SOUTHERN PARTNERS

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) covers Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. It consists of bilateral policies between the EU and the 10 individual partner countries, plus a regional cooperation framework, the Union for the Mediterranean. The EU boosted support for democratic transformation under the ENP in 2011, in response to the uprisings in its southern neighbourhood. It further reviewed the ENP in 2015.

LEGAL BASIS

— Article 8 of the Treaty on European Union;
— Title V of the Treaty on European Union: the EU’s ‘external action’;
— Articles 206-207 (trade) and 216-219 (international agreements) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

INSTRUMENTS

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is implemented through bilateral (tailor-made for each country), regional, neighbourhood-wide and cross-border cooperation programmes (between EU countries and neighbourhood countries sharing a land border or sea crossing). Association agreements provide the legal basis for the EU’s bilateral relations with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority and Tunisia. The association agreement initialled with Syria before the Syrian Government’s violent crackdown on public protests in 2011 was never signed. The negotiations for an EU-Libya framework agreement were suspended in February 2011 and have yet to be resumed.

In the framework of the ENP, the EU and its southern partners (except Libya and Syria) have adopted bilateral action plans, partnership priorities or association agendas. These establish agendas for political and economic reform with short- and medium-term priorities of between three and five years. Reflecting the needs, interests and capacities of the EU and each partner, ENP action plans are aimed, in particular, at developing democratic, socially equitable and inclusive societies, promoting economic integration and education, developing small and medium-sized enterprises and agriculture, and facilitating the movement of people across borders.

The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) was the key EU financing instrument for bilateral cooperation with the southern partners for the 2014-2020 period. The new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) –
‘Global Europe’ – will frame the EU’s cooperation with these countries for the 2021-2027 period. Under the new ‘Global Europe’ NDICI, an increased emphasis on blending EU grants with loans from European and international financing institutions will allow partner counties to unlock substantial levels of concessional funding for investments. The new system of guarantees provided for under the ‘Global Europe’ NDICI will give access to additional funds from the crowding-in of both public and private investors.

On 9 February 2021, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy adopted a joint communication proposing an ambitious and innovative new Agenda for the Mediterranean to relaunch and strengthen the strategic partnership between the European Union and its Southern Neighbourhood partners. This new agenda focuses on five policy areas: a) human development, good governance and the rule of law, b) resilience, prosperity and digital transition, c) peace and security, d) migration and mobility, and e) green transition: climate resilience, energy and the environment. At the same time, a dedicated Economic Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours aims to aid the economic recovery and improve the quality of life of people in the region, including following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EU is also seeking to advance market access and cooperation on migration and mobility issues with its southern partners. Negotiations on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) are in progress with Morocco and with Tunisia. Mobility partnerships have been concluded with Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan, and negotiations are ongoing with Lebanon. A number of projects have been implemented within these frameworks, in particular under the Mobility Partnership Facility, launched in 2016. In addition, regional and bilateral initiatives on migration and mobility are being funded under the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, the North Africa window, in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. The EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the ‘Madad Fund’, provides support to Syrian refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and local communities in Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt.

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), launched in 2008 to revive the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, provides a regional framework for cooperation between the EU Member States and 15 Mediterranean countries, including the 10 southern partners.

**CURRENT STATUS**

**A. Algeria**

As a major regional player and an important energy producer, Algeria is a key EU partner in the southern neighbourhood. An association agreement entered into force in 2005. The EU and Algeria adopted their shared Partnership Priorities at the Association Council of March 2017. The partnership priorities set up a renewed framework for political engagement and enhanced cooperation, with a focus on: (i) governance and fundamental rights; (ii) socio-economic development and trade; (iii) energy, environment and climate change; (iv) strategic and security dialogue; and (v) the human dimension, migration and mobility.
B. Egypt

Relations between the European Union and Egypt are governed by an association agreement, in force since 2004. In the context of the revised ENP, a set of EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities for the 2017-2020 period were adopted by the EU-Egypt Association Council in July 2017. The partnership priorities aim to address common challenges facing the EU and Egypt, to promote joint interests and to guarantee long-term stability on both sides of the Mediterranean, with a focus on: (i) economic modernisation, energy sustainability and the environment; (ii) social development and social protection; and (iii) governance, enhancing stability and the modern democratic state. The validity of the existing partnership priorities has been extended until new priorities can be agreed under the ‘Global Europe’ NDICI.

C. Israel

EU-Israel relations are extensive, underpinned by strong economic and trade relations and technical cooperation. Based on the 2000 association agreement, the relationship developed dynamically in subsequent years, with a substantial expansion across many sectors. The EU-Israel action plan, agreed in 2005, is based on shared common values of democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law and basic freedoms, and promotes the integration of Israel into European policies and programmes. In 2009, the EU decided that, in order for relations to be upgraded to ‘advanced’ status, there would have to be progress in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). Cooperation continues, however, on the basis of the 2005 ENP action plan, which remains in force until 2022.

D. Jordan

The EU considers Jordan an important partner that plays a stabilising role in the Middle East. The EU-Jordan association agreement, in force since May 2002, provides the legal basis for this bilateral relationship. Jordan was the first Mediterranean partner country to conclude technical negotiations leading to an ‘advanced status’ with the EU in 2010. An ENP action plan was adopted in 2012 and new EU-Jordan Partnership Priorities as well as an EU-Jordan Compact were agreed in December 2016. The validity of the existing partnership priorities has been extended until new priorities can be agreed under the ‘Global Europe’ NDICI. The priorities focus on: (i) macro-economic stability and sustainable and knowledge-based growth; (ii) strengthening democratic governance, the rule of law and human rights; and (iii) regional stability and security, including counter-terrorism. The Compact aims to improve the living conditions of refugees and their host communities. In October 2014, the EU and Jordan launched a Mobility Partnership to manage mobility and migration. In addition, Jordan has benefited from EUR 1.08 billion in macro-financial assistance from the EU since 2013. The last loan programme of EUR 700 million was adopted in 2020. This will help Jordan to support economic stabilisation, enhance public debt sustainability, expedite economic reforms and limit the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. Jordan also receives funding under the ‘Madad Fund’, the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis.
E. Lebanon

Relations are based on the EU-Lebanon association agreement, in force since 2006, the 2016 EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities and the EU-Lebanon Compact, addressing the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. The validity of the existing partnership priorities has been extended until new priorities can be agreed under the ‘Global Europe’ NDICI. The partnership priorities focus on (i) promoting growth and job creation; (ii) fostering local governance and socio-economic development; and (iii) promoting the rule of law and enhancing security. EU-Lebanon cooperation includes specific support for capacity development and institution building, as well as measures to benefit civil society. The EU-Lebanon Association Council, held in July 2017, agreed to pursue discussions with a view to the signature of a Mobility Partnership. A country of 4.4 million inhabitants, Lebanon currently hosts around 1 million registered Syrian refugees. Lebanon receives funding under the ‘Madad Fund’, the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis. In December 2020, the EU announced that it would launch, together with the UN and the World Bank, a ‘Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework’ to ‘build back a better Lebanon’ guided by the principles of transparency, inclusion and accountability. However, in addition to a people-centred recovery, substantial EU assistance for the reconstruction of a democratic, transparent, inclusive and prosperous Lebanon will continue to be conditional on tangible progress on the necessary reforms.

F. Libya

Since the fall of the Gaddafi regime, Libya has been sliding into civil war, against the background of complex political, territorial, social and tribal divisions. Libya is also known as a Sahelian transit route for human trafficking and contraband. In this context, the EU is seeking to assist Libyans in establishing a stable and inclusive state. The EU supports the UN’s mediation efforts to bring an end to hostilities, and makes diplomatic approaches to Libyan and regional stakeholders. Libya does not have an association agreement or other contractual agreement with the EU, but the country is eligible for funding under the ENI and other financial instruments. Local and regional instability have turned Libya from a destination country for migration into a transit country, requiring an immediate EU response to tackle the most urgent needs. Libya has therefore received funding through the North Africa window of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, which tackles the root causes of irregular migration and provides support to protection and migration management.

G. Morocco

Of the southern partners, Morocco has one of the most developed relationships with the EU. An association agreement has been in force since 2000 and a new ENP action plan was adopted in 2013. The country was granted ENP ‘advanced status’ in 2008, reflecting the ambition to strengthen EU-Morocco cooperation and to further support economic and political reforms. The EU-Morocco mobility partnership was launched in June 2013. Negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements and a DCFTA are ongoing. In addition, a renewed fisheries agreement entered into force in 2014. According to two recent rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union, the EU
can implement its agreements with Morocco, but these agreements do not apply to Western Sahara.

**H. Palestine**

The EU is the leading financial supporter of the Palestinian Authority (PA), with an indicative annual bilateral allocation of around EUR 300 million. The overall objective of EU support is to help build the capacities of a future viable, independent and democratic Palestinian state, coexisting in peace and security with Israel and other neighbours. The legal basis for the EU’s relations with the PA is the *Interim Association Agreement on Trade and Cooperation*, concluded in 1997. The EU and the PA have signed an ENP action plan, which entered into force in 2013. That same year, the EU offered Israel and the future state of Palestine ‘Special Privileged Partnerships’ providing an unprecedented package of political, economic and security support subject to the conclusion of a future final status agreement. The EU is active in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) and is a member of the Middle East Quartet, working towards a two-state solution based on the 2003 Roadmap for Peace.

**I. Syria**

The EU suspended all its bilateral cooperation with the Government of Syria in May 2011, following the escalation of violence and unacceptable human rights situation. In parallel, the EU adopted various restrictive measures in the form of sanctions. In line with the *EU Strategy on Syria* of 3 April 2017, the EU supports inclusive peace talks towards a Syrian-led political transition. The EU is the leading donor in the response to the Syrian crisis, and the EU and its Member States have collectively provided more than **EUR 24.9 billion** for humanitarian, development, economic and stabilisation assistance since 2011. Since 2017, the EU has organised yearly Brussels Conferences, co-chaired with the UN, on ‘Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region’. The overarching objective of these conferences has been to support the Syrian people and mobilise the international community in the search for a lasting political solution to the Syria crisis in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254. All Brussels Conferences to date have addressed the most critical humanitarian and resilience issues affecting Syrians and communities hosting Syrian refugees, both in Syria and the neighbouring region.

**J. Tunisia**

Since the 2011 Tunisian revolution, the EU has provided political, financial and technical support for the country’s democratic transition. The legal basis of the bilateral relationship remains the association agreement, which has been in force since 1998. In 2012, taking account of the progress achieved, the EU and Tunisia agreed to establish a ‘privileged partnership’ with a detailed action plan for 2013-2017. In July 2018, the EU-Tunisia Association Council adopted the main guiding lines for the *EU-Tunisia Privileged Partnership for the period 2018-2020*. Tunisia and the EU launched a mobility partnership in March 2014, which led to the opening of negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements. Negotiations on a DCFTA were approved in October 2015 and are ongoing. The consensual adoption of a new constitution in Tunisia in January 2014 and the successful organisation of parliamentary and presidential elections in October-December 2014, followed by long-
awaited municipal elections in May 2018, were a major step forward in the country’s democratic transition.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Parliament is fully involved in the European Neighbourhood Policy. Through its Committee on Foreign Affairs, it monitors the implementation of the ENP, with particular regard to annual progress reports and reviews. The committee follows the political situation in partner countries through regular exchanges of views with high-level government officials, experts and civil society stakeholders. Budgetary powers give Parliament a direct influence on the amounts allocated to the relevant financial instruments. Parliament’s consent is required for the conclusion of all association agreements with southern ENP partners. Parliament must also consent to any new trade agreement, including future DCFTAs with Morocco and Tunisia.

Regular bilateral relations with the parliaments of southern partner countries are maintained through standing delegations. Relations with the Moroccan Parliament were thus upgraded with the creation of a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) in 2010. JPCs were further established with Tunisia in 2016 and with Algeria in 2018. Parliamentary relations with Syria have been suspended due to the civil war, and the current context in Libya is also preventing interparliamentary relations. Parliament has taken part in several EU Election Observation Missions in southern partner countries and provides assistance to Tunisia under its democracy support programme. At regional level, Parliament participates in the Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM, which holds one plenary session and several committee meetings per year. The European Parliament currently holds the rotating presidency of the Parliamentary Assembly (2020-2021).

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