

# TODAY'S ZAMAN

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## **Jordan-Turkey-Europe: a model partnership?**

The growing rapprochement between Turkey and the rest of the Middle East is creating an opportunity to develop a regional project in support of democratization, involving competent European actors.

Jordan, Turkey and Europe should seize this opportunity and forge an exemplary partnership.

Recent efforts have led to the establishment of strategic cooperation councils and a visa-free regime between Turkey and a number of Arab countries. Yet, this progress on the bilateral level could evolve into a trilateral process by adding the "European component." Such remodeling would make it a more multidimensional process, allowing these countries to benefit, through Turkey, from the best know-how in democratic modernization.

Countries in the Middle East aspire -- although to different extents -- to reform of their public institutions, regionalization and decentralization, human rights and women's emancipation. Europe is the most valuable and closest source of such expertise, and Turkey is well placed to provide guidance. To test such a trilateral partnership, Europe-Turkey-Jordan is a suitable axis.

As outlined by Jordanian researcher Deena Dajani, the conditions of political liberty in Jordan in recent decades compare favorably to those of its Arab neighbors. Even a historian as critical of Arab states as Bernard Lewis has argued that it is in the "reforming autocracies" of the Arab world such as Jordan that the best prospects for democracy exist. I would also add that Jordan is not an "oil rich" country, a factor that pushes society to rely on its own performance and human capital. Jordan's "benevolent monarchy" is a partner receptive to innovative approaches. Finally, it has the advantage of stability.

European know-how would benefit a changing Jordan; the question is by which institutions and in which political framework could it be best provided. A reforming country would need a range of expertise in developing democratic institutions, in the judiciary and rule of law, local and regional authorities, human rights, women's emancipation and education. These tools are available as an "all-inclusive package" at a one-stop shop -- the Council of Europe (CoE). Established in 1949 in Strasbourg, this organization is made up of 47 members today, including countries such as Turkey, Ukraine and Russia. It's good to remember that the CoE was the forerunner of the "European unity" project, before it got overshadowed by the Brussels-based EU.

### **Mashreq's bridge to Europe**

In the 1990s, the CoE played a catalyzing role in the democratic transformation of Eastern Europe, which later helped it to join the EU. Now it could have positive impact on the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Some non-European countries are already engaging with it. In 1957 Israel joined the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) as an observer, and in 1994 its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. Today, Tunisia and Algeria participate in the CoE's Venice Commission, dedicated to constitutional issues. But

the most successful example is Morocco, which recently obtained “partner for democracy” status and joined the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre).

The countries of the Middle East would benefit significantly from discovering the CoE and exploring its potential. Jordan would be a perfect forerunner, as Queen Rania was awarded the CoE’s North-South Prize for empowering women in 2008. Such a partnership could start a pilot cooperation in the eastern Mediterranean, something that Morocco did successfully in the West.

Given its key position, Turkey has a historic opportunity, if not a responsibility, to foster such a partnership as it takes the helm of the CoE. Since January Turkey began a two-year presidency term in PACE and will soon chair the Committee of Ministers for six months. Initiating a trilateral partnership under the Turkish presidency would have a particular significance and broader regional impact.

### **Turkey’s gate to the Indian Ocean**

Other fields of potential mutual benefit for Turkey and Jordan await their exploration. Jordan, which assumed the secretariat general of the Union for the Mediterranean, could encourage Turkey’s active involvement in this project. In the field of economic integration, Turkey and Jordan have the chance go further than just lifting visa requirements and set their sights on greater achievements. For instance, both countries could grant reciprocal privileges in using their maritime ports. This would allow Turkey access to the Red Sea through Aqaba and Jordan to the Mediterranean via Iskenderun or Mersin. Circumstances are favorable to this. Turkey and its neighbors intend to restore the historic Hejaz Railway, which a century ago was built to connect Istanbul to Mecca. This track has one branch that is still in active use today: the Aqaba railway. The prospect of such a rail connection and the close partnership that Turkey is developing with Syria and Jordan make the project realistic. Turkey, which is striving to expand its foreign trade and regional involvement, would definitely benefit from such easy access to the Indian Ocean, something that it seems to also have in mind as it builds up its strategic partnership with Iraq. However, the Aqaba route would be clearly a better choice than a Basra route through unstable Iraq.

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<http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-213794-jordan-turkey-europe-a-model-partnership.html>