



# **GREEN MENA NETWORK**

## **THE EU GREEN DEAL AND THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

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# The EU Green Deal and the Middle East and North Africa

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Abstract..... 3**
- Why this paper?..... 3**
  - Who are we to make this call?..... 3
  - Presentation of the EU Green Deal and the Adoption of proposals by the European Commission..... 4
  - We say: linking to a green agenda for Europe’s neighboring MENA-region is necessary..... 4
- Climate and Environment in the Middle East and North Africa ..... 5**
  - What Europeans need to know about the MENA-region ..... 5
  - Some numbers and statistics ..... 6
    - Heat..... 6
    - Water ..... 7
    - Biodiversity..... 7
- How the EU Green Deal can support a green agenda in the Middle East and North Africa.. 8**
  - What we specifically ask EU politicians to do, keeping in mind the dire environmental situation in the MENA-region: ..... 8
    - a. Acknowledge the crucial role of local communities, cities, SMEs and civil society in the MENA region in advancing their countries’ sustainability agenda. .... 8
    - b. European policies need to ensure that economic, diplomatic, humanitarian and developmental activities in the MENA do not conflict with one another ..... 10
    - c. the costs of Europe’s internal and external measures towards climate-neutrality should not be relocated to other parts of the world, like the MENA-region..... 11
- Epilogue..... 12**

## ABSTRACT

**The European Green Deal (EUGD) needs to be linked to a long-term green agenda for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).** Europe's green transition will have a major impact on the MENA-region, while at the same time it is one of the regions in the world that are hit very hard by the impact of climate change and other environmental crises.

Parts of the MENA-region are becoming literally uninhabitable because of rising temperatures. The region also has the highest proportion of a population exposed to water stress. Shortened agricultural seasons combined with drought make food production virtually impossible, leading to food insecurity in many places.

**Keeping in mind the dire environmental situation in the MENA-region, we specifically ask EU politicians and actors to:**

**1) Collaborate with green actors in the MENA in a bottom-up and decentralized manner, recognizing the crucial role of local communities in taking up climate and environmental challenges.**

Continue and expand existing collaborations with SMEs, NGOs and mayors in the MENA region (not just the EuroMed-region). The best partners in the designing and implementation of an environmental or climate agenda, *on the long run*, are local actors. Upscaling of projects, on the contrary, are much less of a guarantee for sustainable success. Both in urban and rural settings, local citizens must play a key role in implementing solutions and in energy transition. This requires decentralized sovereignty and skills. European stakeholders need to support such a decentralization when they offer knowledge and technology, and when they look for partners.

**2) Align diplomatic, economic, developmental and humanitarian policies for the MENA-region in support of the long-term green agenda.** For economic relations, this means encouraging EU banks, companies and multinationals to divest from fossil fuels while supporting the transition to renewable energy in all its stages and to stop with all forms of extraction in the region that damages people or planet. EU leaders should use their diplomatic relations to push for the protection and support of environmental activists wherever possible.

**3) Ensure not to relocate the costs of the EUGD to other parts of the world, including the MENA-region.**

Europe has a history in the Middle East and North Africa that has impacted the relation of MENA-citizens to their land and nature. In fact, the Middle East is what it is today because of colonial resource extraction and everything that came with it. To allow outside Europe what is not allowed inside Europe, should no longer be an option. European companies and governments are to respect environmental laws and be prohibited from damaging resource extraction for the European market.

## WHY THIS PAPER?

### WHO ARE WE TO MAKE THIS CALL?

The Greater Middle East Platform aims to bridge the gap between the Netherlands and countries in the Middle East. It offers a nuanced and human perspective of societies and citizens in the wider Middle East region. The Platform is independent and brings together a diverse range of Dutch Middle East experts. It offers advice and expertise, and it initiates and facilitates debate.

We initiated the Green MENA Network project in 2019 when we noticed that sustainable actors in the MENA-countries are repeatedly overlooked and are often not invited to take part in global discussions on climate and sustainability. We mapped more than 550 green NGOs, researchers, companies and activists active in the region from Iraq to Morocco. During collaborative activities, we have learned about their



agenda and needs. Moreover, our partner the Arab Reform Initiative<sup>1</sup> did in-depth research on the topic and how it relates to European policies<sup>2</sup>. Based on the combined expertise and priorities of smaller and bigger local actors, we feel obliged to make this urgent call to the EU Commission and European stakeholders.

## PRESENTATION OF THE EU GREEN DEAL AND THE ADOPTION OF PROPOSALS BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The European Green Deal sets the blueprint for a transformational change of the European economy and its society. It was presented by the Commission in 2019 and was positively received by the European Parliament.

In July 2021, **the European Commission adopted a set of proposals to make the EU's climate, energy, transport and taxation policies fit for reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030**, compared to 1990 levels. According to the Commission “Achieving these emission reductions in the next decade is crucial to Europe becoming the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050 and making the European Green Deal a reality.” The proposals set the EU on a path to reach its climate targets by 2030 in what it calls “a fair, cost effective and competitive way.”<sup>3</sup>

## WE SAY: LINKING TO A GREEN AGENDA FOR EUROPE’S NEIGHBORING MENA-REGION IS NECESSARY

The Commission acknowledges the fact that addressing climate change can only be done in collaboration with international partners<sup>4</sup>. It wants to be an example to major international players in the world both in terms of targets and ambitions and in terms of technology and product development. When it comes to aid and international cooperation, it earmarks 30% of the EU's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) to support climate objectives

The proximity of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to Europe, as well as the historic, colonial and contemporary economic and cultural ties, and the region’s geopolitical setting, necessitate a more proactive and holistic approach: **an EU Green Deal cannot be viewed in isolation from a green agenda for the MENA-region**. In its Neighbourhood policy, the EU expressed it has a ‘special relationship’ with ‘the Neighbourhood countries of the East and the South’. It is founded on cooperation, peace and security, mutual accountability and a shared commitment to the universal values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Over the last century, both oil, trade and aid-relations with the MENA-countries focused on growth. This leaves the MENA-region to this day entangled in a complex interrelationship between oil and other resources that are extracted from the earth, money flows, geopolitics, and power. This is true both in more stable countries and in (post-) conflict countries. Up until now, most governments in the MENA-region lack comprehensive long-term strategies for energy transition and other climate-change mitigation and adaptation measures. The EU can support MENA-partners in developing such strategies.

The most significant impact of the EU’s Green agenda itself will be on governments and societies in MENA-countries as a result of the required energy transition away from fossil fuels. Countries such as

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.arab-reform.net/area\\_of\\_work/environment/](https://www.arab-reform.net/area_of_work/environment/)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.euromesco.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/A-Euro-Mediterranean-Green-Deal.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal\\_en#boosting-global-climate-action](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en#boosting-global-climate-action)

Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which currently rely on fossil fuels for 65–85 percent of total government revenues, will require assistance to transform their economies. At the same time, European governments, businesses and other stakeholders will develop new partnerships, which should be based on shared green values.

**Taking into consideration the EU's historic and current ties with the MENA-countries, its proximity to Europe, and the tremendous impact Europe's transition will have on the MENA-region, it is evident that the EU needs to consider the MENA's green agenda next to the EU Green Deal.** In order to understand the critical importance of a green deal for the MENA-region, one only has to consider the environmental challenges the region is facing.

## CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

### WHAT EUROPEANS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE MENA-REGION

Climate change and environmental challenges are among the most important issues determining the future of the MENA region, and Europe's relationship with the MENA. **Issues like rising temperatures, drought and pollution are directly related to conflict and a lack of economic perspectives.** Failing economies and failing authorities put countries in the region under pressure. More than half of the population of the MENA region is under 30 and nearly half of this young population group has considered leaving their country because they have no say in their own future. Population growth, rapid urbanization and a high rate of poverty push governments in the MENA to focus on economic development, growth and jobs, instead of dealing with the collapsing environment.

**The region lacks rigorous environmental institutions and legal frameworks that are essential to tackle environmental deterioration. But among local communities in the MENA, there is growing awareness of the need to transform societies and economies to ensure environmental justice and a good life for all within planetary boundaries.** Especially among Arab youth and at local and community levels, numerous initiatives exist that aim to deal with climate change and loss of biodiversity. Even among the 16.8 million people in the MENA-region designated as "people of concern" by the UNHCR (refugees, internally Displaced Persons, returnees, and stateless people), a growing number is concerned about the changing environment and the increasing challenges it brings and are ready to act with local initiatives.

For the green actors in the MENA region, green is more than climate action or sustainability. **In many of the Mediterranean countries, a sustainable future is tied to decolonization and reclaiming of sovereignty.** For instance: in the heart of the Algerian Sahara, in 2014-2015, a collective movement protested shale gas exploration by the French oil company Total. The campaign claimed that Algerian citizens were confronting not only the environmental and health hazards of fracking but also a form of neo-colonialism. While France has banned Total and other companies from fracking on its own territory, it is still pushing for it in its former colonies.

For Palestinians especially, the land and the soil itself are interlinked with colonization. Israel, the occupying power, is presenting itself as genuinely working on sustainability and fighting climate action. But in fact, it is colonizing land and oppressing the 5.2 million indigenous inhabitants of that land. Israel controls water and land use in Palestine, dumps waste and regularly destroys farmland, water wells and orchards, leaving Palestinians completely dependent on import (which is also controlled by Israel).

Our governance and economic systems are exhausting our planet and climate action also **needs a profound political and socioeconomic transformation.** This means that the current status quo will have



to be changed. In the region, the events of the Arab Spring were already a disruption, were youth-led uprisings linked governance and the deteriorating climate in the region.

Autocratic regimes in the region do not necessarily appreciate transformative change. And although some countries in the region have picked up on the climate change theme, they mostly try to demonstrate that economic power and technological innovation are a way to face the crisis. They fail to rethink the governance and socioeconomic systems and the relationship with nature, or to provide serious long-term strategies to get there. The consequences are environmental exploitation, decreasing social and human security, enduring economic inequalities, poor governance, and rising violence. This means, once again, that Middle Eastern populations are left to struggle for their own dignity, or *'karama'*, the key word during the Arab Spring. It may well become a refrain of disruptions to come related to climate shocks<sup>5</sup>.

Geopolitics in the region exasperate the environmental problems as well. Unfortunately, neighboring countries in the region that deal with the same environmental issues do not have the habit of helping each other and trying to deal with the problem together. But the more individual states prioritize their national needs first, rather than cooperating on the basis of ecological integrity and environmental regeneration, the more they will undermine their own stability and cause environmental degradation.

## SOME NUMBERS AND STATISTICS

### HEAT

**Parts of the MENA-region are becoming literally uninhabitable<sup>6</sup>.** With 4 °C global warming, summer temperatures are expected to be up to 8 °C warmer in parts of Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq by the end of the century due to a simultaneously drying trends in the region<sup>7</sup>. As extreme temperatures and severe droughts ravage the region, forests burn, and cities became islands of unbearable heat. In June 2021, Kuwait recorded a temperature of 53.2 degrees Celsius, while Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia all recorded over 50 degrees temperatures. A month later, temperatures in Iraq spiked to 51.5 degrees, and Iran recorded a close 51 degrees.

Worst of all, this is just the start of a trend. **The Middle East is warming at twice the global average<sup>8</sup>** and by 2050 will be 4 degrees Celsius warmer as compared to the 1.5 degree global target that according to scientists is the limit to save the planet. The World Bank says extreme climatic conditions will become routine and the region could face four months of scorching sun every year<sup>9</sup>.

**Heat creates other crises.** It leads to drought, which in most MENA-countries is exacerbated by dramatic mismanagement. **The Middle East is experiencing its most severe drought in 900 years**, according to NASA<sup>10</sup>, one which is seemingly endless. The drought peaked between 2006-2010, and although 2007, 2009 and 2010 saw “normal” amounts of total rainfall, the region was still in drought.

**Heat causes wildfires.** This summer, several countries in the Middle East became tinderboxes. If the region faces a 2°C increase, wildfires will cause the loss of 87% of its forests. Indeed, in 2021 in Algeria, 90 people were killed by wildfires. In the past years, the country is experiencing an average of 1,500 fires that cover

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<sup>5</sup> [https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/83256?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss](https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/83256?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss)

<sup>6</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/24/the-middle-east-is-becoming-literally-uninhabitable/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10113-017-1144-2>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.mpg.de/10856695/W004\\_Environment\\_climate\\_062-069.pdf](https://www.mpg.de/10856695/W004_Environment_climate_062-069.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/mena-climate-change>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2016/nasa-finds-drought-in-eastern-mediterranean-worst-of-past-900-years>



35,000 ha annually. In Lebanon, in 2019, after 15 years of conscious reforestation, a chain of fires that found its way to Syria, destroyed more than 3,000 hectares of forests, destroying the work of 15 years in a few hours.

**Rising heat means temperatures become inhuman, and increased areas are less habitable**, for example because of wet bulb temperatures that measure relative humidity, and sand- and dust storms that affect air quality and health. **Some parts of the region will be seriously affected by rising sea levels**, especially the low-lying areas in Nile Delta, the South of Iraq, and the low-lying coastlines of the Arabian/Persian Gulf<sup>11</sup>.

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## WATER

**The MENA region has the highest proportion of a population exposed to water stress, home to just one percent of freshwater resources but five percent of the world's population**<sup>12</sup>. Nine of the ten most water-stressed countries in the world are in the Middle East and North Africa: Qatar, Israel (and, we presume, Palestine), Lebanon, Iran, Jordan, Libya, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE<sup>13</sup>. It also has the least sustainable water resource use and is the most water scarce region in the world. The lines of rivers threading across the map of the region are few and far between. The arid climate also means that where there are stores of water below the surface, those aquifers are not being replenished very quickly. In some cases, aquifers are not being replenished at all.

At the same time depictions of the Middle East as water scarce must be nuanced by an appreciation of the region's varied geographies. There are lush mountainous regions, areas with milder climates with rain, and green river banks.

**The already shortened agricultural seasons combined with the drought make the growing of food virtually impossible, leading to food insecurity**. Crop yields are expected to decline by 30 percent with 1.5–2 °C warming and up to 60 percent with 3–4 °C warming, with regional variation and without considering adaptation<sup>14</sup>. While the MENA-population is still growing, it may become more dependent on food imports. Agriculture uses 85 percent of the region's water. Governments across the Middle East and North Africa have spent huge amounts of money investing in water infrastructure to meet this need.

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## BIODIVERSITY

The region has always had a high biodiversity and many endemic flora and fauna. From the forest steppe in the mountains of northern Iraq and northeast Syria, to woodlands in the Mediterranean Basin, to the marshes in Southern Iraq: the MENA is unique and diverse in its environment. But these unique landscapes and plants and trees are under severe threat.

In 2015 in the MENA, approximately 2.476 species were under threat according to the IUCN Red List, this includes fishes, plants, birds, mammals and other species.<sup>15</sup> The UN Environment Programme stated that species loss and habitat decline are mostly driven by development, climate change (sea temperatures warming cause coral bleaching), conflict and inadequate policies such as insufficient protected areas coverage or conservation and restoration programs.<sup>16</sup> The MENA is witnessing a dramatic deterioration of biodiversity. First of all, this is the case for marine biodiversity in the region. The corals of the northern Red Sea around Sharm el-

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/middle-east-front-lines-climate-change-mena/>

<sup>12</sup> *World Resource Institute, 2021* Via: [https://www.climatecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/RCCC-ICRC-Country-profiles-Region\\_Middle\\_East.pdf](https://www.climatecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/RCCC-ICRC-Country-profiles-Region_Middle_East.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2019-countries-facing-water-crisis/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10113-017-1144-2>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ecomena.org/habitat-loss-in-mena/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.unep.org/ar/node/27244>



Sheikh and the Gulf of Aqaba are among the richest natural habitats on earth, home to more than 1,000 species of fish and 250 different types of coral. But these marine ecosystems are facing difficulties. In the Arabian Gulf Mangroves, seagrass beds and coral reefs are critically endangered, while they sustain rich communities. These include the world's second largest population of dugongs and the endangered green turtle.<sup>17</sup> Corals in the Red Sea, for example, have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of rising temperatures and climate change<sup>18</sup>. However, haphazard tourist development, waste disposal in the sea, overfishing, and the use of explosives by fishermen have all done serious damage to the region's biodiversity<sup>19</sup>.

Many countries in the Middle East rank low in the Megafauna Conservation Index. This is because of years of conflict in some countries in the Middle East that have destroyed natural habitats and killed off animal populations. Landmines throughout Iraq for instance, have killed many domestic and wild animals. To reveal enemy hideouts, forests and drained wetlands were burned, killing animals and destroying their habitat in the process.

The Middle East also remains one of world's biggest wildlife trafficking transit hubs in the world<sup>20</sup>. According to a study published on Birdlife International, 1.7–4.6 million birds of at least 413 species are killed or taken illegally each year in the Arabian region, Iraq, and Iran<sup>21</sup>. The increased demand for Saker falcon, a migratory bird popular among falconers in the Gulf, has made the UAE the number one country for reported bird trafficking cases since 2009.

Aside from animal trafficking, some countries in the Middle East have also had a huge poaching problem. In Oman, for instance, rampant poaching has adversely affected the population of Arabian oryx and Sand gazelle.

## HOW THE EU GREEN DEAL CAN SUPPORT A GREEN AGENDA IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

### WHAT WE SPECIFICALLY ASK EU POLITICIANS TO DO, KEEPING IN MIND THE DIRE ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATION IN THE MENA-REGION:

- EU actors needs to collaborate with MENA-actors in a bottom-up and decentralized manner, recognizing the crucial role of local communities in taking up the climate and environmental challenges.
- EU diplomatic, economic, developmental, and humanitarian policies for the MENA-region are to be aligned and not conflict with the green agenda.
- The costs of the EUGD are not to be relocated to other parts of the world, including the MENA-region.

### A. ACKNOWLEDGE THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES, CITIES, SMES AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE MENA REGION IN ADVANCING THEIR COUNTRIES' SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA.

Planning green strategies requires medium- and long-term thinking. **It is crucial to know who are the best partners in the designing and implementation of plans, on the long run.** Who will ensure sustainability of plans, beyond the first years? For citizens in the MENA-region to embrace a climate agenda, it must be relevant to their surroundings and needs, locally driven and people-centered. This means that local small and medium

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.unep.org/ar/node/27244>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.anthropocenemagazine.org/2018/03/red-sea-coral-reefs-climate-change/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://egyptindependent.com/red-seas-coral-reefs-are-in-serious-trouble-environmental-ngo/>

<sup>20</sup> 'In Plane Sight: Wildlife Trafficking in the Air Transport Sector, via <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-worst-performing-countries-in-wildlife-conservation.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.birdlife.org/news/2021/01/21/tackling-illegal-killing-taking-and-trade-of-birds-in-sub-saharan-africa/>





sized enterprises (SMEs), NGOs, authorities and communities must be involved in developing these agendas. Existing collaborations between EU and MENA SMEs, NGOs and mayors need to continue and to expand. Programmes and instruments that exist in a Euro-Mediterranean context can be widened, to incorporate and support partners in Iraq and the Gulf-region.

In addition, **funders at all levels (multilateral, international and national, public, and private) need to rethink the suitability of upscaling of projects.**

Large (technology-based) projects, whether for renewable energy, for reforestation or for smart agriculture and agroecology, will often exclude or even hurt local communities. Small-scale projects that incorporate knowledge of local society and environment, will in many cases be more sustainable and benefit both nature and communities much more.

Finally, **we have to keep in mind that technology is not neutral, and (technological) solutions should be maintained and owned by local users and communities.** In the same way, local farmers have the right to choose seeds and methods of cultivation, free of corporate interference and control. EU actors can support communal solutions that increase climate resilience, rather than top-down profit-driven industrial-scale farming systems.

Considering for example the transition away from fossil-fuels, typically in most MENA-countries, energy is controlled or even produced by state actors, or corporate actors with close ties to the state. Protecting profits is often more important than enhancing human and ecological conditions. This also holds true in cases where investments are made in renewable energy.

In the MENA-region, states are preoccupied with developing renewable energy at large scale. For example, in Morocco and in Dubai large solar projects are developed that are really a continuation of the existing energy model. These megaprojects are political as much as economic projects. They support exclusionary political regimes and are a manifestation of state centralization, as they require no input from the localities in which they are placed. **An alternative decentralized model allows for ownership and operation of renewable energy to remain in the communities where it operates.** Solar and wind technology is scalable, whereas previous technology was not. This allows for the creation of an energy system that is not only sustainable but also democratically owned and designed.

Interestingly in Jordan, which has no fossil energy resources, we see a great example of such a more just and decentralized energy transition. The Jordanian government grants loans to homeowners in rural communities to install solar systems. Homeowners pay back the loan with the money they otherwise would have spent on their energy bill. Once the loans are repaid, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources re-invests the money into other homes.

**As for cities, citizens play a key role in furthering the urban energy transition.** Cities' energy systems have a direct impact on citizens' lives, impacting how their energy is produced, transmitted, and used, as well as aspects like local air quality and reliability of electrical access. City residents can help shape the renewable energy infrastructure of their cities by, for example, investing in renewables. But city governments in MENA-countries have comparatively little political autonomy and often lack financial and human resources. This makes it difficult for cities alone to implement ambitious renewable energy projects or to invest in major infrastructure such as district cooling networks or public transit, relying instead on national governments, foreign donors or on direct partnerships with the private sector.

Even at the national level, greening strategies in MENA-countries have often been donor-driven and project-based to accommodate donor goals and timeframes. This did not result in sustainable practices nor any form of

**WE CALL ON THE EU TO ENSURE AT LEAST THE FOLLOWING:**

**- INVOLVE MENA-FARMERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EU REGULATIONS THAT AFFECT MENA-EUROPE AGRICULTURAL TRADE.**

**- INCREASE RESEARCH, INNOVATION, AND INVESTMENTS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR OF MENA COUNTRIES TO FACILITATE MARKET ACCESS. PRIORITIZE INVESTMENTS IN LOCALLY LED SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH TO INCREASE KNOWLEDGE ON CLIMATE ADAPTATION IN AGRICULTURE FITTING THE LOCAL CONTEXT.**

**- INCREASE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR OF MENA-COUNTRIES TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL LOW CARBON AND CLIMATE ADAPTED SOLUTIONS FOR BUILDINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE.**

**- BUILD LINKAGES BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL SCIENCE ORGANIZATIONS WITH FARMERS AND AGRICULTURE EXTENSION AGENCIES.**

**- PROTECT ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS FROM HARM AND HARASSMENT.**

**- SMALL SCALE, BOTTOM-UP, DECENTRALIZED INITIATIVES IN RENEWABLE ENERGY AND AGROECOLOGY SHOULD BE CENTRAL IN THE TRANSITION PROCESS FOR IT TO BE SUSTAINABLE. THIS WOULD ALSO MEAN THAT DECENTRAL GREEN ENERGY AND AGROECOLOGY PROJECTS THAT EMPOWER LOCAL COMMUNITIES ARE PREFERRED TO RECEIVE SUPPORT.**



ownership. **Instead of relying on European ‘solutionism’, solutions must be found through collaborations with local researchers and practitioners and actively involving local communities.**

## B. EUROPEAN POLICIES NEED TO ENSURE THAT ECONOMIC, DIPLOMATIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES IN THE MENA DO NOT CONFLICT WITH ONE ANOTHER

It is a commendable step to dedicate 30% of the EU's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instruments to support climate objectives. However, this will only be meaningful if support for climate objectives becomes part of all EU dealings in the MENA-region. **All policies are to be aligned to support the green agenda in the MENA.**

**For economic relations, this means encouraging EU banks, companies, and multinationals to divest from fossil fuels, while facilitating the transition phase to renewable energy.** It means not exploiting the fossil fuel supplies, including the gas supplies under the Mediterranean. The EU should not invest in pipelines, not support any of the East- or South Mediterranean countries in developing the necessary infrastructure or exploitation of the oil or gas fields. European businesses should not be allowed to extract valuable resources (such as water for Europe-bound agricultural products) in ways that harm the environment, biodiversity, and communities in MENA-countries. The EU Commission needs to come up with legislation that obligates European companies in all sectors to respect human rights and avoid environmental harm in the full supply chain. It should sanction violations of such legislation, as was already requested by EU Commissioner Reynders in 2020.

The European Union has already stated its willingness to collaborate with Middle Eastern partners on a variety of transitions. However, it is critical to consider which types of governance systems are required to usher in truly resilient transitions that revitalize local and national economies from the ground up—literally.

**For diplomatic relations this means EU leaders are to protect and support environmental activists wherever possible.** These activists are Europe's partners in working towards the goals of a green deal. They need to be safe to work. Besides, Europe can make use of the opportunity when infrastructures and energy systems are replaced: calling for decentralized structures, education of citizens and encouraging the installation of renewable energy at the community level. Calling for growth of locally led organizations supporting community ownership of renewable energy assets.

**For humanitarian relations this means that as soon as aid transitions from emergency to resilient recovery, it should be aligned with the green agenda.** And this green agenda should take the local context, local knowledge, and the local needs into account. Climate disasters like floods and extreme weather requires redesigning landscapes in such a way that they can buffer the impact of disasters and store as much flood water as possible. Land restoration, rebooting local soil-related cultures and resilience building can only be done together with local communities.

WE CALL ON THE EU TO ENSURE AT LEAST THE FOLLOWING:

- FOSTER COOPERATION ON DIFFERENT GOVERNANCE LEVELS, INCLUDING CITY-TO-CITY, COUNTRY-TO-COUNTRY, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND BUSINESS ALLIANCES.
- COORDINATE AND ALIGN THE EU GREEN DEAL OBJECTIVES WITH THE BILATERAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS OF EU MEMBER STATES.
- DISENGAGE FROM THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY, INCLUDING FRACKING. ENGAGE WITH OIL- AND GAS-EXPORTING COUNTRIES TO FOSTER THEIR ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION, INCLUDING RENEWABLE ENERGY.
- EXISTING EUROPEAN TRADE AGREEMENTS ARE TO INTEGRATE THE GREEN ECONOMY PARADIGM.
- FORMULATE A JOINT EU-MENA VISION FOR SUPPORTING A COMPREHENSIVE CIRCULAR ECONOMY ENCOMPASSING VALUE CHAINS ACROSS BOTH REGIONS.
- SUPPORT LABOR-INTENSIVE, JOB GENERATING GREEN TRANSITION PROJECTS.
- STIMULATE THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO MAKE USE OF THE BUSINESS POTENTIAL ASSOCIATED WITH COOPERATION ON GREEN TRANSITIONS IN THE MENA AND EUROPE.
- INVEST IN EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND TRAINING IN THE RENEWABLE ENERGY SECTOR. ENERGY DEMOCRACY THEORY SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN UNIVERSITY CURRICULA.
- ENCOURAGE LOWER LABOR TAXES IN GREEN INDUSTRIES.
- INVEST IN GREENING OF REFUGEE CAMPS THROUGHOUT THE REGION (BOTH EXISTING CAMPS AND NEW ONES THAT WILL APPEAR DUE TO CLIMATE CONDITIONS), E.G. ROOF TOP GARDENS, SOLAR ENERGY, SKILLS OF SUPPORT STAFF.
- RETHINK GREEN FINANCING, FOR EXAMPLE BY SHIFTING TO SMALLER SCALE INITIATIVES, AND BY ENSURING THAT GREEN FINANCING IS INTEGRATED WITH AND COORDINATED ACROSS OTHER REGIONAL PROGRAMS.



**Regarding developmental relations, all North-African countries, and all Arab Middle Eastern countries apart from Iraq and the Gulf states can benefit from the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI),** its partner countries are - besides six countries to the East of Europe- Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria (although suspended 'due to the political situation'), and Tunisia. As 30% of the ENI budget is needed to support climate objectives, it is important to select truly sustainable partners. In ENI, 'special emphasis will be given to engagement with civil society', this means there are great opportunities to support local urban and rural environmental initiatives. In the case of Iraq, this would mean that efforts to revitalize the national economy need to be directed at shifting away from oil production. What may seem like a short cut to jobs and dollars, is in fact keeping the country away from developing truly sustainable initiatives.

The European Commission should not only approach the environment in the MENA-region with technical fixes or technocratic or bureaucratic expertise. The EU should stay clear from extractive models of development that do more harm to people and planet.

### C. THE COSTS OF EUROPE'S INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL MEASURES TOWARDS CLIMATE-NEUTRALITY SHOULD NOT BE RELOCATED TO OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD, LIKE THE MENA-REGION.

**Europe has a history in the Middle East and North Africa that has impacted the relation of MENA-citizens to their land and nature.** Colonizing powers forcibly introduced new and foreign crops and ways of farming. Even after decolonization, local markets were affected by Western governments subsidizing their own cereal or dairy farmers leading to overproduction and dumping, causing countries like Tunisia and Egypt to reform their agrarian sector and destroying national capacity to feed themselves. Many countries became structural food importers where they were once the food providers of the world, or at least agriculturally self-sufficient.

Also, Western/European oil companies and their way of dealing with local power structures, the rentier system, severely impacted the relation of MENA-populations to their land. In fact, the Middle East is what it is today because of resource extraction. Economic progress was accompanied with economic predatory practices, inequities, disenfranchisement, corruption, violence, and conflict. It was also accompanied with authoritarianism.

The double standard of European governments raises anger and frustration among environmental activists and citizens in the region. As mentioned above, the French government banned fracking on its own soil, but collaborated with the non-democratic Algerian authorities to have French-owned Total introduce the practice in Algeria<sup>22</sup>, causing fury and protest from local citizens.

- GREEN SOLUTIONS SHOULD NOT UNDERMINE MENA PARTNERS BY IMPOSING SEVERE GREEN REQUIREMENTS OR BY DENYING THEM ACCESS TO FINANCE BECAUSE THEY DO NOT MEET NEW GREEN CRITERIA. INSTEAD, EUROPE CAN ASSIST MENA PARTNERS IN MEETING THE NEW STANDARDS, AS WELL AS IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS IF NECESSARY. ENSURE THAT MENA STAKEHOLDERS ARE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TRADE REGULATIONS.

- INCLUDE THE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE MENA-EUROPE PARTNERSHIP ON CLIMATE.

WE CALL ON THE EU TO ENSURE AT LEAST THE FOLLOWING:

- NO DESTRUCTIVE EXTRACTION OF RESOURCES SUCH AS WATER, METALS, AND MINERALS IN COUNTRIES OUTSIDE EUROPE BY EUROPEAN PLAYERS. ENSURE HUMAN RIGHTS TRANSPARENCY AND MONITORING, PROTECTION OF LABORERS, FARMERS, AND INDIGENOUS GROUPS, AS WELL AS LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY.

- AGRICULTURAL EXTRACTIVISM IN NORTH AFRICA IS PARTICULARLY DAMAGING TO WATER RESOURCES AND LEADS TO SOIL DEGRADATION AND DESERTIFICATION. WATER-INTENSIVE MONO-CROP AGRIBUSINESS FOR EXPORT TO THE EU SHOULD THEREFORE NOT BE ALLOWED.

- LOOK FOR REAL SOLUTIONS TO RECYCLE OR CLEAN UP ALL WASTE PRODUCED OUTSIDE EUROPE AND INVEST IN REMANUFACTURING AND RECYCLING FACILITIES IN THE MENA THAT ADHERE TO HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS.

<sup>22</sup> <https://merip.org/2020/10/algeria-is-not-for-sale-mobilizing-against-fracking-in-the-sahara/>



**The climate footprint is very high in European countries compared to MENA-countries** (with the exception of Gulf countries, that are amongst the most polluting countries per capita in the world). Climate justice also means that Europe has an obligation to help the countries that suffer from its footprint. This help should not lead to donor-dependency but to cooperation and co-developing of programmes and projects.

**The EU needs to carefully monitor sustainable investment banks and sustainable investment funds**, following its own Action Plan for Financing Sustainable Growth, and the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR). Are these funds indeed being used to support sustainable projects, or are they green washing shields really targeting economic growth?

**The EU can also set standards for European companies active in the MENA-region**, and request reports on their conduct. It is not acceptable that European businesses import agricultural products from water-stressed countries like Tunisia. Nor is it acceptable that European owned multinationals produce cement in factories in Egypt, causing severe coal-pollution, ignoring local environmental legislation (not to mention the use of cheap labor and benefiting from low electricity prices while there isn't enough electricity for the local population). With stakeholders and local communities, the EU should seek alternatives to safeguard local employment and livelihoods and to make industries truly green and sustainable, starting with European multinationals that work in the MENA-region.

Finally, the EU needs to give insight in its strategies for obtaining the resources needed to implement its energy transition to renewables.

## EPILOGUE

TO LIVE! LIKE A TREE ALONE AND FREE  
LIKE A FOREST IN BROTHERHOOD

THIS YEARNING IS OURS.

*Nazim Hikmet, from Plea. Translated from Turkish by Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk.*



With this whitepaper, we urge European policymakers to pay explicit attention to how all cooperation and interaction with the MENA-region can be shaped in the context of the EU Green Deal agenda. Recognizing that countries in this region are at the forefront of the climate crisis, the EU should support more European action in a green agenda for the Middle East and North Africa. Cooperation is the only way to address these enormous challenges, and it is critical to consider the region's broader context of social-economic and democratic situations. The EU and the MENA region should seek closer cooperation and work together to ensure a sustainable planet for us all.

The Greater Middle East Platform has invested in a Green MENA Network which connects more than 550 green actors in the MENA region. They are sustainable partners for Europe to connect, facilitate and cooperate for a green future.

Autumn 2021, The Greater Middle East Platform  
Sylva van Rosse, Vanessa Lambrecht

*The Greater Middle East Platform aims to bridge the gap between the Netherlands and countries in the Middle East. It offers a nuanced and human perspective of societies and citizens in the wider Middle East region. The Platform is independent and brings together a diverse range of Dutch Middle East experts. It offers advice and expertise, and it initiates and facilitates debates. More information about services and activities can be found [on our website](#).*

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