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“Political and Security Developments in the MENA region”

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Report

I. INTRODUCTION

1. A series of structural challenges continue to characterize the security situation in the Middle East and North Africa. Developments in hotspots such as Libya, Syria, and Palestine have further implications on the global security, particularly in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Additionally, increased instability in the Sahel, and issues related to water supply/security along the Nile, have raised new concerns for the region. Waves of protest in some European and MENA countries have equally signaled a widespread discontent from youth in the region.
2. In light of the current situation, parliamentary diplomacy remains an indispensable tool for international relations due to its unique capacity to engage in open dialogue, build trust, and create parallel initiatives aimed at peace, conflict resolution, and security in the region.
3. The report attempts to summarize some of the key developments relative to the security and political situation, and highlights those PAM initiatives aimed at contributing to constructive dialogue, resolving ongoing disputes, and increasing security in the region. Further recommendations for PAM member parliaments are outlined in the draft resolution connected to this report.

II. LIBYA

4. Throughout 2019, the situation in Libya continued to be source of concern for the international community and PAM, as the political crisis and security situation deteriorated further, with the deepening of divisions between the UN backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli and the internationally recognised House of Representatives in Tobruk. As indicated by the International Crisis Group “international rifts and competing regional ambitions remain an overarching conflict driver, locally interlocking competing narratives of political and military legitimacy”¹

¹ “Global Watch list – Second update 2019”, *International Crisis Group*, 17 July 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/watch-list-2019-second-update>

5. Last spring, on 4 April 2019, in preparation for an imminent National Conference of key actors on Libyan soil, under the aegis of the UN, and subsequent elections in the country, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres paid an official visit to Libya. However, on the same day, the Libyan National Army (LNA) launched an assault on the coalition of militias that control Tripoli, and that support the Government of National Accord.
6. This military escalation derailed the national reconciliation process. The military confrontation is still ongoing, with the LNA keeping up its offensive on Tripoli, associated to a campaign of airstrikes hitting the capital and Misrata's airports in November.² In December, General Haftar further escalated the fighting around Tripoli to seize the capital city³. Recent developments have witnessed a higher profile by the Russian Federation and Turkey supporting different parties.
7. Since the beginning of the November offensive, more than 200 civilians have been killed and more than 128,000 people had to flee their homes. More than 135,000 civilians remain in frontline areas, and an additional 270,000 people live in areas directly affected by the conflict.⁴ Further to that, the situation is exacerbated by the lack of humanitarian funding, as the UN Humanitarian Response Plan is funded only up to 50% (101 million dollars of 202 requested by the UN), with the EU, US, Italy and Germany paying the larger share, contributing 75% of the funds.⁵
8. The situation continues to be a major destabilising factor for the entire Euro-Mediterranean region. The security vacuum has offered an opportunity for criminal organisations to engage in human trafficking, migrant smuggling, proliferation and trafficking of arms, and other criminal activities.
9. For the sixth year in a row, in 2019, more than 1,000 people died crossing the Mediterranean Sea trying to reach Europe,⁶ with Libya continuing to serve as the central route. There are reports of widespread abuse of migrants by human traffickers, constituting modern day slavery and torture,⁷ while the renewed conflict has made more difficult for international organizations, such as IOM and UNHCR, to return to work safely in the Tripolitania or Fezzan regions.⁸
10. ISIL terrorists continue to be active in Libya and present an imminent threat for the entire region. It is estimated that in Libya alone there are some 500 or 700 ISIL fighters, including

² "December alerts and November trends in Libya", *International Crisis Group*, November 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/december-alerts-and-november-trends-2019#libya>

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/libya-haftar-announces-decisive-battle-capture-tripoli-191212205130743.html>

⁴ "SRSG Ghassan Salame briefing to the Security Council - 18 November 2019", *Ghassan Salame – Special Representative of the Secretary General in Libya*, 18 November 2019, <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/srsg-ghassan-salame-briefing-security-council-18-november-2019>

⁵ "Libya – 2019 Humanitarian Funding Overview", *OCHA*, 10 December 2019, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/20191210_lby_overall_funding.pdf

⁶ "More than 1,000 people dead in Mediterranean so far this year", *Al Jazeera*, 1 October 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/1000-people-dead-mediterranean-year-191001140843136.html>

⁷ "Trafficking in persons report", *US Department of State*, June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Trafficking-in-Persons-Report.pdf>

⁸ Varvelli A. and Villa M., "Italy's Libyan Conundrum: The risks of short-term thinking", *ISPI*, 26 November 2019, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/italys-libyan-conundrum-risks-short-term-thinking-24469>

foreigners.⁹ Moreover, following the killing of ISIL leader Abu-Bakr Al Baghdadi by US commandos in northern Syria, numerous ISIL groups in Libya have already pledged allegiance to the new leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Qurashi.¹⁰

11. During a 13-months data collection period, from January 2018 until March 2019, in Libya a total of 29 IS-affiliated attacks were recorded and 81 IS-inflicted fatalities counted. Next to these, in at least 26 cases, it was noticed some IS related movement, aimed at proving its presence by erecting checkpoints. ISIL has strong interest in Libya because it sees it as a safe haven, a potential recruitment base for western foreign fighters, and a potential entry for IS terrorists to Europe, in particular given the weak law enforcement capacity in the country.¹¹ To counter these threats, the Pentagon's Africa Command has coordinated at least three military airstrikes in 2019, killing 36 ISIL fighters at various locations in the country.¹²
12. The conflict on the southern outskirts of Tripoli is characterised by fluid frontlines, increasing involvement of foreign actors, of mercenaries and fighters from foreign private military companies.¹³ The repeated violation of the UN arms embargo by numerous states continues to add fuel to the confrontation. The UN Secretary General commented on the issue, saying "that several member states are violating that arms embargo and are saying publicly that they are doing so, which is something that I believe is unacceptable in relation to international law"¹⁴.
13. Moreover, the conflict is uniquely distinguished by the use of unmanned airpower and precision technology, with some analysts defining the conflict a "ground zero for Drone Wars".¹⁵ Particularly, a new generation of drones, which are significantly cheaper than their predecessors, are influencing conflict dynamics, as they allow for continued fighting for tactical advantages in a stalemate situation, with a decreased risk of military casualties.
14. In July, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) proposed a three-point peace plan¹⁶ for the resolution of the dispute:
 - Establishment of a truce between the parties (during the Eid al Adha)
 - Convening of an international meeting in preparation for a Libyan meeting
 - Convening of a conference reserved only to Libyan parties.

⁹ UN Secretary General, "United Nations Support Mission in Libya – Report of the Secretary General", *UN Security Council*, 26 August 2019, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_unsmil_s_2019_628e.pdf

¹⁰ "Isis in action", *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, 20 November 2019, <https://eyeonisisinlibya.com/isis-in-action/13-november-19-november-isis-libya-released-photos-showing-its-pledge-to-new-group-leader/>

¹¹ Trauthig I. K., "Assessing the Islamic State in Libya", 3rd conference of the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) Advisory Network on terrorism and propaganda, 9-10 April 2019, https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/inga_trauthig_islamic_state_libya.pdf

¹² Schmitt E., "U.S. Military Again Strikes ISIS in Southern Libya", *The New York Times*, 27 September 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/27/world/africa/strikes-isis-libya.html>

¹³ Ghassan Salame – Special Representative of the Secretary General in Libya, op. cit

¹⁴ <https://unric.org/it/remarks-of-the-secretary-general-at-joint-media-appearance-with-the-prime-minister-of-italy-giuseppe-conte-rome-18-december/>

¹⁵ Sabbagh D., Burke J. and McKernan B., "Libya is ground zero: drones on frontline in bloody civil war", *The Guardian*, 27 November 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/nov/27/libya-is-ground-zero-drones-on-frontline-in-bloody-civil-war>

¹⁶ António Guterres – UN Secretary General, op. cit.

15. Germany has since played a critical role to host an international meeting in Berlin. Several preliminary meetings have taken place, which have also included representatives of the US, France, the UK, Italy, Russia, Egypt, the UAE, Arab League and the European Union, among others. In these meetings, key actions needed for a resolution to the conflict were identified, including a ceasefire, the return to the Libyan-led political process, economic reform, implementation of the arms embargo and security reform, as well as the upholding of international human rights and humanitarian law norms.
16. On the margins of the 74th UN General Assembly, in a bilateral meeting with Mr. Ghassan Salamé, Special Representative and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), PAM was requested to assist with facilitating a parliamentary track of the national reconciliation efforts. Ahead of the Berlin conference, PAM is coordinating with UNSMIL preparations for a meeting of a selected group of MPs of good will, from all parties, at the new PAM regional office in Naples, under the auspices and chair of the UN Special Representative. PAM is at present in close contact with the UNSMIL, the Parliament in Tobruk and other actors in Libya, as well as with Rome and Berlin to ensure the success of this initiative.

III. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

17. The situation in the Middle East remained tense throughout 2019, with numerous instances of flare-ups between the Israeli Defense Forces and various armed groups in the Palestinian territory, notably Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. While the level of casualties was much lower than in 2018, casualties are still high and disproportionate. In fact, in 2019, reports indicate 134 Palestinians killed and 15,272 injured, compared to 10 fatalities and 120 injured among Israelis.¹⁷
18. On 25 March 2019, the US President Donald Trump signed a decree formally recognising the Golan Heights as part of Israeli territory, rather than occupied Syrian territory. This unilateral action was widely condemned by the international community, including key US allies.¹⁸
19. During the election campaign in September 2019, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that, if re-elected, he would oversee the annexation of parts of the West Bank occupied territories. This announcement has been deemed detrimental to the future of the peace process, and specifically to the Two-State solution. The international community opposed this announcement.
20. In November 2019, the US Administration reversed its own decades-long policy on Israeli settlements in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, and Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, announced that he will no longer consider them illegal. The policy change was also widely

¹⁷ “Data on casualties”, *UN OCHA*, Latest update 18/12/2019, <https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties>

¹⁸ “Golan Heights: Israel unveils 'Trump Heights' settlement”, *BBC News*, 16 June 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48656431>

considered inconsistent with international law,¹⁹ including with UN recalling that its position on the matter, which states that the settlements are illegal, remains unchanged.²⁰

21. PAM is carefully following the developments and remains in close contact with all relevant parties. In the near future, PAM intends to organize a dedicated meeting between Israeli and Palestinian politicians of good will to discuss available options to resume peace talks.
22. PAM also welcomes the announcement that new elections are planned to take place in Palestine in 2020. The issue was discussed at length at the 37th PAM Bureau meeting in Rome, and it was underscored that free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections would also add a fresh and strengthened mandate for elected Palestinian leaders to proceed in the peace process negotiations. For this reason, PAM offered to support the electoral process and to dispatch a small team of parliamentary observers, as it has done for other elections in the region, should Palestinian authorities wish so.
23. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has recently faced a severe budget crisis due to US funding cuts, encountered new challenges, as allegations of mismanagement led to the suspension of funding from other countries, and even led to the resignation of the head of the agency. Despite this setback, the Agency received an overwhelming show of support at the UN General Assembly to renew its mandate until 2023, with 170 countries voting in favour with only Israel and United States opposing the resolution.
24. The issue of UNRWA was discussed in detail at the 37th PAM Bureau meeting. In that occasion, it was recalled PAM support for the socio-economic role of that agency, until Palestinian authorities will have the resources and capacity to take over, and it was further decided for PAM President Alia Bouran and PAM Vice-President Hon. Belal Qasem to hold a meeting with the interim leadership of UNRWA, to discuss the prospects of the agency.

IV. SYRIA

25. The conflict in Syria continues to be the main point of instability in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The conflict is complex, multifaceted, constantly changing and involves active military engagement from numerous regional and global powers.
26. In March 2019, ISIL, which once controlled territory about the size of Britain, lost the last pocket with the fall of Baghuz. The resulting displacement of tens of thousands of ISIL survivors, including FTFs, women and children, who are held either in make-shift prisons

¹⁹ Hansler J., Gouette N. and Diamond J., “Pompeo announces reversal of longstanding US policy on Israeli settlements”, *CNN*, 18 November 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/18/politics/pompeo-west-bank-settlements-announcement/index.html>

²⁰ “UN ‘regrets’ new US position on legality of Israeli settlements”, *UN News*, 19 November 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/11/1051711>

or detention camps in north eastern Syria, represents a major security and humanitarian problem.

27. Additionally, there have been major shifts in the military situation in north east Syria. Throughout the recent years of the conflict, there was a tactical alliance between the United States and the armed group known as the so-called “Syrian Democratic Forces”, which are mainly composed of Kurdish fighters. The combination of US support, especially from the air, and the SDF presence on the ground was successful in fighting against ISIL in this part of Syria, and help liberating the ISIL self-proclaimed capital of Raqqa.
28. In October 2019, in a dramatic shift in US policy, the Trump Administration abandoned its alliance with the SDF by withdrawing / redeploying its troops in the area. This development paved the way for Turkey to launch a military campaign, code-named operation “Peace Spring”, into parts of north east Syria, close to the border with Turkey. According to Turkey, which considers SDF as a terrorist organization, the objective of the operation was to secure parts of territory in this area, in order to facilitate the return of Syrian refugees, of whom Turkey hosts over 3.5 million, more than any other country.
29. The abrupt US policy reversal on its alliance with Kurdish militias and the Turkish offensive into this territory was perceived as controversial by the international community and amongst NATO Allies. Since then, ISIL has tried to take advantage of the decreased presence and role of the SDF in north east Syria, and the terrorist activity has raised again. According to some authors, ISIL could use the death of Al-Baghdadi to rally its supporters in the name of revenge.²¹
30. With the abrupt withdrawal of US troops, in order to prevent an extended Turkish advance, the Kurdish negotiated an alliance with the Syrian Government in Damascus, allowing the Syrian Army to enter key parts of north east Syria.
31. These developments prompted an issue of concern from the international community, PAM and other actors regarding the fate and treat represented by ISIL survivors detained in the region. PAM advocated for the creation of a UN mandated “Mission of Inquiry” to establish the nationality/citizenship of foreign fighters, as well as their surviving families and especially unidentified children, in order to facilitate international cooperation. In this framework, countries of origin may repatriate, prosecute and rehabilitate them accordingly. In response to the proposal, and shortly before the launch of the Turkish offensive, PAM was asked by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in September to consider conducting a fact-finding mission to North East Syria, an initiative which has been postponed until the security situation improves.

²¹ Khatib L., “Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: What his death means for ISIS in Syria”, Chatham House, 28 October 2019, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-what-his-death-means-isis-syria>

32. In addition to the developments in the north east region, there has been growing concern by many countries over the presence of Iranian military in southern Syria, close to the borders with Israel and Jordan. Israel claims to have been targeted by Iranian missile strikes originating from Syrian territory and, in response, Israeli military have conducted several strikes on military targets in Syrian territory.²²
33. Meanwhile, international processes to end the conflict continued to gain momentum. Constructive talks in the format of the Astana process, brokered by Russia, Turkey and Iran, continued to take place in Kazakhstan, and under the auspices of the UN-lead track for national reconciliation, a Syrian Constitutional Committee begun its work in Geneva. The committee is made up of 150 representatives, nominated in equal numbers by the Government, opposition and civil society.

V. WATER SECURITY IN THE NILE REGION

34. In 2011, the Ethiopian government announced plans to build the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa, with a cost estimated between \$4 billion to \$6.4 billion, and a production of some 15 billion kilowatt hours of electricity.²³ The dam, called “Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam”, is being built on the Ethiopian-Sudanese border and will be filled by the Blue Nile waters.
35. Alongside the Ethiopian benefits, there are different impacts on other countries in the region. While Sudan considers the dam useful for its country, due to the possibility that it will reduce the Nile floods and, consequently, the loss of harvest, Egypt is concerned with the consequent loss of vital water supply, due to the decrease of the Nile and Lake Nasser’s water capacity. Engineers calculated that the reservoir will take 5 to 15 years to fill and flows from the Nile into Egypt could drop by as much as 25%. This could mean a loss of fertility for the land alongside the Nile’s shore, a loss of energy security for industries, and loss of vital water security for the population, as Egypt takes 90% of its fresh water from Nile River. All three countries face an exponential growth of their populations, which lead to an increase in their need for water to ensure food security and economic development.²⁴
36. In 2019, this project has led to tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt, and the matter became a concern also for PAM in the context of regional security.
37. This is why, in September and October 2019, PAM delegates travelled to the United States to take part in the UN General Assembly in New York and for high-Level consultations with the US Administration in Washington DC. Inter-alia, PAM has raised this issue with the US State Department and the White House National Security Council. Shortly

²² “Israel carries out ‘wide-scale strikes’ on Iranian forces in Syria”, *BBC News*, 20 November 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50485521>

²³ Schlanger Z., “250 million people rely on the Nile for water that may not exist by 2080”, *Quartz*, 17 September 2019, <https://qz.com/1709757/climate-change-threatens-the-niles-critical-water-supply/>

²⁴ Palios E., “Nile Basin Water Wars: The Never-Ending Struggle Between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan”, *Geopolitical Monitor*, 4 November 2019, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/nile-basin-water-wars-the-never-ending-struggle-between-egypt-ethiopia-and-sudan/>

afterwards, it was appreciated that the United States had changed its approach and had offered to mediate negotiations between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia to arrive at an acceptable resolution to this dispute. Several high-level meetings were consequently held, and the negotiations are ongoing.

VI. INCREASING INSTABILITY IN THE SAHEL

38. The security situation in the Sahel region is worsening, becoming “an axis for debilitating security challenges across Africa, resulting in irregular migration of people across the continent and even into Europe”.²⁵ Many countries of the Sahel are experiencing a security and governance vacuum, which is being filled by non-state armed groups, which include violent extremist organizations, self-defence militias, criminal gangs, insurgencies, warlords, and local clans.²⁶ This has led to a spike in violence in countries like Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, and northern Nigeria.
39. Terrorist groups, bolstered also by foreign fighters experienced in battles in Iraq and Syria, are exploiting low-intensity conflicts to further destabilise the situation. The principal insurgent activities in the region are attributable to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Islamic State's West Africa Province, formerly known as Boko Haram. These can build up on the large operating freedom offered by the bad or weak governance in the region, where countries are among the poorest and most heavily indebted in the world.²⁷ In the event that a second attempt is made to establishing an extremist “caliphate”, similar to that which lost its territory in Iraq and Syria, the conditions for the establishment of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara are ripe.²⁸ The effects of such well-planned terrorist actions are significant, and recently a large scale attack in Niger claimed the lives of 71 soldiers.
40. In the course of consultations with the UN on this issue, PAM learned that most of the international resources earmarked for socio-economic development in the Sahel are being re-diverted to pay local security forces and, of the amounts pledged, only 10% materializes. This results in further lack of economic opportunity for the local populations, which further adds to the destabilisation of the region, causing more violence and population movements.
41. PAM is closely following the situation in this region. Moreover, PAM is working closely with the newly established NATO Strategic Direction South (SDS) Hub in Naples to increase information sharing on the latest developments in the Sahel region. PAM, together with NATO SDS Hub and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly is also planning a dedicated

²⁵ Bala S. and Ali R., “Governance, Climate Change and Security Challenges: The case of lake Chad”, in *Governance and Security in the Sahel: Tackling Mobility, Demography and Climate Change*, Venturi B. (ed), April 2019, FEPS and IAI, <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/9788833652054.pdf>

²⁶ NSDS HUB - in collaboration with the University of Kent, “Informal governance of nonstate armed groups in the Sahel”, October 2019, https://thesouthernhub.org/resources/site1/General/NSD-S%20Hub%20Publications/Informal_Governance_of_non_state_armed_groups_in_the_Sahel.pdf

²⁷ Bala and Ali, op. cit.

²⁸ Sambe B., “How the Sahel has slipped into a new post-Jihadist era”, Timbuktu Institute – African Centre for Peace Studies, 27 November 2019, <https://timbuktu-institute.org/index.php/toutes-l-actualites/item/294-how-the-sahel-has-slipped-into-a-new-post-jihadist-era-by-dr-bakary-sambe>

event in Naples in fall 2020 to explore ways to strengthen the cooperation on security issues between the North Atlantic, Euro-Mediterranean and the Sahel regions.

VII. DEMONSTRATIONS IN MENA REGION

42. 2019 was also characterised by large-scale rallies in a number of MENA countries, which started in Sudan in December 2018 and extended to Algeria, Lebanon and Iraq. While not escalating to conflict, these protest movements are important to be taken into account when assessing the security of the region, especially in the post Arab Spring context. Some researchers have named this wave of protest “a Second Arab Spring” or “Arab Spring 2.0”, with root causes for protests still similar to those of 2011/2, such as lack of social justice, large unemployment and lack of transparency.²⁹
43. Besides, researchers point out at “lack of trust in all political leaders [which] has reached a point of no return”.³⁰ Given the rising mistrust towards leaders in power and in the opposition, “with no trusted institution in the region who could carry out people’s rightful demands”,³¹ and with calls to “ignite a debate about the sort of economic future citizens want”³².
44. An announcement of intent to contest another electoral term by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika lead to the largest protests in decades in Algeria. The movement lead to his resignation in April 2019. However, the peaceful mass demonstrations continued throughout the year, demanding a change of the political system, until transparent presidential elections took place in December.
45. Beginning in October 2019, Lebanon experienced large-scale protests, which were initially triggered by a number of newly introduced taxes, including internet-based services, such as *Whatsapp*. These developments were followed by a related financial crisis, in which Lebanon’s economy is projected to shrink by 2.5 by the end of 2019, and the local currency, pegged to the US dollar, is struggling to maintain its stability in the wake of a severe foreign currency shortage in the country³³. Increasingly, people started taking to the streets to protest austerity measures, lack of solutions to the economic crisis, sectarianism, and corruption, which, as referred by some local politician, has become a “stolen country”.³⁴ The demonstrations lead to the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri, and yet demonstrations persisted beyond his resignation.

²⁹ Ghanem D. and Kausch K., “Reaching a turning point? Crises and uprisings in the MENA Region”, *ISPI*, 12 December 2019, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/reaching-turning-point-crises-and-uprisings-mena-region-24608>; Muasher M., “Is this the Arab Spring 2.0?”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 October 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/30/is-this-arab-spring-2.0-pub-80220>

³⁰ Muasher, op. cit.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Mahroum S., “The Arab World Needs a Brexit Debate”, Project Syndicate, 5 December 2019, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/arab-world-needs-brexite-debate-by-sami-mahroum-2019-12>

³³ <https://www.thenational.ae/business/economy/lebanon-faces-extreme-macroeconomic-instability-without-external-support-moody-says-1.952719>

³⁴ Makhzoumi F., “Reaching a turning point? Crises and uprisings in the MENA Region”, *ISPI*, 12 December 2019, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/reaching-turning-point-crises-and-uprisings-mena-region-24608>

46. While the protests in Algeria and Lebanon have been largely peaceful, the situation in Iraq has been much more violent, resulting in over 400 deaths and thousands of injuries as results of crackdowns.³⁵ The protests have also led to the announced resignation of the country's Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi.

VIII. PAM PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY

47. PAM strongly believes in the value that parliamentary diplomacy brings to international relations, as a unique parallel track of dialogue among elected officials. This is more flexible at seeking out common ground and collective solutions than those that could often be achieved at the intergovernmental level. In addition to the specific actions on priority areas, already mentioned above, PAM continues to facilitate constructive political dialogue among its members through various initiatives and platforms.

48. In January 2019, PAM organised in cooperation with the Parliament of Malta the meeting of the Parliamentary dimension of the 5+5 West Mediterranean Dialogue, which is a unique sub-regional forum that allows neighbouring countries to address common issues, and this year focused on sustainable development, migration, and youth.

49. In 2019, PAM continued to constructively engage with other inter-parliamentary institutions aimed at facilitating political dialogue towards security and peace, including with the NATO PA, IPU, Arab IPU, PACE, PABSEC, OSCE PA, IPA CIS, Arab Parliament, PUIC, Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, and UfM PA, among others.

50. Meanwhile, PAM itself, remains a unique political forum, where senior politicians from Europe, America, Russia, Israel, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Algeria, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia among others, continue to sit around the same table and discuss concrete issues related to the stability, security, human rights, economic development, and trade integration in the region, and often achieve political consensus on these issues through PAM Resolutions.

51. Many areas of the MENA region remain volatile, lacking stability and security. As security in the Euro-Mediterranean region is a shared concern and is closely interconnected, all efforts should be made to achieve conflict resolution and stabilization in the region through political dialogue. PAM should continue actively monitoring all the developments in the region and continue to seek out opportunities to engage in constructive parliamentary diplomacy to support these efforts.

³⁵ Ghaith A. in Najf and Graham-Harrison E., "Defiant protesters back in Baghdad square within an hour of slaughter", *The Guardian*, 7 December 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/07/protesters-return-baghdad-square-after-slaughter-iraq>