

HOW IS THE EUROPEAN UNION SECURITIZING CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST?*

Climate change, resource extraction, and the impact of those on the environment, and social and economic life have been a long-standing concern for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Middle Eastern countries are generally acknowledged to be among the states most vulnerable to the diverse impacts of climate change, including increasing heatwaves, decreasing precipitation, droughts, and rising sea levels. The climate challenges impact the pre-existing conflicts in various fields and reinforce the regional governments' instabilities in the Middle East.

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decreasing precipitation, droughts, and rising sea levels. Adapting to difficult conditions is often viewed as an effort that results in a waste of time and resources. The climate challenges impact the pre-existing conflicts in various fields and reinforce the regional governments' instabilities in the Middle East.¹

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The European Union's approach towards climate change in the Middle East is composed of various concerns and perceptions of urgency due to the changing characteristics of the region.

Given the geopolitical significance of the Middle East, it is crucial to examine the intricate relationship between climate change and instability in the region.

The arid feature of the Middle East's climate has been merged with the changing political balances and economic bindings on limited natural resources. This situation poses serious security problems in the MENA region, Europe, and the rest of the world. Climate change may be a catalyst as it plays a role as a threat multiplier and intensifies existing conflicts that harm regional instability.

Europe as a region and the European Union (EU) and European public and non-governmental organizations have been producing reports and developing policies to adapt to climate change and to deal with its ramifications. These organizations maintain connections with their members at both the national and EU levels. Notably, their influence extends beyond domestic concerns, as they can also participate in intergovernmental processes related to justice and home affairs, as well as in external policies that encompass social and economic issues.²

The EU's general approach to events has generally focused on various fields, including human rights and its violations, peacebuilding, and international cooperation. However, in this study, I will focus on environmental discussions within the context of European securitization. Focusing on Syria can illuminate the devastating nexus between climate change and conflict, revealing how these intertwined forces inflict harm on civilians through food insecurity, water scarcity, and mass displacement. To further clarify and relate this issue, it can be said that the impacts of climate change can be measured and assessed according to their relationship with local political, social, and economic situations in the region.³ Given the European perspective, the effects of mass migration, for instance, are felt in various political, economic, and social fields. With migration, Europe is facing problems





in many interrelated areas such as resource allocation, housing, health, and education. Added to this are infrastructure problems. Another challenge is cultural integration, which exacerbates the environmental refugee problem. It feeds the heterogeneity of societies and is felt in all aspects of daily life. Moreover, economic and social difficulties encourage anti-immigration policies, disrupting Europe's unity and shaping its domestic and foreign policies.⁴

This article will seek to answer the following question: "How is the European Union securitizing climate change in the Middle East?". This question aims to illuminate the European Union's approach to addressing environmental impacts and concerns in this region.

European Union's Perspective on Climate Change in the Middle East

The European Union's approach towards climate change in the Middle East is composed of various concerns and perceptions of urgency due to the changing characteristics of the region. This perspective, accordingly, can be acknowledged as multifaceted and complicated. The EU, with all its branches, recognizes the importance of addressing climate change due to its impact on existing water, social, and nutritional problems. Besides these, it cannot be overlooked that Europe's concerns are largely driven by the migration flow from that part of the world.⁵ In this context, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that 3.6 billion people in the Middle East are remarkably vulnerable to climate change damage. Indeed, it is currently feared that climate-related disasters and consequent migration waves will become more frequent and serious.⁶

The EU leadership in mitigation plans regarding the disadvantages of climate change in each part of the world has been sought since the early 2000s. Thus, the regional strategic plans developed by the EU and the cooperation in the most vulnerable parts of the world have been acknowledged as necessary actions to effectively address the security risks posed by climate change.

The long drought resulting from climate change has been accepted as the most important reason for the Syrian civil war. During that time, people in the rural areas were forced to move into cities, and it further deteriorated the existing instabilities of the Assad regime. This situation partially allowed militant groups such as the Islamic State (IS) to apply violence so that they could control the water and other limited resources. At this point, the report argued that the weaponization of natural resources over water and infrastructure was adopted as a part of the insurgency.

In addition to that, while looking at the discourses of the prominent institutions of the EU, climate challenges as a threat multiplier tend to deteriorate existing conflicts and destabilizations.⁷ According to the European Commission, the adverse effects of climate change are not only related to human nature but also to various risks in the field of politics and security, which could directly threaten Europe's interests. The increase in violence and fragility, coupled with the proliferation of economic, social, and political conflicts, has also jeopardized security.

For this reason, the EU finds itself in a position where it must respond comprehensively to the risks of climate change in the Middle East for the security of Europe. In this respect, all initiatives in the Middle East aim at sustaining European interests through involvement in several policy processes.⁸

The literature accordingly advises that the EU's capacity can be strengthened and intensified with the following institutions: the Institute for Security Studies, the EU Satellite Centre (EUSC), the EU Joint Situation Centre (SITCEN), the EU Network of Energy Correspondents



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developed by the EU and the cooperation in the most vulnerable parts of the world have been acknowledged as necessary actions to effectively address the security risks posed by climate change. Hence, the literature emphasizes that the EU and its member states must bolster their planning and response capabilities by enhancing civil protection measures and leveraging all available crisis management and disaster response instruments, both civilian and military.⁹ Given the current events in the Middle Eastern region, regional governments must prioritize climate change, as they can barely address transformative change. At this point, the EU's narrative is that it has always taken necessary steps towards climate change in the Middle East to compensate for the gap between the relevant policies and the environmental challenges.¹⁰ Strengthening regional and national economic conditions has also always been on the agenda. Even if the organizations in the region are not directly under the framework of the EU, the EU relationship and influence can be seen in each of them through the cooperation in the projects carried out. For instance, the EU handled the discussion on the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland within the scope of the United Nations High Commissioner Refugees (UNHCR).¹¹

Given the existing literature and the above-mentioned statements, the European approach cannot be analyzed through one dimension. This article identifies the following sub-themes: security, partnership, migration, trade, energy, decarbonization, and the case of Syria.

Security

Given the comprehensive and general information about the relationship between climate change and its effects, the issue of security is critical from the perspective of Europe. Europe's concern about security focuses on international security, particularly due to unchecked migration and planning for land use.¹² According to an analysis of the European Parliament, the nexus

(NESCO), the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security and Joint Research Centers. The reason is that various effective early warning systems against climate change demand close attention to situations where fragile states, rising political extremism, resource competition, environmental and economic strain, vulnerable infrastructure, contested borders, human rights violations, and potential mass migrations pose significant risks. Additionally, the EU leadership in mitigation plans regarding the disadvantageous of climate change in each part of the world has been sought since the early 2000s. Thus, the regional strategic plans

While the EU has traditionally viewed certain Middle Eastern nations, such as Syria, as strategic partners within the Mediterranean region, various political, economic, and institutional impediments have hindered the development of a unified EU Mediterranean policy.

between climate change and security should be further tackled within the scope of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which is the central framework aiming at improving an effective European security and defense strategy, mitigating conflicts, and consolidating international security and defense. Data shows that Middle Eastern countries are vulnerable to the negative effects of environmental challenges, as they increase the possibility of social, economic, or political crises due to food scarcity, regional instability, and lack of resources.¹³ According to the report of the European Parliament published in 2021, these issues have been steadily emphasized within the scope of the EU's concerns regarding migration and terrorism.¹⁴ Since the existence of livestock, accordingly, has been under threat for many years, the conditions in the rural areas are getting devastated. Besides these, inequalities in various fields in the MENA region, particularly the lack of water resources, have triggered social tensions and deteriorated the existing conflicts. For instance, the long drought resulting from climate change has been accepted as the most important reason for the Syrian civil war. During that time, people in the rural areas were forced to move into cities, and it further deteriorated the existing instabilities of the Assad regime. This situation partially allowed militant groups such as the Islamic State (IS) to apply violence so that they could control the water and other limited resources. At this point, the report argued that the weaponization of natural resources over water and infrastructure was adopted as a part of the insurgency.¹⁵

As noted above, instability and resource scarcity stemming from climate challenges can be strategically exploited by armed groups, organized criminal networks, and corrupt or authoritarian governments, encompassing crimes against the environment.¹⁶ According to Marwa Daoudy, both state and non-state players tend to use

the limited resources of the region, especially water, to weaponize the relationship between climate change and security.¹⁷ Security concerns have accordingly been accelerating due to the tension and violations at the regional and international levels. International Institute for Sustainable Development, on the other hand, has compiled the risks that stem from climate change that interact with the tensions and potential conflicts; firstly, climate change has an important potential to increase the struggle over restricted water resources, and it makes the cooperation and negotiation of peace agreements more complicated. This may deteriorate the national instability. Secondly, climate change directly impacts food insecurity and increases the hazard regarding preserving or reclaiming the vulnerable lands. Agricultural production



in local areas decreases, and food security gets further politicized. This situation is also affected by the growth of the population, as increasing demands lead to rising domestic pressure, as in Syria. Thirdly, governments' capacity to provide social or economic services and create job opportunities can decrease, leading to economic growth and social stability. The fourth risk is the militarization of natural resources. Control over the existing natural resources may lead to increasing tension and potentially make the issue of national security more complex. That is why limited resources can be perceived as a triggering factor for militarization. Lastly, inactivity on climate change by Western countries can reinforce the perception of distrust and can jeopardize the European view of "good global citizens".¹⁸

The EU's perspective on climate-related security issues is based on the rising awareness and encouraging effective actions. Additionally, their perception of climate security has been developed by the consideration of "threat multiplier," and many policy initiatives have been created so that they can combine climate-related issues with their foreign and security policies.

It is believed that destabilization in any country, particularly in the most vulnerable ones, can deteriorate an existing problem or create a new one that will shape global security trends. Indeed, it is feared that global

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governance may be challenged by climate change because climate change increases the tension in the relationship between international peace and security. Many factors support the argument since climate change has the potential to trigger migratory movements, unsanitary conditions, social insurrection, and insecurity.¹⁹ Therefore, the EC's report on climate and international security mentions that if countries, institutions, and human communities act together against climate challenges, the destructive potential can be reversed and global governance can be strengthened instead.²⁰

Partnership

The EU exists with its many branches, Member States, and different perspectives on the relationship between climate change and security in the Middle East. It has played an important role in evolving effective strategies towards climate challenges and tackling devastating climate impacts due to political, economic, and geographical relations with the region. Therefore, the EU has taken a role in many technical projects in the MENA region concerning climate change and its effects.²¹ The EU accordingly approaches energy dependency with

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certain Middle Eastern nations, such as Syria, as strategic partners within the Mediterranean region, various political, economic, and institutional impediments have hindered the development of a unified EU Mediterranean policy. Despite being presented as complementary aspects of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) embody distinct approaches to the region, as evidenced by their core principles: “partnership” for the EMP and “neighborhood” for the ENP.²⁴

On the other hand, the EU is not the only transnational actor in the battle against climate change. The UN certainly has a crucial role in determining strategies against climate change, and at the point of cooperation, the EU’s attempt to support the UN has enforced the coordination between Member States, regional organizations, NGOs, and civil society. The EU emphasizes the importance of comprehensive dialogue regarding climate security as it has been related to political radicalization, conflicts over natural resources, or regional border disagreements. It can be said that the EU’s interference in each field of climate challenges and climate security is based on “the system of multilateralism”.²⁵

The term “climate security” has been on the agenda of EU due to the linkage between climate change and security. It has a determinant impact on EU’s foreign policy actions aiming to ameliorate the strategic, social, political, and economic effects of climate change.²⁶ Given the perspective of the EU, according to the latest reports about the environmental challenges in the Middle East, the EU and its Member States made crucial investments worth €7 billion in the region, and 42% of these investments were related to ameliorating the destructive effects of climate change. Additionally, the EU, which represents the European perspective in the MENA region, got involved in a lot of diplomatic relations to sustain and strengthen the interest in climate change and its effects. For instance, financial aid provided to reach “Green Hydrogen” is one of the most important investments in renewable energy.²⁷

great concern. Thus, increasing energy requirements leads them to consider energy security. This concern contains factors such as climate change and security, as the dynamic between them depends on geographical features.²² For instance, the Barcelona Declaration, signed in November 1995, shows that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) wanted to sustain innovative security strategies, including energy or food. According to the literature, the Barcelona Process is taken seriously because it gives priority to energy security.²³

Besides these, while the EU has traditionally viewed

The scarcity of resources has brought various discussions regarding food security, accessibility to renewable energy materials, and free trade policies. In this context, according to the Carnegie Endowment's report regarding the European Union's security approach toward the Middle East, reducing carbon emissions is the most crucial topic on the agenda, particularly since the outbreak of the Arab Spring.

According to the Joint Communication between the European Parliament and the Council, the linkage between climate change and environmental difficulties has a direct impact on food security, as it decreases the fertility of important crops such as rice or wheat in the Middle East. In addition to that, inconsistent food production leads to water scarcity. Furthermore, by 2050, projections suggest that over a billion individuals may face inadequate access to water, soil degradation could escalate to 90%, and the need for food is expected to grow by 60%.²⁸ According to the 2022 IPCC report, concerns regarding security in various fields, particularly in food security, will accelerate due to the impacts of global warming, drought, and changing precipitation rates. In this context, the EC mentioned that the EU played a supportive role in the most vulnerable regions, including MENA countries, to establish international cooperation regarding the research and innovation studies for food security.²⁹ According to the Commission's report, the EU has become a powerful actor in the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) for this purpose. These attempts are accepted as the necessary steps to adapt to climate challenges, protect the existing resources, and improve effective approaches to applying landscape management or agroecology. Moreover, food prices and food insecurity have been regularly followed by the Commission to compare and coordinate with other international groups or organizations. This situation is analyzed by using the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) to compare the stock levels in the vulnerable countries. It oversees the demand for goods where global inventories are low by sending precise market signals to boost production through sustainable methods. Additionally, it plays a crucial role

in enhancing humanitarian support to nations facing food shortages and those impacted by conflicts in regions like MENA, Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁰ On the other hand, not only the EU, but AECID - the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation is also interested in the vulnerable countries in the Middle East through the ACERCA Program. AECID aims at zero hunger, sanitized areas, improved health conditions, and comprehensive education in the disadvantaged areas in the Middle East by promoting agricultural innovation and economic development regarding climate change.³¹

Migration

The migration issue is handled by diverse actors such as The Issue-Based Coalition on Migration (IBC/M) in the Arab countries, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the League of Arab States, the EU or the Regional United Nations Network on Migration in the Arab region. The worsening of environmental conditions due to climate-related events like droughts, sea-level rise, flash flooding, and the expansion of deserts typically exacerbates factors that drive people to migrate and



extend the length of their displacement. Simultaneously, the spread of urban areas, the degradation of land, and the intensifying competition for limited resources tend to escalate conflicts and tensions, which may lead to further displacement and compulsory migration. In the Arab region, the situation mirrors these trends. Between 2010 and 2019, floods accounted for 58% of the individuals who were displaced due to natural disasters. Moreover, intense storms have led people to uproot states including Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen. In 2020, Arab nations bore the brunt of a global movement, taking in nearly 15% of the world's migrants and refugees while witnessing the internal displacement of millions due to conflict and natural disasters. Within their borders, 44% of displaced people remained, highlighting the region's complex role as both a host and a source of migration flows.³²

Looking at the aftermath of the Arab Spring, experts argue that Europe may be indirectly impacted by climate migration even if it does not directly lead to displacement into the EU.³³ They believe large-scale movements within developing countries or between them could cause instability and conflicts, ultimately affecting Western interests. Even though

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the EU has launched various cooperation programs addressing this issue, funding dedicated to this area remains significantly lower compared to spending on border control measures. For instance, the Stockholm program (2010-2014), outlining the EU's internal security strategy, mentions climate change's security implications for migration patterns.³⁴ Similarly, an EC project funded for migration and asylum cooperation highlights the need for work on the link between climate and migration. However, these pronouncements have not translated into a comprehensive approach to address climate-induced migration. Although EU leaders



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publicly recognize climate change as a potential driver of migration, their actions do not fully reflect this concern. European ministers do not favor restrictive immigration implementations, namely the “fortress Europe” approach. On the other hand, cooperation with other countries to regulate climate migration is preferable. That is why, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the migration policies of the EU have been acknowledged as ambivalent and the rules regarding migration into Europe have become increasingly restrictive. At its root, the EU’s main focus is on disaster response, not disaster preparedness.³⁵

Given this information, the above-mentioned agencies reached a common consensus that the negative impacts of climate challenges in Middle Eastern countries must be taken seriously to prevent the diverse impacts of displacement. New policies should be implemented within this scope. Policies focusing on adapting labor mobility to address climate change and creating fair transition strategies should be developed with the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders. This process should involve a social dialogue that brings together voices from employer groups, worker unions, and civil society entities. The need for coordinated action in addressing the issues of migration and displacement brought on by climate change is critical, especially considering the threats they pose to peace and security. It is equally important to establish and maintain migration pathways that are secure, well-managed, and consistent, especially under circumstances of severe climate change impacts, such as the ones seen in natural disasters.³⁶

Trade, Energy, and Decarbonization

The MENA region has been continuously impacted by poverty or lack of basic humanitarian needs stemming



from the negative impacts of climate change. However, this region also has a very significant place in the international agenda due to its rich natural resources and potential for agriculture, despite the concerns about food insecurity. Furthermore, these rich resources and geographic advantages require an interdependent focus on energy, decarbonization, and trade. According to the literature, MENA is certainly very compatible with various kinds of investments, generating development energy policies, enhancing water-related activities like food production, and establishing relationships regarding trade, especially as emphasized in the post-Arab Spring period. In this context, the potential of the MENA region has been supported by the EU through environmental and security cooperation with the UN and other partners, and determining economic integration goals within the sphere of fair trade.³⁷

Environmental challenges have important impacts not only on political or social fields but also the economic



security. It means that climate change plays a role in shaping many security areas through its impact on trade or other economic operations.³⁸ On the other hand, one of the key challenges related to trade is how to reconcile the potentially destabilizing impacts of climate change with the need for economic transition, including building planning capacity for different climate policies to maintain economic security.³⁹ From a trade perspective, climate change projections focus on a supply-oriented approach, and this issue stems from concerns about the use of natural resources and energy supply within the framework of the scarcity problem. As a result, the environmental repercussions of climate change experienced at the local level ripple through global economic interconnectedness, affecting various regions and industries. Since the EU is contingent upon foreign resources for managing consumption, the assessment of transfrontier effects is crucial.⁴⁰ In this context, various cross-border models are being considered by the EU, such as environmentally-extended multiregional input-

output analysis (EE-MRIO). This approach is based on traditional input-output analysis, which is included in the regular flow of goods between industries within an economy. EE-MRIO has been used in analyzing environmental data, like greenhouse gas emissions or water use, in the analysis. The EU's various environmental approaches concerning trade and consumption are frequently examined for climatic phenomena occurring inside and outside of existing member states using the EEMRIO analysis. An assessment tool like EEMRIO allows policymakers in the Middle East to evaluate the environmental consequences of economic activities, like oil production and infrastructure projects. This analysis can then be used to pinpoint areas in need of improvement and craft plans to encourage sustainable practices throughout the region.⁴¹

Besides these, while tackling the challenges and risks toward the utilization of energy and water, it is more influential to reflect on social, political, technological,

The consensus on climate change is that it is a “threat multiplier” and an actor that aggravates the existing conflict in vulnerable parts of the world. Many reports and analyses show that the main aim of European organizations is to protect their people and their interests almost all over the world.

and environmental conditions that enable countries to reach out to water and energy. For instance, Sewers argues in one of the reports that government policies, economic capacity, and features of infrastructure might be included in the variables of the energy usage. Hence, these factors cannot be reduced to physical inadequacy. The wars, civil conflicts, and occupations in Syria, which suffer the most from water and energy shortages, show that the issue cannot be reduced to physical causes alone. All this leaves already weak energy and water systems vulnerable to further degradation and destruction.⁴²

European economic security, on the other hand, has been significantly impacted by climate change because the geoeconomic aspect of climate challenges has a decisive role in EU policies. The scarcity of resources has brought various discussions regarding food security, accessibility to renewable energy materials, and free trade policies.⁴³ In this context, according to the Carnegie Endowment’s report regarding the European Union’s security approach toward the Middle East, reducing carbon emissions is the most crucial topic on the agenda, particularly since the outbreak of the Arab Spring. The European Commission has also introduced several energy policy directives focusing on a 40% target for reducing carbon emissions in the context of climate change.⁴⁴ Since the European Commission’s approach is compatible with free market policies, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has been encouraged by the EU to establish a list of “green goods” within the scope of liberalized exchange. Additionally, many argue that free renewables trade is the most geo-strategically important element of the EU’s climate security agenda. They argue that the WTO should take precautions against food export bans imposed by some governments due to droughts in many parts of the world in 2009 and 2010. They also discuss that free trade routes are significantly functional for safe raw material

supply. Ultimately, the main goal is to keep the integrity of supply chains intact in regions affected by climate instability.⁴⁵

An effective and coherent action of EU is required to maintain its energy security agenda. Increasing energy prices, the rising importance of and demand for fossil fuel reserves, the competition over them in mostly Middle Eastern countries, and the approach to the politicization of energy trade can be acknowledged as the motivating reasons for the EU’s policy. Additionally, the common thought of European experts is that the securitization of energy can be maintained by shared trade, transit, and environmental regulations within the scope of the ENP. In this context, energy cooperation has been on the agenda of the EU since the proclamation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and ENP.⁴⁶ Since the early 2000s, the EU has been actively engaged in various forms of energy cooperation. Initiated by the Barcelona Declaration and prior Euro-Mediterranean energy conferences, the EC launched an action program to set into motion the goals of the envisioned Euro-Mediterranean energy partnership. The central mechanism for this initiative was the establishment of a regional energy forum, which involved European and Southern Mediterranean Countries (SMC) energy officials. This forum, known as the Euro-Mediterranean Energy Forum (EMEF), became a primary platform for energy collaboration in the Mediterranean, complemented by the Euro-Med energy ministerial conferences. The EMEF’s primary role, as defined by the EU, has been to assist in overhauling the energy regulatory and legislative frameworks of its Mediterranean partners and their corresponding industries. This was to foster policy uniformity and encourage investment, aiming for the eventual amalgamation of the region’s energy markets. This goal was reflected in the periodic action plans regularly presented by EMEF since its inception in 1997. Over the next ten years, three action plans were implemented by the Euro-Med energy ministers, covering 1998-2002, 2003-2006, and 2008-2013, respectively. These plans were foundational, building on the standards and strategic goals set during the second EMEF meeting in Grenada in 2000. While there were slight variations in the focus of each action plan, their core objectives remained consistent: aligning energy policies between the EU and its Mediterranean partners, integrating energy markets in the region, enhancing competition within these markets, and

promoting the use of renewable energy as part of sustainable development efforts. The current EMEP action plan focuses on harmonizing energy markets and legislation, supporting sustainable energy development, and initiating collaborative projects in crucial areas such as infrastructure expansion, investment funding, and research and development.⁴⁷

On the other hand, given all these initiatives, the EU's Energy Roadmap 2050 asserts that decarbonization should provide a competitive advantage for the EU as a pioneering force in the global renewable energy market. This type of government-supported commercial diplomacy has become more notable in recent years as Europe has started to fall behind in green technology compared to China and other emerging powers.⁴⁸ The top issue discussed in the literature in this context is that the supranational objective of the EU-backed Energy Union to integrate the energy and climate policies of member states may be missed. This is because the decarbonization priority is not matched by advancements in electricity storage and a continued aversion to natural gas. According to experts, this would greatly increase political instability and erode the consensus between the EU and MENA. The EU appears to be alone in this goal because other European member states are not sufficiently concerned about the effects of climate change. Moreover, the cost of decarbonization reduces the motivation for clean energy and a clean climate.⁴⁹

The current discussions focus on the decarbonization of various sectoral activities with the help of renewable energies such as electricity or green hydrogen. This issue has been challenged due to the requirement of high cost for transformation and storage, and the mismatch between supply and demand in the abundant regions. MENA, in this context, takes its place among the hydrogen-supplier countries due to its rich renewable resources, and many memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and projects have been discussed and implemented between the European Union Members and the MENA region.⁵⁰ Europe's recent environmental and energy policies could create friction with gas suppliers outside the EU in 2023. The proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) targets certain goods from energy-intensive industries in North Africa and the Middle East, even though it does not directly apply to gas imports. However, the separate gas price cap mechanism has caused the most immediate stir among

African nations with significant gas exports. Europe's push for cleaner energy sources might impact future investments in African gas projects. Although there are various initiatives between Africa and the EU, as North Africa is among the most important hydrocarbon-producing regions, Africa's concerns regarding the EU Green Deal to generate clean energy are far from quelled. To stay competitive, African producers and international investors will likely need to prioritize technologies that capture, store, or utilize carbon emissions. Reducing wasted gas through flaring and tackling methane emissions will also be crucial. On the other hand, the focus on large-scale green hydrogen exports to Europe, relying heavily on new renewable capacity in North Africa, prioritizes external needs over Africa's access to clean energy, which remains inadequate.⁵¹

European Union's Focus on Syria

The countries in the Middle East, particularly Syria, have gone through a highly destructive period for more than a decade, whilst the increasing levels of internal displacement and refugee numbers have created a humanitarian crisis. In Syria, in addition to various kinds of insecurities and conflicts, disasters have also played a very important role in displacement. Storms, challenging winter conditions, drought, and other climate-induced reasons have forced people into displacement and have pushed them into the middle of unsanitary living conditions and conflicts. That is why, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), the significant displacement rates challenge the effectiveness of crisis prevention and response strategies. Issues such as the absence of unified action among humanitarian, development, and disaster risk reduction efforts, the constraints of short-term and insufficient funding, and the lack of comprehensive baseline data to accurately evaluate the extent of internal displacement are critical issues that urgently require attention.⁵² The MENA region can be characterized as vulnerable to environmental challenges since the issue of water scarcity has always been on its agenda. As proof, water scarcity in the region has further deteriorated due to various factors such as increasing population and agricultural activities. Therefore, the mobility of people in the Middle East has become a reality. According to the 2022 IDMC report, the number of people who were internally displaced in the Middle East was 233,000 in 2021. Furthermore,

the World Bank claimed in 2021 that predictably, 19.3 million people may be internally displaced by 2050 due to the changing climate conditions and inadequate development.⁵³ The displacement of 305,000 people due to climate challenges and of 12.7 million people due to the conflict and violence can be acknowledged as proof of the World Bank's prediction.⁵⁴ The European Union and many agencies are actively involved in various initiatives focused on crisis response, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and emergency preparedness, as well as tackling global and inter-regional challenges. Current major initiatives in crisis response are taking place in countries such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, Syria, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic, and Venezuela. A further focus on approaches to climate change is needed in Syria, where population and stability changes have been most pronounced in recent years.⁵⁵

Syria is among the most affected countries by climate change and regional conflicts. The Arab Spring has been seen as a triggering factor of the Syrian Civil War. However, much data proved that the extended period of drought and the deterioration of the economy have also played important roles in the outbreak of conflict in 2011. Approximately 6.5 million people have been internally displaced due to the impacts of the climate and conflict-induced reasons, while around 5.6 million people have become refugees abroad.⁵⁶ Besides these, the existence of non-state actors such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Syria has been among the most attractive issues due to the weaponization of limited natural resources. In Syria, both the state forces and nonstate groups have intentionally targeted water facilities and crucial infrastructure as part of their military tactics. Furthermore, the 2013 seizure of the Tabqa Dam on the Euphrates, Syria's largest dam, by ISIS marked a significant strategic gain for the group.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the European perspective has perceived the interference of non-state groups and the effects of climate change as a concerning phenomenon because of its deep impact on social, economic, and political balances in European countries. Rising concerns have emerged as studies reveal the role of climate factors in the Syrian conflict, which has led to a substantial influx of refugees into Europe. The Arab Spring and the Syrian crisis demonstrate that in nations experiencing significant political upheaval, climate change-induced migration becomes increasingly probable. The clear security risks linked to climate in some of the world's

most impoverished and unstable regions, such as the Middle East, present significant challenges to the EU's security. These include the onset of conflicts necessitating humanitarian aid, military intervention, and irregular migration, which could exacerbate tensions among EU Member States regarding the management and distribution of refugees.⁵⁸

Conclusion

Human security is mainly based on the individual's 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear,' as the influential 1994 UN Development Report outlines. The United Nations General Assembly resolution 66/290 advocated for 'responses that are people-centric, holistic, tailored to the specific context, and focused on prevention, enhancing the protection and empowerment of all individuals.' The fundamental findings regarding the literature accordingly mention that the EU's global strategy aims to promote 'human security through a cohesive approach'.⁵⁹ Besides these, the EU acknowledges the complex relationship between climate change, security threats, and humanitarian disasters unfolding in the region. They urge policymakers to develop comprehensive approaches that handle these interrelated issues while they play an important role in determining European security or economic policies. The ENP might be shown as an example of these interventions, as the aim of this initiative is to sustain environmental development and collaboration and to address the root causes of instability in the Middle East.⁶⁰

The consensus on climate change is that it is a "threat multiplier" and an actor that aggravates the existing conflict in vulnerable parts of the world.⁶¹ Many reports and analyses show that the main aim of European organizations is to protect their people and their interests almost all over the world.⁶² European Union and European civil society actors acknowledge the urgency of addressing climate change, given its potential to exacerbate existing challenges related to water scarcity, social inequities, nutritional deficiencies, and exhausting natural resources.⁶³ Syria offers crucial examples of how climate change intertwines with conflict, emphasizing the increasing need for comprehensive solutions that deal with the environmental, social, and political aspects of this crisis.⁶⁴

On the other hand, there are also many gaps in the existing literature. It is emphasized that a consistent and

integrated structure is required to take more effective precautions for the mitigation of climate change-induced risks. At this point, the weak existence of the local communities is highlighted to empower their effectiveness regarding climate challenges.⁶⁵ To address the complicated relationship between climate change and security threats, stronger cooperation between the EU and other European organizations, regional governments, and international organizations is essential. According to many regional or international agencies, the situation in Syria further highlights how both state and non-state actors across the Middle East attack the infrastructure and take advantage of resource scarcity due to climate

change. This exacerbates climate-related vulnerabilities and contributes to greater instability in the region. That is why, while governance issues, the management of cross-border resources, and various economic weaknesses pose significant risks in light of climate change, it is necessary to see that they also offer considerable opportunities for risk mitigation, adaptation, and ultimately, enhancing human security.⁶⁶ Furthermore, efforts to mitigate the destructive impacts of climate change should target the underlying reasons behind societal vulnerability, such as governance weaknesses, economic inequalities, and social strain.⁶⁷

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