, encompassing women’s, LGBTQ+, sexual and reproductive health rights.

6.4. Ensure adequate funding for gender equality, by propose new funding programmes and/or grant schemes that directly fund core activities of local women’s rights organisations, feminist movements and organisations representing people experiencing intersectional discrimination such as persons with disabilities, migrant women and LGBTIQ communities, enabling them to assume full leadership and power.

6.5. Ensure that INGOs and local women’s rights organisations do not have to compete with each other for the same funding pot by establishing separate funding streams.

7. Ensuring Rights-Based and Fair Migration and Asylum Policies

With the recent agreement on the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, the **EU continues policies which have resulted in widespread rights violations including pushbacks at sea, and a dismantling of the right to asylum, the principle of non-refoulement, and international protection.**

In recent years, the EU’s approach to migration and asylum has aimed to reduce arrivals by reproducing a violent system of deterrence, securitization of borders, and containment in third countries.

The recent examples of the **EU-Egypt Strategic Partnership and the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding** show how European decision-makers prioritizes the externalization of border control to authorities in the Southern shore of the Mediterranean over human rights considerations. These agreements not only fail to decrease arrivals to Europe and curb smuggling. They also render migration journeys more dangerous; in the last year alone, the Central Mediterranean registered 2,476 dead and missing people - the highest number since 2017. Moreover, externalisation policies - and the funds allocated to implement them - contribute to reinforce non-democratic and authoritarian states.

We ask the upcoming European Parliament and Commission to:

7.1. Call for the immediate halt of all illegal practices - including pushbacks, pullbacks, and forced returns - and ensure the establishment of independent monitoring mechanisms at the external borders.

7.2. Increase legal pathways for migration, including family reunification, resettlement, humanitarian corridors and visas as well as a wider access to visas and legal labour migration.

7.3. Urge EU Member States to increase the number of refugee resettlement quotas and effectively implement them.

7.4. Ensure transparency of EU funds for migration-related cooperation projects and activities in third countries and provide public access to relevant information such as partner institutions/organizations, budgets allocated, and results achieved. The European Parliament should enact its power of scrutiny to ensure transparency and accountability over migration-related agreements and deals with third countries.

7.5. Ensure that the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum is in compliance with fundamental rights, and that measures which contravene these rights such as the right to asylum and the principle of non-refoulement are immediately.

7.6. Abandon any negotiations on readmission agreements for Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians, Egyptians and third-country nationals. In light of the ongoing violations of human rights and the rights of migrants and refugees in those countries, the absence of an effective post-return monitoring mechanism, these countries cannot be qualified as “safe countries of origin” or “safe third countries”.

7.7. Call EU Member States to establish a coordinated, effective and transparent maritime search and rescue mechanism to prevent further loss of life at sea as well as a search mechanism for migrants going missing on land. Ensure that EU agencies such as Frontex prioritize saving lives.

7.8. Urge EU Member States to redirect funds currently spent on border surveillance to search and rescue, and to increase resources and capacity to establish effective identification procedures, search mechanisms for missing migrants, and repatriation of bodies.

7.9. Establish an effective and permanent mechanism with a human rights-based approach to support the families of missing persons and survivors, so that all persons concerned receive psychological and legal assistance adapted to the particular needs of each group of victims, and to protect families and civil society actors involved in identification efforts in order to avoid their criminalization.

7.10. Provide sufficient support and resources to countries in the Southern Mediterranean hosting refugees and asylum-seekers in line with the principle of international solidarity.



About the Manifesto:

Recommendations drafted based on the activities carried out within the framework of the MAJALAT II project.

MAJALAT II is a regional initiative led by Euro-Mediterranean Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and networks, supported by the Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean, which promotes dialogue between CSOs in North Africa and Middle East and the European Union. The three-year project (2023-2025) is implemented by a consortium comprising EuroMed Rights, Forum Alternatives Maroc (FMAS) and Legal Agenda, and engages with an extensive network of human rights CSOs working in the MENA region.