

# BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL CENTER

2021 – 2022

## RESEARCH & ACTIVITIES PORTFOLIO

### AT A GLANCE:

Despite the continued challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, BIC continued to provide insightful analysis on global challenges for policy-makers, partners, and the public between 2021 and the start of 2022. In the past year, **BIC launched a new podcast, MENA Talks**, and continued its flagship project, “Rethinking Security in the 2020s,” which aims to develop proactive solutions to the evolving nature of insecurity, hybrid warfare, and COVID-19. BIC promoted this research and analysis by publishing **over 25 research papers**, and organizing **4 high-level conferences**, which facilitated constructive dialogue between policy-makers, civil society, international organizations. This year, BIC developed **valuable new partnerships**, including with the Millennium Film Festival, which aims to highlight film makers who **promote the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**.

### TABLE OF CONTENTS:

BIC LAUNCHES NEW PODCAST “MENA TALKS” .....	2
EVENTS AND ADVOCACY .....	4
FEATURED RESEARCH: NORTH AFRICA .....	8
FEATURED RESEARCH: MIDDLE EAST .....	10
PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS .....	12



# BIC LAUNCHES NEW PODCAST “MENA TALKS”

The “The MENA Talks” is a podcast series by the BIC. Our four hosts engage with international, regional, and local experts to explore many underlying **historical, economic, social, and political** drivers behind today’s multidimensional challenges in the Middle East and North Africa region.



This podcast series discusses the roles and consequences of international actors on ongoing conflict and crises in the MENA region. Discussion themes will focus on the effect of **multinational organizations such as the UN, EU and AU**, and how they can utilize their tools to better support peace-building and development goals across the MENA.

This podcast segment will discuss the making of politics from the margins in the Maghreb. (Re)placing at the heart of the debate recent years’ social movements, this series of episodes will attempt to understand the way **non-traditional actors are reshaping the socioeconomic landscape** in the region through collective action.



This podcast series will focus on the geopolitical aspects that are impacting the Middle East, including actors **beyond the European Union, such as the United States, Russia and China**. The host will engage in more thematic aspects of the Middle East that involve multiple countries, or regionally based topics that can be specified through interactions with relevant and knowledgeable guests.

## FEATURED PODCAST EPISODES



**[Ep. 3 - Political Disruption: Elections and Regional Developments in the Middle East](#)** - Hosted by *Elisa Chery, BIC Middle East Analyst* - Interview with *Amb. Marc Otte, BIC President*

This episode of the MENA Talks explores the **upcoming elections in the Middle East**, particularly within Iran and Syria. These elections have geopolitical consequences and could alter the power dynamics in the region. What could **new leadership in Iran** mean for actors like the **European Union** and the **United States**? With ongoing political violence, this episode will also bring light to the situation in Gaza – Israel/Palestine.



### [Ep. 5 - Race et Féminisme\(s\) en Tunisie: Le Grand Tabou?](#)

*Hosted by Yasmine Akrimi, joined by Saadia Mosbah: Figure de l'antiracisme en Tunisie et fondatrice de l'association M'nemty*

Y a-t-il réellement une volonté d'intersectionnaliser **les lutte féministes en Tunisie**? Comment expliquer l'invisibilisation des femmes noires au sein du mouvement féministe tunisien? Dans ce podcast, Yasmine Akrimi discute de la place de la question raciale, et donc de **l'antiracisme**, au sein des mouvements féministes tunisiens pré et post 2011 avec la militante **antiraciste Saadia Mosbah**.



### [Ep.6 - Confronting the Challenges of Aid Workers in Yemen](#)

*Hosted by Elisa Chery, BIC Middle East Analyst, joined by Jean-Nicolas Beuze, Yemen Representative for the UNHCR*

This episode of the MENA Talks podcast explores security concerns that national and international **aid workers in Yemen** are confronted with on a daily basis. Jean-Nicolas Beuze gives an overview of some of the logistical, legal, and cultural hurdles aid workers face to remain fully operational throughout the country. Other topics include the role of the United Nations, its local partners in delivering aid, the **effects of COVID-19** and the resource restrictions that Yemen is experiencing.



### [Ep.7 - Special Edition – What will Afghanistan's future look like? Tough regional geopolitics and how the EU can play a role](#)

*Hosted by Shada Islam, BIC's Senior Commentator on Geopolitics, joined by Jawed Ludin, President of Heart of Asia Society and former Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan*

This episode discusses regional and geopolitical implications of the **current crisis in Afghanistan**. From internal dynamics of this new phase under the Taliban rule to the different roles that the international community should take, Shada and Jawed share a deep understanding of events on the ground, **with a focus on the way ahead** for the country and the region.



### [Ep.8 - Takeaways from the 76th UN General Assembly: A New Era of Multilateralism in 2021?](#)

*Hosted by Ben Lowings, BIC's Political Analyst, joined by Professor Alanna O'Malley, Chair of United Nations Studies in Peace and Justice at Leiden University and The Hague University of Applied Sciences*

Following from the 76th United Nations General Assembly held in New York, USA in September, this episode discusses some of the main issues framing the debates of **multilateral diplomacy**. How can the **UN work better to address these diverse challenges** and what are the prospects for the success of such multilateral action in the near future



**“Inclusive solutions must be a pre-requisite for efforts to preach by example, and to restore credibility of the values we supposedly continue to believe in – if we really want to encourage ownership of the solutions elsewhere.”**

**Ambassador Marc Otte**  
**President of the Brussels International Center**

Ambassador Otte is a Belgian diplomat who has held numerous posts within the Belgian MFA, including Ambassador to Israel. Between 1999 and 2003, he served as Advisor for Security and Defense Policy to the High Representative for EU Foreign and Security Policy, and from 2003 to 2011, as EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process.

## EVENTS AND ADVOCACY

### **Post-Patriarchal Security: Inclusion And Equity For The Other 55%** – March 2021 – Online Conference

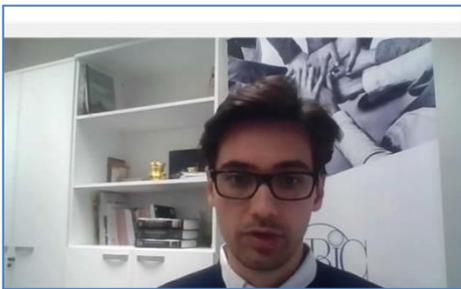
This event, co-organized with Friends of Europe, aimed to build policy expertise and political will for gender inclusiveness and equity in security forces, as well to build greater trust between minority communities and police and military. Despite institutional commitment to abide by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), women are still largely under-represented in crisis management, security and defence.

According to the #SHEcurity Index, women on average make up only 11% of military staff and 25% of police forces in the EU, its member states and the G20. Panelists considered steps to deliver concrete outcomes, including better evaluation to measure the impact and effectiveness of existing policies, as well as consideration for quotas, gender trainings, and more flexible working plans.

Speakers also discussed the need to shift cultural perceptions within military structures, starting with encouraging leadership to speak out against discrimination and harassment. Integration of women should also avoid gender-specific assumptions or goals on boosting effectiveness in specific fields, which are often found in essentialist versions of the WPS agenda.

#### KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- **Marie Meigård**, Sargeant Major in the Swedish Armed Forces
- **MEP Dr. Hannah Neumann** - Member of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, Member Subcommittee on Security and Defense
- **Alan Sneddon**, Police Office in Scotland
- **Paul Kirby**, Co-director at the UKRI GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub, London School of Economics



*In partnership with Friends of Europe, an independent policy analysis think-tank based in Brussels.*

## **The Resurgence of the Taliban: Plotting a New EU Course of Action for Afghanistan** – November 2021 – Hybrid Conference



This event provided a platform to discuss some of the missteps and failures that led to the collapse of the Ghani administration, the emerging security challenges in Afghanistan, and the major geopolitical impacts in the wider region. There was particular emphasis on what the ramifications of the Taliban takeover will be for European nations, as well as how the EU should configure its ‘dealing with, but not officially recognising’ relationship with the Taliban.



In summary, the event provided a clear set of recommendations for the EU, most notably to ensure a consistent, coherent, and unified diplomatic stance, and to implement the 2011 arms embargo in full across the entire state of Afghanistan. The event also considered how to revise existing legal migration pathways to Europe, considering the likely repercussions of the crisis on increased flows of both refugees and migrants.

### **KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:**

- **Ambassador Roya Rahmani**, Former Ambassador of Afghanistan to the US
- **Arnout Pauwelsm**, Deputy Head of EU Delegation in Afghanistan
- **Sima Samar**, Member of the UNSG High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement and Former Special Envoy of the President of Afghanistan and State Minister for Human Rights and International Affairs
- **Jean-Louis De Brouwer**, Director of the European Affairs Program at the Egmont Institute
- **Wilson Fache**, BIC Middle East Correspondent



*In partnership with the Egmont Institute, an independent policy analysis think-tank based in Brussels.*

**Moderated by Shada Islam:** BIC Senior Commentator on Geopolitics





## **Remembering the Victims: Six Years After the Brussels Attacks** – March 2022 – Conference at the Federal Belgian Parliament

Six years after the Brussels terrorist attacks, the EU and Belgian security authorities are still facing challenges when it comes to the issue of violent extremism. This event, organized by BIC's AVERA Department, was held at the Belgian Federal Parliament, in collaboration with parliamentarians, Georges Dallemagne and Koen Metsu.

This event assessed the extent to which current criminal justice policies in Belgium are tackling the root causes of violent extremism, and the event had a parallel session on crimes committed by the Islamic State against the Yazidi community, including sexual and gender based violence.

### **KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:**

- **Ambassador Marc Otte**, BIC President
- **Koen Metsu**, Member of the Belgian Federal Parliament
- **George Dallemagne**, Member of the Belgian Federal Parliament
- **Baba Sheikh**, Spiritual Leader Yezidi
- **Professor Koen Defeyter**, Uantwerp, Victims of Terrorism with V-Europe



## **Healthcare and Politics in the Europe-Africa Partnership**

April 2022 – Online Conference

On 17-18 February 2022, the sixth African Union – European Union Summit took place, which saw a new and welcome focus on tackling health inequalities between the two continents. In order to analyze this important and rapidly changing space, the Brussels International Center held an online conference with the European Commission and health experts to examine the steps taken at the Summit, and the work that remains to be done.

The event discussed how the pandemic revealed dangerous inequalities between both continents in access to health care, vaccines and other medicines, underlining how the issue of health reflects distorted power dynamics, and increasingly intersects with political priorities. The event explored how the EU could improve its partnership with Africa by empowering the continent's health sovereignty, including by increasing resource capacities and supporting issues such as the TRIPS waiver.

### **KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:**

- **Asil Sidahmed**, BIC Strategic Advisor and Analyst for Africa, former Advisor to Minister of Health of Sudan
- **Inma Vazquez**, Representative for the EU and NATO at Médecins sans Frontières (MSF)
- **Jens Pedersen**, Independent Consultant at Africa First Advisory
- **Gabriella Fesus**, Head of Unit Social Inclusion, Protection, Health and Democracy at the European Commission

**Moderated by Ben Lowings**: BIC Political Analyst



## “Judges Under Pressure” at the Millennium Festival

May 2022 – Event and Film Festival



The Millennium Festival highlights and supports filmmakers around the world who topics related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. to the major challenges and objectives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, adopted by the United Nations in 2000. It aims to promote humanity’s dreams and ambitions for a fairer and more equitable world.

Since its creation in 2009 by Lubomir Gueorguiev and Zlatina Rousseva, the MILLENNIUM Festival presents every year the best of committed documentary cinema from around the world. It supports innovation in documentary creation, authenticity and investment by independent directors.

In partnership with this festival, the Brussels International Center co-organized a screening for the film, “Judges Under Pressure” with **MEP Maria Arena**, the **Chair of the Sub-Committee on Human Rights at the European Parliament**. The screening featured an interactive dialogue where Ms. Arena discussed the issue of migration in Europe, and how recent crises have shown Europe’s flexibility to adapt when needed.

The film screened follows the plight of judges in Poland who risked their careers and liberties to resist pressure from the government, and insist on the independence of the judiciary, which has been seriously threatened since the rise to power of a far-right parties. Magistrates who do not toe the government line risk unemployment or prison. But rather than toe the line, many choose to disobey.



**“This recent ban on access to secondary education for women is very alarming for women in the region who have made great strides in terms of empowerment. This can also be contagious, because an idea can spread from one country to another.”**

**Shada Islam**  
**BIC Senior Commentator on Geopolitics**

Shada Islam is an influential Brussels-based specialist on European Union affairs who works independently as a commentator, advisor, analyst and strategist on Europe, Asia, Africa, Geopolitics, Trade, Migration, Inclusion, Diversity and Women’s Empowerment. She previously served as Director of Europe and Geopolitics at Friends of Europe. At the BIC, Shada collaborates on written commentaries on geopolitics, primarily in EU-MENA relations.



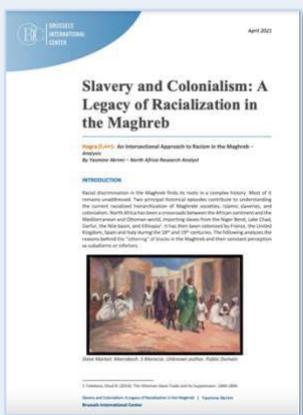
## FEATURED RESEARCH: NORTH AFRICA



### [Why the EU should put women front and centre of its new agenda for the Southern Mediterranean.](#)

March 2021

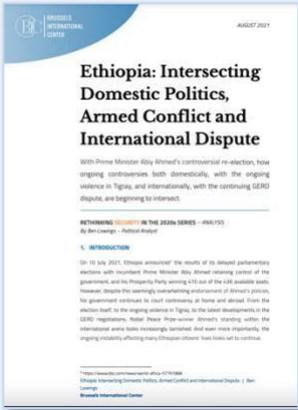
The European Commission’s latest effort to re-imagine relations with countries in the Southern Mediterranean is a welcome development. Twenty five years after the Barcelona Declaration, with its ground-breaking commitment to a comprehensive Euro-Mediterranean partnership, and ten years after unfulfilled hopes of change raised by the Arab Spring, there is a compelling need for a stronger EU effort to work with its Southern Mediterranean neighbours, giving priority to the region’s immense climate change challenge.



### [Slavery And Colonialism: A Legacy Of Racialization In The Maghreb](#)

April 2021

Racial discrimination in the Maghreb finds its roots in a complex history. Most of it remains unaddressed. Two principal historical episodes contribute to the current racialized hierarchization of Maghrebi societies: Islamic slaveries and colonialism. North Africa has been a crossroads between the African continent and the Mediterranean and Ottoman world, importing slaves from the Niger Bend, Lake Chad, Darfur, the Nile basin, and Ethiopia. It was then colonized during the 18th and 19th centuries. This article analyzes the reasons behind the “othering” of blacks in the Maghreb and their constant perception as subalterns or inferiors.



## [Ethiopia: Intersecting Domestic Politics, Armed Conflict And International Dispute](#) August 2021

On 10 July 2021, Ethiopia announced the results of its delayed parliamentary elections with incumbent Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed retaining control of the government, and his Prosperity Party winning 410 out of the 436 available seats. However, despite this seemingly overwhelming endorsement of Ahmed's policies, his government continues to court controversy at home and abroad. From the election itself, to the ongoing violence in Tigray, to the latest developments in the GERD negotiations, Nobel Peace Prize-winner Ahmed's standing within the international arena looks increasingly tarnished. And even more importantly, the ongoing instability affecting many Ethiopian citizens' lives looks set to continue.



## [Droits Des Migrants Subsahariens En Tunisie : Une Chaîne De Vulnérabilités](#) September 2021

La présence migratoire précaire en Tunisie, principalement par sa labour, est visible à l'œil nu. Les migrant.es subsaharien.n.es sont surreprésenté.e.s au sein des métiers sous-payés. Selon les chiffres officiels, parmi 53 000 étrangers présents en Tunisie, 12 000 sont originaires d'Afrique subsaharienne. Pourtant, institutionnellement, ces migrants ne sont nulle part. Le cadre juridique régissant le travail en Tunisie est basé sur une logique quasi-explicite de « préférence nationale ». Cependant, les étrangers sont loin d'être « égalitairement » discriminés dans l'accès au marché du travail régulier.



## [Analyzing Latest Political Developments In Tunisia: Unclear Paths For A Structural Change](#) October 2021

This article explores Tunisia's latest political developments, 2014 constitution fragmented political parties' power and allowed no clear majority to emerge, implement its policies, or be held accountable. It has been efficient in preventing the hegemony of a single political formation, yet in reality the constitution's weaknesses largely served the interests of the well-organized Islamists of Ennahda and deflected accountability from the failure of post-2014 governments. However, Tunisia's problems lie in its political elite and dire economic crisis which no constitution could handle on its own. The focus on debating the current political system puts the much-needed structural economic reforms in second place. The president's narrative about Tunisia's unlimited existing resources which simply need to be retrieved, as well as his disregard for the reality of market dynamics, also set unrealistic expectations no political system can fulfill.

# FEATURED RESEARCH: MIDDLE EAST



## [Injustices Against Aid Workers in Yemen](#) July 2021

Following the death of Yemeni national, Fathi Mahmoud Ali Salem Al-Zurigi, in May 2021, one of many cases over the course of the civil war resulting in the death of aid workers, Yemen continues to struggle with unsafe working conditions for those working to delivery vital humanitarian aid. Alongside the ongoing humanitarian disaster and increased levels of fighting throughout the country, the international community must address the pressure that aid workers, both nationals and internationals, are put under in Yemen and throughout the world. Further, due to the complex situation on the ground the employment of Yemeni nationals disproportionately impacts them compared to their international counterparts.



## [Iraq's Water Politics: Impacts Of Drought, Mismanagement And Conflict In The Middle East](#) August 2021

Iraq is currently facing one of its driest summers on record. 2018 was the driest year ever recorded due to a lack of rainfall, and 2021 is not far behind. Recent years' droughts have wreaked havoc on the land in Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, but climate change is not the only driver of water shortages. Consequences of unilateral, upstream activity, water mismanagement, a lack of accountability and conflict have all exacerbated Iraq's water crisis. The political consequences of the ongoing water emergency have worsened the regional tensions between Iraq and its neighbours and is yet another factor in the Iraqi people's mistrust of their government, who continues to fail them and dismiss their concerns.



## [Promoting regional connectivity should be an EU priority for Afghanistan](#) August 2021

For many, it is a disaster foretold. As America ends the longest of its “forever wars”, foreign troops leave Afghanistan after twenty troubled years and Taliban militants seize more and more territory amid fears of rising bloodshed and destruction, the emerging international consensus is simple: another state collapse in Afghanistan at the hands of the Taliban would be a danger both to the region and the world. Hard-won gains made in educating and empowering women are under threat. Peace and stability are further complicated by rising geopolitical competition and acrimony among neighbours, but can be improved through stronger regional connectivity.



## [Afghanistan: How Europe Should Navigate The Return Of The Taliban](#) October 2021

Exploring the current EU approach of engagement with the new Taliban government without official recognition, and how the EU's five benchmarks for assessment should be interpreted and considered. Following an announcement of his intent to withdraw all US military personnel by US President Joe Biden in mid-April, the government and armed forces of Afghanistan collapsed in the face of rapid advances by the Taliban, culminating in the seizure of Kabul on 15 August 2021.



## [In Southern Iraq, Protesters Welcome Election Results With Mixed Feelings](#) October 2021

Nasiriyah, in Iraq's poor southern heartland, has been at the epicentre of protests since the revolution of October 2019. Recent parliamentary elections, held nationwide on October 10, are unlikely to answer the demands of the city's demonstrators who are still seeking justice for the bloody crackdown on their movement.

# PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

Partners with whom BIC has signed an official agreement or memorandum of understanding.



Friends of Europe



University of Maastricht



Royal African Society  
Promoting Africa

Royal African Society

Partners with whom BIC has collaborated with for events and papers.



International Center of Excellence in Countering Violent Extremism, Hedayah



Egmont Institute



All Digital AISBL



European Peacebuilding Liaison Office



Science Po Paris



London School of Economics

