



Europe should not forget the challenges to its south

by Luigi Scazzieri, 22 September 2022

European policy-makers have rightly focused on the war in Ukraine and the economic challenges that the EU now faces. But Europe should not get complacent about its southern neighbourhood. The region will also suffer from the fallout of the war, while pre-existing challenges like the conflicts in Libya, Syria and Yemen persist. In this new Centre for European Reform policy brief, '[Europe should not forget the challenges to its south](#)', senior research fellow, Luigi Scazzieri, makes the case for Europe devoting more attention and resources to the region.

To date, European foreign policy towards the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has often been passive, incoherent and ineffective. Many European states have considerable influence in the MENA, but Europe has often punched below its weight. Europeans have often been divided and unable to leverage their economic weight effectively. And the EU's political and economic offer to its neighbours has not been sufficiently ambitious.

Old challenges have not gone away: the wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continue to simmer; terrorist groups remain a threat across parts of the Middle East; and Iran's destabilising foreign policy is likely to endure. There is also potential for further instability, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean, Lebanon and Iraq.

Europeans will need to learn how to navigate a more complex Middle East. There is a widespread perception of US withdrawal, while China and Russia's presence and influence have increased. Regional powers like Iran and Turkey have become more assertive and the alignment between Israel and the major Arab powers has established a new diplomatic reality. Add in the knock-on effects of the war in Ukraine on the MENA - where food and energy insecurity will compound long-standing socio-economic issues, fostering instability - and it is clear Europe needs to step up its involvement in the region.

In the short-term, the EU help its southern neighbours to manage the immediate consequences of the war, but in the long-term, it should look to help the region to become more prosperous and resilient.

Luigi Scazzieri, author of the report, said *"As Europeans focus on supporting Ukraine and deterring Russia from further aggression, they should not lose sight of the many challenges to their south. Europeans must now learn how to navigate a more complex regional environment and devote more attention to addressing security and socio-economic challenges in the region."*

Note for editors:

For further information on the new research and to request an interview with Luigi Scazzieri [@LScazzieri](#), please contact Rosie Giorgi in the CER press office on pressoffice@cer.eu or +44 (0) 20 7233 1199.

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