

Building resilience with the EU's southern neighbourhood

It is a major concern for the European Union that most of its neighbourhood is marked by instability: the 10 countries in the southern neighbourhood are all either involved in internal conflict or threatened by terrorism, or both. The migration phenomenon complicates matters still further. A new strategic approach is required. The political and economic forces that produce instability need to be tackled. The new European Neighbourhood Policy reflects this reality and might complement the revised EU security strategy.

Southern neighbourhood: stabilisation is a priority

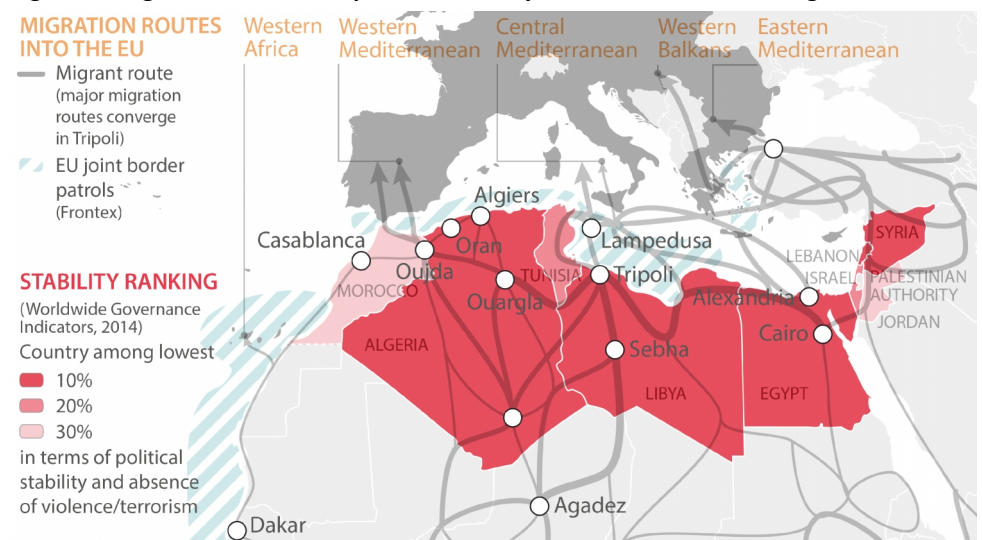
The Middle Eastern and North African countries which enjoy cooperation within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) – namely [Algeria](#), [Egypt](#), [Israel](#), [Jordan](#), [Lebanon](#), [Libya](#), [Morocco](#), the [Palestinian Authority](#), Syria (until May 2011) and [Tunisia](#) – face numerous challenges.

They are experiencing [slow economic growth](#), owing both to the global slowdown and local factors. Oil exporters (Algeria and Libya) have suffered significant losses with lower oil prices, while the profit for oil importers did not offset the economic downturn

caused by security concerns and instability (for example, tourism in Egypt and Tunisia suffered a 40% decrease in bookings in 2015). [Climate change](#) and [water scarcity](#) are set to aggravate economic difficulties, in particular in Israel, Palestine and Lebanon.

Young people, and particularly young women, are the [worst affected](#) by the economic hardship. In those EU neighbouring countries that experienced the Arab Spring, the economic situation that preceded the uprisings has not changed very much. Politically, [Egypt](#) enjoys relative stability but [violence against civil society](#) organisations might lead to further trouble; [Tunisia](#) is struggling to achieve its democratic transition; while the legitimacy of the Government of National Accord in [Libya](#) is still challenged by rival forces. [Unresolved Western Saharan and Palestinian](#) issues feed international tensions and frustration among populations. Against this backdrop, non-state armed groups – some of them supposedly [backed by ISIL/Da'esh](#) (Islamic State) – have settled in almost all the southern neighbourhood countries, in peripheral regions [neglected by central state authorities](#), notably in [Libya](#).

Figure 1: Migration routes and political stability in the EU's southern neighbourhood



Sources: [Migration and the EU: A long-term perspective](#), EPRS, May 2016 (with data from [govindicators.org](#), 2014) and [European Neighbourhood Policy: Southern Neighbourhood – Migration Issues](#), EPRS, December 2015 (with data from [Frontex](#), 2015)



EU initiatives to build resilience in the southern neighbourhood

Reacting to this changing context, considered to be [threatening its own security](#), the European Union has used a variety of tools to foster resilience – that is 'the [capacity](#) ... to withstand, to adapt, and to recover quickly from stresses and shocks' – in its southern neighbourhood.

On the diplomatic front

The EU, together with some of its Member States, has been engaged in most international efforts to hold [high-level dialogues](#) with [Syria](#), [Libya](#), [Israel and Palestine](#). It is also playing a pivotal role in the [Yemen](#) peace talks, although the country is not one of its southern partners. More generally, the EU supports [regional cooperation](#) within and beyond its neighbourhood: for example, in November 2015, a Strategic Dialogue was launched to plan for regular meetings with representatives of the [League of Arab States](#). The [EU's Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel](#) also provides for cooperation and resilience projects beyond its focus countries, with North and West African states in particular.

Promoting democracy and the rule of law

[Enforcement of the rule of law](#) complements peace and governance agreements. Since the Arab Spring uprisings, the EU has increased its spending on democracy support, which now represents about 18% of the total ENP (South and East) budget. The EU has also strengthened its [engagement with civil society organisations](#) and developed a [joint programme](#) with the Council of Europe to support constitutional reform in the southern neighbourhood and promote regional cooperation on human rights and the rule of law.

Social and economic measures

A wide range of European projects in the southern neighbourhood aim at mitigating the effects of [climate change](#) and boosting the [economy](#), with a focus on better inclusion of the most fragile population groups: [young people](#) and [women](#). The new [Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#) is also designed to support such projects. Undoubtedly, the intention is partly to [address the causes](#) of uncontrolled [migration flows](#), so that harder measures, such as deployment of the [EU naval force](#) to tackle migrant smugglers in the Mediterranean, stay limited in scope.

In its [resolution of 12 April 2016](#) on the situation in the Mediterranean and the EU approach to [migration](#), Parliament stressed the need for cooperation with third countries in tackling the root causes of migration to Europe: poverty, natural disasters, climate change, war, political repression and violence of all sorts. In a [resolution of 9 July 2015](#), Parliament pointed out that the ENP had not been effective in enabling the EU to adapt quickly to the deteriorating environment in its neighbourhood. Among other outreach initiatives, it suggested reinforcing inter-parliamentary dialogue and improving the way social media are used to keep in touch with all sections of society.

The need for resilience in the EU

To the north of the Mediterranean, new challenges are also faced by the EU: [modest economic growth](#), the [migration and asylum crisis](#) and [terrorist attacks](#) on its soil. The EU model of liberal democracy is being [challenged](#) in some Member States. The EU-Turkey deal on refugees has raised [suspicions](#) that the EU is backtracking on the values it promotes abroad. The southern partners [are concerned](#) about European restrictions on migration owing to the gap between strong migration pressure and limited legal migration channels. At the same time, analysts have noted the Arab states' [decreasing tolerance](#) towards conditionality clauses – according to which countries that are more engaged in democratic reform enjoy more aid, better trade conditions and enhanced mobility. In this matter, the EU has lost part of its [leverage](#), since its southern neighbours can turn towards less demanding donors, such as the [Gulf States](#) or [China](#), whose strategic interest in the region has recently been growing. As a result, a few years after the '[more for more](#)' approach, a [review of the European neighbourhood policy](#) was adopted by the Council in [December 2015](#). The new approach acknowledges that the EU's values are not shared by all its partners, and makes clear the focus on the EU's own interests (energy security, counter-terrorism and controlling migration). The main aim is to stabilise the partner countries by [building resilience](#) – by means of greater social inclusion, climate action and counter-radicalisation. This flexible approach based on *à la carte* projects applied only to those countries with a 'shared commitment' should help the EU to respond more effectively to an ever-changing context, thus building its own resilience. To complement this approach, on [13 April 2016](#) the European Parliament adopted a resolution about the future EU global security strategy, stressing the need for greater coherence between EU policies, in particular towards the southern neighbourhood. This is very much echoed in the Commission's recent [proposal on resilience](#).