

LES POLITIQUES DE L'UNION EUROPÉENNE ET DE SES ÉTATS MEMBRES AU YÉMEN EN GUERRE : REFLETS D'UN PARADOXE CONSTITUTIF

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

State of play

The political transition which followed the 2011 Yemeni revolution and the departure from power of President Ali Abdallah Saleh -who had been governing the country for more than 35 years- has failed. The new government led by the former vice-president Abderabuh Mansur Hadi and the project of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) failed to reach any agreement endorsed by all political forces. In September 2014, northern Houthi rebels took Sanaa, Yemen's capital. In the following months, the deposed president joined forces with those who, until then, were known as his enemies (and finally murdered him). In March 2015 and at the request of President Hadi, who had fled to Saudi Arabia, a coalition of Sunni Arab states led by Saudi Arabia launched a first military operation called "Decisive Storm" to fight the Houthi rebellion.

Since then, Yemen has been at war. In the north, the coalition pulled back to Sanaa the Iranian-backed Houthi rebellion, which had previously conquered all of the country's major cities, from Sanaa to Aden via Hodeida and Taiz in 2015. In the south, separatist groups are fighting for the control of Adan, the former capital of South Yemen. For civilians, consequences of the war are heavy: the most populated part of the country is besieged, militias fight on the ground and rebel's positions are ravaged by Saudi airstrikes. Prices of basic commodities have soared, most of the food, water and health infrastructures lies in ruins and millions of people struggle to access food and clean water, which resulted in thousands of deaths from hunger or cholera spreading through unsanitary water. Those who survive are becoming largely dependent on humanitarian aid. The Yemeni economic and humanitarian crisis is since then considered by the UN and the EU as the "worst humanitarian crisis in the world."¹

The longevity and the extreme severity of this war have three main causes:

1. Saudi Arabia, just like Iran, is trying to make a national and territorial conflict a **regional and allegedly religious proxy war**.
2. Parties to the conflict have **international political and military support**, and **several of the most influential UEMS are backing the action of the Arab coalition by selling them arms and military**

¹ Stephen O'Brien, Former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator at the UN, in front of the Security Council, the 20th of March 2017.

equipment.

3. Meanwhile, **third countries and supra/international organizations show very low political commitment**. Some do provide emergency aid on the humanitarian, economic development and security level that cannot, however, supplant the political resolution of a conflict which endurance makes the country increasingly dependent upon foreign actors.

EU and EUMS policy

Since 2015, nearly 1 billion euros has been invested in Yemen, which is nevertheless a moderate investment when compared with the EU in Syria's one. The Office for Yemen, a substitute for the European delegation in Yemen, relocated to Amman in 2017, operates on three levels: humanitarian aid, economic development aid and political and security support.

The main budgetary component is that of **emergency humanitarian aid**, necessary to face the current humanitarian crisis. These programs mainly involve access to food, water and medical care.

In addition, the EU funds **economic development aid** programs, expected to help offset the country's growing dependence on emergency aid and consider medium-term solutions. However, the EU's absence of horizon for a political solution impedes its ability to move beyond emergency action.

Indeed, the **political and security support** of the EU is **very timid and almost limited to passive support for UN action**. Therefore, **investment in humanitarian and development assistance cannot be truly effective, or even sustainable**. Finally, **few concrete measures are taken against the Member States which pursue a policy of military and political support to the coalition, destroying the efforts for peace and the way out of the humanitarian and economic crisis made by the EU**. This total political inconsistency of EU foreign policy is a direct result of the paradoxical construction of the European edifice.

Policy recommendations

- In the current context of humanitarian disaster caused by the destruction of most basic infrastructure, coupled with a major economic crisis, the funding of humanitarian and development projects in Yemen is more than ever necessary, but only in **a relevant and sustainable way** for the country's economy.
- The political and diplomatic aspect of EU action should not be limited to passive support for the UN mission, while some Member States are politically and militarily backing the Saudi-led coalition. The position of political neutrality desired by the EU must be enshrined in **action against states which are guilty of war crimes**.
- From a security point of view, there is an urgent need to **take action against every Member States which has sold or currently sells arms to Saudi Arabia and the Emirates**, politically legitimizing, materially taking part and thus complicit of war crimes.