



Arab NGO Network for Development
شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية

The EU – Arab Summit: The Uncompleted opportunity?

The first ever League of Arab States and the European Union heads of states summit took place on 25-24 February 2019 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Representing over 250 civil society organizations from the Arab region and monitoring the engagement of the European Union, as the biggest donor and key partner in the Arab region, the Arab NGO Network for Development has closely followed the meeting.

Ahead of the meeting, ANND has shared civil society concerns to both parties, calling for the cooperation to aim at, foremost, achieving sustainable development, peace and human security, through rights-based policies implementation and promotion; enhancing regional integration and ensuring full respect to human rights. Engaging all relevant stakeholders, ensuring mutual accountability and addressing the root causes of inequalities remained our primary calls for the principles of cooperation between both institutions.

In this respect, we are grateful to see the commitments made towards the Agenda 2030, people-centered endeavours and recognition of the role of civil society. Both parties position on the situation of Gaza Strip and commitment to ending Israeli occupation is much welcome as well. Although we consider several elements of the **-17points summit declaration as success**, we also note the following:

- **The Summit focus remains on economic cooperation through deepening trade agreements and promoting more investments. Yet the promotion of investments driven with corporate interests and free trade and liberalization for the sake of liberalization only have proven negative for development of productive sectors and generating sustainable jobs. In addition, increasing growth rates will not address deep-rooted and structural inequalities; unless enhanced with redistribution policies to reverse inequalities, social polarization and marginalization. Whereas the title of the declaration indicates ‘investing in stability’ remains a priority in the region; yet stability in the Arab region, for the sake of security of the EU borders should not be the utmost aim. Components of the positive cooperation agenda should respect policy coherence for development.**
- **Without strengthening governance structures and safeguard mechanisms, ensuring transparency, monitoring and accountability of private sector, promotion of further investments in key sectors like energy, infrastructure will continue undermining human rights. Further cooperation in these sectors should ensure a priori and posteriori human rights and environmental sustainability impact assessments; engaging those who would be directly impacted by them.**
- **Commitment to protection of and support to refugees in accordance with the international law as elaborated in point 3 is welcome. However, measures taken by the EU member states to protect their borders at the expense of the rights of refugees; and the position of several EU member states on the Global Compact itself are in total contradiction to this affirmation. When dealing with the refugees; security interests; national sovereignty has prevailed over human rights; with measures designed to keep refugees in southern neighbors mainly; and with security measures strengthened at the expense of protection measures.**



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- Establishment of new mechanisms and modalities to operationalize mutual cooperation identified in point 15 should be transparent and engage civil society actors through inclusive, open national dialogues in their design, planning, implementation and monitoring.

- Points 12,13 ,6 and 14 require a comprehensive approach to security, moving from militarized security approach to achieving human security and taking effective measures to stop arms trade to the Arab region. Commitments made with regard to regional peace is important as well the affirmation on the interrelatedness and interdependency of peace and security, human rights and economic and social development. However, these commitments made should turn into political will, concrete and coherent actions with effective measures towards ensuring fundamental freedoms, enhancing civic participation and addressing marginalization and discrimination as the root causes of conflicts in the region.

Last but not least, given that the next meeting will be in 2022 and coincides with the midterm period for the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and 17 Sustainable Development Goals, we call it to be an opportunity for both LAS and the EU to provide a midterm assessment of their contributions to the achievement of sustainable development.