

## Civil Society Dialogue Network Meeting

### European Union – League of Arab States co-operation and the EU response to changes in the Arab region: Views from civil society

**Venue:** Grand Hotel Excelsior, Valletta, Malta

**Date:** Saturday 1 June, 09h00 – 16h00 and Sunday 2 June, 09h00 - 14h00

#### Meeting Description

##### Introduction

Regional integration can be an important peace-building tool and means for addressing region-wide challenges. This is recognized in the European Security Strategy and constitutes one of the reasons underlying the EU's cooperation with other regional organizations.

In this context, the Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) will host an expert-level meeting on the future prospects for European Union (EU) – League of Arab States (LAS) co-operation and discuss the EU's response to regional transformations and challenges bringing together European and Arab policy-makers and civil society analysts.

##### Background

The EU and the LAS have recently stepped up their co-operation on a range of issues, including energy, culture, empowerment of women, legal affairs, human rights, humanitarian assistance, electoral process, crisis management and early warning, including the creation of Crisis Room. Their joint work program offers promising opportunities for enhanced cooperation. In addition, recent joint EU-LAS declarations and the joint work program underlined the importance of civil society, in particular in light of current regional transformations.

##### Purpose

In order to contribute to an adequate EU response to the challenges brought by the transformation in the Arab world and inform the development of the EU-LAS cooperation in meeting these challenges, the purpose of the meeting will be:

- (1) To gather analysis from civil society experts from the MENA region and Europe on the key challenges of peaceful transformation in the Arab world, the EU's response to these regional transformations and EU-LAS cooperation in developing regional and joint responses;
- (2) To discuss the relationship between regional organizations and civil society in addressing these regional issues within a comparative perspective.

##### Format

Invited participants (40 to 50) will include those with expertise in the issues under discussion. Civil society participants will be drawn from NGOs, think-tanks, and research institutions— primarily from across the Middle East North Africa region, with a small number from Europe who are working on regional integration and/or with the LAS. The meeting will also include officials from both the LAS and the EU.

##### Location

The meeting will take place in Malta at the European Commission – League of Arab States Liaison Office. It will take place over 1.5 days.

#### The Civil Society Dialogue Network

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a three-year project funded by the European Commission aimed at facilitating dialogue on peacebuilding issues between civil society and EU policymakers. The CSDN contributes to strengthening international and regional capacity for conflict prevention and post-conflict co-operation (for more information [www.eplo.org](http://www.eplo.org)). It is managed by EPLO, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office in cooperation with the EEAS and the EC.

**Saturday 1 June**

**09h00 – 10h00 Open Remarks**

- League of Arab States – H.E. Dr. Haifaa Abou Ghazala, Secretary General's Envoy for Civil Society
- EEAS – Christian Berger, Director Middle East North Africa
- EPLO – introduction to the meeting

**10h00 to 13h00 Session 1: The EU Response to Changes in the Arab World: Pitfalls and Potential**

Following the political changes in the Arab world, the EU is committed to support the emergence of deep democracy and more inclusive growth, through support to democratic processes, support to civil society, increased assistance, trade opening an increased mobility, and renewed engagement in regional cooperation (see below). More than two years into the transitions, it is clear that the process of political and economic transformation is complex and will take time, presenting pressing political, security, economic and social challenges. Is the EU response adequate to support the peaceful transition in this context?

- What are the main challenges faced by Arab societies in ensuring a peaceful transformation in the Arab world conducive to justice and democracy?
- What role can the EU play as neighbouring partner in meeting these challenges?
- In view of the EU's institutional, legal and political structures, what priorities, policy and tools should be implemented to maximise the positive impact of EU response?
  
- Moderator: EPLO;
- Opening comments:
  - European Union – Christian Berger, Director EEAS Middle East North Africa and Michael Koehler, Director DG DEVCO, European Neighbourhood Policy
  - League of Arab States – Ambassador Hesham Youssef, Senior Advisor to the Secretary General
- Facilitated roundtable discussion

**11h00 to 11h30 Coffee break**

11h30 – Continuation, **Session 1: The EU Response Changes in the Arab World: Pitfalls and Potential**

- Reflections from LAS on the topic and on the discussion so far
  - Ambassador Omnia Taha, LAS, Head of the Department for European Affairs
- Facilitated roundtable discussion continues

**13h00 to 14h00 Lunch Buffet at Hotel Excelsior**

**14h00 to 16h30 Session 2: Role of EU-LAS Cooperation and European and Arab Civil Society in Addressing the Regional Challenges of Peaceful Transformation**

Many challenges, whether political, security related or economic and social, are regional in nature and call for regional responses. In this context the EU and the LAS have stepped up their dialogue and cooperation. The landmark EU-LAS ministerial meeting in November 2012 signaled their shared commitment to develop their cooperation in meeting common challenges and a programme of concrete cooperation is under implementation.

Civil society is playing a key role in the MENA transformation and can bring an essential contribution in fostering regional as well as Euro-Arab cooperation. The LAS and the EU have expressed willingness to engage more closely with civil society, in particular on support to transitions. The EU has its own experience of working with civil society and other regional organizations, such as the AU. How relevant is this experience for EU-LAS cooperation in meeting regional challenges?

The following topics will be discussed:

- Cross-regional responses to challenges identified
- Using EU – LAS co-operation in support to peaceful transition in the MENA region and meeting regional challenges
- Regional organization–civil society engagement: successes and failures
- Contribution of civil society to LAS work and EU-LAS cooperation

Moderator – Dr Mouin Rabbani, CMI

14h00 – Introduction to the topic

14h15 to 15h45 – Small groups discussions

- Group 1 – Challenges and cross regional responses
- Group 2 – Recommendations for EU-LAS co-operation
- Group 3– Cooperation between regional organizations and civil society: successes and failures
- Group 4 – How to involve civil society in EU-LAS cooperation?

15h45 Reports from groups and plenary discussion

16h30 Session 2 ends (coffee available at 15h30)

**18h00 Reception at EC-LAS Liaison Office**

**Sunday 2 June**

**09h30 to 13h00 Session 3: The Arab World and the EU Civil Society Network: Towards an Effective Cooperation and Partnership**

The following topics will be discussed:

- The LAS' new approach to cooperation with civil society
- The potentiality of the Civil Society Secretariat to act as a focal point for the Arab region
- The EU experience in terms of integrating the civil society into the EU mechanisms, and how the LAS could benefit from it
- EU-LAS potential cooperation in capacity building for the Arab civil society organizations
- Possible future activities and programs which engage the civil society organizations with the EU and the LAS

Format: facilitated roundtable discussion

- Moderator: Ambassador Inas Mekkawy, LAS, Head of the Department for Civil Society
- Opening comments:
- EEAS – Charles Michel Geurts, EEAS, Deputy Head of Division, Human Rights Guidelines & Multilateral Cooperation
- EPLO – contributions from the floor from EPLO members
- Facilitated roundtable discussion (with coffee break 11h to 11h30)

**13h00 Informal concluding remarks, followed by lunch**

**14h00 onwards – departure of participants**