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As far as the main area is concerned, power imbalances shape economies, and the region is one of contrasts with high-tech cities bordering war-ravaged neighbors. Some governments can afford to subsidize education, healthcare and electricity for their citizens, while others struggle with inflation, poverty and high unemployment rates.

What accounts for such stark disparities? It is mainly oil and gas which propel the region's wealthiest economies, and it means that they are fragile given the global efforts towards transition and economies moving away from fossil fuels. For these reasons, many countries in the region are now pivoting from their previous reliance on oil, as we know the UAE has done by investing increasingly in technology, transportation and renewable energy.

North Africa was once on the geopolitical periphery of the Middle East dynamics, but it has increasingly come to shape regional trends. In addition to internal political and economic transformations that were accelerated by this so-called Arab Spring, the region is also contending with a range of external challenges. These include changing market dynamics, including energy markets, the growing presence of new regional actors, like China, Russia, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel, each of which has competing interests, priorities and operating methods and the changing role of traditional allies such as the EU, GCC and the USA. These dynamics are compounded and worsened by climate and demographic changes and meanwhile, the increasing number of migrants attempting to reach Europe leaves European countries scurrying to find solutions while standing for human rights. It is a somewhat difficult task, as we see with Tunisia, a country with which the EU has heavily engaged by signing a memorandum of understanding that aims to stem migration flows while also improving its economic conditions. In other words, North Africa, sometimes considered as a backwater within the broader Middle East context, actually deserves, in my opinion, far more attention from the international community. Its states are facing a dizzy array of challenges related to domestic and global trends, political transformation, either recent or underway, economic stagnation worsened by the pandemic, social challenges associated with a frustrated young population. These trends are giving the region more geopolitical relevance with implications for the broader Middle East, Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Adil Alzarooni, CEO of Al Zarooni Emirates Investments and Al Bidayer Holding, Founder of Citizens School

After everyone presents their points, I would appreciate it if sets of questions were addressed to the different members of the panel and to enrich the discussion.