

MAJALAT - Brussels Civil Society Forum

CONCEPT NOTE

Security and countering violence

The Southern Mediterranean region is strongly marked by endogenous and exogenous violence whose sources are rooted in history as well as in more contemporary factors that may have their origins in territories outside the region. More recently, in 2011, a wave of violence and radicalization strongly hit the region. This wave illustrated the ability of violence to extend regionally and globally but illustrated above all the complexity and multicausality of this phenomenon. This wave was accompanied by a growing militarization that resulted in the exclusion of civil powers and in the reduction of civil society space. This spread violence justified the imposition by Governments of restrictive measures on freedom and liberties often legitimizing a permanent derogation of international conventions protecting human rights and freedoms. These responses given by public authorities are likely fragile and misleading. The hard economic circumstances in this region and the trend of settling political and societal conflicts without consensus or reconciliation mean that the strategies put in place to contain violence could be ineffective and unsustainable. Furthermore, there is a lack of accurate knowledge and information on the recent levels of violence because of the information vacuum created by the post-2011 Southern Mediterranean regimes and their tight control over the public sphere.¹

Defining “security” is a complicated task. This multilayered concept can have various definitions depending on the actor. The civil society and the public authorities (national or European) may have different understandings of what security means and therefore diverging priorities. Individuals may perceive security differently, depending on their personal situation, and may therefore generate different needs and demands. The concept of security in the current mainstreaming means above all a repressive military and police intervention by the State against an enemy.

For the Majalat Consortium, the concept of "security" should be interpreted as the duty of the State to protect its citizens and to guarantee their access to the entire human rights system - political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights. Security is therefore a mean to protect human rights as well as a mean to protect the society itself. Security becomes a collective right and duty of the State, but also of the society as a whole, and therefore it should not be dominated by repressive or military actions. On the contrary, security policies in order to be effective require investment in education, social justice, human rights protection, and respect of democracy values.

It should be noted that violence primarily affects the most vulnerable groups: individuals and human groups weakened by inequality, exclusion and oppression by authoritarian regimes. More specifically, security is a demand by unprotected workers, women who suffer from the persistence of the patriarchal system, migrants whose rights are violated, and also by young people who constitute the largest part of the populations of neighbouring countries and who suffer from a lack of opportunities, lack of jobs and obstacles to mobility.

On the other hand, one of the major factors contributing to the increase of violence is radicalization. This term is often combined with the term "terrorism" which is an ill-defined concept which can easily lead us to overlook the diversity and complexity of the map of violence, its actors and their incentives. In fact, radicalization, commission of act of terrorism and participation to violent groups

¹ <https://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/Euromesco%20Policy%20Brief%2097.pdf>



can often be a reaction to marginalization, dissatisfaction with the political trajectories and difficult societal grievances.

Counter-violence policies and security policies cannot be reduced to fighting acts of terrorism. Effective and innovative solutions to deal with violence need to respond to the root causes generating this vicious circle. Different methods and strategies are needed to counter violence, without however, exonerating actors - whatever their nature is- from their responsibility. Strategies to counter violence however must be in strict compliance with the rule of law and cannot be relegated to the background under the pretext of efficiency.

North and South

If all situations do not reach the same degree of dangerousness, it is important to underline the worrying conjunction in the north and south of the Mediterranean of processes tending to hinder civil societies action, in particular by criminalizing the actors in charge of them.

In the perspective of the construction of a security area in the north and south of the Mediterranean, four essential criticisms must be made:

- The human rights clause in bilateral association agreements is totally ineffective as it leads to the denunciation of an agreement without the possibility of using more partial and more gradual measures.
- The programs developed by the European Union for democracy do not take sufficient account of the qualitative evolution of the areas concerned, prioritizing purely quantitative criteria. If a judgment is made more quickly, it does not imply that its quality is better.
- Agreements signed and programs implemented in the security field do not always provide the necessary involvement of civil societies. They are barely or not associated with the design and implementation of these programs/agreements.

Inserting all programs in the prism "fight against terrorism", or even "fight against illegal migration", is to ignore the root causes of this phenomenon. This leads too often not to deal with the institutional violence of States. Finally, the programs developed by the European Union do not focus on promoting the fight against racism and freedom of conscience. This situation is unfortunate as these issues affect both shores of the Mediterranean. They would allow not only a better cultural understanding, but also a better understanding of the ways in which societies fight against racism and promote freedom of conscience.

What role for civil society?

Civil society plays a crucial role in building and consolidating functional democracies, based on the establishment of effective institutions that are accountable, respect the rule of law and respond to the needs of the population..

Security sector reform should aim at strengthening the effectiveness, transparency and integrity of defence and security actors and institutions. Within this context, civil society organisations (CSOs) are an important channel through which citizens (both women and men) can participate in the development of public policies and provide citizen oversight. Representative and credible CSOs are essential to the democratic governance of the security sector and can, to cite but a few examples, have an impact by:

- influencing the development of policies to ensure they reflect the security concerns of women, men, girls and boys in the country, including those living in isolated areas;
- informing and educating the public on changes to the security context, the role of defence and security organisations, and the role of citizens in preserving security for all;



- encouraging the consolidation of peaceful and constructive relationships between security institutions and civilian populations; and
- providing national institutions with expertise on fundamental matters such as budget analysis, gender analysis, respect for human rights, changing legal frameworks, or the fight against corruption in the security sector.

Above all, the active involvement of committed, competent and diverse representatives of civil society in public oversight of the security sector strengthens citizens' confidence in the state mechanisms responsible for security.²

Entry points and recommendations

This concept note is the result of discussions that took place during the thematic Workshop on Security and countering violence held in Casablanca (Morocco) in April 2019, the youth workshop (Tunis) in April 2019 and, the subsequent reflections resulted from the South Seminar held in Tunis, in September 2019. Given the complexity of the thematic, additional academic sources and contributions made by Majalat have been used to draft this concept note.

The objective of the additional work done was to better specify and develop the definition of this thematic- and, therefore, suggest recommendations and new entry points to be validated during the discussions with the participants.

➤ Proposed entry points:

1. how are human rights addressed in association and partnership agreements: the role of civil society in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in EU programs / policies and the respect for human rights
2. breaches of human security, discrimination / violation of freedom of conscience
3. the role of women and youth in security policies

➤ Proposed recommendations:

- Promoting and developing cultural exchanges between all the actors of the civil societies and consequently favor freedom of movement,
- Linking in the institutional field any quantitative aid with a qualitative requirement
- Link any security collaboration with a requirement of respect for fundamental rights
- Putting in place a policy to fight against racism and discrimination and for freedom of conscience
- Implementing joint programs in the north and south to combat racism and promote freedom of conscience
- Including youth in decision-making related to security and fight against all forms of violence when it comes to revise the EU Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).
- Increasing political and financial support to youth-led initiatives for the promotion of peace and the prevention of violent extremism.

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² <https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/104807/1875874/SSRG-West-Africa-Toolkit-Tool-6-EN.pdf>

