

## **EuroMeSCo ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2023**

# **FROM THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP TO A EURO-MEDITERRANEAN GEOSTRATEGIC ALLIANCE**

Madrid, 10-11 October 2023

Report

# Summary



“From the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to a Euro-Mediterranean Geostrategic Alliance” was the theme of the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference which took place at the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Cooperation in Madrid on 10-11 October 2023. The event welcomed around 150 participants from 32 countries across the region, including representatives from think tanks, academic institutions, government, civil society organisations, and the private sector, as well officials from EU institutions and members states, the Union for the Mediterranean and the European Investment Bank in view of discussing common regional challenges and contributing to policy shaping in the region.

New arising geostrategic security and energy challenges in the region call for intensified cooperation of the EU with its southern neighbours. This has opened new horizons for Euro-Mediterranean relations and calls for reflections on how existing Euro-Mediterranean cooperation

mechanisms and institutions could be adapting to this new reality, offering the conditions for win-win partnerships between equals. Along the same lines, the creation of the European Political Community involving Eastern neighbours of the EU, with two summits foreseen in 2023, also calls for renewed and parallel efforts to instil new dynamism into the Southern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, whose 20th anniversary is celebrated in 2023-2024.

Against this backdrop, the conference consisted of three plenary sessions on energy cooperation, conflict resolution and a new architecture for Euromed relations respectively. The first plenary session focused on energy, as one of the most strategic priorities of cooperation in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The panel explored the political and geostrategic nature of these relationships. The second plenary session discussed conflict resolution in the Mediterranean and the quest for a more



geopolitical EU Foreign Policy. This session was marked by the recent outbreak in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Experts analysed the triggers leading up to the escalation of violence, the role of the international community and the EU and opportunities for peace and cooperation. The third plenary focused on the institutional mechanisms in place, both under the ENP and under the UfM, with the objective to contribute to the debate on stock taking of the implementation of the southern dimension of the ENP and the Agenda for the Southern Neighbourhood as well as to the arising discussions on reframing this institutional architecture.

The conference also hosted three parallel plugged-in sessions, which consisted of spontaneous debates between EuroMeSCo researchers about regional issues and developments that are high on the Euro-Mediterranean agenda. The topics of the plugged-in sessions were: "Natural disasters diplomacy in the Mediterranean", chaired by Dorothée Schmid, Senior Research Fellow, Head of Ifri's Turkey and Middle East Program; "Perspectives on the coups in the Sahel region from both sides of the Mediterranean", chaired by Haizam Amirah-Fernández, Senior Analyst for the Mediterranean and Arab World, Elcano Royal Institute; and "2024, an election year in the Mediterranean", chaired by Salam Kawakibi, Director, Paris office, Arab Centre for Research and Policy

Studies. The event also included three parallel working sessions where six research proposals selected through the Call for Proposals under the theme "The quest for a more „geopolitical“ EU Foreign policy in the MENA region" were presented and discussed.

The event was registered in the official programme of events under the [Spanish Presidency of the EU Council](#) and it was held back to back with two side events which took place at Casa Árabe Madrid on 9 October: the Business Platform on "The Global Gateway, a New Paradigm for Relations Between the European Union and its Partners In the Mediterranean and Beyond" and the Euromed Young Researchers Forum on "Bridging Divides: Exploring Youth Approaches to Conflict Resolution in the Changing Euro-Mediterranean Region".

The event was organised by the European Institute of the Mediterranean ([IEMed](#)) (IEMed) in the framework of the [EuroMeSCo: Connecting the dots](#), a project co-funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Regional Programmes Neighbourhood South Unit (DG NEAR B2) and IEMed that aims to connect the dots between diverse stakeholders – think tanks, experts, civil society, the private sector, academia – as well as between the EU, its Southern Neighbours and the wider region.

# Opening Session





Amb. **Senén Florensa**. Executive President, IEMed

**Álvaro Albacete**. Deputy Secretary General, Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)

**Luis Cuesta**. Under-Secretary, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and Cooperation

Ambassador Florensa extended a warm welcome to the distinguished speakers and participants at the EuroMeSCo 2023 Annual Conference, held in Madrid in the framework of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, under the theme “From a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to a Euro-Mediterranean Geostrategic Alliance.” Ambassador Florensa expressed his gratitude to the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and Cooperation for hosting this edition of the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference. He highlighted that it was a timely moment to celebrate the Conference considering the recent events taking place in Israel and Gaza, and he underscored the long-

standing mission of the EuroMeSCo network to continually seek pathways and provide policy recommendations that can guide the Euro-Mediterranean region through challenging times, as well as to foster dialogue that bridges peace and prosperity in the region.

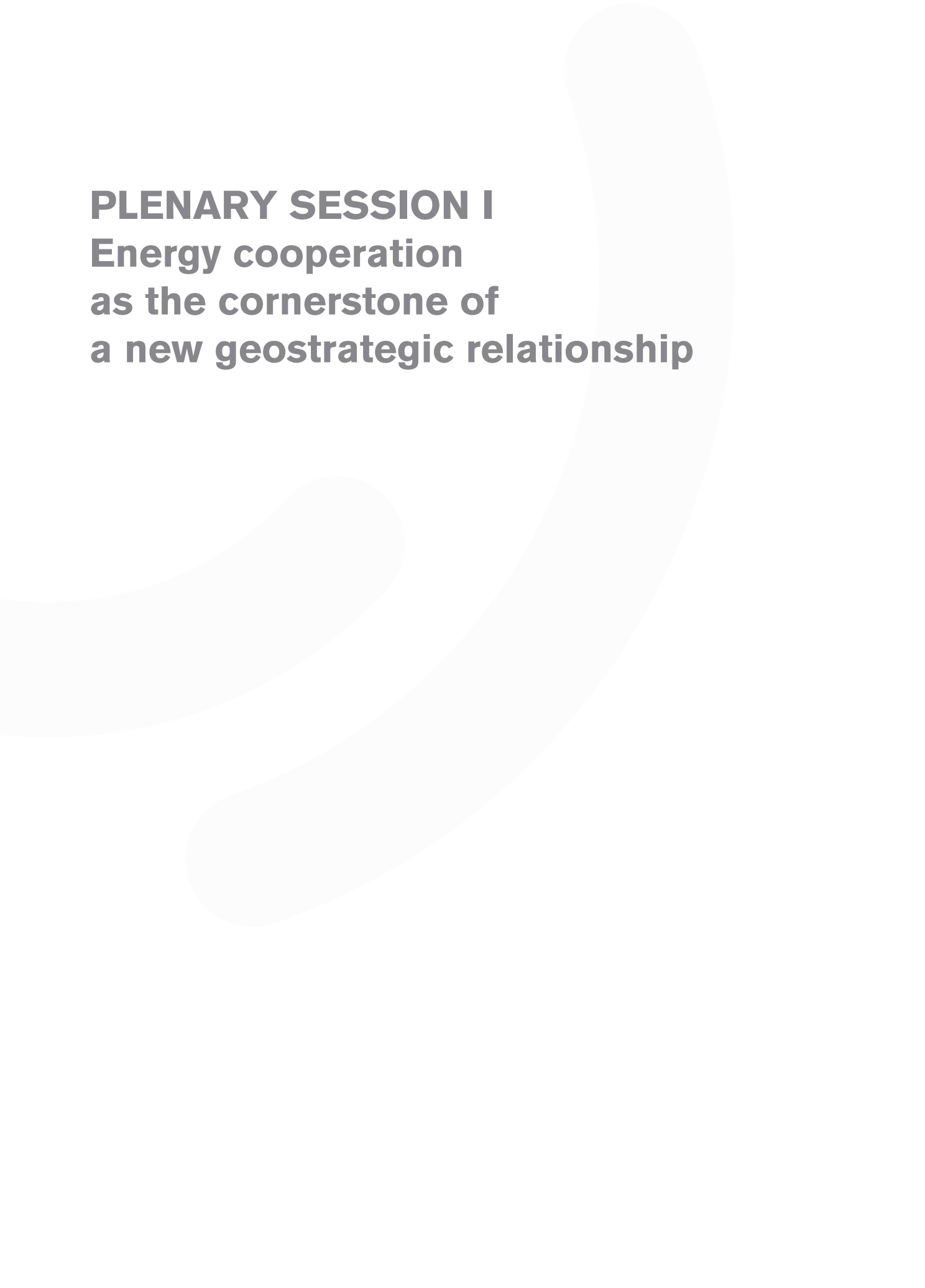
Álvaro Albacete took the opportunity to recall the fifteenth anniversary of the UfM. He mentioned that it is currently working on how to enhance the organisation and that its future will be discussed at the ministerial meeting scheduled for the end of November 2023 in Barcelona. He underlined the importance of EuroMeSCo as network of research centres and think tanks in the Mediterranean and the UfM’s commitment to promoting the work of researchers and higher education institutions in the Euro-Mediterranean region. As an example of this, he pointed to the ongoing efforts of the UfM to expand the Erasmus+ programme to the entire region as a tool to create a sense of belonging similar to what the programme has created in the European Union.



Finally, Luis Cuesta reiterated the Spanish Government's condemnation of the terrorist attacks perpetrated against Israel, expressed his full solidarity with the victims, and he pointed that Spain is working together with other partners to avoid an escalation of the conflict which would lead to a greater loss of human lives. He stated that international humanitarian law must be respected, civilians protected and that hostages must be freed. In this sense, he stressed Spain's commitment to peace and stability in the region and underlined that only a political process can lead to a two-state solution.

He also highlighted the Spanish government's unwavering commitment towards the Mediterranean, remembering that the Euro-Mediterranean process was launched in Barcelona in 1995, that the UfM Secretariat is based in Barcelona and that Spain is a full supporter of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Mr. Cuesta noted that we are currently facing challenging times on both a global and regional scale and stressed the need to address urgent issues and challenges with dedication. In this regard, he highlighted Spain's collaboration with the UfM, the European External Action Service, the European Commission, and like-minded countries to advance the Euro-Mediterranean Agenda. He acknowledged that the theme of the EuroMeSCo 2023 Annual Conference is in line with their current efforts to strengthen the Euro-Mediterranean partnership and transform it into a genuine alliance based on shared values and interests. He encouraged partners to engage in regional-level dialogues to develop concrete responses to the ongoing challenges. Finally, he expressed his gratitude for the crucial role of think tanks and research centres and emphasized the paramount importance of EuroMeSCo's role in this context.



**PLENARY SESSION I**  
**Energy cooperation**  
**as the cornerstone of**  
**a new geostrategic relationship**

Chair: **Roger Albinyana**. Managing Director, IEMed.

Speakers: **Houda Ben Jannet**. Director General, Observatoire Méditerranéen de l'Energie – OME.

**Gonzalo Escribano**. Senior analyst and Director of the Energy and Climate Change Programme, Real Elcano Institute.

**Laury Haytayan**. MENA Director, Natural Resource Governance Institute.

**Cristina Lobillo Borrero**. Head of the Energy Platform Task Force (EPTF), Directorate-General for Energy (ENER TF), European Commission.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 significantly disrupted the global energy geopolitics. In response, the European Union launched [REPowerEU](#) with the objectives of enhancing energy source diversification, reinforcing energy security, and accelerating decarbonisation. These developments are reshaping Europe's strategic alliances, and Southern Mediterranean countries hold the potential to play a pivotal role in ensuring the EU's energy se-

curity. Against this backdrop, this session aimed at exploring how energy geopolitics of the Euro-Mediterranean region have evolved and how energy cooperation can serve as the cornerstone of a new geo-strategic relationship.

The session began by analysing the significant efforts the EU has made to decouple from Russia and replace its gas imports, which has accelerated the decarbonisation of the European economy. The challenge of diversifying energy sources was also discussed, with special praise for the role played by Southern Mediterranean countries. The EU has transformed its approach to cooperation with Euro-Mediterranean region countries and cooperation has seen substantial growth. Examples discussed during the session included the EU-Egypt-Israel Memorandum of Understanding, concluded in June 2022, and various initiatives to expand bilateral energy cooperation with countries such as Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt.

Despite these efforts, energy cooperation in the region still faces several barriers. In this regard, two main aspects were primarily addressed: energy security and re-



liability issues. Energy security varies greatly between the two shores of the Mediterranean. While the northern countries are currently more dependent, their energy transition and decarbonisation efforts are more advanced. In contrast, the southern countries face the inverse challenge, calling for more decarbonisation efforts. However, potential issues may arise in MENA countries in the future due to the expected exponential population growth by the year 2050. With regards to reliability issues, these particularly affect the Eastern Mediterranean. Egypt encounters difficulties in ensuring its own energy supply, while Israel is currently grappling with issues arising from the ongoing conflict. Consequently, this could lead to a rise in energy prices in the EU. Experts discussed the possibility of establishing an integrated energy market in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

This introduced one of the key topics of the session: what should a Euro-Mediterranean energy deal look like? Experts agreed that there is will and appetite for a deal among Southern Mediterranean partners. They concluded that applying a

differentiated integration is key in this process; it is crucial to understand that each country's situation is different, and therefore, consider its needs when working on the integration of the Euro-Mediterranean energy market. Experts highlighted that the foundation for greater integration and a Euro-Med energy deal lies in energy transition on the one hand and the decarbonisation of the economies of the Southern countries on the other. The EU intends for the energy transition to be the guiding principle of its cooperation with the Southern partners. As for the decarbonisation of economies, experts underlined that energy integration should be based on renewable energy sources. However, they also stressed the importance of the EU being more cautious and not raising irrational expectations, as there are significant limitations such as a lack of foreign investment in the region. Experts underpinned that climate action should be the bedrock of an energy deal and that more efforts to further climate action in the region are needed.

In the same vein, ensuring a just transition should be at the forefront of energy co-





operation initiatives. According to the experts, cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean is a win-win game. However, it is crucial to consider the specific circumstances of each country. Many partner countries face distribution challenges, which should be addressed in order to ensure a transition which does not leave vulnerable sectors and communities behind. In this regard, it is important to integrate Southern Mediterranean countries into decarbonised value chains. Experts stressed that this process of decarbonising the economies of Southern countries is critical because there will be no industrial future without decarbonised economies.

In relation to this, green hydrogen received significant attention during the debate. Experts emphasized that it is not an energy source but an energy carrier, and it can never replace gas or renewable energy as a primary energy source. However, green hydrogen plays a critical role in helping countries meet their commitments under the Paris Agreement. In this regard, countries need a plan to achieve their climate commitments and climate neutrality, and

this is where green hydrogen can have a key role. On the other hand, the EU's focus on green hydrogen faced criticism because it involves importing it from countries with significant energy needs, such as Morocco or Namibia, among others. Therefore, the priority should be on decarbonising these countries' economies before importing green hydrogen. Beyond solely focusing on environmental sustainability, the EU should also consider other aspects such as social and geopolitical sustainability in its partner countries.

The potential of energy cooperation to resolve conflicts in the Euro-Mediterranean region was also analysed. As an example, the recent Lebanon-Israel maritime deal was tackled. Experts pointed out that this was not an agreement driven by the energy transition but rather by Lebanon's need for gas and, in fact, gas played a pivotal role in mediating an agreement between both countries. This was a political agreement, with a strong mediator and with all the spoilers on board. In light of this agreement, experts highlighted the potential to address the Cypriot issue by striving for a similar agreement. This would transform Cyprus into an energy island and has the potential to resolve the long-lasting Cypriot conflict.

Finally, some aspects related to the EU's strategic communication in the region were tackled. While the EU often speaks in terms of projects, targets, visions, etc., the same language is not spoken in the Southern Mediterranean countries. Moreover, these countries feel that their priorities are not being heard in discussions about these plans. It is, therefore, essential to listen to the priorities of these countries and to citizens in the MENA region and to communicate in Arabic, key elements that can help increase energy integration in the Euro-Mediterranean region.



**PLENARY SESSION II**  
**Conflict and security in**  
**the Mediterranean: the missing**  
**link of Euro-Mediterranean**  
**cooperation mechanisms**



Chair: **Dalia Ghanem**. Senior Analyst, European Union Institute for Security Studies – EUISS.

Speakers: **Joseph Bahout**. Director, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut – IFI/AUB.

**Lina Khatib**. Director of the Middle East Institute, SOAS, University of London.

**Nickolay E. Mladenov**. Director General of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, former UN Special Coordinator for MEPP and Iraq, former Foreign, Defence Minister of Bulgaria.

**Harry Tzimitras**. Director, PRIO Cyprus Centre.

Given the events taking place in the Middle East at the time of the Conference, the Israel-Palestinian conflict marked the discussions of the plenary on conflict and security in the region. Experts analysed the triggers leading up to the outburst, the role of the international community

and missed opportunities for peace and cooperation. The effects of Hamas' invasion were discussed stressing that it will mark the Israeli's society for years to come and make any return to a peaceful negotiation more difficult. As for Gaza, the consequences will be devastating, with destruction which may render it un-governable and lead to a humanitarian catastrophe for 2mn people.

Experts agreed that international players such as the EU have tended to compartmentalise issues affecting the region, zooming in on migration for example, and not enough efforts have been put towards resolving ongoing conflicts such as the Israel-Palestine conflict or the Syrian conflict. The inaction of the EU vis-a-vis the conflict was mentioned as well as the reactions of surprise in Europe to how the attacks of Hamas have unfolded, and the terror inflicted. Nickolay E. Mladenov reminded participants that the escalation of the conflict should not come as a surprise given the dynamics of the situation in Gaza itself with all indicators (socio-economic, political, economic, access to



resources) pointing to an escalation of violence.

Joseph Bahout discussed the dynamics in the region in recent years which have been oscillating between two very divergent approaches: a rapprochement through transactional deals i.e., the Iranian-Saudi agreement, the trade agreement between the UAE and Turkey, the Lebanon and Israel maritime deal on the one hand, and dynamics of strong conflicts, i.e., Syria, and the Hamas-Israel conflict on the other. This sway between conflict solving and conflict flaring dynamics comes at a time when the global context is weighing heavily on the region, with renewed tensions brought by the war in Ukraine affecting energy and food security, and new powers such as China.

The regional role of Iran in the Middle East was addressed. Lina Khatib explained that in the last 15 years, there has been an artificial separation in policy circles in Europe, in the US and in the UK, between Iran's nuclear files and Iran's destabilizing role across the

Middle East. While there is currently public dispute over Iran's role in the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023, experts underlined that, without Iran, Hamas would not have the weapons, capacity, training, and warfare knowhow to carry out such attacks. It is therefore impossible to talk about a regional security cooperation framework across the Middle East without talking about the Israel-Palestine conflict and about Iran's regional role.

Experts analysed the role of the Abraham Accords and recalled that they were envisioned as a way for Israel to engage with certain Gulf countries in case of a conflict against Iran. They are seen as a consequence of years of several Gulf countries feeling they are not being heard in Washington and in Europe, in particular regarding the threat Iran poses to the Middle East as its neighbours. Experts considered that, if there had been a comprehensive strategy regarding Iran's destabilizing role which has been seen as a too complicated matter in the West, a more strategic solution may have

been possible, one that incorporated the Palestinian, the Syrian, and other regional issues in which Iran has a hand.



There were differing views on the role the Abraham Accords play in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Some experts considered them an addition to the Arab Peace Initiative, and a good incentive for relations between Israel and Arab countries which will be increasingly important in the future for economic opportunities and cooperation on issues such as trade and transport. When they were signed, there was a component on the Palestinian question that stopped the annexation of the West Bank. Experts agreed that these agreements will be disrupted by recent events. In particular the Israel- Saudi Arabia – US deal, which will be stalled.

Other expert views considered that the Abraham Accords have fragmented the regional infrastructure and shattered regional solutions in favour of transactional bilateral solutions, which put weaker players at a disadvantage. This has cre-

ated a vacuum which has been filled by illegitimate actors such as Assad in Syria, Hamas, Houthis in Yemen. These players use violence as their political tool, presenting themselves as de facto powers, and force the international community to deal with them. Lina Khatib explained that many of these players count on the support of Iran.

Experts debated whether there is political will in Brussels to have a more prominent and strategic role in conflict resolution in the Middle East, and underlined how the mismatch of voices between member states' interests and EU interests on certain issues undermines the EU's leverage. There is a need for more coherent messages. Moreover, the perceived double standards regarding the EU's close relations with some autocratic leaders and not with others damages its legitimacy. Harry Tzimitras called for better geographic and thematic threading of the EU's actions, as what happens in East Mediterranean affects the West Mediterranean and what happens relating to climate affects the economy and society and translates into migration. He highlighted the growing complexity of conflicts in the region. Multi-actor, multilevel, and multilayer conflicts accumulate and superimpose new challenges, which makes it extremely difficult to predict threats in the region.

When addressing the question of the way forward and the role of the EU in conflict resolution and security in the region, Lina Khatib called for a comprehensive approach to security cooperation, engaging what is happening on the ground and avoiding looking at self-serving policy frameworks in a myopic way. It was also noted that China, India, Gulf countries and the US are stronger players in terms of transactional deals; in order for the EU to have a comparative advantage, it

should focus on values and human rights. Experts agreed that the EU should be clear and concrete about its objectives and avoid making high level promises that later do not translate into concrete policies. It is key to listen to the countries on the other side of the Mediterranean to understand their priorities and how they see access to resources, in order to allocate resources in such a manner that ensures they reach the citizens and that they serve to build partnerships.

Experts advocated for a stronger role of Arab countries in resolving the Israel-Palestinian conflict in the future, in cooperation with Europe, the US, China and Russia, and underlined the need for a strong Arab component in the discussions, as main players and not a side show. Cooperation mechanism such as

regular meetings between Mediterranean defence ministers, strengthened cooperation on strategic issues such as energy, coordination of positions of Mediterranean countries vis-a-vis COP 28 and cooperation based on the models such as the Council of Europe, were some of the suggestions to forward a strategic regional alliance in the region.

Experts noted the need to look beyond the Southern Mediterranean, to the Sahel and to Gulf countries and warned of a bigger storm forming in the coming 30 years in the context of a growing population in sub-Saharan Africa, debt crises, growing divides between digitalised societies and those with low access to new technologies, and the climate crisis. In face of these many challenges, a more strategic European approach is paramount.



**PLENARY SESSION III**  
**What architecture for  
a new geostrategic  
relationship?**

Chair: **Alberto José Ucelay Urech**. Director-General for the Maghreb, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Cooperation.

Speakers: **Cengiz Günay**. Director, Austrian Institute for International Affairs – OIIP.

**Beatriz Salvador García**. Deputy Head of Division, Regional Affairs (MENA 1), European External Action Service.

**Kataryna Wolczuk**. European Neighbourhood Policy Chairholder, College of Europe – Natolin Campus.

The crisis in the Middle East is yet another wake-up call for the EU to rethink the pillars of its foreign policy in its Southern Neighbourhood. With this assumption, the chair stressed that the debate on the policy and institutional architecture of EU Foreign policy in the region and Euro-Mediterranean relations was much more than a mere bureaucratic exercise. Both the chair and the

EEAS representative stressed the role of the IEMed and EuroMeSCo in this debate.

Beatriz Salvador recalled that the EU released the New Agenda for the Mediterranean in 2021 with the objective to equip itself with a regional strategy regarding its Southern Neighbourhood under the umbrella of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Paragraph 5 of the Council conclusions endorsing this strategy in April 2021 called for renewed structures to underpin political dialogue between the EU and its partners, including Ministerial meetings to be organised yearly at Foreign Ministers level, as well as sectoral Ministerial meetings in the ENP South format. The third ENP Foreign Ministers meeting is scheduled on 27 November, back-to-back with the UfM regional forum, and will be an opportunity to take stock of the implementation of the New Agenda for the Mediterranean. These conclusions also contemplated the possibility to organise summits at head of state level, which has not materialized yet.



The same Council conclusions also called for a structured review of the New Agenda for the Mediterranean in 2024. This is likely to be organised under the new Commission, following EU elections in 2024. This will go hand in hand with a review of the EU's financial instruments. This represents an opportunity for a deeper assessment of the EU's approach in the Mediterranean.

While the EEAS representative argued that the priorities identified in the New Agenda remain valid (including the focus on socio-economic resilience and green transition), she also acknowledged that there is an urgent need for the EU to adapt to new realities and to how the EU is perceived in the region. While doing so, the EU needs to concentrate on its added value, its interests and realize it faces fierce competition in the region. The EU needs to find avenues to strengthen its partnerships and give them more visibility. As part of this assessment, the EU needs to invest in the interconnectivity agenda, develop innovative approaches, building on frameworks such as the Global gateway, the Team Europe approach and the investment plan. There could also be a need to focus more on thematic part-

nerships involving only a few countries of the region working together in one area, as well as renewed efforts to promote cross-regional cooperation, especially with the Gulf Council Countries and sub-Saharan African countries. A participant also hinted to the geopolitical potential of the India-Middle East-Europe corridor announced during a recent G20 meeting.

Looking at the Eastern Partnership (EaP) may prove useful and beneficial. Katarzyna Wolczuk observed that there was a feeling that the EU had overpromised and underdelivered both in its Eastern and in its Southern Neighbourhood. She described the EaP as a soft policy framework mainly geared towards bilateral relations (rather than regional cooperation). The EaP's achievements have been more significant in some areas (e.g., civil society, fostering reforms in Ukraine, digitalisation) than others. Given the heterogeneity of EaP countries and the volatility of the region, the key success factor is to seize the opportunity when it arises. A lesson deriving from the EaP is that the EU needs to avoid complacency and shying away from serious problems, as it did with Nagorno Karabakh.





At first, the EU was relatively passive when reacting to the Maidan revolution in Ukraine. However, it then created a task force for Ukraine with about 40 people, a move that was instrumental in allowing the EU to promote reforms in an effective way, including pushing for decentralisation. The EU's political engagement must indeed be accompanied by an adequate mobilisation of human resources. Kataryna Wolczuk illustrated the limitations of the EU in this regard, comparing the staffing of the team dealing with Albania in the European Commission (12 people) with the staffing of the Georgia team (only one person).

In the case of Ukraine, the capacity of the EU to use conditionality in a strict manner and to be able to identify who were the political forces willing and capable of driving reforms, were two other key recipes for success. Pouring financial resources only could not in itself solve the problems. Moldova for instance was receiving at some point the highest amount of per capita assistance from the EU. However, the EU first failed to realize that it was dealing with a very corrupt administration that had been using EU integra-

tion as a smokescreen and an excuse to avoid making reforms. Things changed when the EU started using conditionality more strictly and moved to a more political approach. In that sense, Moldova is a good example of how geostrategic the EU can be.

Overall, despite the heterogeneity of the EaP with two countries being at war with each other and Belarus turning its back to the EU, there is still a sense that the EaP has to be maintained. However, there is a great deal of institutional uncertainty regarding what would happen with some EaP countries being moved to the enlargement portfolio of the European Commission.

Cengiz Günay argued that the EU has always been geostrategic or geopolitical in different ways. First, the EU's colonial past with its strong legacy makes the EU historically geopolitical. Second, the EU's normative approach is also highly political. The EU's normative approach is not only about promoting human rights and democracy in other countries in a vacuum. It is also about expecting that benefits would derive from EU partners adopting

its norms and values, and to some extent making other countries more dependent on the EU.

The idea that the EU could transform its neighbourhood was part of the liberal order that prevailed in particular after the end of the Second World War. Europe's role in this sense was part of an implicit labour division with the US, whereby the EU could thrive as a soft power while the US would ensure security. Global changes with new emerging powers trying to shape norms in the region make it very difficult for the EU to keep aspiring to this transformative mission. The EU's carrots are no longer sufficient to trigger transformations. Since the Arab Spring, the region has become a marketplace for regional and global powers. In this context, countries of the region not only seek alternatives in terms of norms to follow but also in terms of security and economic partnerships.

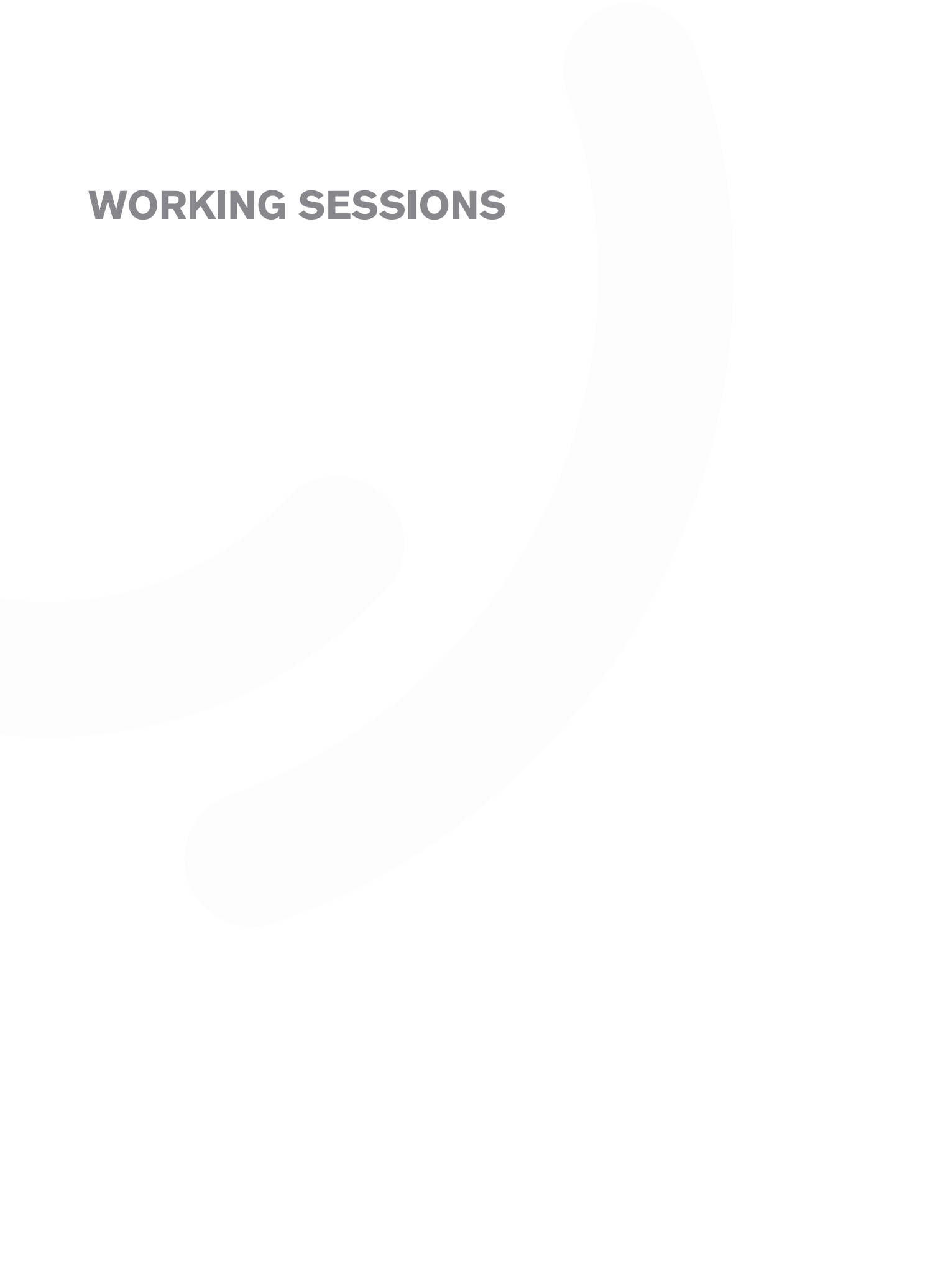
Recognising this for the EU would require not a mere new policy label, but a brand new approach, without which the EU would not become more geopolitical. The definition of a new approach should not be dominated by migration and security concerns. However,

being realistic and geopolitical does not make it necessary to give up completely on the normative approach. A participant argued that part of the paradigm change of the EU could be to find renewed avenues to support new political parties in the region, after having focused for decades the civil society (that now aspires to move to the political arena in countries such as Lebanon).

While defining this new approach, the EU needs to be realistic and accept that it only has a limited capacity, since it is not a nation state. Similarly, the EU needs to become less Eurocentric, be more aware of its colonial legacy and how it is perceived in the region. It also needs to be less asymmetric and accept that it can also learn a lot from its partners in the region.

As part of this reflection, the EU needs to think whether the concept of neighbourhood still serves a purpose. A participant argued that not only had the EU's neighbourhood lost any sort of homogeneity and purpose but also the MENA region as such needed to be approached differently, given the heterogeneity between the Gulf, the Levant and North Africa.

# WORKING SESSIONS





The aim of this working sessions was to present the concept notes and initial approach of the research proposals selected in the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference Call for Papers entitled „The quest for a more „geopolitical“ EU Foreign policy in the MENA region“. The parallel working sessions consisted of selected researchers presenting their papers and discussing them with other EuroMeSCo researchers and participants to gather feedback to be incorporated into their final publications. The Papers will be published in November-December 2023.

## I. Exploring Narratives and Analysing Geopolitical Approaches in a Context of Strategic Competition

This session analysed the tension between liberal and realist principles, as well as the implications of a more geopolitical approach in the MENA region. It assessed the EU's narratives in its southern neighbourhood against the backdrop of great power competition, evaluating their potential, strengths, and limitations. This included the examination of the intersection between narratives and policies, and the impact on Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. This session explored how the EU external migration policy in the MENA region serves or on the contrary inhibits the ambition of the EU to develop a more “geopolitical” Foreign Policy.

Chair: **Rabha Allam**. Expert & Head of Terrorism & VE Studies Program, Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies – ACPSS.

First discussant: **Andrea Dessi**. Scientific Advisor for the Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa programme, Istituto Affari Internazionali – IAI; Assistant Professor in International Relations and Global Politics, American University of Rome – AUR.



Papers presented:

***Europe as a Geopolitical Actor: Reforming EU's Narrative in North Africa***

**Zine Labidine Ghebouli.** Visiting Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations – ECFR.

***The EU's External Migration Policies in its Southern Neighbourhood: The Migration Agreements for a Geopolitical Europe***

**Ezgi Irgil.** Research Fellow, The Swedish Institute of International Affairs (Utrikespolitiska Institutet) – UI.



## **II. Eastern Mediterranean Geopolitics: Rethinking EU's Strategic Interests and EU-Türkiye Relations**

The Eastern Mediterranean including its Gulf extension holds strategic importance for the European Union due to a number of factors including energy resources, trade routes, and migration challenges. This session offered a platform to assess EU's approach in that region of geopolitical significance through two main angles. First, it explored EU strategic autonomy at sea by examining naval policies, capabilities, and partnerships with local actors to secure European interests from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Second, it analysed the evolving nature of Türkiye-EU relations and the impact of geopolitical developments on Mediterranean security and strategic interests.

Chair: **Juha Jokela.** Programme Director, European Union and Strategic Competition, Finnish Institute of International Affairs – FIIA.

First discussant: **Harry Tzimitras.** Director, PRIO Cyprus Centre.

Papers presented:

***Securing European Interests from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf: Rethinking EU Strategic Autonomy at Sea***

**Jean-Loup SAMAAN.** Associate Research Fellow, French Institute for International Relations – IFRI.

***Türkiye-EU relations, European Political Community and the Mediterranean: Is the transactional turn here to stay?***

**Başak ALPAN.** Associate Professor, Middle East Technical University.

### III. Shaping a Geopolitical EU: Exploring the Quest for Influence in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

The war in Ukraine has reinvigorated calls for the European Union to become more “geopolitical”. This session offered an opportunity to get to the bottom of what a more geopolitical EU foreign policy may mean in relation to the MENA region. It explored the EU’s quest for a greater geopolitical role in the Mediterranean and the MENA region, looking into the changing context and opportunities for the EU to enhance its presence and influence through strategic actions and policy adjustments. It examined the potential of minilateralism as a framework for enhancing cooperation and fostering a stronger partnership between Europe and the Mediterranean region.

Chair: **Erzsébet N. Rózsa.** Senior Re-

search Fellow, Institute of World Economics – IWE.

First discussant: **Kristina Kausch.** Deputy Managing Director GMF South, German Marshall Fund of the United States – GMFUS.

Papers presented:

***The EU’s Quest for a Greater Geopolitical Role in the Mediterranean and the MENA Region: Where do we stand, where should we go?***

**Silvia Colombo.** Senior Researcher and Faculty Advisor, NATO Defense College & Associate Fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali – IAI.

***Exploring the Potential of Minilateralism for Europe-Mediterranean Partnership***

**Roe Kibrik.** Director of Research, Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies –Mitvim.



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