



RegioC onf

THE EU, REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

REGIONAL CONFERENCE IN CAIRO: 29 April 2014, American
University in Cairo, Egypt

The second regional workshop for the RegioConf project was hosted by the American University in Cairo (AUC) to provide a forum for the discussion of regional integration and conflict resolution in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Along with project partners, the workshop also brought together academic experts and

practitioners on the Western Sahara and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts from Europe, North America and the MENA region. Consisting of five sessions, the workshop kicked off with an introduction to the project framework by Thomas Diez and Nathalie Tocci and a keynote address by Rosemary Hollis, followed by panels on the Israeli-Palestinian and Western Sahara case studies and ending with a roundtable discussion on the future of the EU's involvement in conflict resolution and regional integration.

After a short welcome by Nathaniel Bowditch, the Dean of the AUC's school of Humanities and Social Sciences (HUSS), project partners Thomas Diez and Nathalie Tocci presented the RegioConf framework, outlining the project's core theoretical paper (Diez et al) and its relevance to the two case studies in the Mediterranean: Israel-Palestine and the Western Sahara. A short discussion after the presentation focused on the viability of a relationship between regional cooperation and conflict resolution as well as how far such a relationship is a *conscious* EU strategy (Hollis).

The second session consisted of the keynote address by Rosemary Hollis: "The EU Approach to Conflict Management: Idealism, Bureaucracy and Securitization", followed by a short Q/A. Concentrating largely, but not exclusively, on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Professor Hollis presented an overview of the EU's normative approach toward conflict resolution/management in the (southern) Mediterranean neighborhood; EU involvement in Israel-Palestine and the wider Mediterranean Neighborhood; EU migration controls and security concerns and the challenges posed by the recent Arab uprisings. She concluded that there was a consistent prioritization of European economic interests, security and migration control and that the EU was incapable of recognizing the problem because of its normative understanding of the European identity.

The first panel of the workshop focused on the EU, regional integration and conflict resolution in the Israel-Palestine case and featured a presentation of the case study paper (Azhar). The presentation concluded that, in broad terms, the EU has failed to pursue a tangible regional cooperation strategy to transform the conflict and that there has been a significant disconnect between rhetoric and actions. Economic leverage (through trade and aid), for instance, has not been used to implement an effective 'carrot and stick' approach. However, the EU's functionalist approach – based largely on an economic impetus – has certainly deepened its involvement in the conflict and has the potential to indirectly impact it. This includes both bilateral and trilateral (EU-Israel-Palestine) projects as well as those launched by regional initiatives like the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). These include the UfM's recent Gaza water desalination

project as well as a variety of economic and cultural joint projects. Panelists spoke about the need to determine the sequencing of regional integration and conflict transformation as well as the nature of the relationship (i.e. causal or symbiotic) in this particular case study (Asseburg, Emerson). The evolution of EU goals and aims was also highlighted, with particular emphasis on why the EU has increasingly resorted to conflict management and allowed the United States to lead all multilateral peace negotiations (Asseburg, Tocci). Another issue raised during the general discussion was the nature of the EU's association agreements with both the Israelis and Palestinian and whether they were designed from the onset to function imperfectly (Miguel Ruiz). The panel ended with calls to evaluate the relative importance of other pathways of influence – namely social learning – to better evaluate the EU's impact (Bouris, Diez).

The second panel saw the presentation of the case study paper on the EU promotion of regional integration in the Maghreb and its potential impact on the Western Sahara conflict (Louis). As in the case of Israel-Palestine, the presentation highlighted the multiple incoherencies between the EU declared goals and its actions on the ground. The regional initiatives launched by the EU have tended to gradually shift from multilateralism to bilateralism, increasing the socio-economic differences among the Maghrebi partners and therefore failing to foster regional integration in the sub-region. Brussels' position as a neutral actor in the conflict is increasingly being questioned due to the influence France and Spain have in shaping the EU Mediterranean policies in the Maghreb according to their own national interests. These two powerful member states seem to favor the *status quo* out of fear of seeing Morocco, a major economic and geostrategic partner destabilized by the creation of an independent Sahrawi state. Panelists and experts identified the conflict as the major cause of destabilization of the Maghreb and underlined that the continuation of the *status quo* prevents any sound attempt at establishing regional integration in the Maghreb (Zoubir, Sidati). They criticized the EU and its policies for not contributing, and even undermining, the UN-led peace process (Ruiz, Mundy). Nevertheless, it was pointed out that while Morocco appears to be the main beneficiary of EU policies and non-involvement in the Western Sahara dispute, the socio-economic burden the conflict represents for Morocco is consequential and largely contributes to the perpetuation of the 'Non-Maghreb' (Abdelmoumni). Finally, the panel concluded with a Q&A session whereby the possibility to use *social learning* was discussed in order to describe the way Morocco has adapted to play within the EU rules of the game as part of its Western Sahara 'Grand Strategy' (Fernandez, Diez).

The final session featured a roundtable discussion on “The Future of Europe’s Regional Conflict Resolution” and was moderated by AUC project partner Marco Pinfari. Issues raised concerned the various forms of regional integration in the region (such as those contingent on an Arab cultural identity), a common understanding of regional institutions, the presence of non-state actors and a possible updating of the pathways debate (e.g. compulsory vs. coercive) (Pinfari). One suggestion was for the introduction of institutionalized tools and a revision of the entire ‘carrot and stick’ approach (Miguel Ruiz) that would realistically match both the EU’s normative approach and Mediterranean expectations from the EU. There was also concern that there is no genuine European commitment to conflict resolution in the region and accordingly, no discernible EU strategy to deal with either conflict (Hollis). To this end, project partner Diez remarked that there is a need to analyze the various layers of regional integration and not just those formed at a macro level.

List of Workshop Participants

Project Partners

Thomas Diez, University of Tübingen

Eva Scherwitz, University of Tübingen

Nathalie Tocci, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

Marco Pinfari, The American University in Cairo (AUC)

Hirah Azhar, The American University in Cairo (AUC)

Justine Louis, The American University in Cairo (AUC)

Discussants and other panelists

Fouad Abdelmoumni, Farah Développement

Muriel Asseburg, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)

Dimitris Bouris, College of Europe

Michael Emerson, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)

Irene Fernandez, College of Europe

Rosemary Hollis, City University London

Carlos Ruiz Miguel, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela

Jacob Mundy, Colgate University

Mohamed Sidati, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic Minister for the European Union

Yahia Zoubir, Kedge Business School