

## **“NAMEPES in 2022”**

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The second edition of the summer school on North Africa, the Middle East Politics and EU Security (NAMEPES), which took place from 20 to 24 June 2022 at the School of International Studies, was strongly influenced by the impact of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. The war is affecting, and will continue to affect, the MENA region in many ways, especially with regards to its democratization process and the role of Europe in that direction. Throughout the summer school, the specificities of each lecture contributed to this wider theme, by connecting insightful speeches with intense discussions. The first day was filled with introductions. Pina Picierno Vice-President of the European Parliament gave an opening address emphasizing the importance of the region and the topic to be dealt with.

Tuesday was opened with Fawaz Gerges lecture on the international relations of the Middle East. Covering the timeframe from Napoleon to modern times, the lecture contextualized the Middle East, highlighting problems with the formation of states, orientalism, beauty standard and many more while also putting a focus on the dependency of the West on the region. Condensing as he put it: a years' worth of lectures into one concise lecture. After having highlighted the many ongoing fights, he closed with an emphasis on the existential threat posed to the region by climate change, which renders all other aspects mute. Next was Professor Birte Wassenberg, an expert on border studies, who looked at the MENA region from an EU perspective and especially focused on the security aspect, which in Europe remains dominated by NATO. Also, Prof Wassenberg highlighted how relations with North Africa are mostly seen in the context of migration. With these two lectures rooting both Europe and the North-Africa and Middle East region politically the second day of summer school was ended.

On Wednesday, Professor Joel Gordon went on to discuss the cultural and historical links and issues especially between the Arab world and Europe. The students benefited from his vast expertise on the Arab world, Middle Eastern Studies and especially Egypt. He skillfully combined anecdotes, sound academic advice and expert knowledge. Next was Professor Ali Ansari who had to join via zoom

explaining in detail the issues around the Iran nuclear deal and engaging with the relationship between Iran and Russia which, considering the ongoing war intrigued many students. Engaging with the mindset of the Iranian leadership and the issue of democratization in Iran. With the Arab and the Persian world covered the students now had a good grasp on the region.

Thursday broadened the perspective and the discipline scope with the topic of Maritime delimitations by Trento's very own Marco Pertile, bringing in the aspect of international maritime law in theory and practice, and explaining through several case studies how it created conflict in the Mediterranean, while also helping students get a good understanding of the legal basis of that is topic. The lesser-known topic of maritime law led to many interesting inquiries by students and a small group work in which the students took up the positions of either Italy or Libya and engaged in an intense debate about a naval incident caused intense discussions. Then came the organizer of the event, Professor Pejman Adolmohammadi, who due to COVID-19 could only join via zoom. Starting with the Persian Gulf, he covered the aspects of history of Iranian identity and the foreign policy happening in the region. Building on Professor Ansari's lecture, he emphasized the long history of Iranian domination in the region as well as the long standing differences between both the world of the Iranian plateau and the regions West of it, delimiting both areas through historical examples. He also engaged with modern politics by underlining how history and symbolism has been used in the ongoing political struggles in Iran.

Friday the closing conference kicked off, with experts on China, Russia and the Middle East discussing the contemporary situation, providing new insights and intense discussions. While the current war and its impact was on the minds of everyone, many students also asked questions regarding the more long-term developments such as the retreat of the US, the rise of China and power-shifts among local actors. Professor Nikolay Kozhanov of Qatar University gave his view of the Russian foreign policies in the region but also looked how the war would influence the region, discussing with Professors Gerges and Adolmohammadi. In the second half, Enrico Fardella gave his insights on the topic of China in a discussion with Joel Gordon and Courtney Freer (LSE).

In a nutshell, both the summer school and the conference emphasized the importance of local actors and local agency and, while many changes were observed, continuity was a theme that both events

emphasized. The region will remain pivotal for EU security and while the topic of democratization was not directly touched upon, it remained on the mind of everyone when looking at countries like Iran and Egypt.