

NEW MED Youth Forum, Rome, May 7

Notes.

Opening remarks

Vincenzo Mati (Italian OSCE Coordinator)

- Aim of the Italian OSCE chairmanship is to enhance dialogue and cooperation in the region between OSCE and Mediterranean partners in the region because one dimension reinforces the other.
- Italian chairmanship wants to shift the negative narrative on youth and focus on a positive agenda by including their perspective into the work of previous year's OSCE Mediterranean Contact Group chairmanship (coordinated by Ricardo Pozzi).

Luisa Bindova (Slovak chairmanship of the OSCE Mediterranean Contact Group)

Five plenary contact group meetings, with a focus on:

- Energy security and water
- Cyber security
- Education to combat radicalization
- Security Sector Reform

OSCE Mediterranean conference takes place in Malaga, Spain in October.

Lorenzo Kamel (IAI)

Incidents of terrorism in the region have increased with 6,500% since 2005. Western countries play a key role in destabilizing economies in the MENA, not least through weapon sales (i.e. fifty per cent of US weapon sales go the Middle East).

Session 1. Conflict Dynamics

Ahmed Sukker / Gaza

- Changing attitude of youth (*who is the "youth"/ how have you established these findings, because youth if not a homogenous group*) towards politics in the Gaza strip because of:
 - a. changing political circumstances
 - b. shifting youth priorities
- These attitudes should guide the process of reconciliation between the PA and Hamas of which there have been seven attempts since 2006 (latest in October 2017, Cairo agreement based on the one in 2011).
- Changing attitudes of youth:
 - Fatah youth before 2011 calling for Hamas to step down. Hamas cracked down on the movement.
 - Arab Spring March 15 movement to put pressure on political leaders to push for reconciliation. Slammed down by Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.
 - Third wave of ad hoc movements protesting on the streets to call for services, rather than offering solutions 2015-2016. Frustrated by party politics, only care about their needs of services.
 - So we have witnessed a shift in attitude from a focus on party politics to a focus on public services.

- This movement should be sustained → youth feels empowered beyond party politics (because they see they have been tricked and disappointed by all parties).

Youth v politics: young Palestinians are angry and disillusioned by party politics. They feel completely marginalized and abandoned by the parties. Hamas is using the border protests for its own purposes to channel people's anger.

Role of the occupation and international community.

Young people know the occupation is the source of all evil but at the same time the occupation is an abstract issue. There is frustration – they blame Israel but other issues (mentioned above) are more important and urgent.

Bilal Sukkar / Syria

How are policy approaches towards youth shaped by current security and instability discourse, leading to making policies based on the perception of youth as (1) radicals or (2) peace makers?

Disclaimer: Youth is a diverse group and should better be defined by its degree of marginalization and exclusion rather than by their age.

Youth – peace link can be counterproductive. It would be better to make the link between youth – peacebuilders not shying away from conflict.

Move away from prevailing top down approach.

On international community / Syrian civil society:

- Syrian youth (in diaspora) has not moved away from the scene. They should be supported by the international community. Not only as peacemakers and advisors but as peacebuilders, and be engaged in all phases of negotiation. Conflict resolution to conflict transformation. Move away from violent conflict to non-violent, constructive conflict.
- There should be support by the international community to connect the civil society diaspora worldwide and help them to speak with one voice (there is a coalition growing: **We Exist**).
- Western governments must think about how to reconcile both facilitating the integration of Syrian refugees into their societies while at the same time empower them as an opposition force against the Assad regime, which will sustain the conflict, and might not be in the interest of Western governments.

On Gulf influence in Palestinian territories:

- Qatar is building roads and mosques
- Hamas is leaning towards Iran, rather than Saudi
- Saudi Arabia is funding the PA

Session 3. Civic activism.

Tunisia.

Withdrawal of youth in civil society (only 3%) while at the same time participating in protests in the streets. They are engaged in less structured and institutionalized ways of civic participation. Dangerous for a young democracy.

Reasons?

- Inclusiveness of civil society in the political process is not in the DNA of Tunisian administration.
- Disillusionment in government results.
- Perception that youth is being used for the agenda of political parties but not engaged in a constructive and meaningful way.
- Political gains were not matched by a success in the economic sphere. The government is not being able anymore to provide employment.

Concrete success stories, especially at the grassroots level to bridge the gap between young people and elected officials →

- Development of an app to connect people to local governance.
- Participatory meeting in budget distribution where attended and even facilitated by young people.
- Trainings (in the South) to engage young people with local counselors.
- Electoral law obliges 30% of lists being made up by young people.

Policy recommendations:

- Establish a regular consultation process with young people in a strategic manner.
- Existing course on civic education on elementary school, primary school and high school. Reform these courses to establish a learning by doing approach through study visits.
- Internships at local counsels to simultaneously strengthen political skills and literacy of young people as well as fill the human resource gaps within local government institutions.

FOLLOW UP / NEXT STEPS

- Ettore: Med OSCE meeting in October in Milan, organize a side event together?
- Papers will be revised and updated in light of the discussions today and then published, possibly in an edited volume.