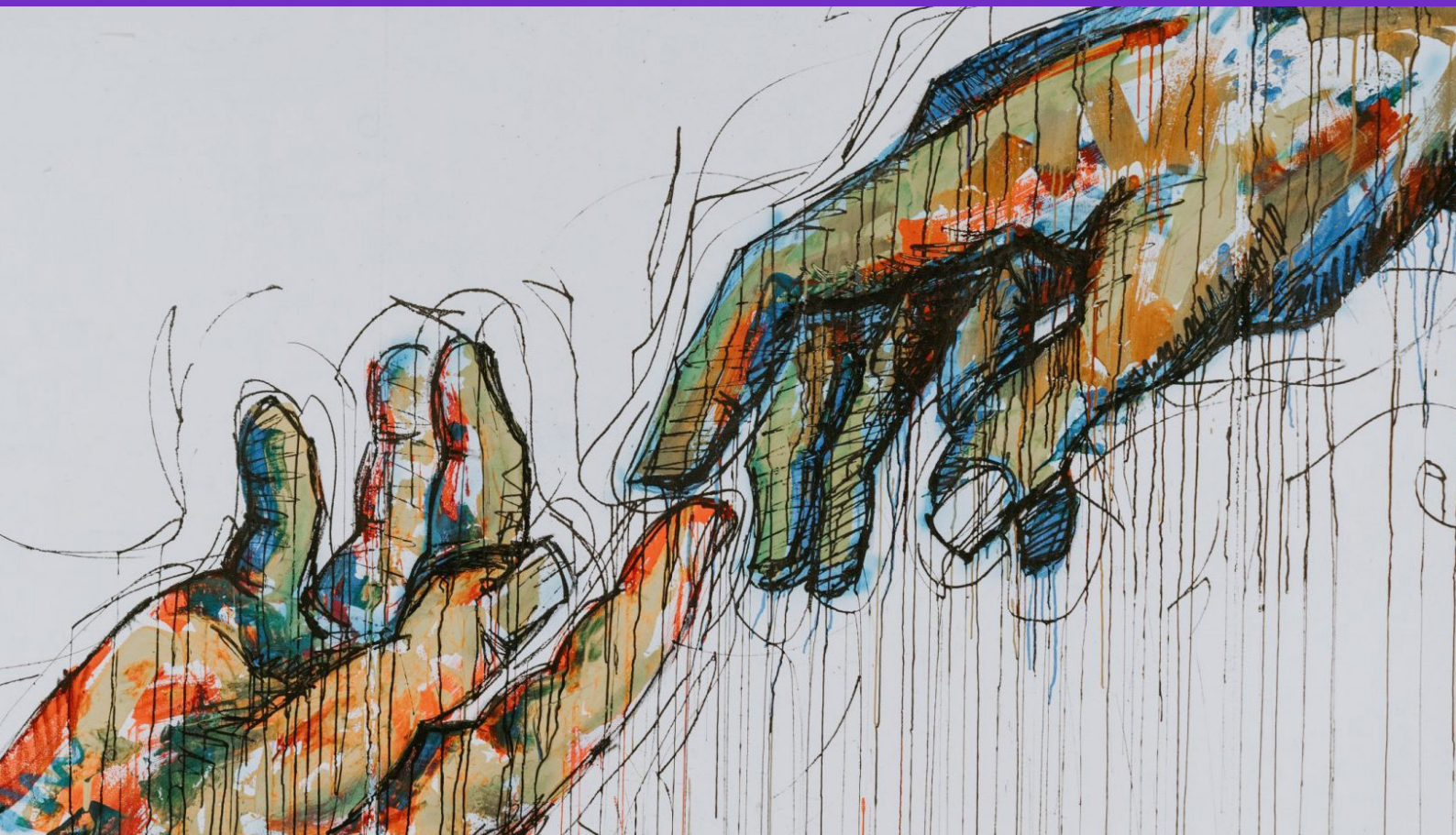


SUMMER 2020

Sustainable development in the Euro-Mediterranean

Aligning Covid-19 recovery with the 2030 Agenda

EVENT REPORT



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The Euro-Mediterranean area needs enhanced partnerships; a redoubled commitment to multilateral solutions; and increased empowerment of young people through education and technology, to ensure that the region's emergence from the coronavirus pandemic advances wider sustainable development goals.

Those were amongst the key ideas to arise from Friends of Europe's and the Anna Lindh Foundation's online debate on aligning regional recovery from Covid-19 with fulfilment of the United Nation's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“ [Covid-19] which has crossed borders and does not recognize [them] can only be met by more partnerships, by more working together

Nabil Al-Sharif, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures

“The fear is that development, cooperation, partnerships will be put on the back burner as a result of Covid-19 ... this would be a devastating option. It could be even more devastating than the disease itself,” warned **Nabil Al-Sharif**, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures.

“This disease which has crossed borders and does not recognize [them] can only be met by more partnerships, by more working together,” he insisted.

“ Multilateralism: that is the key thing that we have seen in terms of the pandemic ... any global crisis has to be responded to in a global way

Anna Strzaska, Head of Department for Strategy and Instruments of the European Neighbourhood Policy at the European External Action Service (EEAS)

While the response to the pandemic in many countries has been to turn inward and seek unilateral solutions, all speakers emphasised that strengthened partnerships and cross-border cooperation are needed around the Mediterranean region and beyond.

“Multilateralism: that is the key thing that we have seen in terms of the pandemic ... any global crisis has to be responded to in a global way. That's why we have been engaging very closely with multilateral partners,” said **Anna Strzaska**, Head of Department for Strategy and Instruments of the European Neighbourhood Policy at the European External Action Service (EEAS).

“The key question is ‘what comes next? What is the medium to long term response that we can shape?’ I think that here is where partnership comes into play,” Strzaska told the debate. “We are very far from knowing what the impact of the pandemic will be, but one thing is for sure and clear: it will be huge for both sides of the Mediterranean and for the whole world.”

“ [Covid-19] has a short-term negative impact on most SDGs and these impacts are amplified for the vulnerable groups

Angelo Riccaboni, Chair of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Mediterranean and Chair of the ‘Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area’ (PRIMA) Foundation

Angelo Riccaboni, Chair of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Mediterranean and Chair of the ‘Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area’ (PRIMA) Foundation, pointed to the SDSN’s report released on June 30 measuring states’ progress on reaching the SDGs and he highlighted the impact of Covid-19.

“This year there is a clear focus on Covid,” he said. “Covid has a short-term negative impact on most SDGs and these impacts are amplified for the vulnerable groups.” He explained that the pandemic was creating ‘clear problems’ for progress toward the achievement of the goals of reducing poverty, eradicating hunger, good health, decent work and economic growth, and reducing inequalities.

“ The Covid crisis has shown how interdependent our societies and our economies are, and this calls rather for stepping up the international cooperation against the coronavirus and, of course, for a more just, sustainable and peaceful post-Covid world

Nona Deprez, Head of Unit for the Partnership Instrument for the Service for Foreign Policy Instrument (FPI) at the European Commission

However, despite those setbacks, **Nona Deprez**, Head of Unit for the Partnership Instrument for the European Commission’s Service for Foreign Policy Instrument (FPI), saw an opportunity to harness the urgency behind the global fight to stem the pandemic and relaunch stricken economies in order to speed progress toward longer-term ambitions on sustainable development up to 2030.

“The Covid crisis has shown how interdependent our societies and our economies are, and this calls rather for stepping up the international cooperation against the coronavirus and, of course, for a more just, sustainable and peaceful post-Covid world,” she said.

“This is a key moment where the short-term goals completely align with the EU’s long term goals, because building resilience is a growth strategy, it is fully in line with the green transition, with the digital transition, and brings us close to the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Joining this intercultural dialogue from around the Mediterranean, young people stressed how the Covid crisis has highlighted the need for greater support for education, and investment in digital technologies.

Nacer Nafea, a student from Morocco, explained how the pandemic has hit education in North Africa and asked what Europe could do to help the region close the gap in terms of digital learning. From Egypt, **Zinab Zidan**, a member of the Anna Lindh Foundation's Young Mediterranean Voices (YMV) programme, cautioned that virtual education opportunities were beyond the reach of refugees and other marginalised communities.

The two speakers from the European Union stressed the EU's commitment to education in the region. Strzaska recalled that 44,000 students from North Africa and the Middle East had participated in the EU's Erasmus exchange programme over the past five years and that the push for digital transition was an important part of European partnership programmes. As an innovative example, she pointed to the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD), set up in 2017 to promote investment in Africa and countries neighbouring the EU.

“ We can make the most of the remaining 10 years ahead only if we work together on a new normal that is more sustainable and more inclusive and thus also more digital

Nona Deprez, Head of Unit for the Partnership Instrument for the Service for Foreign Policy Instrument (FPI) at the European Commission

Deprez said digital partnerships would play a crucial role in the decade left to reach the Sustainable Development Goals. “We can make the most of the remaining 10 years ahead only if we work together on a new normal that is more sustainable and more inclusive and thus also more digital,” she said.

The commitment to a multilateral, rules-based international order was made clear by both EU representatives. “Multilateralism is the cornerstone of our external action,” said Strzaska. “With Covid we see it even more clearly.”

Still, participants stressed that a deeper multilateralism needs to be developed to forge ties at civil society, as well as at state-to-state level.

“Multilateralism shouldn't be left to political leaders,” argued **Dharmendra Kanani**, Director of Insights at Friends of Europe, who moderated the debate.

“Take multilateralism into your own hands,” he told participants from both shores of the Mediterranean. “Create a different form of informed, youth-led galvanised multilateralism and show the way. The lesson for funders and leaders is to provide you with the means to walk forward faster on this agenda.”

The added urgency generated by the pandemic had highlighted the necessity of sustainable international action. The time for prevarication has to be replaced with a time to act in line with SDG 17 which aims to ‘strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.’

“We need to deal with SDG 17 with concrete action” concluded Riccaboni. The initiatives undertaken by the Anna Lindh Foundation and Friends of Europe to promote closer cooperation between different stakeholders hold considerable importance. The effort to favour intercultural dialogue and cross border cooperation is key not only to drive forward the implementation of the 2030 Agenda but also to enable more understanding and coordination in the short-term.

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