

Pact for the Mediterranean

One Sea. One Pact. One Future.



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The EU's New Pact for the Mediterranean: Between the Promise of Renewal and the Paradox of Repackaging

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In October 2025, the EU officially unveiled its “New Pact for the Mediterranean,” outlining a new, broadly ambitious strategy that seeks to enhance the bloc’s cooperation with its Southern Neighborhood. The goal of this renewed framework is to contribute to “[building a ‘Common Mediterranean Space’ that is connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure.](#)” The Pact’s presentation in November 2025 coincided with the 30th anniversary of the Barcelona Process. It includes ten non-EU countries along the Mediterranean: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Following the launch, a specific action plan will be developed, detailing designated participating countries and stakeholders for each initiative outlined in the strategy.

The New Pact builds on previous EU initiatives by reiterating regional partnership aspirations, sectoral collaboration objectives, and institutional ties. Nevertheless, it distinguishes itself through its framing, priorities, and geopolitical context. Against a backdrop of intensified and adversarial geopolitical competition in the shared neighborhood, the New Pact embodies a cooperative political, social, and economic approach grounded in realism and pragmatism, acknowledging shared concerns and interests while proposing concrete projects. It places a strong emphasis on “delivery,” contrasting the ambiguity and slow progress of previous versions. It also frames the critical themes of migration and security cooperation within partnership narratives.

The New Pact is built on three main [pillars](#): 1) People as a catalyst for change, connections, and innovation; 2) Stronger, more sustainable, and integrated economies; and 3) Security, preparedness, and migration management. Each pillar combines new, practical initiatives with the expansion of existing programs. This approach allows for flexibility, enabling engagement with multi-level stakeholders and adaptation of initiatives to specific contexts. Yet, despite its ambitions and promises, the process will be hindered by conflicting agendas and priorities, political disunity, and a lack of credibility and trust between the North and South.

Why Now?

The New Pact is timely, offering a relevant solution at a critical moment when structural cooperation and partnership between Europe and its Southern Neighborhood are badly needed. Brussels presents it as a comprehensive, practical revamping of a Common Mediterranean Space, built on the pillars of stability, peace, mutual benefits, and prosperity. This revision acknowledges the pressing need for the EU to address the harsh geopolitical realities that now define it. This includes ongoing genocide in Gaza, transition in Syria, and persistent instability in Libya and Lebanon. Combined with spillover from the Red Sea and Sahel crises, these developments have successfully exposed the fragmentations and limitations of EU actions.

Concurrently, increased domestic political contestation over migration issues has prompted the EU to reconfigure its strategy, expanding its scope and hardening its regulatory measures on border management and external migration. Moreover, the imperative to reduce reliance on Russian energy sources, the necessity of accelerating the energy transition, and the increasing competition



from China have amplified the Mediterranean's strategic relevance. Consequently, a reevaluation of the Pact allows the EU to develop and implement a new, equitable framework, align existing instruments with rising concerns, and reaffirm its commitment to a renewed political, structural, and strategic Euro-Mediterranean alliance.

What's New?

The new version of the pact is substantively structured on pillars that portray it as an integrated regional agenda, rather than a series of individual sectoral projects. It aims to respond to increased regional instability across the MENA region, persistent migration pressures, and the critical need for economic and energy diversification. It emphasizes co-ownership, co-creation, joint responsibility, and deeper cooperation on shared concerns through concrete initiatives in trade, clean energy, and youth empowerment. It also expands its regional partnerships to include the Gulf, highlighting the interconnectivity of regional challenges and opportunities.

Brussels' inclusive narrative is supported by a strong security-focused approach aimed at limiting migration, combating instability, and safeguarding energy supplies. The EU's engagement and adopted mechanisms aim to strike a balance between goals for shared prosperity and structural concerns about growing geopolitical competition from Russia and China. Compared to the previous framework, the Pact particularly associates market access and financial support with migration and border control cooperation, as well as better coordination with member states' bilateral mechanisms to project a more cohesive EU position.

The Pact could be considered a strategic and complementary extension of [Global Europe](#). Besides differences in scope and focus, the Pact serves, to an extent, as a regional implementation vehicle of Global Europe, helping translate the latter's objectives for security, sustainable growth, human development, and green and digital transitions into a specific regional agenda. This makes the New Pact a thematic 'Mediterranean filter' for Global Europe, drawing multiple instruments and financing streams under a unified framework in unprecedented forms, such as under the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) or the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM.)

Where the Pact Falls Short

Despite its crafted framing with ambitious, promising language, the Pact's design reveals fundamental weaknesses that undermine its transformative pledge, rendering it more of a rebranding process than a meaningful strategic reset.

Recycled Tools, Limited Impact

The Pact aims to reshape the entire Euro-Mediterranean framework, but with familiar instruments that fail to mitigate the current geopolitical challenges and demands, such as conditionality, recycled funding envelopes, partnership asymmetry, and coordination platforms that fail in most cases to translate incentives into concrete projects.

The gap between broad rhetoric and limited instruments exposes internal structural contradictions: while aspirations are transformative, ambitious, and necessary, the mechanisms in place to realize



them are more incremental and project-based than strategic. This would eventually lead to a framework that overpromises on what existing policies can realistically and legitimately provide—a recipe for partners’ disappointment and distrust. A further significant shortcoming lies in the absence of robust political support. The prioritization of divergent national interests and the resulting externalization, especially evident in the actions of Spain, France, Italy, and Greece, erodes the Pact's fundamental principles and diminishes its influence.

Weak institutional coherence (between EEAS, national capitals, and the Commission) and overlapping schemes (Global Gateway, ENP, and Union for the Mediterranean) create a promising but complex and confusing ecosystem. Partner countries must navigate knotty funding channels and an entanglement of labels and bureaucracy, diminishing the Pact’s claimed added value and limiting its effectiveness as a distinctive, unique, strategic concept. Moreover, with most EU external funding already allocated until 2027 and the lack of a dedicated budget line, the Pact’s success depends on contributions from member states and the business sector, particularly for new regional initiatives. Thus, its outcomes will only be seen several years down the line.

Southern Voice is Nowhere to be Seen or Heard

Despite the Pact's emphasis on concepts like "win-win" outcomes, "joint ownership," and "shared prosperity," the real power in shaping its agenda and making decisions still resides firmly in Brussels, with limited consideration or co-design by Southern partners. The framework’s priority-setting favors EU concerns, particularly in migration control and energy security. The Pact serves as an instrument for the EU to rebuild its image and revive its relevance and leverage in the region. However, the lack of the Southern members’ priorities and concerns highlights the clear tension between the EU’s attempted claims of cooperative vision for the Neighborhood’s integration and the reality of the bloc’s inclination towards the region as a strategic buffer for European security and energy needs. As a rebranding framework, it remains [insufficiently rooted in local realities](#).

Moreover, the Southern Neighborhood is continuously gravitating away from the West and forging other international alignments, which, combined with the US’s changing stance on multilateralism, undermines EU leverage and exposes the reality of the co-ownership rhetoric and claimed authenticity of the Pact’s new initiatives. Thus, North African countries, no stranger to “new efforts” (especially following the Barcelona Process and ENP,) consider the EU’s renewed interest in regional cooperation as a repackaging of old, empty promises that failed to materialize. This sentiment is shared among the Arab countries, whose discontent, following decades of failed EU low politics, consolidated into a general skepticism about EU initiatives. The general consensus is that the EU continues to ignore the neighborhood’s pushback against colonial rhetoric and societal disconnect.

Geopolitical Blind Spots

The Pact’s geopolitical interpretations of the Southern Neighborhood are noticeably outdated. It overlooks the GCC’s role as a diplomatic powerhouse, Turkey’s diplomatic and military assertiveness, and China’s BRI footprints. It interprets US disengagement and withdrawal as a background variable rather than a structural change in global and regional security architectures. This provides room for Southern partners to balance power between the EU, the Gulf, China, and Turkey. Nevertheless, the Pact presumes that Europe can lead unilaterally, ignoring how this hedging undermines EU leverage.



Indeed, the Pact substantially replicates 2000s-style notions about the bloc’s “normative projection” into a presumably receptive, passive neighborhood, portraying it as an implementation ground where the EU is the agenda-setter. The Pact is not designed for a post-Western system where Southern partners are continuously diversifying away from conventional alliances. This mismatch renders the new framework analytically outdated and strategically underpowered.

Beyond the Pact

A credible EU strategy towards its Southern neighbors necessitates genuine co-ownership, departing from donor-recipient asymmetry towards cooperative agenda-setting, with Southern priorities shaping decision-making and agenda-setting. It should be reframed to prioritize flexibility and issue-specific coalitions over rigid, one-size-fits-all policies, converging on pragmatic interests such as climate resilience, energy trade, and skills-based mobility.

The EU should institutionalize collaborative agenda-setting through co-created country and sub-regional agreements, ones characterized by inclusive negotiations across different stakeholders. This would help incorporate the Southern voice and ownership into the Pact’s core, making the priorities more politically and institutionally viable.

Moreover, the Pact should streamline its regional tools by developing a single, easy-to-navigate Mediterranean funding track that combines existing instruments with on-demand funds for flagship projects in digital connectivity, mobility, and green energy. This would streamline administrative processes, allowing Southern partners to generate visible, high-impact outcomes on common priorities with the EU.

Most importantly, the Pact’s focus on conditionality should promote shared socio-economic goals with secure, long-term funding, rather than solely focusing on migration restriction. This would make the framework less transactional and more focused on delivering the Pact’s promises.

Combined, these approaches can gradually transform the Pact from a top-down, EU-centered, and security-focused framework to a more desirable, balanced, and credible regional collaboration. Otherwise, the Pact risks will further expose the EU’s geopolitical blind spots and entrenched institutional fatigue.

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