




## POLICY PAPER

# Towards the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone: which role for the EU?

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## Background

Even if it is still an issue, the idea of a Free Zone in the Middle East has a long history. Since the beginning, the ambitious initiative has encountered numerous obstacles.<sup>1</sup> The wider Middle Eastern region is a sensitive geopolitical area, defined by structural instability and crises. Furthermore, it is definitely a conflict-prone region, in which there are deep-rooted tensions with repercussions also beyond the blurred Middle Eastern borders.

In this regard, it is essential to define the Middle East as a distinct geographical area, since there is no proper and unique definition of the region.<sup>2</sup> In particular, when referring to the Free Zone – whether limited to nuclear weapons or broadened to all kinds of weapons of mass destruction –, the Middle East is intended as a wider region that includes also the North Africa. In fact, the Free Zone project comprises states from the Maghreb to the Mashrek, including all the Arab League countries<sup>3</sup>, Iran and Israel<sup>4</sup>.

The idea of a Middle East Free Zone has been proposed for the first time by Iran and Egypt in 1974 during the United Nations General Assembly<sup>5</sup>, referring specifically to a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. After the entry into force of the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1970, several initiatives took shape with the aim of strengthening non-proliferation through regional cooperation in the framework provided by the so-called Free Zones. Such regional initiatives were envisaged by the Article VII of the NPT, that states:

*Nothing in this Treaty affects the right of any group of States to conclude regional treaties in order to assure the total absence of nuclear weapons in their respective territories.*<sup>6</sup>

In this context, the idea of establishing a Free Zone in the Middle East took shape. The ambitious process towards the achievement of a Middle East Free Zone has always presented difficulties and challenges. Nevertheless, it gained a large support in the region and in the international community. In particular, the European Union has always endorsed the regional initiative, in order to avoid dangerous military build-ups and avert arms races at the European borders

Later came the proposal of broadening the initial idea of a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone into a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (ME WMDFFZ), not limited to nuclear weapons but

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<sup>1</sup>Tomisha Bino, James Reville and Chen Zak (eds.), *Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Voices from the Region*, UNIDIR, Geneva, 2022, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Erzsébet N. Rózsa, *Weapons of Mass Destruction in The Middle East and North Africa*, Menara Working Papers No. 24., November 2018, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Arab League States Parties: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. European External Action Service, *League of Arab States (LAS)*, August 2021, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/league-arab-states-las\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/league-arab-states-las_en) (accessed December 2022)

<sup>4</sup>Countries included in the Free Zone project: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

<sup>5</sup>United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 3263 (XXIX) on the Establishment of a Nuclear-Weapons-Free-Zone in the Region of the Middle East, A/RES/3263(XXIX), 9 December 1974.

<sup>6</sup> Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 1970, Article VII

including all kinds of weapons of mass destruction in an overall ban from the region. The proposal came from Egypt in 1990<sup>7</sup> and became an aim of the NPT Resolution on the Middle East in 1995<sup>8</sup>.

Subsequently, the main progresses ahead in this regard were made in 2010 during the NPT Review Conference<sup>9</sup> which defined the practical steps towards the ME WMDFZ and called all the Middle Eastern states to take part in a conference covering that specific topic, in order to engage in dialogue and negotiations. However, the 2012 Conference has been indefinitely postponed with consequent regret and disillusion. The main reason given was the irreconcilable disagreement of certain parties involved in the Conference, besides the security conditions in the MENA region at those times.<sup>10</sup> In fact, in those years protests, uprisings and rebellions spread across the Arab world, thus several Arab Countries were more focused on internal security concerns.

The lack of stability, security and peace in the wider Middle East, besides deep tensions among State parties, have been a major obstacle to the achievement of significant progresses towards the realization of a Free Zone. Furthermore, different security concerns in the region are still unsolved, one above all: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Besides this crucial question, also the Iranian and Israeli nuclear issues represent disruptive elements in the Middle Eastern stabilization process.

Therefore, in light of this polyhedric and challenging scenario, it is essential to seek answers to some of the main questions in this respect: which role could the EU play in the process towards the ME WMDFZ establishment? How could the EU through its policies positively contribute to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament in the wider Middle East?

## Current State of Play

The EU has always promoted arms control and non-proliferation as means to avoid conflict and thereby achieving lasting stability, peace and security in Europe and beyond. The European integration process itself began with an arms control and conflict prevention purpose.<sup>11</sup> The process took shape after WWII with the European Coal and Steel Community<sup>12</sup>. The main aim of this initiative was to put in common crucial resources through a process of economic integration in order to overcome history-rooted hostilities in the Old Continent, and thereby limiting the military build-up capacities of European powers and averting further wars.<sup>13</sup>

The strong EU commitment towards arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament has been expressed through different official documents, in the broader comprehensive framework provided by the Common Foreign and Security Policy<sup>14</sup>. In particular, a milestone in this regard is represented

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<sup>7</sup>Tomisha Bino, James Reville and Chen Zak (eds.), *Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Voices from the Region*, UNIDIR, Geneva, 2022, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup>United Nations, Resolution on the Middle East, NPT/CONF.1995/32/RES/1, 11 May 1995, in 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Final Document, Part I: Organization and work of the Conference, New York, 1995, p. 13-14

<sup>9</sup>United Nations, 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty of Nuclear Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Final Document, NPT/CONF.2010/50, New York, 2010

<sup>10</sup>Kelsey Davenport and Daniel Horner, *Meeting on Middle East WMD Postponed*, Arms Control Today, December 2012

<sup>11</sup>Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet, Schuman Declaration, Paris 1950

<sup>12</sup>Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, ECSC Treaty, Paris 1951

<sup>13</sup>Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet, Schuman Declaration, Paris 1950

<sup>14</sup>Further information on the European Commission Website: [https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/common-foreign-and-security-policy\\_en#:~:text=The%20Common%20Foreign%20and%20Security,of%20the%20United%20Nations%20Charter](https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/common-foreign-and-security-policy_en#:~:text=The%20Common%20Foreign%20and%20Security,of%20the%20United%20Nations%20Charter) (accessed December 2022)



# TOWARDS THE MIDDLE EAST WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION FREE ZONE: WHICH ROLE FOR THE EU?

by the European Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction<sup>15</sup>, as part of a broader European Security Strategy<sup>16</sup>, later updated with the European Union Global Strategy of 2016<sup>17</sup>. The WMD Strategy has been improved with regular updates, remarking the significant commitment of the EU in this regard. In particular, the WMD Strategy addresses the external dimension of Weapons of Mass Destruction proliferation. Specifically, the Strategy's text includes a clear reference to the necessity of tackling WMD proliferation beyond the EU borders:

*In areas of tension where there are WMD programmes, European interests are potentially under threat, either through conventional conflicts between States or through terrorist attacks.*<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the EU stated its commitment to prevent this threat even beyond its borders, wherever the European interests are at risk, by promoting and fostering arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament focused in particular on – but certainly not limited to – weapons of mass destruction.

For these reasons, even if the spread of these weapons represents a global challenge which needs multilateral efforts at global level to be tackled, the EU will prioritize those contexts in which its interests would be affected. Afterwards, the Strategy includes also a reference to a specific geographical scope of the EU action:

*as security in Europe is closely linked to security and stability in the Mediterranean, we should pay particular attention to the issue of proliferation in the Mediterranean area*<sup>19</sup>.

Since the Mediterranean region comprises several Middle Eastern and North African countries, it is thus clear that the realization of the Middle East WMD Free Zone should be considered a priority in the EU non-proliferation and disarmament agenda and treated accordingly, inasmuch it affects directly the EU security and stability. Nevertheless, besides the identification of EU priorities, the real challenge is to elaborate practical ways to realize the ambitious aims, by defining a more prominent role for the EU, as supporter, mediator and facilitator of such Free Zone in the wider Middle East.

Furthermore, identifying a path forward and a suitable role for the EU is particularly challenging, since among the regional actors there are deep-rooted contrasts and divisions. In fact, the countries in the Middle East support different approaches to the Free Zone initiative, leading to inconclusive results and a lack of a comprehensive agreement in this regard. One of the main focal point in this respect is the renowned debate around whether to prioritize the achievement of peaceful conditions or disarmament first.<sup>20</sup>

On one side, Israel deems the achievement of necessary security conditions in the region as an essential *sine qua non* in order to consider significant disarmament commitments towards the WMD

<sup>15</sup>Council of the European Union, EU Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, 15708/2003, Brussels, 2003

<sup>16</sup>Council of the European Union, European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World, 15895/2003, Brussels, 2003

<sup>17</sup>European External Action Service, European Union Global Strategy (EUGS): Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, 14392/16, Brussels, 2016

<sup>18</sup>Council of the European Union, EU Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, 15708/2003, Brussels, 2003, Chapter 1, Point 11

<sup>19</sup>Council of the European Union, EU Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, 15708/2003, Brussels, 2003, Chapter 2, Section B, Point 24

<sup>20</sup>Marc Finaud, Tony Robinson and Mona Saleh, *Is There a New Chance for Arms Control in the Middle East?*, Arms Control Today, June 2021

Free Zone establishment: *mutual recognition, normalization and peace, and the establishment of a regional security architecture*<sup>21</sup>. From the Israeli perspective, only afterwards it could be possible to engage in a dialogue about disarmament in the region.

On the other side, the Arab League countries support the “*disarmament first*”<sup>22</sup> approach towards the achievement of the WMD Free Zone, since from the Arab perspective the politics of nuclear ambiguity proposed by Israel is a major obstacle towards the achievement of trust in the region. Therefore, the Arab League countries perceive this politics as a threat to security and peace, and a disruptive element in an already complex scenario.

In this respect, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a significant problem, inasmuch it has represented for decades the most critical security concern at regional level and it still persists today, since a shared solution is far from being agreed. Therefore, it is fundamental to address such a divisive issue, which has been for years a source of tensions and instability, with repercussions far beyond the regional Middle Eastern dimension. In fact, the EU is strongly committed in the peace process through political support and financial aid.<sup>23</sup>

Another significant obstacle has been represented by the growing tensions with Iran in respect to the nuclear deal. In this regard the European Union has been able to play a significant role, demonstrating a renewed engagement in the efforts towards arms control and non-proliferation in the Middle East. In light of the central role played during the whole negotiation process leading to the achievement of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action<sup>24</sup> in 2015, the EU could aspire to give a significant contribution in the ME WMDFZ establishment process. In fact, the constant efforts in fostering the agreement, even after the US withdrawal, constituted a further confirmation of the European Union commitment in preserving a deal with Iran, which can be contextualized in a broader ambitious policy oriented to the promotion of conflict prevention through arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament in the framework provided by the Middle East WMD Free Zone project.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to the crucial question, *peace or disarmament first?*, the European Union is committed to promote both peace and disarmament. In fact, while disarmament is considered a preventive means aimed at avoiding further conflicts and war, by promoting a peaceful resolution of international controversies, on the other hand peaceful conditions or at least the lack of relevant security threats – real or perceived – can promote non-proliferation and disarmament:

*The best solution to the problem of proliferation of WMD is that countries should no longer feel they need them.*<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, the path forward is rich of challenges in the complex Middle Eastern context. This Summer the Tenth NPT Review Conference<sup>27</sup> took place and the EU had the chance to reaffirm its

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<sup>21</sup>Marc Finaud, Tony Robinson and Mona Saleh, *The Middle East: Is There a Light at the End of the Long Corridor?*, Pressenza, February 2021

<sup>22</sup>Ibid

<sup>23</sup>European External Action Service, *Middle East Peace Process*, August 2021: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/middle-east-peace-process\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/middle-east-peace-process_en) (accessed November 2022)

<sup>24</sup>European External Action Service, *Nuclear Agreement – JCPOA*, August 2021: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/nuclear-agreement-%E2%80%93-jcpoa\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/nuclear-agreement-%E2%80%93-jcpoa_en) (accessed November 2022)

<sup>25</sup>Ibid

<sup>26</sup>Council of the European Union, *EU Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 15708/2003, Brussels, 2003

<sup>27</sup>For further information visit the United Nations website on the Tenth NPT Review Conference: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/npt2020> (accessed November 2022)

support to the Middle East WMD Free Zone project. The EU Statement<sup>28</sup> delivered on this occasion expresses clearly the European Union commitment to the implementation of the 1995 NPT Resolution<sup>29</sup> and the 2010 NPT Review Conference on the Middle East<sup>30</sup>. Once more the European Union demonstrated its support to the realization of the ME WMDFZ initiative, towards stability, security and peace in the region. So, how could the European Union overcome and improve the current policy architecture and find renewed solutions to the challenges towards the Middle East WMD Free Zone?

## **Policy Recommendations**

In light of this complex and multi-faced scenario, the EU should reaffirm its efforts in order to provide a valuable contribution. Thus, the following recommendations aim at giving a renewed inputs to boost the EU engagement in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament in the Middle Eastern region, by enhancing the current policies while identifying possible rooms for improvement.

### ***-Fostering effective multilateralism***

The EU should continue promoting multilateral approaches at regional and international level, in order to define a shared path towards the common goal of establishing a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East. Multilateralism has always represented a core element of the EU<sup>31</sup>, both at the internal and external level. In fact, the only way to address complex challenges is through common efforts, by elaborating shared solutions.

Therefore, the EU should contribute in fostering multilateralism in the complex Middle Eastern context, through dialogue and diplomacy, in order to overcome history-rooted hostilities and thereby ensuring the achievement of agreed solutions not only for the establishment of the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone, but also for the overall future of the region.<sup>32</sup>

### ***-Promoting dialogue on the ME WMDFZ at international level***

In order to raise awareness around the ME WMDFZ Project, the EU together with the MENA countries involved in the initiative should promote dialogue around these topics in international fora. Engaging international organizations in the process could benefit the project, since it could gain relevance and attention even beyond the regional dimension.

Arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament represent transnational challenges which need common efforts to be tackled, therefore the EU could take advantage of the participation in several international settings in order to foster this initiative. The European Union has a significant presence at international level and, further, it cooperates with different international organizations in the peace and security field, committed in the promotion of non-proliferation and disarmament. Furthermore,

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<sup>28</sup>European External Action Service, *EU Statement on the 10th Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT): Main Committee II Regional Issues, including the Middle East*, August 2022, New York, available on the EEAS website: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-10th-review-conference-parties-treaty-non-proliferation\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-10th-review-conference-parties-treaty-non-proliferation_en) (accessed December 2022)

<sup>29</sup>United Nations, Resolution on the Middle East, NPT/CONF.1995/32/RES/1, 11 May 1995, in 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Final Document, Part I: Organization and work of the Conference, New York, 1995, p. 13-14

<sup>30</sup>United Nations, 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty of Nuclear Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Final Document, NPT/CONF.2010/50, New York, 2010

<sup>31</sup>European External Action Service, *Multilateral Relations*, August 2021: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/multilateral-relations\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/multilateral-relations_en) (accessed November 2022)

<sup>32</sup>Council of the European Union, *EU Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 15708/2003, Brussels, 2003, Chapter 2

the EU has also promoted different side projects, as one of the main donors in the arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament field, by sustaining financially several kind of initiatives that contribute to the efforts oriented in this sense<sup>33</sup>. For instance, the ME WMDFZ Project carried out by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)<sup>34</sup> is funded by the EU, with the aim to foster research and raise awareness on the matter, and thereby facilitating the establishment process.<sup>35</sup>

## ***-Support the civil society engagement***

The civil society could play a central role in the ME WMDFZ initiative.<sup>36</sup> Actually, the only draft treaty covering the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone has been elaborated by the civil society and in particular by the Middle East Treaty Organization (METO)<sup>37</sup>. Therefore, the EU should support the development of civil society organizations committed in the peace and disarmament field and encourage their engagement in order to foster an inclusive process towards the Free Zone institution. Ensuring the participation of civil society representatives is crucial not only to achieve noteworthy results, but also to broaden the discussion on the matter.

Furthermore, the civil society can also play a significant role in advocacy of the ME WMDFZ initiative, raising awareness among the population and thereby drawing the attention of governments and other relevant political stakeholders on these issues. For these reasons, the EU should support the development of an aware civil society and encourage its involvement in the ME WMDFZ project.

## ***-Addressing the Middle Eastern security context and the States' perceptions***

The lack of security, real or perceived, in the Middle East represents definitely a crucial obstacle towards the effective possibility of establishing a Free Zone in the region. Moreover, these security concerns are a limit even for engaging in constructive dialogue. For these reasons, it is essential to address the security perceptions of the countries in the region in order to create favourable circumstances for the promotion of diplomacy, arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.<sup>38</sup>

In this respect, the history-rooted Israeli-Palestinian issue represents a pivotal element, which needs to be addressed in order to achieve lasting and relevant results. Thus, besides the promotion of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament, the EU should carry on its commitment in the Middle East Peace Process<sup>39</sup>, through compromise, multilateralism and diplomatic dialogue.<sup>40</sup>

In order to reduce tensions and hostilities in the region and pave the way to the Free Zone initiative, it could be useful to implement several confidence and security building measures (CSBMs), tailored

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<sup>33</sup>European External Action Service, *Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Export Control*, August 2022: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/disarmament-non-proliferation-and-arms-export-control-0\\_en#15418](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/disarmament-non-proliferation-and-arms-export-control-0_en#15418) (accessed November 2022)

<sup>34</sup>For further information about the ME WMDFZ Project of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR): <https://unidir.org/programmes/middle-east-weapons-mass-destruction-free-zone> (accessed December 2022)

<sup>35</sup>Council of the European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) in Support of a Process of Confidence-Building Leading to the Establishment of a Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and All Other Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East*, 2019/938, Brussels, 2019

<sup>36</sup>Sharon Dolev and Leonardo Bandarra, *Towards an Achievable WMDFZ Treaty for the Middle East: Insights from Civil Society*, in *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, Vol. 5, 2022, Issue 1, Pages: 9-27

<sup>37</sup>For further information about METO: <https://www.wmd-free.me/> (accessed December 2022)

<sup>38</sup>Council of the European Union, *EU Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 15708/2003, Brussels, 2003, Chapter 2

<sup>39</sup>European External Action Service, *Middle East Peace Process*, August 2021: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/middle-east-peace-process\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/middle-east-peace-process_en) (accessed November 2022)

<sup>40</sup>Ibid



to the specific Middle Eastern security context.<sup>41</sup> The adoption of CSBMs could definitely have a positive impact on stability and security in the region, since transparency and trust can reduce threat and threat perception of the countries, and thereby preventing conflicts and avoiding escalations.<sup>42</sup>

## ***-Proceeding by steps and implementing lessons learned***

Since the Middle East Free Zone is a wide-ranging project, it should be addressed gradually. The pursuit of an overambitious goal, which seems utopian, can lead to deadlock, with consequent frustration and disillusion. Thus, it could be very useful to aim at intermediate objectives, taking a slow and progressive path towards the major goal of establishing the ME WMDFZ.

In this regard, the EU itself had a similar experience with the integration process towards the Union<sup>43</sup>, therefore – even if the two situations are very different from each other – the lessons learned from the gradual European integration process could be suitable as a model for the Middle Eastern WMD Free Zone initiative.

Furthermore, in order to achieve noteworthy results, all the countries in the region should be resolute towards the shared goal and they could prove their commitment by joining and respecting relevant international treaties in the arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament field, such as the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).<sup>44</sup>

Beside the international treaties, also specific agreements can be elaborated in order to address particular cases. In this regard, the Iran Nuclear Deal represents an excellent example of agreement concerning non-proliferation issues in the region. Furthermore, the Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action (JCPOA) is also proof of the valuable EU contribution as facilitator and mediator during the whole negotiation process and afterwards.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the Iran Nuclear Deal has been a significant demonstration of the EU common action and effective multilateralism. Thus, the JCPOA experience could definitely be considered not only a notable precedent for the real possibility of a positive EU contribution in the ME WMDFZ establishment process, but also as an overall role model for a gradual strategy, which address one issue at a time, and a source of inspiration for other similar initiatives in the region and beyond. Therefore, besides the several challenges and difficulties<sup>46</sup>, from this perspective the Iran Deal still represents a meaningful accomplishment, contextualized in the broader EU objective of fostering non-proliferation and disarmament in the wider Middle East.

## ***-Ensuring the regional ownership of the ME WMDFZ Project***

Last but not least, even if the European Union could play a valuable role in the achievement of the ME WMDFZ, the EU remains an external actor in the project. Therefore, the EU should play a

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<sup>41</sup>Marc Finaud and Anna Péczeli, *Modest Confidence- and Security-Building Measures for the Middle East: No-First Use Declarations, Transparency Measures, and Communication Structures*, in Academic Peace Orchestra Middle East (APOME), No. 20, July 2013

<sup>42</sup>Ibid

<sup>43</sup>Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet, Schuman Declaration, Paris 1950

<sup>44</sup>Erzsébet N. Rózsa, *Weapons of Mass Destruction in The Middle East and North Africa*, Menara Working Papers No. 24., November 2018, p. 18.

<sup>45</sup>European External Action Service, *Nuclear Agreement – JCPOA*, August 2021: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/nuclear-agreement-%E2%80%93-jcpoa\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/nuclear-agreement-%E2%80%93-jcpoa_en) (accessed November 2022)

<sup>46</sup>Kelsey Davenport, *Iran Nuclear Deal Talks Stall Again*, Arms Control Now, September 2022

supportive role in a process lead by regional actors, since it is essential to ensure the regional ownership of the project by the MENA countries involved in the initiative.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless the EU can still positively contributes to the Free Zone establishment process as facilitator and mediator, by promoting a comprehensive approach to security issues through arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation as means to avert war and achieve a lasting peace in the Middle Eastern region.

## Conclusion

The ambitious aim of this Policy Paper was to define the role of the European Union in the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone initiative, inasmuch it represents a significant aspect of the broader EU commitment in the region, concerning specifically the peace and security dimension, through arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

Since the topic is vast and complex, the focus has been put on the main aspects, trying to emphasize the core issues of the matter.

After an overview of the EU background in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament issues, demonstrating the renowned engagement in this field, the attention has been drawn to the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone project, outlining the most relevant issues at regional and international level, while trying to define the main opportunities and challenges ahead for a valuable EU contribution in this regard.

The complex Middle Eastern context has made the already ambitious project even more difficult to realize. Nevertheless, the EU has always remained committed to the promotion of stability, security and peace through arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament in the wider Middle Eastern region.

Therefore, taking also in consideration the complex geopolitical scenario, the continued EU engagement in the Middle East WMD Free Zone is remarkable. However, it is necessary to consider also the limits of the role the EU – as an external actor – can play in this respect.

In light of the actual state of the art, the Policy Paper provides a few recommendations in order to improve the current EU policy framework, by identifying the possible scope for improvements and the future path ahead, while acknowledging the most prominent results achieved so far, the constant EU commitment in this respect and the several challenges. Thus, the proposed recommendations aim at enhancing the EU engagement towards non-proliferation and disarmament in the complex Middle Eastern theatre.

In conclusion, the Policy Paper outlines how the EU should continue to sustain the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone initiative, as mediator and facilitator, by sharing the lessons learned and supporting the project, while always ensuring the local lead of the realization process.

In light of the accomplishments reached so far and the resolute commitment demonstrated, the EU has definitely a role to play in the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone initiative, intended as a significant step towards the achievement of lasting peace and security in the Middle Eastern region and beyond, through the promotion of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

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<sup>47</sup>For further information about extra-regional actors see also: Tomisha Bino, James Reville and Chen Zak (eds.), *Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Voices from the Region*, UNIDIR, Geneva, 2022, p. 23.

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