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Instability in the Mediterranean region: an analysis of the role of the European Union

The Political System of the European Union
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Introduction

Since the origins of civilization, the Mediterranean basin has always been a melting pot of cultures, religions and ethnicities. Although this sea has been the battleground of many wars, it has contributed above all to establishing good relations between its shores. Sea routes allowed the movement of people, goods and knowledge. Not surprisingly, major ancient civilizations flourished in this fertile basin. Even in the Modern Age, the Mediterranean allowed western European powers to assimilate know-how from the far east, enjoying valuable goods such as silk and spices. At that time, taking advantage of their strategic positions on the coasts, several powers managed to emerge. In this regard, a good example is provided by the Maritime Republic of Genoa. According to Genoese merchants, a round trip from Genoa to Paris would have been longer than the Genoa-Istanbul route, although the latter is geographically farther than the former. This clearly explains the potential of the Mediterranean. The objective of this thesis is to understand how the EU's approach to the southern neighborhood has evolved, particularly in relation to increased regional instability. With this research, an attempt is made to analyze how the role of the EU, and its self-conception, has changed within the Mediterranean region from the launch of the ENP in 2004 to the present.

Still after centuries, the basin has maintained its centrality in global affairs. Indeed, although it counts just for 1% of world waters, from an economic prospective, the Mediterranean basin covers 20% of the global maritime trade value. In this framework, 10% of all global maritime traffic passes through the Mediterranean Sea annually¹. The entire regional economy is tied to the vibrancy of these sea routes, which make the Mediterranean ports so important to the region's growth and stability. Despite this, new challenges are raising as we will see in Chapter One. Climate change and the alleged annual opening of the Arctic Route could pose several threats to the regional balance. Indeed, on the one hand, the sea temperature is rising by 20% compared to the rest of the world, confirming concerns that the Mediterranean is one of the most relevant "hot spots"². These occurrences risk increasing regional insecurity and exacerbating latent tensions among countries, as the Ethiopian-Egyptian case will illustrate. On the other hand, in contrast, climate change is deeply shaping maritime routes, allowing global players such as China and

¹ Giorgi, F., 2006. "Climate change Hot-spots". *Geophys. Res. Lett.* 33, L08707

² *Ibidem*

Russia to open up to new scenarios in the Arctic and thus strengthening their grip on global shipping routes. Furthermore, the two countries mentioned above are intensifying their presence in the Mediterranean basin.

In stark contrast with this trend, the European Union (EU) launched the 2004 European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) aimed at boosting its partnership with the eastern and southern neighbors. At a time when “enlargement” was no longer deemed an available option, the EU developed conditionality as an alternative tool to influence neighboring regions. Such a model will be discussed in Chapter Two, where we will glimpse the historical and financial evolutions of the European approach, while analyzing the implications brought by the critical conjuncture of the Arab Spring of 2011. Interestingly, since the 1990s, the EU has changed its narrative toward the neighborhood. This pattern is evidenced by the fact that the original “civilizational mission” of bringing democracy and the rule of law to the southern region was swiftly replaced by a more pragmatic approach focused on security and stability. In light of this, we should understand the 2015 ENP Review and the 2016 Global Strategy that redesigned the EU's foreign policy. Undoubtedly, this has created even more problems for Brussels in terms of the “democratic deficit.” For example, while it promoted (including financially) human rights and dignity in Libya during the civil war that broke out in 2011, it has also been the main sponsor of migrant detention camps, which have been condemned by the UN and various NGOs.

In Chapter Three we will focus on the specific field of energy cooperation. Reasons are many and varied. Firstly, the Mediterranean has always played an important role in European energy supply. In 2017, southern and eastern Mediterranean countries accounted for 9.1% of the EU's oil imports and 13.6% of its gas imports. Secondly, despite its desire to make Europe a carbon-neutral continent by 2050, the von der Leyen Commission was forced to reorient its policy agenda due to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022. Notably at the beginning of the conflict, the European energy system was socked. Overnight, Europe realized that it was totally dependent on Russian energy reserves, although worrying signs in this regard had been there for some time. With an energy transition still incomplete, the EU has been forced to strengthen new partnerships with the Southern Mediterranean. In light of this, regional platforms such as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) were seen as the main tools through which to try to build this new cooperation. Third, regional stability is further exacerbated by the aggressive role of some regional players, such as Turkey, which aims to establish itself as a regional energy hub. As we

shall see, it is especially the Turkish claims on the Cypriot gas fields and the agreement between Libya and Turkey on the Libyan EEZ that have fired up EU protests, pushing for a new geopolitical reconfiguration of regional alliances.

Chapter Four takes in account one of the most evident cases of EU's neighborhood policy failure: the Libyan civil war. When the Arab Springs broke out across the MENA region, there was optimism in Western capitals that the region was awakening from a long hibernation. Democratic hopes prompted many governments to support the rebels, with no thought of the aftermath. The same mistake was made by the EU, especially in the remarkable case of the civil war in Libya. After more than a decade, the country is still a puppet state, divided internally, lacking a central authority that can exercise its sovereignty to the full extent of its faculties over the entire national territory, and at the mercy of foreign powers. The Union, held hostage by the national interests of its Member States, found itself paralyzed and unprepared to handle a crisis of such magnitude. This was also due to the failure to reform the Treaties on common foreign policy and defense, still perceived by the Member States as inalienable pillars of their national sovereignty. However, the historical Western presence in Libya, now replaced by Turkish and Russian influence, makes us think that the EU really needs structural reforms if it is to keep up with an increasingly competitive and insecure world.

The last chapter analyses China's role in the Mediterranean as a strategic competitor of the EU. Although Beijing has not formulated a comprehensive strategy, the Mediterranean has become part of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping. Through the use of 'infrastructure diplomacy' as an instrument of soft power, China aims to build a positive self-image and strengthen its galaxy of friendly countries that can turn a blind eye to issues concerning Hong Kong, Taiwan and violations against the Uighur minority. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Beijing is held in diametrically opposite regard depending on whether one analyses the two shores of the Mediterranean. While in the South it is viewed positively by governments as a possible interlocutor to reduce dependence on the West; for the countries on the northern shore, China is seen primarily as a subverter of the world order. The chapter specifically analyses the relationship between China and Egypt, which has experienced a new momentum since 2014, with Abdel Fattah al Sisi's seizure of power. The two countries share many goals including: the fight against Islamic extremism, the desire to emerge as inde-

pendent powers, the feeling of revenge against a common colonial past, and the eagerness to establish a new world order in which the Global South is increasingly central.

The ENP, promoted since 2004, is a major innovation in the field of common foreign policy. In this regard, the ENP can be seen as an instrument aimed at extending European leadership beyond its natural borders. However, like most of the policies promoted by Brussels, its overly ambitious goals have proved to be beyond the Union's real capabilities. The events of the Arab Springs that began in 2011 caused a real geopolitical earthquake, reshaping regional balances, changing the EU's approach and modifying the conception of its role within the neighborhood.

Two decades after the ENP was introduced, the EU still has not fulfilled its ambitious aim of creating a “circle of allies” in the southern neighborhood. The 2015 ENP Review and the 2016 Global Strategy emphasize the need for the EU to adopt a more cautious and realistic approach. As the world grows more complicated, the EU is encouraged to build its strategic independence to avoid falling under the sway of external powers.

Chapter 1: New challenges for the future of the Mediterranean region

1. 1 Climate change as a risk factor for Mediterranean stability: the Nile case study

The Mediterranean basin could be identified as a climate transition region between temperate climate of central Europe and the arid climate of northern Africa³. Scientists recognize its vulnerability to climatic change. Not by chance, Giorgi defined it as one of the most relevant “hot-spots”⁴. Despite growing concern, projections of climate change in the Mediterranean are still inadequate and limited. This highly fragile sea is warming 20% faster than the rest of the oceans. Climate change has had the effect of prolonging summers, which are now increasingly dry and hot. Data collected predict a reduction in precipitation of more than 25-30% in the near future, resulting in higher temperatures. This combined with rising sea levels due to global warming could have devastating effects on water resources, natural ecosystems, human activities and our health⁵.

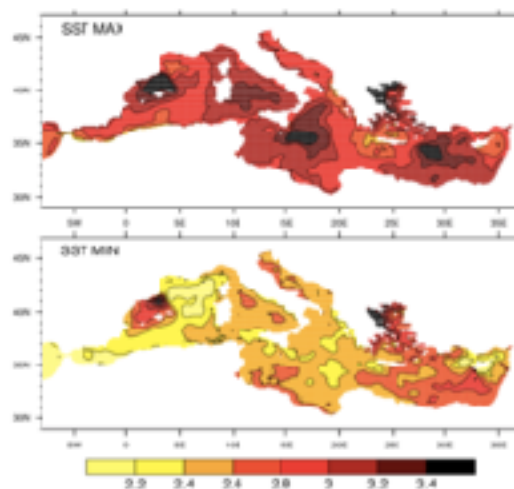


Fig. 1 Expected minimum and maximum changes in sea surface temperature for the 2070–2099 period (vs. 1961–1990). The Balearic Islands, the northwest Ionian, the Aegean and Levantine Seas have been identified as the regions with maximum increase of sea surface temperature, (Adloff et al. 2015, pp.9-10))

³ Lionello P, “The relation between climate change in the Mediterranean region and global warming”, *Regional Environmental Change* (2018) 18:1481–1493

⁴ Giorgi, F., 2006. “Climate change Hot-spots”. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* 33, L08707

⁵ Giorgi F, Lionello P. “Climate change projections for the Mediterranean region”, Elsevier October 2007

Focusing on the Mena region, it has undergone a phase of intense demographic, political and economic transformation since the post-World War II period, that has seen water at the center of government-led development strategies. The growth in water demand, coupled with population growth and improved living conditions, has affected interstate relations within the region itself. In light of this, one might wonder about the economic, social and political consequences caused by climate change. With a specific focus on water resources, we are going to analyze the case study of the Nile Delta so as to understand the correlation between water management, climate change and regional security.

The Nile, at 6,650 km in length from its source to the Mediterranean Sea, is the longest river in the world. It flows through seven countries, namely: Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, South Sudan, Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt. However, its catchment area, having an area of about three million km², extends to four other countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Eritrea. The Nile River is comprised of three major tributaries: the White Nile, the Blue Nile, and the Atbara River. The latter two account for over 80% of the Nile waters⁶.

As far as Egypt is concerned, the Nile River is considered the country's main water resource, with a supply of about 55.5 BCM/year; that is more than 97% of the fresh water of the country⁷. The remaining three percent comes from rainfall and groundwater basins. The UN has formally listed Egypt as a water-scarce country and its ranking will deteriorate to "absolute water scarcity" by 2025⁸. Egyptian agriculture consumes most of the fresh water in the Nile Basin: more than 80% of the total; while only 6% is consumed as domestic water. Sugar cane and cotton are major industries along the Nile. Agriculture represents for 12% of the Egyptian GDP, and employs 20% of the labor force. Egypt is the third most populous country in Africa and the first in the MENA region. Estimates predict that Egypt's current population of 111 million will reach the 237 million in 2100. At the same time, Egypt's annual per capita share of Nile water has decreased dramatically: from 2,500 m³ per capita per year in 1950 to about 680 m³ in 2012. It is estimated to drop to about 350 m³ per capita per year in 2050. Indeed, population growth and increa-

⁶ "Africa: il bacino idrografico del Nilo", IRIAD Review: Studi sulla Pace e sui Conflitti, number 1, January 2023.

⁷ P. Lionello & L. Scarascia, "The relation between climate change in the Mediterranean region and global warming", *Regional Environmental Change* (2018) 18:1481–1493 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-018-1290-1>.

⁸ Ezz and Arafat, 'We Woke up in a Desert'

sing pollutants reduce the amount of available water per person. In this regard, about 80% of drinking water supplies use surface water sources from the Nile or main canals, while 20% rely on groundwater and desalination is limited to remote areas on the coasts.

Given the characteristics of the predominantly desert terrain, the population is unevenly distributed. Indeed, almost 97% of the inhabitants live in three major regions of the country such as: in the Nile Delta, along the banks of the Nile Valley and near the Suez Canal. These regions, which occupy about 4% of the country's land area, are among the most densely populated in the world. The Nile Delta constitutes a large flood plain. Of the country's six aquifers, that of the Nile Delta is the most important: 87% of the total groundwater pumped into Egypt is extracted here⁹. Despite this, due to pollution, poor land management, sea level rise, salinization and climate change, the Nile Delta aquifer system is at great risk¹⁰.

It is clear that Egypt's water sector faces many challenges, such as: limited water resources from the Nile River, nonrenewable groundwater and rainfall, increasing population and population distribution, water quality degradation, costs for new projects, lack of awareness, and the need for greater coordination of different stakeholders. As is well known, access to water has strong economic and social implications. Water scarcity can easily further aggravate social inequalities and poverty in the country. Indeed, when water is scarce, it often hits marginalized communities hardest. This can lead to increased medical expenses and reduced ability to work, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. In Egypt, the urban riots and other internal tensions of the 1980s were directly linked to inadequate food and drinking water. Those without access to modern water treatment systems, often farmers living on the banks of the Nile, are most affected by contaminated water. In addition, data show that poverty is most prevalent in the northern areas of the Delta, where salinization encroaches on once arable land¹¹.

⁹ Sharaky, A. M., El Hassanein, A. S., Atta, S. A., & Khallaf, K. M. A. (2017). Salinization and origin of the coastal shallow groundwater aquifer, northwestern Nile Delta, Egypt. In A. M. Negm (Ed.), *Groundwater in the Nile Delta* (pp.75–306). Cham: Springer.

¹⁰Said I., Salman S., Elnazer A.:“Salinization of groundwater during 20 years of agricultural irrigation, Luxor, Egypt” *Environ Geochem Health* (2022) 44:3821–3835

¹¹Nosair A., Shams M.: “Predictive model for progressive salinization in a coastal aquifer using artificial intelligence and hydrogeochemical techniques: a case study of the Nile Delta aquifer, Egypt”, *Environmental Science and Pollution Research* (2022) 29:9318–9340

The recent increase in demand for water has challenged the primacy of the agricultural sector, which has always been the main recipient of national water resources, thanks to pricing policies that have made water use in agriculture almost free. In some Mena countries, the difficulty governments have in reducing the share of water allocated to agriculture stems from constraints that are essentially political. Strong farmer opposition to increased tariffs makes it difficult for governments to rationalize water use in agriculture. Managing domestic tensions, therefore, takes the form of a delicate political exercise in which governments' goal is to avoid the loss of consensus resulting from unpopular measures. The strategy based on increasing water supply through the construction of large water projects (such as dams) tends, therefore, to prevail, shifting contention for water from the national to the supranational scale.

When we consider that 90% of Egypt's water supply comes from outside its borders, predominantly from Ethiopia, we can easily understand the deep connection between national security and international water resource management. As argued by Hassan: "the Nile River is Egypt's principle artery of life. It is life itself for Egypt. This basic fact does not apply to the same extent to the other riparian states. Therefore, one of the major strategic threats to Egyptian national security is the threat to vital resources lying beyond Egyptian borders"¹². In 2011, Ethiopia, one of the world's poorest countries, began construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, a mega-dam considered the great national redemption after the civil war ended in 1991¹³. This construction increased tensions between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan over water supply. Analysts are certain that in the future more and more wars will involve disputes about access to vital resources such as water. In this regard, rivalries among the Nile riparian states have long been watched to try to predict future trends. More than a decade after work on the dam began, the disputes still remain.

1. 1.1 Salinization and pollution in the Nile Delta aquifer

When in 146 B.C. Carthage was burned to the ground by the Romans, the Senate ordered soldiers to dig furrows in the ground and fill them with salt to make that "cursed"

¹² T. Oestigaard, "Water Scarcity and Food Security along the Nile Politics, population increase and climate change" *Current African Issues* 49 (2012)

¹³ Berndtsson R, Madani K, Aggestam K, Andersson D-E. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: Conflict and Water Diplomacy in the Nile Basin. In: Shafiqul S, Madani K, eds. *Water Diplomacy in Action: Contingent Approaches to Managing Complex Water Problems*. Anthem Press; 2017:253-264.

land never again able to stand against the power of Rome. Even at that time, the Romans understood the destructive potential of salt to bend their enemies.

As regards freshwater, salinization and pollution are two of the major problems that we are facing at the global level. Both of them are strictly link with human activities and over-exploitation of natural resources. Groundwater salinization is a global problem affecting 11 to 30% of the world's irrigated areas. This poses a significant concern, limiting the use of water for various uses and represents a threat to local communities, public health, economic development, and agricultural productivity.

Not only is water scarcity a matter of quantity, but also of quality. One of the most important factors that deteriorate groundwater quality is salinization. Between 11 and 30% of the global irrigated lands are affected by salinity, where the latter is currently growing at a rate of 10% per year. Globally, 38–43% of agricultural lands depend on groundwater¹⁴. Specifically for Egypt, 41% of the total groundwater abstracted is consumed by agricultural irrigation. Unsurprisingly irrigation is one of the main factors affecting groundwater salinity in arid and semi-arid regions. Indeed, intensive irrigation significantly modifies the hydrological cycle. In this regard, the salinization process could be seen as a result of over pumping, where saline water, moving from the ocean to costal aquifers, rises to replace the freshwater withdrawn. In Egypt the excessive extraction of groundwater has led to the depletion and degradation of aquifers, while data confirm that seawater intrusion has been detected 100 km inland as a result of over pumping in Nile Delta. This trend is further exacerbated by the fact that more than 95% of the world's coastal areas are expected to experience sea level rise by the end of the century. Seawater will submerge the low lands along the shoreline, and the groundwater below these lands will become saline. In light of this, since the Nile Delta aquifer is one of the largest coastal aquifers near the Mediterranean coast, it will suffer even more from saltwater intrusion due to climate change in the coming decades. Such trend is further aggravated by the fact that, here, groundwater has been heavily exploited for irrigation and domestic uses over the past 30 years. Indeed, since the 1950s, the amount of irrigation water withdrawn has doubled and is expected to increase by 14% by 2030. The uncontrolled pumping and the high density of wells have led to increased salinization and subsequent well abandonment, especially

¹⁴ Kotb T., Watanabe T., Yoshihiko O., Tanji K. "Soil salinization in the Nile Delta and related policy issues in Egypt", *Agricultural Water Management* 43 (2000) 239-261

Almost 20% of groundwater in the Nile aquifer does not meet drinking water standards¹⁶. Despite the fact that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has invested more than two billion dollars in Egypt's urban water and wastewater infrastructure, the situation remains worrisome, especially in urban areas¹⁷. For instance, the head of the Internal Medicine Unit at a specialized hospital in Damietta (ca. 200 km north of Cairo) said that more than half of the patients treated at suffer from liver disease, kidney disease and infections.

The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that episodes of infection increase every time a new dam or agricultural program is undertaken¹⁸. Other water-related infectious diseases, such as: diarrhea, malaria, dengue, intestinal worm infections and river blindness, correspond to consumption of polluted water¹⁹. Diarrhea alone causes four million deaths a year worldwide and is the leading cause of child death in developing countries such as those in the Nile Basin. The aforementioned chemicals are also responsible for harmful effects, manifesting mainly in decreased fertility, birth defects, and chronic diseases. For example, lead pollution rates in Cairo are the highest of the world's largest cities and cause an additional 10,000-25,000 deaths per year.

This situation requires concrete and effective normative intervention. Indeed, the Egyptian Public Authority for Drainage Projects has installed a network of subsurface drainage in almost 50% of the total cultivated lands of the country so as to decrease salt deposition on farmland. However, the real challenge is fought for the groundwater. To ensure sustainable groundwater use, especially for the Nile aquifer, the withdrawal rate should not exceed the recharge rate (1-8 mm/year). It follows from this that the use of groundwater for industrial purposes is the most logical option, as it involves less water consumption and a greater share in GDP than the agricultural sector. Moreover, at the scientific level, the lack of an environmental database is one of the main causes of government inaction. Without a scientific basis, allocating scarce economic resources effectively becomes difficult. In this regard an Early Warning System (EWS) as a water management strategy is

¹⁶ Wieb K. "The Nile River: Potential for Conflict and Cooperation in the Face of Water Degradation" *Natural Resources Journal*, Volume 41, issue 3 Summer 2001

¹⁷ USAID, The USAID FY 1998 Congressional Presentation: Egypt

¹⁸ Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, *The River Nile: Main Water Transfer Projects in Egypt and Impacts on Egyptian Agriculture*, in 3 *LONG DISTANCE WATER TRANSFER* (1983),

¹⁹ Pamela LeRoy, *Troubled Waters: Population and Water Scarcity*, 6 *COLO. J. INT'L ENV'T. L. & POL'Y* 299,303 (1995).

essential to provide stakeholders and the local community with information on threats to the groundwater resource. Among many forecasting methods, AI plays a key role in future planning.

1. 1.2 Regional water disputes: the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is a mega project launched by the Ethiopian government in 2011. It was built 15 km from the border with Sudan. At 1259 km long, it would be the fifth longest dam in the world and the first on the African continent. The dam should be understood from the perspective of promoting national confidence and development of one of the world's poorest countries. In fact, Ethiopia ranks 173rd out of 189 states in the UNDP's Human Development Index 2020²⁰. Its cutting-edge turbine will enable it to generate 5150 megawatts per year, while its water basin will generate a reservoir larger than the City of London. As widely acknowledged, Ethiopia's food insecurity is mainly related to droughts and floods that cause crop loss and famine among the population. According to government statements, GERD represents a great opportunity for regional development. In this regard, Addis Ababa is confident that the dam will foster cooperation, mitigate climate change uncertainties, and catalyze greater market and trade integration. Despite this enthusiasm, environmental groups have criticized the mega-project arguing that it will flood more than 1,680 square kilometers of forest, submerge communities and displace more than 20,000 people. In addition to environmental concerns, there is the fact that GERD is increasing tensions between Ethiopia and two other states such as Egypt and Sudan²¹.

²⁰ World Bank data; UNDP, 'The Next Frontier'

²¹ Ron Matthews & Vlado Vivoda (2023) 'Water Wars': strategic implications of the grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, *Conflict, Security & Development*, 23:4, 333-366



Fig. 2 Map of the Nile Basin. Source: Suter, 2016

Since the Nile is by far the most important source of fresh water for both Egypt and Sudan, the construction of a mega-dam is primarily perceived as a threat to their respective national security. Indeed, the two downstream countries fear that Addis Ababa may use the dam as leverage to increase its geopolitical relevance in the region. According to current projections, the reduction in water flow caused by the Renaissance Dam will result in a loss to the Egyptian economy of \$51 billion and the loss of 4.74 million jobs, such that Egypt's GDP per capita will be 6 percent lower in 2024²². Add to this the critical effects caused by climate change, intensive land exploitation, chemical discharges into the river's waters, and population growth, and one can easily understand why the scientific literature on water conflicts has focused primarily on the Nile case study.

Over the past decades intra-African water security tensions have dramatically increased. Since the 1990s, a concept of water security has taken hold in the field of Security Studies, expanding the traditional military and defense orientation. In particular, the Copenhagen School's securitization theory provided the foundation for contemporary security studies, which consider energy, food, water and the environment as (non-traditional) security issues. UN-Water defines water security as "the ability of populations to safeguard

²² Wheeler, Kevin G., Marc Jeuland, Kenneth Strzepek, Jim Hall, Edith Zagona, Gamal Abdo, Thinius Basson, Don Blackmore, Paul Block and Dale Whittington, 2022. 'Comment on 'Egypt's Water Budget Deficit and Suggested Mitigation Policies for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Filling Scenarios'. *Environmental Research Letters* 17(8)

sustainable access to adequate quantities of water of acceptable quality"²³ for people, the economy and the environment. In contrast, water insecurity emerges in the absence of any of these conditions²⁴.

Former President Morsi's statement labeling the GERD as a "declaration of war" suggests a significant likelihood of military action²⁵. This approach already appeared evident, when in 1979, during the historic signing of the peace accords with Israel, then Egyptian President Anwar Sadat declared: 'The only matter that could take Egypt to war again is water'²⁶. Ever since the days of Nasser, Egypt has made its military the main boast in the MENA region. In line with its strategic culture, 2015-2019 Cairo became the third largest arms importer in the world and the second largest in the MENA region after Saudi Arabia. Comparing military capabilities between Egypt and Ethiopia, the former's superiority is indisputable: in 2021, Egypt spent \$5.2 billion on defense to support 836,000 armed forces compared to Ethiopia's \$448 million and 138,000 forces.

However, despite its clear military superiority, Egypt should cautiously weigh the implications that a preemptive attack on the Ethiopian dam would cause. Such an action would likely lead to the imposition of international sanctions, damage to relations with third countries, especially the Nile Basin countries and Africa more generally. However, drastic cuts from much-needed Western aid would also be evident. Moreover, such an attack would also cause extensive damage to Sudan. In fact, the breaking of the dam, and the consequent spilling of thousands of cubic meters of water in a few moments, would cause a violent flood that would raze to the ground anything it encounters within a hundred kilometers.

From a legal prospective, experts agree on claiming that the current dispute dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. At that time, Egypt was largely recognized as the

²³ United Nations Water (UN-Water), 2013. 'Water Security and the Global Water Agenda'. *United Nations University, UN-Water Analytical Brief*.

²⁴ Ngambouk Vitalis Pemunta, Ngo Valery Ngo, Choumbou Raoul Fani Djomo, Sianga Mutola, Judith Achin Seember, Grace Annih Mbong & Enjeckayang Asomanei Forkim | (2021) The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Egyptian National Security, and human and food security in the Nile River Basin, *Cogent Social Sciences*, 7:1, 1875598

²⁵ Dunne, 'The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and Egypt's Military Options'. Arab Center, Washington DC, 30 July.

²⁶ Anwar Sadat cited in Starr, Joyce R., 1991. 'Water Wars'. *Foreign Policy* 82(1), 17-36

'hydro-hegemon' of the Nile²⁷. In 1902, after an intense negotiation with its former colony, the United Kingdom,

In 1902 the British, on behalf of Egypt, concluded an agreement with Ethiopia to protect Egypt's historic claims to the Nile. The treaty, written in both English and Amharic, had been mistranslated, leaving room for ambivalent interpretation. For this reason, too, Ethiopia then refused to ratify the treaty. At the same time, Egypt insisted that the treaty was binding and prohibited Ethiopia from undertaking any project without Egyptian approval. The treaty remained a source of disagreement between Ethiopia and Egypt²⁸.

A second agreement came in 1929 between Sudan and Egypt. It stipulated that construction on the river, its tributaries or its source, which might obstruct the flow of the Nile and affect Egypt's exploitation of the water, would be impermissible. The agreement allocated 48 billion cubic meters of water per year to Egypt and four to Sudan, completely ignoring the other riparian countries. After gaining independence in 1953, Sudan asked to amend the existing agreement. The 1959 Nile Waters Agreement reallocated 55.5 BCM to Egypt and 18.5 BCM to Sudan, but excluded all other riparian countries. In this framework, Ethiopia disavows the treaties, mainly because they do not recognize that the main source of the Nile waters comes from Ethiopia's borders. In this framework it is important to note that the agreements from 1929 and 1959 were heavily influenced by colonial power of the British Empire, which sought to secure water resources for its colonies. Indeed such treaties rooted in a colonial context that primarily served the interests of Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Sudan, while excluding other riparian countries. These agreements ignored the contributions and needs of upstream nations, particularly Ethiopia, which contributes about 85% of the Nile's flow. The exclusion of this country from decision-making processes has left a legacy of resentment and mistrust.

Historically, the countries in dispute have invoked various legal principles to support their arguments. On the one hand, Egypt has used the "prior use" or "historical" doctrine and the "no harm" doctrine, according to which upstream riparian countries cannot use shared waters in a way that is harmful to downstream riparian countries. On the other hand, Ethiopia invoked the Harmon doctrine, according to which, as a matter of soverei-

²⁷ Tekuya, Mahemud, 2020. 'The Egyptian Hydro-Hegemony in the Nile Basin: The Quest for Changing the Status Quo'. *The Journal of Water Law* 26(1), 10

²⁸ Niveen Tadros, Shrinking Water Resources: The National Security Issue of This Century, 17 *Nw. J. IN T'L L. & Bus.* 1091,1091 (1996-97)

gnty, states can use water within their borders unconditionally, to the detriment of other riparians²⁹. Several mediation attempts all failed.

However, only in 1999, cooperation among riparian countries seemed to regain momentum. the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) was signed by water ministers from nine riparian states, with the participation of observers from the World Bank and the United Nations³⁰. The purpose of the Initiative was to achieve a shared vision of "sustainable socio-economic development through equitable use of the shared water resources of the Nile Basin and the benefits derived from them."³¹ Significantly, the three countries involved were among the signatories, confirming the desire to build a platform for future dialogue aimed at delineating the use and management of the Nile River.

Based on the principle of "do no harm", the text of the 2010 Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) outlined principles, rights and obligations for the cooperative management and development of water resources in the Nile Basin. Rather than allocating percentages of water to each riparian state, the Treaty sought to establish a framework to "promote the integrated management, sustainable development and harmonious use of the basin's water resources and their conservation and protection for the benefit of present and future generations."³² To this end, the Treaty provided for the establishment of a permanent institutional mechanism to ensure the implementation of the agreed decisions. However, because six ratifications were required for the CPA to come into force and only three were obtained, the CPA never came into force. In 2011 Addis Ababa began construction of the GERD provoking the wrath of Cairo. However, the sudden outbreak of the Arab Springs in the same year forced Egypt's fermenting political class to focus on the domestic political crisis. Moreover, in 2013, Sudan implemented a rapid reorientation of its foreign policy recognizing that GERD was not a danger to its security. Suddenly isolated, Egypt was forced to compromise. In March 2015, the Agreement on the Declaration of Principles on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam was signed.

²⁹ Christopher L Kukk & David A. Deese, At the Water's Edge: Regional Conflict and Cooperation over Fresh Water, 1 UCLA J. INT'L L. & FOREIGN AFF. 21, 45 (1996)

³⁰ Dereje Zeleke Mekonnen, The Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement Negotiations and the Adoption of a 'Water Security' Paradigm: Flight into Obscurity or a Logical Cul-de-sac?, *European Journal of International Law*, Volume 21, Issue 2, May 2010, Pages 421–440

³¹ Salman, Salman M.A., 2017. 'The Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement: The Impasse is Breakable'. *Sudan Tribune*, 22 June.

³² Agreement on the Nile River Basin Cooperative Framework, 2010

The Declaration marked a pivotal moment in regional diplomatic, with Egypt and Sudan recognizing that the Nile is the source of livelihood and resource development for riparian countries. The Declaration also formally recognized that the purpose of the Ethiopian dam is to "generate power to contribute to economic development, the promotion of cross-border cooperation and regional integration"³³.

Water insecurity is increasingly perceived to exacerbate tensions between states. At the 2008 World Economic Forum in Davos, the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon claimed that: "increasingly, fights are erupting over such basic human needs as water or arable land. I find this trend deeply worrying, especially because such shortages are only projected to grow in coming years. Without a concerted effort to address water security issues, we are likely to see a rise in conflict between communities and nations over access to this essential resource"³⁴. To cite some well-known examples, the Syrian civil war that created 6.7 million internally displaced persons in 10 years has been linked to the impacts of the climate crisis, particularly the low water availability caused by a long drought period that affected the region from 2007 to 2010. Starting from a "climate trigger," then the intertwining of a number of complex factors such as religious, social, and political tensions, deteriorating economic conditions due in part to poor land management choices have reduced the population to the brink, contributing to the igniting of riots, grievances, and the ensuing conflict³⁵.

However, there would seem to be a trend toward resolving these disputes through diplomatic tools, or through cooperation, rather than through military means that could then lead to rapid and unpredictable escalations. This finding is confirmed by the fact that more than 3,600 treaties have been on various aspects of international waters³⁶. Joint management of the waters of the Nile Basin, however, is necessary to ensure regional

³³ Salman, Salman M.A., 2016. 'The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: The Road to the Declaration of Principles and the Khartoum Document'. *Water International* 41(4), 512–527

³⁴ UN News, "Ban Ki-moon warns that water shortages are increasingly driving conflicts", (2008), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2008/02/248092>

³⁵ Legambiente, "Acqua, conflitti e migrazioni forzate: La corretta gestione delle risorse idriche come strumento di stabilità e pace", Report (2024), <https://www.legambiente.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Acqua-conflitti-e-migrazioni-forzate-2024.pdf>

³⁶ Kehl, Jenny R., 2017. 'Water Security in Transboundary Systems: Cooperation in Intractable Conflicts and the Nile System'. In *Water Security in the Middle East: Essays in Scientific and Social Cooperation*, ed. Jean Axelrad Cahan, Anthem Press, London, 39–66

peace and stability. Climate change, projected population growth, as well as the intensive exploitation of aquifers, will increasingly put a strain on inter-state relations regarding water management. Not surprisingly, a new diplomatic current focused on water is gaining momentum to avert future conflicts.

1.2 The Arctic route: is it a possible alternative to the Suez Canal in the near future?³⁷

Although it counts just for 1% of world waters, from an economic prospective the Mediterranean basin covers 20% of the global maritime trade value. With its routes it represents an important exchange node among Europe, Africa, the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific one. Its relevance dates back to the ancient Mediterranean seafaring civilizations that were able to prosper through trade. In light of the recent globalization and thanks to its geographical location, the Mediterranean Sea has turned into a “natural bridge” for global maritime trade. It is not a secret that maritime transport is the main carrier of international trade: in fact, 90% of the world's traded goods travel by sea. Not surprisingly, data show that shipping is estimated to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 3.1% in the period 2018–2026³⁸. In this general framework, 10% of all global maritime traffic passes through the Mediterranean Sea annually. Among its most active ports of call we can identify: Algeciras (Spain), Marsiglia (France), Trieste (Italy) and Valencia (Spain).

As regards maritime routes, it is important to look at chokepoints. The Suez Canal ranks fifth in the world in terms of transit cargo volumes with 15.6 million TEU³⁹. 12% of the world's maritime trade passes through it. In 2019, 1.2 billion of tons of cargo transited through the Canal, carried by nearly 19 thousand ships with a daily average of more than 50. Despite its worldwide recognized centrality, obvious critical issues remain. The blockage of the Canal caused by the stranding of the Ever Given ship for 6 days in March 2021 resulting in the loss of 7.5 billion, regional instability, international piracy, recent assaults launched by the Houthi against container carriers triggered by the war in Gaza show the fragility of the global supply chain. Since the beginning of the Houthi's attacks, several shipowners have preferred to circumnavigate the African continent in order to de-

³⁷ M. Laruelle, (2014), “Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North”, M.E. Sharpe

³⁸ Heininen, L., & Exner-Pirot, H. (2019). Arctic Yearbook 2019: Redefining Arctic Security Northern Research Forum.

³⁹ The twenty-foot equivalent unit, or TEU, is the standard measure of volume in container transport, corresponding to about 38 cubic meters of total footprint.

liver goods from Asia to Europe. This decision led to a one-week increase in sailing time, as well as increased costs by twice as much. Within this framework, experts wondered whether there was space for the development of a new sea route that could be a possible alternative to the dominant one. In this regard, as the Arctic region is expected to be ice-free by 2050 due to climate change, some argue that the Arctic will be navigable year-round, effectively opening up a new faster and cheaper shipping corridor that can connect the Far East to major European ports. If this might occur, the negative impact on the Mediterranean maritime economy and port systems will be overwhelming. In this paragraph we will draw a picture of the current situation in the Arctic, analyzing its strengths and weaknesses; we will then conclude by identifying some possible future scenarios.

1. 2.1 The Arctic Maritime Routs and their implications

According to the OECD “the development of new international trade routes [...] would have important implications for global logistics chains and transport network infrastructure”⁴⁰. Nowadays, the Arctic routes are navigable only for two months a year without the assistance of an icebreaker. Looking at the European Commission's 'Science for Environment Policy' report of 2013, we see that the navigability of the Ocean Arctic is estimated to increase between 94% and 98% between 2040 and 2059⁴¹. According to J.P. Rodrigue, the Arctic Ocean is crossed by four maritime routes⁴². The first is called the North Sea Route (NSR), it runs close to the Russian coast and, given its greater distance from the Arctic ice cap, is expected to be the first to be completely ice-free. For this reason and for its less harsh climate, it is considered the route with the highest commercial potential. Theoretically, the shipping route between East Asia and Western Europe would be shortened by 15 days: from 21,000 km with the Suez Canal to just 12,800 km. In 2019 the NSR was open to transit from July to the beginning of November which counts for 30% of the year.

The second route is the Northeast Passage (NEP), which could be seen as an extension to the NSR. Despite this, we must note an important legal distinction between the two.

⁴⁰ OECD (2019), ITF Transport Outlook.

⁴¹ “Science for Environment Policy”: European Commission DG Environment News Alert Service, 2013, edited by SCU, The University of the West of England, Bristol.

⁴²J.P. Rodrigue, 2017, The Geography of Transport Systems fourth edition.

Indeed, while the NEP is ruled by international law and treaties, the NSR is a Russian domestic trade and maritime route.

On the contrary, the Northwest Passage (NWP) links the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans by crossing the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. Compared to the conventional route via the Panama Canal, the NWP would reduce the journey between East Asia and Western Europe by 10,400 km, which would result in significant savings in terms of time and costs. However, such reductions would produce negative effects on the traffic passing through the Panama Canal, increasing the regional instability of Central America. It is no coincidence that the United States is more cautious in developing Arctic routes.

Lastly, the Arctic Bridge linking the Russian port of Murmansk to Canadian ports could be used, mostly for the grain trade.

There is also a hypothetical route such as the Transpolar Sea Route (TSR). The latter would use the central part of the Arctic to link more directly the Strait of Bering and the Atlantic Ocean. Despite this, such route involves ice-free conditions that are not yet observed and therefore is less likely to occur in the next future.

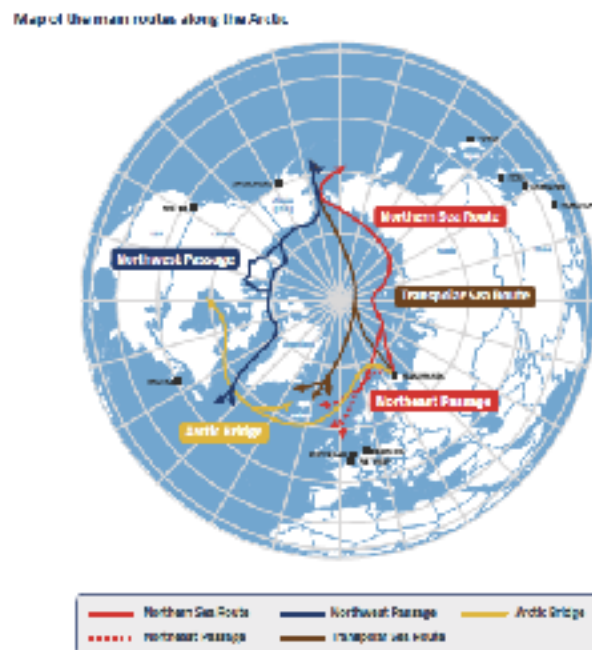


Fig 1. Source: SRM on Amsa, Arctic Portal 2018 search Service Report, 05-02-2020, <https://www.sr-m.it/en/catalog/product/321820/the-arctic-route-climate-change-impact-maritime-and-economic-scenario-geo-strategic-analysis-and-perspectives.htm>

While in the past the NSR appeared to be the only available route to deliver the natural resources stored in the Arctic region, today an increasing number of shipping companies are planning this route to reduce costs and time. Transits on the NSR fluctuated greatly between 2010 and 2019. In 2010, transits amounted to over 100,000 tonnes and reached

a peak of 1.35 million tonnes in 2013, after which they dropped to 40,000 in 2015, with a further increase to 697,000 tonnes in 2019. This fluctuation is mainly due to the price of bunker fuel, geopolitical tensions and EU-US sanctions against Moscow as a reaction to the Crimean war (Fig. 2). In 2019, 37 transit voyages were made passing through the NSR. In this respect, the most active shipping company was the Chinese CESCO, which completed seven international transits. As we shall see, this was an attempt to follow the ambitious government guidelines set by Beijing for the Polar Silk Road. Another noteworthy event occurred in 2018, when the first containership (3,600 TEUs), *Venta Maersk*, made an international transit on the NSR, between South Korea, and Germany.

On 8 June 2015, the Russian government issued the: “NSR Integrated Development Plan 2015-2030”. The governmental document emphasizes the need to provide a more secure and reliable shipping on the NSR for the maritime export of Russian natural resources, but also the strategic relevance of the NSR to its national security. The plan also envisages increasing international cargo transit on the NSR in cooperation with Asian countries and most notably China. This strategy is part of a complex geopolitical framework characterized by a strong strengthening of the Sino-Russian axis in response to EU-US sanctions. According to Russian government officials, a volume of goods on the NSR of 92.6 million tonnes will be expected by 2024, and by 2030 they hope to add a significant portion of international transit⁴³. In this respect, through a public company, Moscow is conducting a federal project called 'The Northern Sea Route', which is part of the Integrated Plan for the modernization and expansion of port infrastructure. In 2018, of the vessels that passed through the NSR, 25% were made by 53 non-Arctic states, an additional sign that this path is becoming increasingly more relevant. However, Russia's predictions did not take into consideration the impact that the Ukrainian war would cause. Although there is no official analysis, Western sanctions have certainly had a strong impact on Moscow's expectations. On the other hand, however, the conflict has also strengthened the Sino-Russian economic partnership

⁴³ Gunnarsson B., Managing Director, Centre for High North Logistics (CHNL) Nord University, Norway, 2016 in *The Maritime executive*, “Future Development of the Northern Sea Route”.

Transit cargo through the NSR 2010-2019 (1,000 tons)

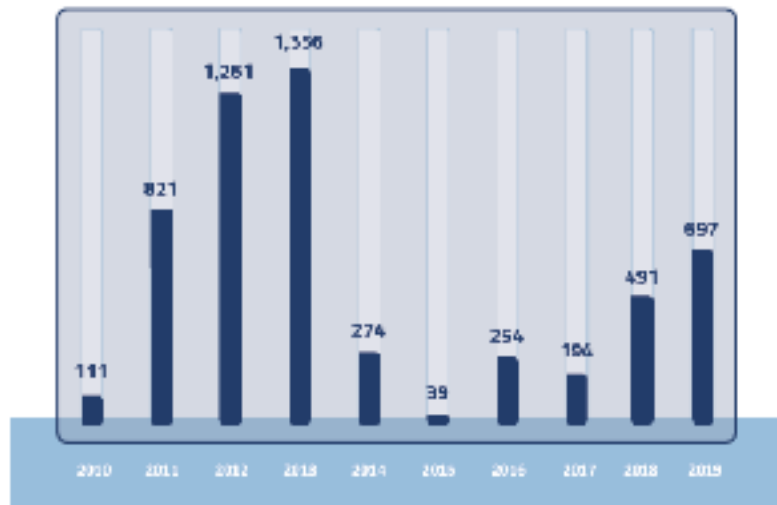


Fig 2. Source: SRM on CHNL information office, 2020

Nonetheless, it is clear from the table below that NSR has some competitive advantages on some routes originating in or going to the northern areas of China and Northern Europe, while it is not competitive for ports such as Singapore in the Mediterranean. Taking the Shanghai-Rotterdam and Shanghai-Genoa routes as examples, we can see that for the former, the NSR allows a significant reduction in travel time of about one week; while for the latter, the current route via Suez remains more advantageous.

An example of the NSR impact: route benefits

■ The figure shows examples of routes and the impact of the NSR

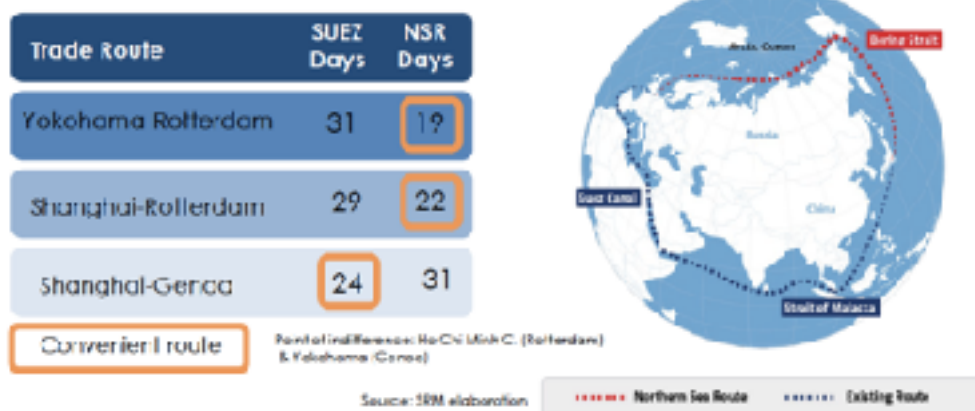


Fig 3. Source: SRM elaboration, 2020

1. 2.2 The role of global actor in the Arctic: between cooperation and competition

Normally open between July and November, the NSR offers remarkable exploitation potential due to the large energy resources in the area. According to recent estimates, 65% of all hydrocarbon reserves in the world are in the Arctic. In this framework, the Russian Arctic Exclusive Economic Zone is estimated to contain about 41% of all recoverable oil in the Arctic and 70% of the total natural gas. It is deemed that in the Arctic there would be approximately one-fourth of the world's undiscovered oil and gas resources⁴⁴. Not surprisingly, the Siberian and Far East regions contribute 10% to the national GDP.

To establish its hegemony in the area, the Russian Federation relies heavily on its logistical advantage and, as the largest of the five Arctic Ocean littoral states with 53% of total Arctic shores, it has developed a relatively more advanced transport network than its direct competitors (i.e. the United States and Canada)⁴⁵. In fact, almost all major ports along Russia's northern coast are experiencing a significant increase in cargo volumes.

This positive trend might be seen as the direct effect of the national strategy issued in 2019 by the federal government for the NSR, which aims at making the Arctic accessible for commercial shipping and fossil fuel extraction. In this regard, Russia is investing in infrastructure, meteorological equipment and the construction of new ships for mapping natural resources⁴⁶. Moscow also aims to invest in the already large fleet of icebreakers, thus consolidating its exclusive control over the NSR in the short to medium term. Indeed, at present even ice-class ships can hardly cross the Arctic route independently, even during the warmest season. It should be emphasized that currently no other country's icebreaker fleet can be even remotely compared to Russia's in terms of total size, power, and overall technological advantage⁴⁷. Despite its effort, the federal government still is facing some relevant challenges. Indeed, the current logistics system is still inadequate to support the economic viability of year-round shipping traffic. Lacking above all is an integrated regional transportation system. Indeed, with a few mere exceptions, most of the cities, industrial complexes, mining camps and even navigable rivers north of the econo-

⁴⁴ "The peculiarities of Russian Arctic development", Official site of the Faculty of Distance Learning of Plekhanov Russian University of Economics

⁴⁵ H. Conley & C. Rohloff, "The New Ice Curtain: Russia' Strategic Reach to the Arctic", A Report of The CSIS Europe Program, August 2015

⁴⁶ "Infrastructure plan for the Northern Sea Route until 2035", Russian Government website, 30-12-2019 [<http://government.ru/docs/38714/>]

⁴⁷ "Russia's Icebreaker Fleet Dominates the Arctic", D. Hunkar Top Foreign Stoks, 17-10-2018

mically developed belt along the Trans-Siberian Railway are generally poorly connected. Road and rail networks are also in need of modernization and maintenance⁴⁸.

Looking at the United States for more than four decades, Washington has developed a series of strategies and guidelines regarding the Arctic; the most recent of which are the 2016 and 2019 Department of Defense Reports to Congress⁴⁹. The latter confirms that: “the Arctic security environment is complex. Many positive, cooperative trends endure in the region. At the same time, the region is increasingly uncertain, with a deepening and intensifying of certain problematic strategic trends. Although the immediate prospect of conflict in the Arctic is low, these trends could adversely affect US national security interests, promote instability, and ultimately degrade security in the region [...] Regional cooperation is in the US interest and contributes to a secure and stable Arctic. This is strengthened by the US-led alliance and partnership network in the Arctic and by maintaining activities in the region in line with international norms.”⁵⁰ However, despite recent joint exercises with Canada, there is a lack of a permanent Coast Guard presence that can handle search and rescue missions. Unlike Russia, the United States lacks adequate infrastructure for maritime transportation and logistics in the Arctic. Primarily lacking are modern and competitive port systems, communication, water, power and hydrocarbon extraction systems. It also lacks a protection system for possible oil or chemical spills⁵¹. From the American point of view, the Arctic is deemed an "emerging market" that is not worth committing to because access is difficult and expensive. Moreover, the unfair competition of Chinese SOEs represents an ulterior disadvantage for the US engagement. Because of better investment alternatives and the general perception that the Arctic is not currently a level playing field, the United States is relying more on monitoring the region from afar while containing Russian and Chinese initiatives through sanctions or tariffs and other trade barriers. In this regard, the imposition of economic and technological sanctions on the Russian Federation since 2014 is already producing its results, limiting Mo-

⁴⁸ “Economic and geopolitical aspects of developing the Northern Sea Route”, N. Didenko and V. Cherenkov, IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science, 2018

⁴⁹ US Department of Defense “Report to Congress on Strategy to Protect United States National Security Interests in the Arctic Region”, 2016; “Report to Congress –Arctic Strategy”, June 2019; “The implications of US policy stagnation toward the Arctic Region”, H. Conley and M. Melino, Center for Strategic International Studies, May 2019

⁵⁰ Report to Congress –Arctic Strategy, June 2019 p.4-6

⁵¹ “Is America losing out on the Northern Sea Route?”, James Gordon 10-09-2019

scow's drilling and processing capabilities at low temperatures and especially in the off-shore sector. The US focus is more on endorsing freedom of navigation along the NSR.

As far as China is concerned, the State Council Information Office issued the 2018 White Paper in which Beijing defines itself as a “near Arctic State”⁵². While it has no geographic proximity to the Arctic, China has at least three main interests in the region: a) the right to conduct scientific research, exploration and resource exploitation; b) the legitimacy to implement maritime security and trade measures; and c) concern about climate change and its potential consequences both on the North Pole itself and on Chinese territory.

To achieve these goals economically and diplomatically, the Republic of China has gradually moved closer to Moscow in recent years, especially since Western sanctions have pushed the Russian Federation to become more reliant on Asian markets in the energy sector⁵³. While over the past decades Beijing and Moscow have cooperated mainly in the energetic filed in the Siberian and Far East Russian departments, today such cooperation is gaining new momentum also in the Arctic. In July 2017, China and Russia signed the “Joint China-Russia Declaration on further strengthening the global, strategic and cooperative partnership”. The declaration includes the North Sea route as a strategic area of cooperation, as a formal part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure. Indeed, the recent Russian infrastructural investments mentioned above could be also understood in light of this document.

In January 2018, China issued the “Vision for Maritime Cooperation Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative”⁵⁴ as part of the BRI Initiative indicating the Arctic as a priority. The document states that China is eager to build a “Polar Silk Road” together with the Arctic littoral countries, notably Russia. According to Beijing, the Polar Silk Road should be the “3rd way” to connect the Eurasian Economic Union along side with the Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road. Russia has the know-how and control of the route, as well as the energy resources, while China has the financial resources and the urgent need to find new routes and new markets for its goods.

⁵² “China’s Arctic Policy”, 26-0-2018

⁵³ “Russian perceptions of China in the Arctic”, A. Calvo, Asia Dialogue 23-03-2015

⁵⁴ The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, China’s Arctic Policy, The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, January 2018.



Fig 4. Source: SRM on China's Development and Reform Commission, The Arctic Institute, National Snow and Ice data Centre, Reuters

In this regard, it is not surprisingly that China is investing over \$1.4 trillion in the economies of the Arctic nations (including Finland and Sweden), \$89.2 billion of which was in infrastructure, assets, or projects⁵⁵.

Despite foreseeable rivalries, the Arctic remains an area of peaceful cooperation among States. A multilateral approach is perceived as vital at such extreme latitudes. Furthermore, international diplomacy has satisfactorily settled disputes on maritime borders and hydrocarbon exploitation. There are two main areas of cooperation that must be mentioned: a) scientific research: could be useful to foster cross-field synergies among all the involved actors; b) Environmental protection: the Arctic is one of the most fragile regions of the planet that must be safeguarded. This is possibly the most solid and established area of collaboration.

⁵⁵ CNA Corporation (US), Mark E. Rosen, Cara B. Thuringer, 2017, Unconstrained Foreign Direct Investment: An Emerging Challenge to Arctic Security.

1. 2.3 Advantages and disadvantages of the NSR

As geographic conditions change, so do national interests' perceptions. Rising temperatures allow longer periods of free passage, although it will still be decades before year-round access is possible. For the shipping industry, Arctic routes undoubtedly represent an opportunity, as they shorten the journey from the Far East to Northwestern Europe both in terms of distance (-40%) and time (-20%), resulting in reduced fuel consumption and costs. Such results would be in line with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) strategy on reducing Green-House Gases (GHG) emissions by 50% by 2050.

The opening of Arctic routes has the potential to bring enormous benefits to world trade, which, however, are accompanied by disadvantages of their own. Despite the reduction in time, in navigating the Arctic Ocean, ships will have to reduce their sailing speed to 10/15 knots in order to anticipate the problems associated with the presence of icebergs and constantly changing weather conditions. For instance, the navigable season is always subject to change due to these factors. Thus, commercial shipping will also be negatively affected from this situation since markets demand goods be delivered on time. In addition, since the Arctic Sea has not been completely charted so far, ships will not be able to proceed at the same speed as well-known trade routes.

Moreover, there are many important ports along the traditional Suez route where ships can stop⁵⁶. In fact, this route is more convenient especially for megaships because it allows for more calls in strategic and fast-growing areas (starting with Shanghai: India, Arabian Gulf, Suez, Mediterranean also as a base for calls in Europe, U.S.), while along the NSR ships face long days of solitary sailing before reaching their destination. On the contrary, the development of the NSR would also depend on the infrastructural and economic growth of Russian ports and more broadly the Baltic area. Indeed, shipping companies consider available port capacity, port costs, and port accessibility as key factors for calling at a port in the future.

From an environmental perspective, the opening of shipping routes in the Arctic poses a threat because of possible collisions, diesel and oil spills, and air pollution. In this regards, several shipping companies have adopted specific policy so as to protect the Arctic.

⁵⁶ Segreteria Nazionale FIT-CISL, "La crisi del Canale di Suez taglia fuori dal mercato i porti italiani e triplica il costo del trasporto delle merci" (1 Febbraio 2024), <https://www.fitcisl.org/documenti/la-crisi-del-canale-di-suez-taglia-fuori-dal-mercato-i-porti-italiani-e-triplica-il-costo-del-trasporto-delle-merci/>

CMA CGM and MSC, are some of those that have stated that they will avoid using the NSR connecting Asia to Europe in order to protect the fragile ecosystem.

Furthermore, it is not a secret that the shipping industry is moving towards bigger ship-size, in order to boost economies of scale. Thus, the limited size of the vessels (around 4,000 TEUs) that can navigate the Arctic Route (because of the ice and icebreakers tracks) compared to Ultra Large Containers Vessels passing through the Suez Canal increase the relative opportunity cost of using the NSR. In this regard, it was estimated that small carriers will be crossing the Arctic by 2030, medium-size ships by the following decade and large vessels by 2050. In the table below we can clearly identify a detailed list of costs and benefits of exploiting NSR.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Shorter distance (North-Central Asian Route: approximately -40% reduction)	Technical challenges on ships and facilities (changes in ice condition)
Lower risk of piracy (the Strait of Malacca and Gulf of Aden)	Depth of ports in the region are limited (big ships cannot anchor even secure facilities of support)
Shorter transit time	Navigation
Fuel consumption saving	Lack of Search & Rescue infrastructure
Planning and working on sufficient infrastructure along NSR	Effect on a unique ecosystem (unexplored impact on regional/global environment)
	Infrastructure during the route
	Transparency (fuel provider)
	Ice-class requirement and ice routing alternatives
	Policy issues
	Complex geographical situation
	Uncertain sea-ice and unfavourable weather conditions
	The length of the sailing season
	Uncertainty in commercial viability
	Waste management in the Arctic area
	Alternative transport options such as railway
	Differing nature of ramp and liner shipping in container shipping
	High insurance costs

Fig 5. Source: adapted from Pruyn, 2016; Zhu *et al.*, 2018; Bekkers *et al.*, 2015; Melia *et al.*, 2016; Chircop, 2016; Walkowski, 2015

1. 2.4 Three possible future scenarios for the NSR

Predicting the future evolution of Arctic routes is not an easy task because of the uncertainty and the large number of factors that may influence the final outcome. Nevertheless, the scientific literature has shown that there are at least three possible scenarios to con-

sider⁵⁷. The first scenario is maintaining the current status. Given this, the development of the necessary infrastructure along the Northern Sea Route is unlikely to advance as quickly as global warming, which is causing the polar ice caps to melt. In addition, achieving the same risk and safety standards for the Northern Sea Route as existing routes is another challenge. There are also concerns about the environmental impact of a possible Arctic route. The main reason why the NSR is unattractive for container shipping is its reliability and punctuality. “Delays are costly for industry because markets rely on just-in-time delivery of goods”. With this configuration, the Suez Canal will maintain its expected growth rate as trade between China and Mediterranean ports is expected to increase.

The second scenario involves the emergence of the NSR as the main link between Far East Asia and Europe. Obviously, this change will not happen drastically but rather gradually also due to climatic conditions. In fact, the peak of polar ice melting will occur between 2030 and 2050. In this time frame, substantial investments will have to be made to logistically prepare the route so that the ships will be served with all the necessary services. Logically the willingness of shipping company to undertake such routes is another relevant precondition. Broadly speaking, at the global level we are witnessing a phenomenon of global shipping aggregation. For example, in the first six months of 2018, the control of 70% of the world's fleet passed from the hands of 15 carriers to those of 10⁵⁸. While some of the latter have expressed their firm opposition to Arctic routes because of environmental concerns, others, such as Maersk and COSCO, consistently refer to the Arctic in their business strategies. For example, Maersk has been delivered a new ice-class ship for testing. Furthermore, it is interesting to see how COSCO has aligned its business strategy with the Polar Silk Road.

The last scenario is more a compromise between the previous two. NSR will become an international maritime route for container cargos, but despite becoming the main one, it will be a supplementary one. Although there are still many complications to be resolved, this is the most plausible scenario. It is worth paying attention to an additional consideration. Because the operation in the NSR will be carried out by ice-class vessels, ships reaching the North Sea will also be able to sail to the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland, calling, for example, at the port of St. Petersburg in Russia. This is not common today,

⁵⁷ W. Joachim, “Handbook on Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: The High North Between Cooperation and Confrontation”, Springer, 2020

⁵⁸ “Suez e le rotte alternative: il futuro dell’Italia nel commercio marittimo”, Andrea Montanino, Cassa Depositi e Prestiti Think Thank, May 2021

where a ship coming from Far East Asia through the Suez Canal eventually makes a transshipment in the port of Rotterdam.

1.2.5 Conclusion

Despite Russian efforts, NSR is still not very commercial, because there are still many obstacles and therefore navigation here is not so profitable than other route. Even in future scenarios involving a possible prolongation of the cruising period, due to rising temperatures on average in the area, the Arctic Route will play a very peripheral role and will be complementary to Suez Canal transits, being unable to represent a real alternative for all major flows using the Suez route. In light of this, the NSR is deemed by the International Association of Ports and Harbors not as a big commercial opportunity at the moment.

Despite this, they suggested that we should look at the Arctic from a different perspective. Many global powers are indeed interested in it due to richness in hydrocarbons. Experts agree on recognizing NSR mainly as an energy corridor. Initially, the importance of the NSR will likely lie in its function as an energy and local transportation corridor along the Eurasian Arctic coast and between port destinations and markets on the adjacent Atlantic and Pacific shores.

In this framework, the Suez and the Mediterranean will remain undisputed for a long time in global commercial maritime trade. Not by chance, container handling increased by 22% from 2014 to 2018, recording the best performance compared to all other seas⁵⁹.

The centrality of the Mediterranean Sea, which now hosts one-third of the world's liner services in container traffic and has been first in trade growth in recent years, will be confirmed. Also relevant to the fate of the routes will be the dynamics of other trends that are revolutionizing maritime trade. These include: ship gigantism, carrier consolidation, and vertical integration among supply chain players.

As far as the former is concerned, operators in recent years have been adding ships of increasing size to their fleets, to the point that containerships with a capacity of more than 10 thousand TEU, which in 2012 accounted for only 13 percent of the world fleet, had risen to 33% by 2018, with growth that before the pandemic was expected to be as high as 40% by 2022.

As regards consolidation activity, over the past decade, there has been an increasing number of both mergers and acquisitions, which have reduced the number of large ope-

⁵⁹ "Dinamica e prospettive dei porti italiani nel contesto mediterraneo" Alessandro Panaro, 2020

rators in the market in favor of their growth in size, and collaborative agreements between operators of different nationalities, active in different routes. Equally rapid has been the formation of alliances, which since 2017 has concentrated market control under three carrier groups, currently covering 93% of east-west routes⁶⁰.

Finally, regarding vertical integration, shipping operators have shown a progressive tendency to extend their activities to other segments of the logistics chain, inserting themselves into terminal or land transport operations, in part to secure higher degrees of reliability, better economies of scale and customized services. The result of this dynamic is that today the most important shipping operators are active in adjacent areas of the supply chain by directly managing terminals, logistics services and segments in rail and road transport⁶¹.

⁶⁰ Shipping Alliances: 2M, Ocean Alliance & THE Alliance, Container-Xchange

⁶¹ Hansen, CØ, Grønsedt, P, Lindstrøm Graversen, C & Hendriksen C., *Arctic Shipping – Commercial Opportunities and Challenges*, CBS Maritime, 2016.

Chapter 2: The EU's European Neighborhood Policy and its relation with the Southern Mediterranean

2.1 Introduction to the ENP⁶²

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is one of the main instruments of foreign policy that the EU has developed over the past two decades. Although the desire to strengthen new partnerships with the Southern Mediterranean had already emerged in the 1960s, this initiative gained new momentum only in 2004 with the official launch of the ENP.

Overall, a neighborhood policy consists of the relations between a principal actor and one or more partners in order to achieve some common goals through interactions characterized by a certain degree of asymmetry.⁶³

Initially, the ENP was developed as an alternative to enlargement, in order to provide countries that had no chance of joining the EU, to enjoy better economic and political relations with the Union. At the same time, Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen announced that the new policy would be 'built on the experience' of the 2004 eastern enlargement⁶⁴. Not surprisingly, the ENP is deemed as an umbrella framework and thus: "a roof over an expanding system of functional regional integration that moves at different speeds and with different dynamics in different policy fields"⁶⁵, and thus in line with the 'concentric circles' metaphor. Indeed, the ENP is considered as the "outer circle" of the European integration. The ENP addresses a heterogeneous group of sixteen countries

⁶² Del Sarto, R. A., & Schumacher, T. (2011). From Brussels with love: leverage, benchmarking, and the action plans with Jordan and Tunisia in the EU's democratization policy. *Democratization*; Meier, D. (2022). *Borderlands. Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East*: by Raffaella Del Sarto, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021, p.1–196, 65£ (hardback), ISBN 978-0-19-883355-0; Full-text via DOI:10.1093/oso/9780198833550.001.0001. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 38(2), 337–338.

⁶³ M. G. Amadio Viceré and G. Venneri, "The The European Union's Engagement with the Southern Mediterranean Integrating the European Neighbourhood Policy", EUROPEAN ADMINISTRATIVE GOVERNANCE, p. 50, 2023

⁶⁴ Barbé, E., & Johansson-Nogués, E. (2008). The EU as a Modest "Force for Good": The European Neighbourhood Policy. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 84(1), 81–96.

⁶⁵ S. Lavenex, "A governance perspective on the European neighbourhood policy: integration beyond conditionality?" *Journal of European Public Policy* 15:6 September 2008: 938–955

ranging from eastern Europe to the southern shore of the Mediterranean. In this chapter we will analyze only the latter⁶⁶.

Over time the EU has emerged as a “market power” able to shape the international arena. Notably, the EU has exercised technocratic and soft power over countries beyond its political sphere, based mainly on trade concessions and economic aid. It is not a coincidence that, since the EU is the main trade partner for the majority of the MENA countries, it has used its economic lever in order to promote its values, rules and democratic reforms in the region.

Regarding the aims of the ENP, the main objective pursued by Brussels is to create a ‘ring of friends’ and a zone of stability beyond its formal members. As stated in the 2004 ENP Strategy Paper: “The objective of the ENP is to share the benefits of the EU’s 2004 enlargement with neighboring countries in strengthening stability, security and well-being for all concerned. It is designed to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbors and to offer them the chance to participate in various EU activities, through greater political, security, economic and cultural co-operation”⁶⁷. At the economic level, goals are twofold: on the one hand the EU wants to provide neighborhood countries with a better market access for goods, services and inputs. On the other, it aims to support the economic development of its neighbors, mainly through development assistance and financing. To promote this economic growth, the EU focuses on three main directions: investment in connectivity, support for agricultural growth, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises.

At the very beginning, the ENP wasn’t rooted in the EU Treaties. Only in 2009, the Lisbon Treaty introduced the so called “neighborhood clause” in Article 8 TUE. This provision empowers the EU to “develop a special relationship with neighboring countries, with a view to establishing an area of prosperity and good neighborliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterized by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation” (Art. 8(1) TEU). To this end, it may conclude “specific agreements” with the countries concerned, which may contain “mutual rights and obligations as well as the

⁶⁶ For more information about EU’s relation with the eastern neighborhood please look at: E. Korošteleva, M. Naturski, L. Simão, “EU Policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood The practices perspective”, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2014;

⁶⁷ European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy STRATEGY PAPER, Brussel 12 May 2004 (https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-01/2004_communication_from_the_commission_-_european_neighbourhood_policy_-_strategy_paper.pdf)

possibility of undertaking activities jointly” (Art. 8(2) TEU). The actual implications of this vaguely worded provision are far from clear and have led to different interpretations in legal doctrine. Indeed, for many the “neighborhood clause” only represents a symbolic or “utopian” provision that does not find a satisfactory solution to resolve the complexities related to finding an appropriate legal basis for concluding international agreements with neighboring countries⁶⁸.

If we look at the recent evolution of EU foreign policy, we can see that the Union has been trying to open up to its neighborhood. The Balkan wars of the 1990s showed that the EU cannot isolate itself⁶⁹. Indeed, the severity of human rights abuses during these conflicts called for international humanitarian intervention. The EU's initial inability to effectively prevent or stop the violence led to criticism of its foreign policy and defense capabilities. The situation highlighted that the EU, which promotes human rights and democracy, could not remain a passive observer when such values were being violated on its doorstep⁷⁰. Moreover, the fact that the EU lacks a common defense does not allow it to pursue an effective deterrence policy. In light of this, to prevent the spread of instability and violence, Brussels has sought to export democracy and good governance with cross-border cooperation in mind. ‘Everything but institutions’⁷¹ was the famous term coined by the former President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, to explain the difference between enlargement and the neighborhood policy⁷². Since its launch, the latter has appeared as an ambitious, complex and far-reaching attempt to exercise EU leadership in the neighborhood.

Over time, the EU's prerogative in the neighborhood has shifted from promoting the rule of law and respect for human rights to stabilizing the region, which is increasingly percei-

⁶⁸S. Blockmans, ‘Friend or Foe? Reviewing EU Relations with its Neighbours Post-Lisbon’, in Koutrakos, P. (ed.) *The European Union’s External Relations a Year after Lisbon*, CLEER Working Papers 2011/13, pp.113–114

⁶⁹ Kostas A. Lavdas, “the European union and the Yugoslav conflict: crisis management and re-institutionalization in southeastern Europe”, *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* Vol. 24, No. 2, Special Issue on "The Balkans" (Winter 1996), pp. 209-232

⁷⁰J. Rupnik, “The Western Balkans and the EU: ‘the hour of Europe’” *Institute for Security Studies*, 2011

⁷¹ A.Chilosi, "The European Union and its Neighbours: Everything but Institutions?," *European Journal of Comparative Economics*, Cattaneo University, vol. 4(1), pages 25-38, June 2007.

⁷² Commission of the European Communities 2004: 3

ved as a “ring of fire”⁷³. This shift to a more pragmatic approach has been imperative as a result of the EU's failures in following the Arab Springs and the subsequent social crises and civil wars it provoked.

Paradoxically, at the time when numerous growing crises have increased the demand for European-level integration in the relationship with the neighborhood, such integration has actually become stricter due to the high political salience of the political issues associated with it.

2.2 The ENP and the theoretical framework

Over the past decades, the ENP has been the main area of research and analyze of the EU foreign policy. The aim of this paragraph is to examine the ENP from a theoretical prospective, by comparing Realism and Constructivism.

Realism is the mainstream and most widespread school of taught of international relations. It dates back to the Ancient Greece and the Modern Age with authors such as Thucydides, Hobbes and Machiavelli. In short, it could be said that Realism argues that the international system is anarchic and therefore conflictual due to the fact that there is no centralized authority capable of enforcing peace and stability. In this framework, States are the most important actors at the international stage, and national cohesion is guaranteed by nationalism. Realists argue that decisions are made according to a logic of self-interest and cost-benefit. Power, wealth and influence within the international system are distributed between these actors in a highly unequal and asymmetric manner⁷⁴.

From this perspective, realists recognize that the EU is surrounded by an “arc of crisis” due to new outbreak of war on both eastern and southern borders, as well as an uncontrollable process of power transition in favor of a new multipolar order.

Realists agree on the idea that the European process of integration occurs only when it is functional to the interests of Member States. In light of this, they claim that the neighborhood policy is a collective institutional vehicle for the pursuit of Member States’ common

⁷³ “Europe’s ring of fire”, The Economist 2014

⁷⁴ Morgenthau, H. J. (1948). *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf; Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley; Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company

interests and shared concern⁷⁵. From this perspective, Member States can easily influence European decision-making process directly through the European Council and indirectly through a multilevel governance mechanism. Indeed, it is in the mandate of the European Council to define the general political direction and priorities of the EU (Art. 15(1) TUE). On the contrary, the Commission is given more room for maneuver when it comes to the more technocratic and bureaucratic aspects of negotiating Association Agreements (AAs), ENP “Action Plans” and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). Once again, the central role of Member States is also reaffirmed by the fact that some of them have played a key role in order to reshape common priorities. This is the case of the French initiative for the southern border, namely the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) launched in 2011, and the Swedish-Polish initiative for the Eastern Partnership⁷⁶.

Realists agree that the ENP’s objective is twofold: on the one hand it is a security maximizer, on the other it pursues second order normative concerns. Indeed, because we live in an anarchic world, security is perceived as the major threat by States, whose only goal is survival. In light of this, the main goal of the ENP is to strengthen European security by stabilizing the neighborhood. Not surprisingly, the ENP is deeply linked to the 2003 European Security Strategy, which aimed at “promoting a ring of well-governed countries, to the east of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean, with whom we can have close and cooperative relations.” The focus on security has also been reaffirmed in the aftermath of the Arab Springs, with the 2015 ENP Review paving the way for the 2016 Global Strategy.

Meanwhile, as far as the promotion of EU norms and values is concerned, realists allege that States are moved by the need to promote their vital national interests.

⁷⁵ Hyde-Price, A. ‘Neorealism: A Structural Approach to the ESDP’, in Kurowska, X. and Breuer, F. *Explaining European Security and Defence Policy: Theory in Action*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 16–40, 2012

Hyde-Price, A. ‘Neither Realism nor Liberalism: New Directions in Theorizing EU Security Policy’, *Contemporary Security Policy* 34(2): 397–408, 2013

Hyde-Price, A. ‘Realism: A Dissident Voice in the Study of the CSDP’, in Biscop, S. and Whitman, *The Routledge Handbook of European Security*, London: Routledge, 18–27 2013

⁷⁶ F. Bicchi and R. Gillespie, ‘The Union for the Mediterranean: Continuity or Change in Euro-Mediterranean Relations?’, Bicchi, F. and Gillespie, R. (eds.) special issue *Mediterranean Politics* 16(1) 2011

On the contrary, in 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, constructivism⁷⁷ emerged as an approach to international relations that could offer an alternative understanding of reality without challenging either realism or liberalism. Indeed, the failure of the two mainstream theories, realism and liberalism, to predict the end of the Cold War paved the way for constructivists. According to the latter, reality is a project under constant construction that must be understood in terms of material forces and ideational factors, thus challenging the materialism of neorealism and neoliberalism. Constructivists argue that structures are encoded in rules and norms that constitute a cognitive map that allows actors to understand what behavior is most appropriate to a given situation. In addition, constructivists emphasize the fact that actors behave according to how they perceive their own identity. Finally, to understand changes in international relations we must consider critical junctures. They occur when a disruptive event makes existing structures and rules no longer appropriate for the new situation.

Regarding the ENP, constructivist scholars wonder what is the main driving force of the relationship between the EU and its neighbors, and what push them to be engaged in such interactions⁷⁸. In this regard, three positions in the study of the ENP could be identified by constructivists. The first one is called “thick constructivism” and alleges that the mutual relations between the EU and its neighbors are based on their identity. Since policies are defined in terms of identity, this can lead to rivalries if the identities of the EU and its neighboring countries are incompatible. One of the most representative approaches of thick constructivism is Ian Manners’ “Normative Power Europe” (NPE). Distancing himself from the Realists and Liberalists, Manners asserted that the EU of the 1990s and 2000s more than being driven by military capabilities or economic calculations, based its actions on ideas and identities. In other words, The Union exerts its power through attraction and example, rather than through traditional forms of power politics. Manners’ analysis looks

⁷⁷ Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Finnemore, M. (1996). *National Interests in International Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Katzenstein, P. J. (Ed.). (1996). *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁷⁸ N. Zaslavskaya, “Russia’s perception of the European Neighbourhood Policy: a constructivist explanation”, IN “Theorizing the European Neighbourhood Policy” edited by S. Gstöhl & S. Schunz, Routledge, 2016

at the action of the ENP, and notably at the process of “persuasion, engagement and differentiation”⁷⁹.

Schimmelfennig called the second position “thin constructivism I” and sees the EU as a normative power willing to spread its values and rules in the neighborhood⁸⁰. However, the ruling class of neighboring countries is conceived as utilitarian, able to rationally manipulate the EU by making appeals to EU values, which makes it difficult for the EU not to pander to their wishes⁸¹. This model predicts that the EU's behavior is largely predictable because it acts on the basis of pre-established norms. In contrast, the neighboring countries have the ability to easily change their positions, adapting them to the regulatory pressure enacted by the EU, in order to obtain greater benefits.

The third type of constructivism, “thin constructivism II,” is the mirror image of the previous one. Here, the main player, the EU, is conceived as a rational actor whose objective is to expand its influence in the surrounding neighborhood, and the neighbors are unable to resist the EU's targeted political and economic influence. EU norms are not blindly followed by EU leaders, but instead are carefully chosen to achieve their aims⁸².

To sum up, according to constructivists, at first the EU adopted a rationalist approach focused on security, then steadily shifted to a normative one with the promotion of the rule of law and democratic rights and finally, after the Arab Springs, back to the rationalist one.

⁷⁹ I.Manners, ‘Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40(2): 235–258, 2002

I.Manners, ‘As You Like It: European Union Normative Power in the European Neighbourhood Policy’, in Whitman, R. and Wolff, S. *The European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 29–50, 2010

⁸⁰ Schimmelfennig, F. (2001) ‘The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union’, *International Organization* 55: 47–80

⁸¹ F.Schimmelfennig, ‘The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union’, *International Organization* 55: 47–80, 2001

⁸² M.Kuus, ‘Europe’s Eastern Expansion and the Reinscription of Otherness in East-Central Europe’, *Progress in Human Geography* 28(4): 472–489 2004

2.3 The EU strategic narrative in the Neighborhood and the conceptualization of the EU borders

If we had to define what a strategic narrative is, we might say it is “a mean by which political actors attempt to construct a shared meaning of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors”⁸³. Indeed, such narratives are crafted so as to built both domestic consensus and external influence. In this regards, they are an important tool of foreign policy. When referring to European foreign policy, difficulties in projecting a credible narrative have challenged the EU's legitimacy as a regional player. Actually, such projection is often considered to be a process of disguising internal divisions among Member States and EU institutions, rather than an exercise in exerting external influence. In fact, coordination is one of the main challenge of EU foreign policy, particularly on major issues where Member States act according to their national interests.

From a historical perspective, the creation of the Union represents a project aimed at ensuring stability and peace on the entire continent that had found itself as the arena of two world wars in less than half a century. This has created a sense of moral imperative and duty that establishes that the EU cannot be satisfied with its own internal achievements⁸⁴. Instead, it must organize space beyond its borders, spreading European values in a broader effort to create a “whole and free Europe”⁸⁵. Browning and Joenniemi have proposed three geopolitical models with a view to conceptualize the role of the UE, and four geopolitical strategies to understand how the UE organizes its space at the borders and how it deals with the others beyond⁸⁶. The first geopolitical model is the “Westphalian” one and alleges the EU is like a sovereign state. The second is the “imperial” one and portraits “EU governance in terms of a series of concentric circles”, where power is “located at the centre in Brussels and dispersed outwards in varying, multi-layered and declining de-

⁸³ Miskimmon, A., O'Loughlin, B. and Roselle, “Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order”, New York: Routledge, 2013, 77-78

⁸⁴ Tereszkieicz, F. The European Union as a normal international actor: an analysis of the EU Global Strategy. *Int Polit* 57, 95–114 (2020)

⁸⁵ T.Schumacher, ‘Uncertainty at the EU’s Borders: Narratives of EU External Relations in the Revised European Neighbourhood Policy Towards the Southern Borderlands’, *European Security* 24(3): 381–401, 2015

⁸⁶ Browning, C. and Joenniemi, J. ‘Geostrategies of the European Neighbourhood Policy’, *European Journal of International Relations* 14(3): 519–55, 2008

grees”⁸⁷. The latter is labelled ‘neo-medieval’ and assumes that power is not centralized, but diffused regionally, analogous to the federated era.

On the contrary, as far as the geopolitical strategies to manage the UE’s borders are concerned, the first one is based on the progressive elimination of borders by creating a shared space of cooperation between insiders and outsiders. This model, called “networked (non)border”, implies a sharing of responsibility. On the contrary, the geostrategy of the “march” separates the inside and the outside thanks to a protective buffer zone in the middle. The geostrategy of a “colonial frontier”, based on power asymmetries between the inside and the outside, “aims at shaping the outside according to the inside’s preferences with the perspective of ultimately incorporating the outside”⁸⁸. While the latter assumes a certain degree of dynamism, the ‘limes’ strategy assumes that although there is an asymmetrical relationship to influence the outsider in line with the insider’s preferences, the boundaries are immutable.

Browning and Joenniemi agree that the way the EU deals with its borders changes with time and space. However, on the whole, while they observe a tendency towards an “imperial” strategy in the East, a more “limes” strategy is detected for the South.

For critical scholars, the way the EU justifies its neighborhood policy harkens back to imperial ideologies and the alleged civilizing mission⁸⁹. Not surprisingly, the neighborhood is often portrayed as unstable and underdeveloped, which must be taken care of to avoid further critical uneases. Primary sources of concern include terrorism, human trafficking, the presence of cross-border criminal groups, and failed States that have arisen as a result of civil wars. On the contrary, the EU presents itself as a benevolent and rational actor operating as an agent of peace to promote democracy, sustainable growth and good governance through the ENP. In this imaginary, the EU is located at the centre, as a presumed pole of attraction and source of order. The fact that this noble self-view has not always been shared by the EU’s neighbors does not undermine the importance of the EU’s civilizing mission. However, it should be kept in mind that civilizing missions are not mere

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*

⁸⁹ J. Zielonka, “Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union”, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006

J. Zielonka, ‘Europe’s New Civilizing Missions: The EU’s Normative Power Discourse’, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 18(1): 35–55, 2013

rhetorical exercises: they seek to convince the peripheries that imperial policies are beneficial to them, not just to the imperial center⁹⁰.

Indeed, the EU continues to assume that its model of liberal economic and political governance is universally appealing and represents a horizon everyone is aiming for. Therefore, outsiders are expected to aspire to a closer relationship with the Union.

The European imperial vision is further reaffirmed by the “neighborhood clause” foreseen in article 8 TUE. The latter refers ‘exclusively to the values of the EU (the self) and not the other’⁹¹. By doing so it basically means that EU norms, values and practices are non-negotiable.

As already mentioned, when the enlargement was off the agenda, the UE created the ENP in order to influence those countries with no membership perspectives. According to Schumacher, the EU has projected four strategic narratives in its neighborhood so as to expand its leadership, such as: 1) the threat/risk and the duty/opportunity narrative; 2) the narrative of the EU as a promoter of peace; 3) the good neighborliness narrative; 4) the narrative of the EU and people's well-being⁹².

These narratives raised expectations about the EU's role in the region, but in the end they only created a gap between expectations and the EU's ability to deliver results⁹³. Specifically, in order to foster economic integration, the EU has sought to grant access to certain areas of the Internal Market in exchange for economic and policy reforms in favor of Brussels-supported values. This approach has not always led to the desired outcomes.

Even before the ENP was published, as early as the 1990s, the EU undertook a gradual change in its narrative toward the neighborhood. Initially, the intention was to influence the countries in the region that wanted to be more like the EU. Meanwhile, the outbreak of new regional crises has forced the EU to focus on stability. In light of this, the Commis-

⁹⁰ T.Diez, ‘Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering “Normative Power Europe”’, *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 33(3): 613–636, 2005

⁹¹T.Schumacher, ‘Uncertainty at the EU’s borders: Narratives of EU external relations in the revised European Neighbourhood Policy towards the southern borderlands’, *European Security* 24(3): 381–40, 2015

⁹² *Ibidem*

⁹³ Schumacher, T. (2015) ‘How to make the European Neighborhood Policy fit for purpose’, *Europe’s World*

sion issued the 2016 EU Global Strategy⁹⁴, a document characterized by pragmatism and prudence. In fact, the EU is now more interested in good governance in the neighborhood than in promoting radical democratic transformation, as promised at the genesis of the ENP. Furthermore, along side with the “principle of pragmatism”, a parallel narrative of resilience has emerged. Resilience might be considered as one of the most important contributions introduced by the 2016 Global Strategy. In light of this, the EU's civilizing mission began to look increasingly utopian and no longer viable.

Finally, the emergence of new media has completely reshaped the way narratives are delivered. The rise of new States and non-state actors has further exacerbated this picture, as we will see in the next chapter. In this regard, emerging powers and regional actors, such as China, Russia, and Turkey, have developed sophisticated media strategies and public diplomacy efforts that often counter or undermine the EU's positions on global issues. These states use a combination of traditional state-run media and digital platforms to project their narratives, sometimes portraying the EU as a declining power or a force of instability. Furthermore, non-state actors, including multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and even extremist groups, leverage new media to advance their own agendas, often in ways that challenge the EU's narrative and policy goals.

Nowadays the EU faces strong challenges to its foreign policy narrative that have the potential to undermine its effectiveness as a foreign policy actor. Competing narratives, misinformation, and disinformation campaigns, facilitated by the new media landscape, threaten to erode public trust and support for the EU both within its member states and abroad. This situation necessitates a strategic reevaluation of the EU's approach to public diplomacy and narrative-building to ensure that it remains a relevant and influential actor on the global stage.

2.4 The “more for more” strategy: the role of conditionality in the ENP

Conditionality is a direct intergovernmental mechanism based on the logic of consequences. The EU provides non-member States with incentives such as financial support, market access or institutional links on the condition that they meet EU demands. The effectiveness of conditionality relies on the magnitude of the EU's rewards and the credibility of its conditionality. On the one hand, the credibility of the threat to withhold rewards in case

⁹⁴ N. Tocci, ‘The making of the EU global strategy’, *Contemporary Security Policy* 37(3): 461–472, 2016

of non-compliance derives from superior bargaining power in the hands of the EU; on the other hand, the credibility of the promise to reward compliance depends on the consistent application of conditionality, which increases the belief of third countries that they will only ever receive rewards when conditions are met⁹⁵. Conditionality has been very useful in preparing the EU enlargement process, and has therefore also been incorporated in the neighborhood policy.

This approach was reinforced in the aftermath of the Arab Springs, when the ‘more for more’ strategy (a closer relationship in return for more reforms) was launched in the second review of the ENP in 2011. As the European Commission and EU’s High Representative put it: “increased EU support to its neighbors is conditional. It will depend on progress in building and consolidating democracy and respect for the rule of law. The more and faster a country progresses in its internal reforms, the more support it will get from the EU”⁹⁶. However, this approach has not been entirely effective. As the Commission noted, the “more for more” strategy “has not always contributed to an atmosphere of equal partnership and has not always succeeded in providing incentives [for] further reforms in partner countries”⁹⁷.

In this regard, a few considerations must be made. The first concerns the scope of conditionality. As stated earlier, the ENP was introduced as an alternative instrument to enlargement. This means that the promise of membership cannot be used and therefore the reward will be lower. In fact, we can see that the costs of adaptation in ENP countries are much higher than in candidate countries because the former have serious governance deficiencies and rather undemocratic institutional systems.

Secondly, from an economic point of view, the exclusion of the agricultural sector from the reward system has been negatively perceived by many ENP countries. Indeed, for many of them, the agricultural sector still represents a cornerstone of their national eco-

⁹⁵ Böhmelt, T. and Freyburg, T. ‘The Temporal Dimension of the Credibility of EU Conditionality and Candidate States’ Compliance with the *Acquis Communautaire*, 1998–2009’, *European Union Politics* 14(2): 250–272, (2013)

⁹⁶European Commission and High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy(2011) *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A Review of European Neighbourhood Policy*, COM (2011) 303, Brussels

⁹⁷ European Commission and High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2015) *Joint Consultation Paper: Towards a New European Neighbourhood Policy*, JOIN (2015) 6 final, Brussels

nomy, in which it is possible to have a competitive advantage. Furthermore, Bruszt and Langbein are critical of the fact that the EU does not provide sufficient financial assistance to mitigate the potentially distorting effects of deep free trade in the EU's partner countries⁹⁸.

Notwithstanding the criticism of ENP conditionality in the short term, it can serve as an external reference point for longer-term domestic policy processes. In other words, it may trigger indirect externalization or imitation effects⁹⁹

2.5 The historical evolution of the ENP

The relationship between the EU and MENA countries dates back to the 1960s, when the European Economic Community (EEC) started bargaining bilateral agreement in the field of trade. In this framework, a turning point was represented by the breakout of the oil crisis in the early 1970s that posed a significant threat toward European economies. With a view to cope with the economic downturn, the EEC hosted the Paris Summit of 1972. The main goal was to establish comprehensive engagement with southern partners allowed to reach consensus on the set up of a Global Mediterranean Policy¹⁰⁰. Such framework aimed at broadening the scope of cooperation including the socio-economic stabilization of MENA countries. Despite these efforts, some Member States, particularly those with a strong historical and imperial heritage in the Mediterranean, continued to pursue their national interests through bilateral agreements¹⁰¹. Not surprisingly, such approach deeply undermined the credibility and thus the relevance of the common approach toward southern partners.

The end of the Cold War represented another turning point for the relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean. European countries agreed on the need to establish an

⁹⁸ Bruszt, L. and Langbein, J. 'Varieties of Dis-Embedded Liberalism: EU Integration Strategies in the Eastern Peripheries of Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy* 24(2): 297–315, (2017)

⁹⁹ Sasse, G. 'The European Neighbourhood Policy: Conditionality Revisited for the EU's Eastern Neighbours', *Europe-Asia Studies* 60(2): 295–316, 2008

¹⁰⁰ Guasconi, M. E., *Europe and the Mediterranean in the 1970s. The Setting Up of the Euro-Arab Dialogue. Les cahiers Irice*, 10(1), 163–175, 2013

¹⁰¹ Pace, M., & Roccu, R. (2020). "Imperial Pasts in the EU's Approach to the Mediterranean". *Interventions*, 22(6), 671–685.

integrated and comprehensive approach to the southern region. A new strategy aimed at fostering economic and social cooperation was issued¹⁰². Meanwhile, the so-called Western Mediterranean Forum, also known as the 5+5 Dialogue, was launched in 1990. Such pioneering initiative paved the way to the for the inauguration of the Euro-Mediterranean Ministers of Foreign Affairs Conference, hold in Barcelona in 1995. Here the decision taken by ministers was toto establish the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Also known as the Barcelona Process, it included fifteen EU member states, five Mashreq and Middle Eastern countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Syria, Jordan), three Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia), as well as Israel, Malta, Cyprus, and Turkey¹⁰³. The main innovation introduced by the Partnership was a multi-sectorial approach aimed to enhance multilateral cooperation in the region, in accordance with the so called “positive agenda”. In particular, this cooperation was based on three prerogatives: firstly, to build peace and stability through political dialogue, in parallel with the definition of Euro-Mediterranean association agreements; secondly, to promote medium-term structural and socio-economic reforms for the liberalization of the current market and the creation of a free trade area; and finally, to promote socio-cultural dialogues through social, cultural and human partnerships. The Declaration also envisaged a complex, multilevel organizational apparatus, allowing for joint governance¹⁰⁴.

It is important to keep in mind that when the Barcelona Process was launched, the European Union was undergoing a profound reorganization of its institutional structure and an unprecedented enlargement toward Central and Eastern Europe. Concluded in 2004, this enlargement increased the number of Member States from 15 to 27. But what is most important to note at this juncture is that enlargement has completely redrawn the boundaries of the European Union. In light of this, a more integrated European approach to foreign policy was needed.

The beginning of the new millennium was shocked by the 9/11 terroristic attack and the consequent war in Iraq in 2003. Security concerns became more relevant from the European prospective. Indeed, at the time uncontrolled migration, the infiltration of extremist forces, the spread of weapon of mass destruction and organized crime were deemed as the major sources of threat. Such path was even marked by the 2003 European Security

¹⁰² European Commission, February 19). Proposal for a COUNCIL REGULATION (EEC) Concerning Financial Cooperation in Respect of All Mediterranean Non-member Countries, 1991

¹⁰³ EUR-Lex. (1995, November). Barcelona Declaration and Euro-Mediterranean partnership

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*

Strategy. The latter deemed the Southern Neighbourhood as a region facing ‘serious problems of economic stagnation, social unrest and unresolved conflicts’, in need of ‘more effective economic, security and cultural cooperation in the framework of the Barcelona Process’¹⁰⁵.

The following year, under the pressure of the UK, the ENP was launched without any consultation with neighboring countries. It originally aimed to foster economic ties and promote democracy without replacing other EU foreign policies¹⁰⁶. A close link between the ENP, the Barcelona Process and the Association Agreements signed with each country was envisaged. Indeed, while the EMP was supposed to provide ‘the regional context’, in terms of bilateral relations, the ENP should have been the framework to trigger internal reforms in the countries concerned¹⁰⁷.

The ENP included the establishment of Action Plans to be bargained with neighboring countries to define key priorities to be pursued in line with EU values¹⁰⁸. The idea of creating a ‘ring of friends’ has been criticized by the MENA countries for feeding only the EU interests in regional security, economic opportunities and border control. For example, some agreements, such as the Association Agreement between the European Union and Morocco, have been accused of favoring European companies and failing to ensure fair market access for local producers¹⁰⁹.

Over time the ENP became the most important tool of the EU’ foreign policy towards the neighborhood. However, since its launch, the ENP was characterized by deep internal frictions between Member Countries’ positions. In fact, different policy preferences led some countries to oppose the idea of opening the Internal Market to non-member countries. Despite this, the institutionalization of the relations with the neighborhood continued and peaked with the establishment of the ENP’s two sub-regional components, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative.

¹⁰⁵ Council of the EU. (2003). European Security Strategy

¹⁰⁶ European Commission. (2003, March 11). Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Wider Europe—Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with Our Eastern and Southern Neighbours.

¹⁰⁷ European Commission. (2007). A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy.

¹⁰⁸ European Commission. (2004b, May 12). Communication from the Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy—Strategy Paper.

¹⁰⁹ Matrakova, M., & Wolfschwenger, J. (2018). Assessing European neighbourhood policy. *East European Politics*, 34(2), 241–242

Indeed, in the context of a state visit to Morocco during his presidential campaign of 2007, the former French President Nicholas Sarkozy, proposed the creation of a Union of the Mediterranean¹¹⁰. The latter would have been an organization separate from the EU and based on four pillars: environment, dialogue between cultures, economic growth and security. President Sarkozy's controversial proposal triggered protests from Mediterranean countries and EU Member States. It was generally feared that the French initiative could duplicate or diminish the impact of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership while fueling its national interests¹¹¹. Notably, both Spain and Germany were critical towards the French proposal. While on the one hand Madrid feared that the Mediterranean Union could tarnish its attempt to stand as the capital of the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue as demonstrated by the Barcelona Process, on the other hand the German Chancellery was concerned about the exclusion of non-Mediterranean Member States from the first draft of the French proposal. At the end a compromise was found, and in 2008 the Union for the Mediterranean was launched with a General Secretariat headquartered in Barcelona. In line with the Barcelona process, its aim was to enhance and foster regional integration and cohesion¹¹². With its 43 Member State, to a certain extent, the UfM created the conditions for a form of sub-regionalism. The organization is based on the principle of co-ownership and shared responsibility between the two shores of the Mediterranean, as the Presidency is co-chaired by the EU, represented by EEAS or the Commission (the Northern shore), and from 2012 by Jordan (the Southern shore).

Another turning point in the evolution of the ENP was the signing of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2007, which entered into force on 1 December 2009. In fact, the Treaty completely redesigned the EU's external policy framework. With the Lisbon Treaty, the three-pillar system established by the Maastricht Treaty of 1993 was finally abolished. Furthermore, according to the new Treaty, the EU's acquisition of its own legal personality under Article 47 TEU gave the EU the formal authority to conclude international agreements with third parties. Moreover, as already mentioned, Article 8 TUE constitutionalized the ENP. At the institutional level, in the post-Lisbon era, the role of the European Parliament has overall increased and has become more active in the scrutiny of external affairs, especial-

¹¹⁰ F. Bozo, "French Foreign Policy since 1945: An Introduction", Berghahn Books, 2016

¹¹¹ Aliboni, R., Driss, A., Schumacher, T., & Tovias, A. "Putting the Mediterranean Union in Perspective". *EuroMeSCo Paper*, Nr. 68. EuroMeSCo, 2008

¹¹² Union for the Mediterranean. (2008, July 13). Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean.

ly in relation to engagement with partners through the ENP framework. Despite this impulse, the Lisbon Treaty maintained an intergovernmental-supranational approach in EU foreign policy affairs. Indeed, the Treaty still separates the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) from EU external action.

Another critical juncture for the ENP occurred in 2011, coinciding with the outbreak of the Arab Springs¹¹³. In the same year, the first review of the ENP, entitled “A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood”, was issued by the Commission and presented by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton¹¹⁴. The document aimed to ‘do something’ in support of grassroots movements agitating for democratic change in the MENA region. Unlike the creation of the UfM, in this case the leading role was not played by the Member States, but by the Commission. However, also at this time, neighboring countries were consulted even less. This document reinforced the conditionality logic by coining the “more for more” approach. An extra fund was allocated to address the disastrous socio-economic conditions in the MENA countries. The impact of the Arab Springs on the development of the ENP has been so disruptive that it deserves a special paragraph as we will see shortly.

2.6 The economic relations between the two shores and the financial tools of the ENP

As mentioned above, the EU is the top trading partner in the MENA region. With the exception of Libya and Algeria, all the ENP-Southern countries have trade deficits with the EU (Table 1). As already said, since the 1960s, the EEC started bargaining trade agreements with Arab counties. Such approach was backed by both France and Italy which pushed for a common set of rules and criteria. Indeed, they feared that bilateral negotiations between EU and Mediterranean countries would lead the former to make more and more concessions in the agricultural sector¹¹⁵.

¹¹³ R. Del Sarto: “Orderlands: Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East”, Oxford University Press, July 2021 DOI:[10.1093/oso/9780198833550.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198833550.001.0001)

¹¹⁴ European Commission/High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2011) A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A Review of European Neighbourhood Policy, COM (2011) 303 Final, 25 May

¹¹⁵ Tsoukalis, L. “The. EEC and the Mediterranean: Is ‘Global’ Policy a Misnomer?” International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–), 53(3), 422–438, 1977

Table 1: 2021 EU trade in goods with ENP-South countries: imports, exports and balance

<i>EU Trade in Goods</i>	<i>Imports Value € m.</i>	<i>Exports Value € m.</i>	<i>Balance Value € m.</i>
Algeria	19,097	12,645	-6452
Egypt	9051	21,554	12,503
Jordan	408	3,308	2899
Israel	12,608	24,271	11,663
Lebanon	523	4148	3625
Libya	17,828	5222	-12,606
Morocco	17,975	25,134	7159
Occupied Palestinian Territory	29	355	326
Syria	69	304	235
Tunisia	10,262	10,838	576

Source: Own Elaboration. Based on European Commission's DG Trade Data for 2021. See European Commission, DG Trade

With the end of the Cold War, the disengagement of the two blocs in terms of financial support in the Mediterranean region forced the European Commission to rethink its approach. The former Spanish European Commissioner responsible for the Mediterranean policy, Abel Matutes, stated that: “it would be regrettable if, just when relations between East and West are improving” the EU ran “the risk of tensions between a prosperous and autarkic North and an impoverished and marginalized South”. According to Matutes, the solution lied “in the economic, social and political development of these countries”¹¹⁶. In light of this, the Euro-Mediterranean Process (EMP) was launched with the aim of expanding cooperation not only in the field of trade, but also on social, cultural and environmental issues. Despite this effort, the process remained mainly focused on trade liberalization through the creation of an EU-Mediterranean free trade area that was supposed to be completed by 2010 but was never realized. On the contrary, on the 10th anniversary of the birth of partnership, economic relations between EU and ENP Southern countries remained deeply unsymmetrical, with the EU contributed to 50% of the imports of the Euro-Mediterranean partners and 60% of their exports¹¹⁷. In reality, the liberalization process

¹¹⁶ European Commission. (1989). Mediterranean Policy of the Community: New Initiatives Summary of Speech by Mr Abel Matutes To the Symposium on ‘Human Movements In Western Mediterranean’.

¹¹⁷ World Integrated Trade Solutions. (2022). *Trade Statistics by Country | WITS*. <https://wits.worldbank.org/countrystats.aspx?lang=en>

has only favored the Arab elites who have maintained their privileges¹¹⁸. Meanwhile, the EMP was unable to trigger social and political reforms in the Southern Neighbourhood.

With the launch of the ENP, the EU moved from 'superficial' trade agreements, focused on trade liberalization, to the creation of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) with neighboring countries. DCFTAs not only include provisions on trade in goods and services, but also cover issues related to 'technical, sanitary and phytosanitary standards, competition policy, industrial policy, research cooperation, intellectual property rights, trade facilitation measures, public procurement and financial services'¹¹⁹.

Meanwhile, Brussels also increased its financial assistance to the region. Indeed, in 2007 the EU launched the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) which aimed at establishing a functioning market economy and an "area of prosperity and friendly neighborliness"¹²⁰. EUR 11.2 billions were earmarked for the budgetary period 2007-2013. However, the main problem was characterized by the lack of flexibility in order to allocate such funds. In fact, these funds were provided on the basis of multi-annual programs. Not surprisingly, with the emergence of regional crisis, the ENPI was unable to provide a rapid response in terms of financial aid. Moreover, the budgetary was limited in the scope. Lastly, the Commission recognized the difficulties to assess the effectiveness of the ENPI¹²¹.

In order to address this shortcoming, the Commission issued the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) for the budgetary period 2014-2020. It was allocated with EUR 15.4 billion. It aimed at "contributing to achieve an area of shared prosperity [...] by developing a special relationship founded on cooperation, peace and security, mutual accountability and a shared commitment to the universal values of democracy, the rule of law

¹¹⁸ Nadia Belhaj Hassine, "Economic Inequality in the Arab Region", *World Development*, Volume 66, February 2015, Pages 532-556

¹¹⁹ Gstöhl, S. "Models of External Differentiation in the EU's Neighbourhood: An Expanding Economic Community?" *Journal of European Public Policy*, 22(6), 854-870, 2015

¹²⁰ Regulation (EU) No 1638/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 310/1, 9 November 2006.

¹²¹ Poli, S. 'Promoting EU Values in the Neighbourhood Through EU Financial Instruments and Restrictive Measures', in Poli, S. (ed.) *The European Neighbourhood Policy-Values and Principles*, London and New York: Routledge, 33-57, 2016

and respect for human rights”¹²². Cooperation between the two shores was structured in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2014, the EU established the Madad Trust Fund to deal with the emergency provoked by years of prolonged civil war in Syria. Such tailor-made financial instrument was different from the others mentioned above since it was more flexible. It mainly focused on: “stabilization, resilience and recovery needs of refugees from Syria in neighboring countries”¹²³. With a total budget of EUR 736 million administered directly by the Commission, EUR 150 million was spent on education-related projects, while resources were also allocated to improving access to healthcare, improving water and sanitation infrastructure, and social inclusion. In light of this, it is interesting to note that the budget of the Madad Trust Fund was mainly provided by the European Union, while the Member States contributed EUR 70 million¹²⁴. This development shines a spotlight on the lack of engagement of the Member States in the Syrian civil war. This lack is mainly related to the fact that, at that time, the attention of European countries was primarily focused on tackling the economic crisis in the Eurozone and the rise of populism.

2.7 Which role do the Arab uprisings play for the ENP?

The starting point for understanding the contemporary evolution of the Middle East is to be found in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 by the U.S.-led international coalition. The strong American interventionism actually split Europe in two. On one side France and Germany opposed it, while on the other side Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary, Denmark, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania took an active part, despite internal public opposition¹²⁵. The Bush administration's effort to promote democracy prompted many regional autocrats to express strong enthusiasm for political reforms, making extensive use of democratic vocabulary. A case in point is the highly symbolic democratic opening desired by the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI,

¹²² European Commission. Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, JOIN(2015) 50 Final, Brussels

¹²³ European Commission. (2016) ‘European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis’

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*

¹²⁵ Youngs, R. ‘Europe and Iraq: From Stand-off to Engagement?’, FRIDE Policy Paper, Working Paper 45, June, 2004

who initiated a reform of the Family Code (*Moudawana*), which improved women's rights by granting them greater legal protection and social status. Moreover, In 2004, Morocco established the Instance Équité et Réconciliation, a truth and reconciliation commission charged with investigating human rights violations committed during the reign of Hassan II. The IER was a symbolic attempt to address the country's authoritarian past and promote an image of reconciliation and transparency. Although the IER did not have the power to prosecute those responsible, its creation was interpreted as a sign of commitment to greater justice and respect for human rights.

Translated with DeepL.com (free version)¹²⁶. Secondly, it should be remembered that the traditional leading powers with which the EU has mainly interfaced, such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, have weakened considerably. Others, such as the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula and Iran, have emerged. Moreover, this strategic vacuum has been filled by the proliferation of new non-state actors, such as the so-called Islamic State (IS) or the Kurds in Syria and Iraq.

Until 2011, Arab regimes felt compelled to embark on a process of political and economic reform, ensuring the survival of their regimes through the introduction of forms of electoral competition and participation that were supposed to boost their legitimacy. Meanwhile, the emergence of a space for dissent, paved the way for the Arab Springs, making civil society more aware of its rights. This development was made possible by a media revolution, triggered since the mid-1990s by the emergence of the Qatari TV station Al-Jazeera, which effectively forced other national TV stations to increase the quality of their programs¹²⁷. Finally, the role played by the Internet and the spread of new social media should not be underestimated, which, not coincidentally, were the preferred tools of young activists to coordinate their public protests¹²⁸.

The beginning of the Arab Springs is symbolically timed to coincide with the resounding act of protest by Mohamed Bouazizi, a young Tunisian street vendor who set himself on

¹²⁶ Bicchi, Federica, Guazzone, Laura and Pioppi, Daniela, eds. "La questione della democrazia nel mondo arabo: stati società e conflitti", Polimetrica, 2004

¹²⁷ Albrecht, H. "Raging Against the Machine: Political Opposition Under Authoritarianism", Chapel Hill: Syracuse University Press, 2015

¹²⁸ Lynch, M. "Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today", New York: Columbia University Press, 2007

fire in the town of Sidi Bouzid on 17 December 2010 in protest against continued harassment by local police forces. The incident triggered numerous street demonstrations against the despotism and corruption of the regime of President Ben 'Alī, in power since 1987. Overnight, outbreaks of protest broke out in numerous Arab countries. In Tunisia and Egypt, regimes were overthrown; in Libya, Syria and Yemen, protests led to the outbreak of violent civil wars. At the same time in the fragile States of Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon, widespread discontent led to extreme polarization of domestic public opinion with the strengthening of new extremist groups such as the Islamic State (IS), Hamas and Hezbollah. However, not all States witnessed a process of regime change: in Algeria, the memory of the bloody civil war of the 1990s deterred the population, thus allowing the survival of the regime. Furthermore, from Morocco to Jordan to the Gulf monarchies, they have attempted to pander to various public pressures for change with political and constitutional reforms¹²⁹. While at first such protests were hailed as an attempt by Arab civil society to throw off the yoke of a decades-long tyranny, their outcome was not so promising. With the exception of Tunisia where a process of democratization gained momentum, the rest of the region sank into chaos. In Egypt, after the Muslim Brotherhood seized power, there was a coup d'état by the armed forces in 2013 that ousted President Mohamed Morsi in favor of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

The outbreak of the Arab Springs coincided with the eurozone economic crisis, which had very negative repercussions on the countries of southern Europe, traditionally the backbone of Europe's Mediterranean policy. The crisis has led not only to "less time for neighborliness,"¹³⁰ but also to a more limited ability to see "through the fog created by the uncertainty of the future"¹³¹. Most European chancelleries opted for a cautious or conservative response, revealing a pro-status quo nature in the Mediterranean.

On the contrary, at the European leave, the Commission's main goal in the region became the so-called "deep democracy," which demanded from Arab partners not only free elections, but also deep political reforms, institution-building, the fight against corruption, an independent judiciary and support for civil society. In response to the Arab Springs, the

¹²⁹ Derichs, C. and Demmelhuber, T. 'Monarchies and Republics, State and Regime, Durability and Fragility in View of the Arab Spring', *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4(2): 180–194, (2014)

¹³⁰ Whitman, R.G. & A.E. Juncos, "The Arab Spring, the Eurozone crisis and the neighbourhood: a region in flux", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 50(2), pp. 147–161, 2012

¹³¹ Kirzner, I.M., "How Markets Work: Disequilibrium, Entrepreneurship and Discovery", London: The Institute of Economic Affairs, 1997

Commission created two institutions, namely the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Southern Mediterranean and a number of Task Forces for key countries. Bernardino León, a Spanish diplomat with a long career focused on Mediterranean cooperation, was appointed as EUSR with the task of increasing the efficiency of the community response. Meanwhile, some Task Forces were created in Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan and new aids were pledged. Despite these efforts, the resulting fragmented and technocratic decision-making process has profoundly affected the EU's efficiency in providing a prompt response.

However, the most important EU response to the crises was the issue of the 2011 ENP review, notably three communications were released a few months apart. The new approach could be sum up through the watchword "more for more". According to the latter, the reforms undertaken by the Arab regimes would be repaid with greater cooperation and support from the EU. The High Representative, Catherine Ashton, summarized the issues at stake in the communication as the "3 M's": money, mobility and market access¹³². As we can note, at that time, conditionality still was the cornerstone of the ENP. In September 2011 the Commission launched the SPRING Program (Support for Partnership, Reforms and Inclusive Growth) with the allocation of EUR 350 million¹³³. In this way, the EU believed that the economic liberalization and the opening of new trade opportunities, would foster the democratization process in the area. In reality, this was not the case. Indeed, once again, it was the local elites who enriched themselves, at the expense of the masses. Furthermore, the SPRING Program was criticized because it mainly targeted Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria and Lebanon, excluding Libya, Palestine and Syria.

Due to social tensions, in Tunisia alone, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported a 35% drop in foreign direct investment revenues, a 40% drop in tourism, and a slowdown in production for domestic consumption and exports. Such a scenario called for more active EU financial interventionism¹³⁴. However, from the analysis of the ENP-related financial instruments, it is clear that the EU has allocated more funds to address the needs of

¹³² European Commission: Joint press conference on the adoption of the joint communication on the European Neighbourhood Policy Review (ENP) Brussels, 25 May 2011

¹³³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_11_636

¹³⁴ 'Middle East and North Africa: Historic Transitions under Strain', IMF Regional Economic Outlook Update, 20 April 2012

the southern shore of the Mediterranean, while actually spending less than before. Indeed, from 2007-2013, the EU allocated €5.7 billion under the ENPI for the southern Mediterranean. For 2014-2020, this increased to around €9 billion under the ENI. However, actual spending often remained low, with absorption rates around 60-70%, leaving 30-40% of funds unspent due to implementation challenges. This gap is attributable to two main reasons. On the one hand, political turmoil has made it difficult to implement long-lasting projects due to the political uncertainty of the moment. The rapid replacement of Arab public officials has made it difficult for European institutions to maintain a continuous interlocution with them. In addition, the priorities of the moment shifted quickly as the political situation evolved. On the other hand, increased conditionality resulted in less flexibility in the use of funds.

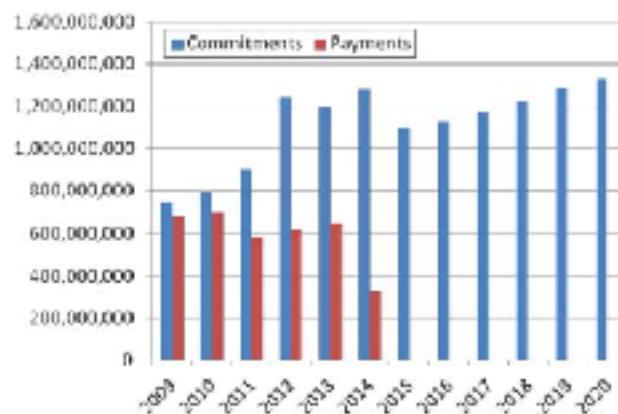


Fig. 6 Source: EU budget, various years, available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/budget/www/index-en.htm>.

Despite the efforts of the European Union, in 2014 the new Commission led by Juncker decided to start a process to reform the ENP. For the first time, this was done with the involvement of Member States and ENP partners. For example, Germany suggested improving the flexibility of economic instruments, as well as greater coordination among Member States' policies¹³⁵. Not surprisingly, the Madad Trust Fund was launched in the same year. Furthermore, greater coordination between ENP and CFSP/CSDP was also called for¹³⁶. In November 2015 the second review of the ENP was released. It was made in close relation between the Commission and the External European Action Service (EEAS). In short, the paper called for the EU to increase financial support, while simplifying

¹³⁵ Auswärtiges Amt, "Building a stronger compact with our neighbours: A new momentum for the European Neighbourhood Policy" – Statement by the Foreign Ministers of the Weimar Triangle, 1 April 2014

¹³⁶ European Council, Outcome of the 3382nd Council Meeting, Luxembourg: Foreign Affairs, 20 April 2015

ing technical and procedural processes for accessing EU funds¹³⁷. De facto, this revision enshrined the abolition of the EU agenda based on the promotion of the rule of law, democracy and human rights. This change paved the way for a new framework that focuses mainly on stabilization, security, controlled migration and sectoral cooperation, disconnected from the principle of conditionality advocated until then¹³⁸. The 2015 revision introduced a reference to the concept of resilience of Mediterranean countries, which would later be expanded by the 2016 Global Strategy. More than ever before, stabilization has become the overarching concept guiding the EU’s new strategy for ‘security and prosperity’ through ‘more *effective* partnerships towards a more stable EU Neighbourhood’¹³⁹. Resilience was already defined by the Commission in 2012 as ‘the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, adapt and quickly recover from stresses and shocks’¹⁴⁰. Through a pragmatic approach, the EU has sought to manage regional crises in the Middle East. Not surprisingly, the former High Representative, Federica Mogherini, stressed the link between resilience and peace-building. In her words, building resilience prevents fragile situations “from turning into new wars, new humanitarian disasters or new refugee crises”¹⁴¹.

Summary of milestones in EU relations with the Southern Neighborhood

Year	Initiative
1972	Global Mediterranean Policy
1990	Western Mediterranean Forum (5+5 Dialogue)
1995	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process)

¹³⁷ European Commission/High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy”, Brussels, 18 November 2015

¹³⁸ Delcour, L. “The 2015 ENP Review: Beyond Stocktaking, the Need for a Political Strategy”, CEPOB Policy Brief 1, 2015

¹³⁹ European Commission, “*Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy*”, JOIN(2015) 50 final, Brussels, 18 November 2015

¹⁴⁰ European Commission, “The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises”, COM 586 final, Brussels, 3 October 2012

¹⁴¹ European Commission, “EU Presents Its Strategy for More Resilient States and Societies around the World”, Press Release, Brussels, 7 June 2017

Year	Initiative
2004	European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)
2007	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)
2008	Union for the Mediterranean
2009	Lisbon Treaty
2011	European External Action Service (EEAS)
2011	First ENP Review
2011	SPRING Program (Support for Partnership, Reforms and Inclusive Growth)
2014-2020	European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)
2014-2020	Madad Trust Fund (for Syria)
2015	Second ENP Review
2016	Global Strategy

Tab.1, Source by the author

However, it should be noted that the EU still has too indecisive an approach toward resilience, which generates a strong inconsistency and confusion in its external policy¹⁴². For instance, supplying repressive southern neighborhood regimes with military equipment or technology can easily be framed as strengthening resilience, since such support would contribute to "state security." Similarly, other actors may choose to fund civil rights movements working against their repressive states on the basis that these states are "inherently fragile", and thus not resilient. In other words, "as long as resilience is conceived as a kind of holistic and all-encompassing 'shopping list,' the EU fosters, rather than reduces, the perplexity and distrust of the recipients of its neighborhood policies"¹⁴³.

¹⁴² N.Tocci, (2020). "Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World", Contemporary Security Policy, 41(2), 176-194

¹⁴³ E. Badarin & T.Schumacher, "The EU, Resilience and the Southern Neighbourhood After the Arab Uprisings", January 2020

2.8 The external promotion of democracy at a time of internal illiberal crisis

As stated, the goal with which the ENP was created was to establish "an arc of friendship" with the neighboring countries to ensure regional stability. The latter was to be achieved through closer economic partnership and with promotion of the founding democratic values of European identity. Nowadays, there is no doubt that the EU is facing an internal illiberal crisis, particularly in central and eastern Member States such as Poland or Hungary, where the rule of law and democratic liberties have been challenged¹⁴⁴. In this context, one might ask whether this democratic deficit crisis could undermine Europe's credibility as a promoter of democracy. Such a hypothesis would emphasize the "perception gap" between the EU's image of itself and others¹⁴⁵. In this paragraph we are going to explain how internal illiberal crisis is perceived by MENA countries.

Between 2016 and 2022 several polls were conducted in the southern neighborhood so as to understand grassroots perception of the legitimacy of the EU. According to them, the final outcome is overall positive¹⁴⁶. In general, with the exclusion of Egypt and Syria, the EU is viewed positively in the MENA (Maghreb/Mashrek). When asked about the closest partners to their countries, 26% of respondents in the Maghreb saw the EU as the main partner, followed by the US (15%), then Russia and China (each 14%). This was not the same in the Mashrek, in which 25% considered the US and Russia to be the main partners, followed by the EU (10%), Turkey (6%) and the UN (5%) Looking at specific cases, the EU is viewed as the most important partner for Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco, and Tunisia¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁴ Bánkuti, M., Halmai, G., & Scheppele, K. L. (2012). From Separation of Powers to a Government Without Checks: Hungary's Old and New Constitutions. In G. A. Tóth (Ed.), *Constitution for a Disunited Nation: On Hungary's 2011 Fundamental Law* (pp. 237-268). Central European University Press; Kelemen, R. D. (2017). Europe's Other Democratic Deficit: National Authoritarianism in Europe's Democratic Union. *Government and Opposition*, 52(2), 211-238; Sedelmeier, U. (2014). Anchoring Democracy from Above? The European Union and Democratic Backsliding in Hungary and Romania after Accession. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 52(1), 105-121.

¹⁴⁵ Chaban, N., & Elgström, O., "Theorising external perceptions of the EU", in S. Gstöhl, & S. Schunz (Eds.), *The external action of the European Union: Concepts, approaches, theories* (pp. 273-287). Macmillan International, Red Globe Press, 2021

¹⁴⁶ EU Neighbours South. (2021). Opinion polls—EU Neighbours South (2016–2020). <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/publications?f%5B0%5D=type%3A169&page=4>

¹⁴⁷ EU Neighbours South. (2022). Opinion poll findings and analysis for the Southern Neighbourhood countries. <https://south.euneighbours.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Opinion-Polls-Final-Regional-Report-1.pdf>

However, compared to the eastern neighborhood, in the MENA region people are a little bit more skeptical towards the EU and other international organization. Reasons lies in lack of trust in political institutions. Moreover, the fact that Brussels has cooperated with oppressive regimes on issues of security, border management and controlled migration, has fueled criticism. Indeed, Arab civil society perceives a mismatch between the EU's interests (more security and wellbeing for EU) and MENA people's aspirations (human rights and good governance based on local perspectives and values)¹⁴⁸.

In general terms, however, it can be said that the illiberal crisis that the EU is going through is not felt much by Arab countries. Reasons are many and varied. First of all, democracy is not the main value in most of the neighboring countries. It is more conditional. People are primarily interested in socio-economic rights rather than civil rights. This is also way the current illiberal crisis is not perceived by them as a "real" crisis. Secondly, in the MENA region the UE is mainly associated with powerful western countries such as: France, Germany, Spain or Italy. Thus, the deterioration of the rule of law in eastern Member States appears insignificant for Arab countries¹⁴⁹.

2.9 A critical analysis of the ENP

After two decades since its launch, it is possible to assess the effectiveness of the ENP in accordance with three criteria, such as: relevance, cohesion and impact. As far as the former is concerned, the performance is assessed as "the ability of an organization to keep established goals, programs and activities in line with the needs of customers and stakeholders"¹⁵⁰. In light of this, relevance is evaluated in relation to Member States (ENP stakeholders) and ENP countries (costumers). While Germany, Poland, Sweden and the Baltic States pushed in favor of the eastern dimension of the ENP; on the contrary Italy, France and Spain tried to counterbalance such pattern by reaffirming the centrality of the Mediterranean for the stability of the continent. Member states' main expectations of the ENP

¹⁴⁸ Teti, A., Gervasio, G., Abbott, P., Bouris, D., Huber, D., & Pace, M. "Perceptions of the EU: Activists and public opinion in the Middle East", in D. Bouris, D. Huber, & M. Pace (Eds.), Routledge handbook of EU–Middle East relations (pp. 20–33). Routledge, 2021

¹⁴⁹ O.Burlyuk, A.Dandashly & G.Noutcheva, "External democracy promotion in times of internal rule-of-law crisis: the EU and its neighbourhood", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31:3, 900-924, 2024

¹⁵⁰ Lusthaus, C., "Organizational Assessment: A Framework for Improving Performance", Ottawa: IDRC, 2002

lay in the distinction between democratization (for the eastern bloc) and stabilization (for the southern bloc). With the second and third revisions of the ENP, however, the first dimension was nullified¹⁵¹.

Regarding the second criteria, we can identify a vertical and a horizontal cohesion. The first involves coordination among member states' foreign policies within a European macro decision-making framework. On the contrary, at the horizontal level, cohesion requires that, in pursuing their various policy objectives, Member States, should not hamper or negate each other. Despite this, evidence shows that when fundamental national interests are at stake, Member States prefer to act unilaterally, avoiding the impasses created by the bureaucratic system of European governance¹⁵².

Lastly, the third criteria refers to the evaluation of performance. Impact can be defined as “the ability of a policy to address, mitigate and eradicate a given problem that led to its creation”¹⁵³. Assuming that the primary objective of the ENP was to promote a stabilization and democratization process in the neighborhood, the impact of the EU has been rather weak. In light of this, the EU has been less able to socialize political elites and change their political systems.

Moreover, the ENP has been criticized because it proposed more or less the same policy package to sixteen countries with completely opposite needs, thus lacking adequate flexibility and foresight¹⁵⁴. At the institutional level, the presence of a highly bureaucratized and fragmented system has not allowed the EU to take timely action. Added to this are the divergent national interests that have often paralyzed the European decision-making system, making the EU an unreliable actor. Not surprisingly, despite its overall superiority in economic and military terms, the EU has been overtaken by regional actors such as Turkey, which have emerged as decisive players in the fate of regional stability.

¹⁵¹ Böttger, K. ‘The Development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): The EU as a Regional Power for Peace and Order?’, 4th Pan-European Conference on EU Politics, University of Latvia, 2008

¹⁵² Rummel, R. and Wiedermann, J. ‘Identifying Institutional Paradoxes of CFSP’, in Zielonka, J. *Paradoxes of European Foreign Policy*, London: Kluwer Law, 35–52, 1998

¹⁵³ Young, O., “The Effectiveness of International Environmental Regimes: Causal Connections and Behavioral Mechanisms”, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999

¹⁵⁴ Del Sarto, R. A., & Schumacher, T. (2011). From Brussels with Love: Leverage, Benchmarking, and the Action Plans with Jordan and Tunisia in the EU’s Democratization Policy. *Democratization*, 18(4), 932-955.

Criticism was not spared to UfM either. Despite promises to adopt a new approach to regional cooperation, UfM has perpetuated the technocratic logic of the ENP¹⁵⁵.

To sum up, as claimed by realist authors, the ENP has suffered from its overly ambitious and contradictory goals, unrealistic operating assumptions, and failure to recognize the continuing importance of competing for security in an anarchic international system¹⁵⁶. The conceptual problem behind the ENP is that it was designed both to stabilize the neighborhood and to democratize it, but such change is almost always destabilizing and disruptive. This clashes with the inclination of European States that prefer to focus on the status quo so as to avoid further complications of an already precarious global order.

The next chapter will specifically address energy cooperation in the Mediterranean region. The issue of energy plays a central role for the European Union, as reflected in Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine.

¹⁵⁵ N.Tocci, "State (un)Sustainability in the Southern Mediterranean and Scenarios to 2030: The EU's Response" (Policy Paper No. 2), Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association, 2013

¹⁵⁶ T.Weiss, 'Driving Forces of Change and Reform: Conditionality and Its Inherent Limits', in Brockmann, K. and Bosold, D. (eds.) Democratization and Security in Central and Eastern Europe and the Post-Soviet States, Berlin: DGAP, 19–21, 2009

Chapter 3: The ENP and energy cooperation

3.1 The European approach towards energy security: the EU External Energy Governance

In 2015 the European Commission released the Energy Union Communication, where it alleged that the EU would have used all its foreign policy tools so as to create energetic partnerships with energy-producing and transit countries. This includes States such as Turkey, Algeria, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan¹⁵⁷. Two-thirds of the EU's energy is based on hydrocarbons, more than half of which comes from the Neighborhood¹⁵⁸. Not by chance, the energetic cooperation sector was the main driver for the launch of the ENP in 2004. In broad terms, energy security has a dual meaning: on the one hand, it refers to the security of supply of energy resources such as gas, oil, and renewables; on the other hand, it deals with the transition of these resources. Over time, the EU has developed an approach to energy security based on three fundamental principles: interdependence of Member States, integration of markets within and outside Europe itself, and convergence in governance standards.

Although the role of the European institutions has steadily increased over time, when the EU is unable to act efficiently, Member States prefer to pursue their interests unilaterally¹⁵⁹. Indeed, the majority of oil and gas collaboration between the two sides of the Mediterranean has been done bilaterally and independently by Member States. In this regards, it might be interesting to understand how Italy, France and Spain, the main Southern European countries, tried to pursue their national interests in the MENA region. As widely known, Libyan oil exportation accounts 9% of the Italian energy needs. The rollout of the Green Stream pipeline, which connects the Mellita gas and oil complex to Gela in Sicily, covered 6.6 % of Italy's total gas imports in 2018 alone. In addition, Algeria accounts for 22% of Italy's energy imports, while in Egypt, ENI's discovery of the giant Zohr offshore gas field in 2015 allowed the two countries to boost energy cooperation. In contrast, in

¹⁵⁷ European Commission. (2015). A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy

¹⁵⁸ International Energy Agency (2013) Medium-Term Gas Market Report 2013, OECD, Paris.

¹⁵⁹ R.Youngs, "Foreign Policy and Energy Security: Markets, Pipelines, and Politics". In V. L. Birchfield & J. S. Duffield (Eds.), *Toward a Common European Union Energy Policy: Problems, Progress, and Prospects* (pp. 41–60). Palgrave Macmillan, 2011

2018, France absorbed 29.6% of the 13.5 billion cubic meters of LNG exported from Algeria. In addition, France's presence in Libya through Total grew after the overthrow of Qaddafi's power, thus obtaining 16.33% of the Waha concession through the purchase of Marathon Oil Libya¹⁶⁰. Finally, far more significant is Spain's dependence on Algerian gas imports, which make up about 82.1% of Madrid's total imports¹⁶¹.

As there is still no clear European foreign policy on energy, the strategy adopted so far by Brussels is threefold¹⁶². On the one hand, it seeks to create a pan-European energy and gas market based on European standards and norms. The second is to diversify sources so as to reduce energy dependence, a risk that Europe knows very well and paid dearly for in the aftermath of the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022. Finally, by standing up as a champion of the fight against climate change, the EU seeks to promote the development of sustainable energy throughout the wider Mediterranean.

Such strategy could be summarized in the so called EU External Energy Governance. The latter could be defined as: "a process that aims at exporting energy related, EU-centred norms and policies to third countries by different bilateral and regional sectorial instruments"¹⁶³. Basically, it provides for European norms and standards to be fully implemented by MENA countries. In practice, loyal to a liberal logic, the EU aims to Europeanize the energy market with the goal of fostering its efficiency.

There are two models of EU External Energy Governance: the *EUnilateral model* and the *decentred model*. The former assumes that the asymmetrical distribution of power in favor of the EU allows Brussels to coerce MENA countries to adopt its norms. This model, based on a regulatory logic, reinforces the vision of the EU as a normative power. In this logic, neighboring countries have just two options: accept or refuse the rules provided by Brussels. Although the EU can use incentives under the so-called "logic of conditionality" to en-

¹⁶⁰ Ghaddar, A. and Lewis, A. "Oil Major Total Expands in Libya, Buys Marathon's Waha Stake for \$450 Million", Reuters. 2 March 2018

¹⁶¹ Statistical Review of World Energy 2019. <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2019-full-report.pdf>

¹⁶² Szulecki, K., Fischer, S., Gullberg, A. T., & Sartor, O. (2016). "Shaping the 'Energy Union': Between National Positions and Governance Innovation in EU Energy and Climate Policy", *Climate Policy*, 16(5), 548-567

¹⁶³ Lavenex, S. "Concentric Circles of Flexible "European" Integration: A Typology of EU External Governance Relations", *Comparative European Politics* 9(4-5): 372-393, 2011

courage counterpart adoption of such standards, since membership is no longer an option, its bargaining power has diminished.

In addition, another limitation of this model should be noted. In fact, its application is standardized, thus not allowing differentiation from country to country. This is perceived by neighborhood governments as a lack of flexibility on the part of Brussels¹⁶⁴.

On the contrary, the *decentred model* claims that actors' interests change in accordance to their perceptions of what is appropriate behavior in specific situations. In this model, the EU power is mainly based on persuasion rather than coercion. Neighborhood governmental actors have the opportunity to jointly define policies as part of the cooperation process. In this way, the neighboring countries feel more involved, and attach greater legitimacy to the final output.

Among the bases governing energy cooperation in the Mediterranean basin, we can identify both Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) and Association Agreements (AAs). Both provide for the establishment of joint councils to monitor and implement the agreements. Furthermore, with the launch of the ENP, the Action Plans agreed bilaterally by the EU and the neighboring countries set out a broader roadmap for cooperation. Although the latter are not legal but rather political agreements, their relevance is again confirmed by the fact that they mention the overall goal of moving closer to EU standards and express the parties' commitment to the development of projects of common European interest. Overall, Action Plans reflect more EU unilateralism than decentring approach due to the overwhelming preponderance of the dissemination of EU norms and standards among the objectives pursued. As said, conditionality has been used by Brussels as a key tool of the EU External Energy Governance. Indeed, through the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI), the EU was able to provide financial support to all sixteen ENP countries in the field of energy cooperation.

Other interesting tools used by Brussels are Memoranda of Understanding (MoU). Like Action Plans, they are non-binding acts signed between high-level representatives of the Commission and neighboring governments. Cooperation focuses on achieving subregional integration to facilitate the emergence of an integrated pan-European market that functions on the basis of binding and precise standards set by Brussels.

¹⁶⁴ J.Kelley, "New Wine in Old Wineskins: Promoting Political Reforms Through the New European Neighbourhood Policy", *Journal of Common Market Studies* 22(1): 29–55, 2006

3.2 The evolution of the energy cooperation in the Mediterranean

As widely acknowledged, energy was one of the main driver of the European integration since its birth in the 1950s. The launch of the European Economic Community (EEC) was designed around cooperation on coal, steel and nuclear energy. However, the outbreak of the oil crisis in the 1970s raised unemployment and inflation rates, marking a severe economic recession in most of Europe. Interesting, until that time, the oil sector was an exclusive prerogative of the Member States. Already in 1968 the Council issued a directive through which it required EEC Member States to “maintain minimum stocks of crude oil and/or petroleum products” to cover at least 65 days of average daily domestic consumption per year¹⁶⁵. The outbreak of the Yom Kippur war was the scapegoat used by the Commission in order to foster a common energy policy. In light of this, between May and June 1974, it published the “Strategy for a New Energy Policy”¹⁶⁶ and the “Community Energy Policy Goals for 1985”¹⁶⁷. In contrast, as far as the EU's external relations are concerned, in 1972 the Commission presented the Comprehensive Mediterranean Policy, in which it identified energy cooperation as a key priority for improving relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean.¹⁶⁸ However, despite all these efforts, at that time Member States still preferred to pursue their national interests bilaterally.

An important turning point was represented by the adoption of the 1986 Single European Act, which enlarged the power in the hands of the Commission so as to liberalize electricity and gas markets. Meanwhile, this domestic regulatory effort was accompanied by an attempt to strengthen a connection between domestic energy issues with external action¹⁶⁹. Over time such pattern was enhanced, until 1995, when the Euro-Mediterranean Partner-

¹⁶⁵ Council of European Communities. (1968, December 20). Council Directive of 20 December 1968 Imposing an Obligation on Member States of the EEC to Maintain Minimum Stocks of Crude Oil and/or Petroleum Products

¹⁶⁶ Commission of the European Communities. (1974, June 26). Towards a New Energy Policy Strategy for the European Community.

¹⁶⁷ Commission of the European Communities. (1974, November 27). *Community Energy Policy Objectives for 1985*

¹⁶⁸ Commission of the European Communities. (1972, October). The Relations between the Community and the Mediterranean Countries. Information Memo P-48/72

¹⁶⁹ Van Elsuwege, P. (2013). The EU's Governance of External Energy Relations: The Challenges of a ‘rule-based market approach’. In D. Kochenov & F. Amtenbrink (Eds.), *The European Union's Shaping of the International Legal Order* (pp. 215–237). Cambridge University Press.

ship (EMP), also known as Barcelona Process, began. Within this partnership, energy cooperation played a central function. In this general framework, the EU's four main objectives regarded: the establishment of a regional forum 'to develop consistent energy policies'; the expansion of 'energy planning tools based on the highly complementary nature of the Northern and Southern Mediterranean markets and supply networks'; the increase of 'trade in energy products'; and 'greater security for private investment in energy resources and networks'¹⁷⁰. As a matter of fact, the Barcelona process inaugurated a long series of ministerial meetings that launched several initiatives aimed at the creation of a common energy market. For example, in 2003, energy ministers met again in Rome where they launched the Euro-Mediterranean Energy Platform (REMEEP). This was a comprehensive framework comprising public institutions, energy companies and financial institutions¹⁷¹.

In the first ten years of the new millennium, the energy issue became important again. In fact, within a decade, Europe's energy dependency had decreased from 66% to 56%. This decrease was partly due to an increase in energy needs, coupled with a decrease in power production¹⁷². The resulting increase in foreign dependency occurred in a historical period characterized by great regional uncertainty. Rising tensions between Israelis and Palestinians led the European Commission to admit that the EU lacked 'the means to negotiate and exert pressure'¹⁷³. Therefore, it was with the ENP that the Commission attempted to reverse course, relaunching cooperation in the area. In fact, the ENP created a functional institutional structure for such partnership. However, the 'big bang enlargement' that occurred in 2004 with the accession of ten new Member States led the EU to focus its energy cooperation mainly on its new neighbor: Russia. It was only with the deterioration of relations between the two, which occurred between 2006 and 2009, that the EU returned to relaunch cooperation in the Mediterranean¹⁷⁴. Indeed, the 2007 Priority Action Plan 2008-2013 for Euro-Mediterranean Energy Cooperation should be read in this sense. Also

¹⁷⁰ European Commission. (1996, April 3). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Concerning the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in the Energy Sector.

¹⁷¹ S. Tholens, "An EU–South Mediterranean Energy Community: The Right Policy for the Right Region?" *The International Spectator*, 49(2), 34–49, 2014

¹⁷² Preure, M., Allal, S., Ben Abdallah, M., & Kappauf, J. "Towards a EuroMediterranean Energy Community Moving from import-export to a new regional energy model". Institut de Prospective Economique du Monde Méditerranéen—IPEMED. 2013

¹⁷³ European Commission. (2000, November 29). Green Paper Towards a European strategy for the Security of Energy Supply.

¹⁷⁴ Reuters, FACTBOX: Russian Oil and Gas as Political Weapon? *Reuters*, 2007

know as the Limassol Priority Action Plan, it marked an important step in the evolution of the ENP. The Plan aimed to improve the ‘harmonization of energy markets and legislations’ and to pursue ‘the integration of energy markets in the Euro-Mediterranean region’; promoting ‘sustainable development of the energy sector’; and jointly developing ‘initiatives of common interest in key areas, including infrastructure’¹⁷⁵. Then, the following year, energy cooperation was included in the six areas of responsibility of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). Several panels were established with the aim of harmonizing energy markets (among them the UfM Gas Platform, a UfM Regional Electricity Platform, and a UfM Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Platform). Noteworthy is the Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP) which aimed to increase the production of an additional 20GW of renewable energy by installing large photovoltaic capacities in North Africa¹⁷⁶. This project was supposed to provide Europe with electricity and increase intra-regional electricity exchanges. In parallel, since 2007, UfM has supported the integration of the electricity market between Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as between these countries and the European energy market¹⁷⁷. However, the financial crisis that hit Europe and the resulting significant drop in energy prices and demand, along side with the regional instability provoked by the Arab Springs, led to the abandonment of these projects.

Another notable turning point was the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. Indeed it introduced a new energy section and explicitly listed a series of objectives for the EU in this policy domain. According to TFEU, Art. 194.1, the EU policy on energy should aim “to: a) ensure the functioning of the energy market; b) ensure security of energy supply in the Union; c) promote energy efficiency and energy saving and the development of new and renewable forms of energy; and d) promote the interconnection of energy networks”¹⁷⁸. Furthermore, the Treaty included energy policy among the shared competences between the EU and the Member States (TFEU, Art. 4). Although Member States have the right to establish bilateral agreements with third countries in the energy sector, the Treaty has gi-

¹⁷⁵ EU Energy Commissioner. (2007, 17 December). Presentation of the Priority Action Plan at the EuroMed Energy Ministerial Conference.

¹⁷⁶ Marín Quemada, J. M., & Escribano, G. “The Mediterranean Solar Plan as a Euro-Mediterranean Vector of Integration and Economic Development”. Report. European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2010

¹⁷⁷ Observatoire Méditerranéen de l’Energie. (2018). MED-EMIP—Euro-Mediterranean Energy Market Integration Project.

¹⁷⁸ TFEU, Art. 194.1

ven the EU institutions greater powers to influence the energy policies of Member States (TFEU, Art. 122.1). In this regard, while the European Council has the right to "define the general political guidelines and priorities" of EU energy policy, the Commission has the power of legislative initiative. Moreover, with the passage of time, the role of the European Parliament has steadily increased, gaining a voice, while the Council has moved from an unanimous to a qualified majority voting system. Despite these steps forward, the lack of a well-defined common energy policy and unilateral action by Member States has limited the EU's ability to promote security of energy supply.¹⁷⁹

3.3 Recent evolution of the energy cooperation in the Mediterranean region

In 2011, the outbreak of the Arab Springs was the turning point that triggered a new demand for a comprehensive and integrated approach to the external dimension of EU energy policy. Indeed, the new regional configuration, characterized by instability and uncertainty, highlighted the volatility of Mediterranean hydrocarbon supply chains. As usual, integration was provided by Brussels through regulation. On 4 February 2011, the European Council called "for better coordination of EU and Member States' activities with a view to ensuring consistency and coherence in the EU's external relations with key producer, transit, and consumer countries"¹⁸⁰. In this way, the European Council urged the Commission to issue a communication on the security of energy supply, prompting the High Representative to include cooperation on energy security within the framework of the ENP. Meanwhile, Member States were encouraged to inform the Commission about their bilateral energy agreements with third countries.

Not surprisingly, after only a few months, the 2011 ENP Review was published in May. As far as the energy sector is concerned, the new document called for strengthening cooperation in the energy sector. To do so, the Commission diverted the ENP's financial instruments so as to improve the efficiency of the Euro-Mediterranean energy market. For example, the project labeled Paving the Way for the Mediterranean Solar Plan

¹⁷⁹ Baumann, F., & Simmerl, G. "Between Conflict and Convergence". CAP Discussion Paper. Center for Applied Policy Research, 2011

¹⁸⁰ Council of the EU, General Secretariat. (2011). Council Conclusions on Strengthening the External Dimension of the EU Energy Policy.

(2010-2013) was funded to support increased use of renewable energy in the Southern Neighborhood¹⁸¹.

Another important step forward in the EU's external dimension of energy policy was the Crimean War in 2014¹⁸². The destabilization of the former Soviet space and the Kremlin's new aggressiveness raised concerns about possible long-term disruptions in gas supplies, thus enabling the involvement of European institutions in Member States' energy policies. In light of this, the 2014 Energy Security Strategy was issued. The Commission claimed that: "too often energy security issues are addressed only at a national level without taking fully into account the *interdependence* of Member States" and identified "a more coherent external action" as being among the keys to improving energy security¹⁸³. Thus, the Commission pointed out some relevant regulatory measures that Member States should undertake alone or jointly with EU institutions. In the Strategy, the Commission rolled out its vision as one "where Member States see that they depend on each other to deliver secure energy to their citizens, based on true solidarity and trust, and of an Energy Union that speaks with one voice in global affairs"¹⁸⁴. In light of this should be read the EU Energy Diplomacy Action Plan¹⁸⁵ issued by the High Representative the following year. The latter aimed to diversify EU energy sources, supplies and routes by fostering EU political dialogue with producers and transit countries, notably in the Southern Neighbourhood. It is in this framework that the Commission reiterated the centrality of energy security among the new 2015 ENP Review's priorities.

Alignment among Member States's energy policies was even reinforced by the publication of the 2019 European Green Deal¹⁸⁶. Ursula Von der Leyen's flagship policy agenda ai-

¹⁸¹ EU Neighbours. (2021). *Paving the Way for the Mediterranean Solar Plan*. <https://www.eu-neighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/projects/paving-way-mediterranean-solar-plan>.

¹⁸² A. Prontera, "The New Politics of Energy Security in the European Union and Beyond: States, Markets, Institutions", London, Taylor and Francis, 2017, pp. 1 - 243

¹⁸³ European Commission. (2014, May 25). *European Energy Security Strategy*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52014DC0330>.

¹⁸⁴ European Commission. (2015, February 25). *A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:1bd46c90-bdd4-11e4-bbe1-01aa75ed71a1.0001.03/DOC_1&format=PDF

¹⁸⁵ Far, S., & Youngs, R. (2015, November). *Energy Union and EU global Strategy: The Undefined Link* (2015:5). Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies.

¹⁸⁶ European Commission. (2019, December 11). *The European Green Deal*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

med to make the EU a pioneer in the ecological transition to address climate change. While initially being intended as a domestic growth strategy, over time, the European Green Deal has also been reflected in regional strategies, among which we find the ENP¹⁸⁷. The emergence of a new climate diplomacy was aimed at supporting the development of renewable energy sources and improving energy efficiency in the Southern neighborhood. This has involved investment in wind and solar energy, as well as support for the development of energy-efficient buildings and factories. Indeed, due to its location and lower production costs, the ENP-South region has immense potential for solar power generation¹⁸⁸. Furthermore, the EU has also promoted the use of green hydrogen as an alternative fuel, which could potentially provide new economic opportunities for the region. In line with this strategy, natural gas is considered a transitional fuel. The expected increase in gas demand in the medium term has led the European Green Deal to rethink the Mediterranean as a gas hub, in which Egypt could play an increasingly important role along with Israel and Cyprus, as we will see in the next paragraph.

Despite its desire to make Europe a carbon-neutral continent by 2050, the von der Leyen Commission was forced to reorient its policy agenda due to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022. In the aftermath of the Russian invasion, the EU found itself totally dependent on energy from Moscow, reducing the effectiveness of its sanctions. Rising energy prices, combined with rising inflation, prompted European governments to diversify their energy sources. On 8 March 2022, the European Commission presented the REPowerEU Plan, providing a blueprint to put an end to the imports of fossil energy from Russia before 2030¹⁸⁹. The sudden outbreak of war, actually forced the EU to backtrack on the energy transition and find new sources for energy supply, especially in the Mediterranean. For instance, on 10 April 2022, the Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans and members of the Egyptian government had consultations in Cairo on reinforcing their cooperation on energy. Through a joint statement, the two of them agreed to create a Me-

¹⁸⁷ Serena Sandri, Hussam Hussein, Nooh Alshyab & Jacek Sagatowski (22 Jul 2023): The European Green Deal: Challenges and opportunities for the Southern Mediterranean, *Mediterranean Politics*

¹⁸⁸ Bennis, A. "Power surge: How the European Green Deal Can succeed in Morocco and Tunisia" — European Council on Foreign Relations. *ECFR Bennis*, January 2021

¹⁸⁹ European Commission. (2022, March 8). *REPowerEU: Joint European Action for more Affordable, Secure and Sustainable Energy*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:71767319-9f0a-11ec-83e1-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF.

diterranean Green Hydrogen Partnership involving Europe, Africa and the Gulf¹⁹⁰. With the spirit of reducing hazards, the Commission launched the EU Energy Platform. In a nutshell, it allowed Member States to coordinate joint purchases of gas from third countries, the use of EU gas infrastructure, and EU outreach to international gas suppliers. The aim was to create economies of scale in the energy sector. Announcing this initiative, the European Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson claimed that: “to end [EU] dependence on Russian fossil fuels and replace them with alternative sources of supply the EU must use its collective political and market power on global gas markets”¹⁹¹.

Furthermore, as part of the REPowerEU plan, on May 18, 2022, the Commission reaffirmed the EU's external engagement in the energy sector through the publication of an ad hoc strategy. While in the short-term it envisaged reducing dependence on Russian energy sources through new partnership with new suppliers, in the long-term it aimed to establish partnerships for the development of renewable energy. Once again, the Mediterranean was selected as a priority region for the establishment of a hydrogen import corridor.¹⁹² In this framework, on 15 June 2022 the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Egypt and Israel on imports of liquefied natural gas¹⁹³.

3.4 The geopolitics of energy in the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean has always played an important role in European energy supply. In 2017, southern and eastern Mediterranean countries accounted for 9.1% of the EU's oil imports and 13.6% of its gas imports¹⁹⁴. Between 2005 and 2018, natural gas exports from Algeria to Europe steadily declined by 31%. Similarly, in Libya there was a decrease in

¹⁹⁰ European Commission. (2022, April 11). *Joint Statement European Union—Egypt*. https://ec.europa.eu/clima/news-your-voice/news/joint-statement-european-union-egypt-2022-04-11_en.

¹⁹¹ European Commission. (2022, April 8). Energy Security: Commission Hosts First Meeting of EU Energy Purchase Platform to Secure Supply of Gas, LNG and Hydrogen. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_2387.

¹⁹² European Commission. (2022, April 11). *Joint Statement European Union—Egypt*. https://ec.europa.eu/clima/news-your-voice/news/joint-statement-european-union-egypt-2022-04-11_en.

¹⁹³ European Commission. (2022, June 17). *EU Egypt Israel Memorandum of Understanding*. https://energy.ec.europa.eu/eu-egypt-israel-memorandum-understanding_en.

¹⁹⁴ BP. (2018). Statistical Review of World Energy 2018. <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/en/corporate/pdf/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2018-full-report.pdf>

energy exports due to the civil war that resulted from the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime. Indeed, in ten years, between 2008 and 2018, gas production decline from 15.1 bcm to 9.8 bcm, while gas export declined from 9.7 to 4.3 bcm¹⁹⁵. This dynamic reflects the economic recession that has affected southern EU countries since 2008, decreasing energy demand. In addition, MENA countries' energy demand increased significantly due to population growth and economic development, granting less room for export of energy sources. Indeed, between 2008 and 2018, energy demand grew by 55.7% in Algeria and 31.7% in Egypt, the most populous countries in the region. This increase turned Egypt into a net importer of natural gas starting in 2015, and caused a 10.1% reduction in Algerian exports of this asset between 2007 and 2017¹⁹⁶.

Since 2009, EU energy interest in the eastern Mediterranean has increased due to the discovery of new offshore gas fields. Indeed, the American company Noble Energy announced the discovery of the 280 billion cubic meter Tamar Basin in Israel's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). This was followed by two more offshore discoveries in 2010 also in Israel and in 2011 in Cyprus. In 2012, Noble, in collaboration with Israel's Delek, announced the discovery of new energy resources in Israel's Tamin and Karish fields of about 67 billion cubic meters. Furthermore, in 2015, Eni made an announcement of the discovery of the 850 billion cubic meter in Zohr field in Egypt's EEZ. Lastly, in 2019, ExxonMobil made an additional gas discovery in Cyprus, estimated at 142 to 227 billion cubic meters.

As is easy to imagine, this fragmented distribution of energy resources has revived ancient rivalries among coastal countries. In this context, Turkey, despite being the only country in the Eastern Mediterranean without offshore gas resources, has assumed a central role in shaping regional balances. In 2013, indeed, Ankara filed a complaint with the United Nations concerning the delimitation agreement between Cyprus and Egypt and claimed the "invalidity" of any agreement related to gas exploration in Cypriot waters. Moreover, Turkey threatened to sanction international oil firms involved in activities in Cyprus' EEZ and stopped the drilling vessels of Noble Energy and Eni in 2011 and 2018, respectively. Further

¹⁹⁵ Baltrop, R. (2019). Oil and Gas in the New Libyan Era: Conflict and Continuity. OIES Paper, 2019/22. Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Oil-and-Gas-ina-New-Libyan-Era-Conflict-and-Continuity-MEP-22.pdf?v=d3d-cf429c679>

¹⁹⁶ BP. (2018). Statistical Review of World Energy 2018. <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/en/corporate/pdf/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2018-full-report.pdf> [

tensions arose in 2019 with a deeply controversial agreement between Turkey and the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) to delimit the respective economic zone.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, the latter did not take into account the delimitations of the waters of the Greek archipelago in accordance with the to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which Turkey refused to ratify.

Regarding relations between Cairo and Ankara, although they had improved since 2009 following the sudden outbreak of the Arab Springs, with the restoration of power under the leadership of President Al-Sisi, these relations deteriorated again. In fact, following a pan-Ottoman and pan-Islamist perspective, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stood up as a defender of all those non-state Muslim groups such as: Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Syrian opposition and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The presidential election of the leader of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), Mohamed Morsi, in 2012 was welcomed by Turkey so as to broaden the front of a political Islam that looked to Ankara as a key reference point. In 2013, President Morsi was dismissed and the FJP was banned the following year. The low mutual esteem between the new president Al-Sisi and Erdogan led the former to move closer to Israel. The new destabilizing role assumed by Turkey actually favored a realignment of coastal countries with strategic energy interests to contain Turkish ambitions. This highlighted the contradictions of Turkish foreign policy: unable to achieve alignment between its strategic priorities and its desire to become the linchpin of regional energy cooperation¹⁹⁸.

However, in recent years, the discovery of new offshore gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean carries another important implication for the EU. In 2018, Russia supplied 177.8 billion cubic meters of gas to the EU, accounting for 38.5 % of European gas demand and 50.9 % of European gas imports¹⁹⁹. In fact, dependence on Russian energy sources was overwhelming. The crisis in Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent invasion in 2022, as already pointed out, have forced the EU to think of new alternative solutions. The develop-

¹⁹⁷ D.Butler, & T.Gumbrutcku, "Turkey Signs Maritime Boundaries Deal with Libya Amid Exploration Row", Reuters, 2019

¹⁹⁸ J.Richert, "Turkey's Energy Leadership Ambitions and Their Implications for Energy Governance in the Eastern Mediterranean". In Giannakopoulos A. (ed.) Energy Cooperation and Security in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Seismic Shift Towards Peace or Conflict? Tel Aviv University Research Paper 8: 47–63, 2016

¹⁹⁹ BP. (2019). Statistical Review of World Energy 2019. <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2019-full-report.pdf>

ment of energy cooperation in the eastern Mediterranean is therefore of strategic importance, particularly because of its geographical location. Moreover, from the perspective of southern European Member States (particularly Italy, Greece, and France) new gas discoveries in the eastern Mediterranean are confidently seen as a means to: balance Germany's hegemony in the European gas market; rebalance the EU's geopolitical axis southward; counter Turkey's foreign policy assertiveness, which is seen as destabilizing for the entire region; and provide a business opportunity for deeply involved energy players such as Eni, Total, and Energean.

Moreover, from the perspective of the Atlantic ally, the construction of a new gas pipeline connecting the eastern Mediterranean and Europe is seen as a useful tool to reduce the dependence of central Europe, specifically Germany, on Russia. It is no coincidence that the United States has consistently obstructed the consolidation of its allies' energy interdependence with U.S. strategic rivals, even to the point of imposing sanctions on Gazprom's project contractors in 2019²⁰⁰.

Several export options have been presented since the 2010s. The *Cypriot hub* was based on the idea of creating a large liquefaction plant at Vasilikos, so as to create pipelines capable of transporting gas from the Aphrodite fields (Cyprus) to Leviathan (Israel). Despite the good political relations between the two countries, Tev Aviv is skeptical about Cyprus' security capabilities to defend the facilities in light of growing tensions with Turkey. Moreover, from a technical point of view, this option is too expensive and complex to implement. The second possible option is the so-called *Israel hub*, but its implementation is even more complicated due to the stark opposition of domestic environmental groups. Furthermore, in 2013, Ankara rolled out the *Turkish hub*. Basically, it foresees the creation of a pipeline connecting the Levant basin to the Turkish gas transmission system. Despite its efforts, such proposal was perceived by regional countries as an attempt to foster Turkish leadership in the eastern Mediterranean. However, growing tensions with Israel over Cyprus and Gaza, and misalignment with Egypt, have led to progressive marginalization of Ankara. As a reaction, this has encouraged an escalation of Turkish naval and diplomatic provocations to the damage of the interests of other energy players²⁰¹. Lastly, the *EastMed hub* ap-

²⁰⁰ A. Gürel, & L. Le Cornu, "Can Gas Catalyse Peace in the Eastern Mediterranean?" *The International Spectator* 49(2): 11–33, 2014

²⁰¹ M. Giuli, "Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean Energy Resources" IN *Transnational Security Cooperation in the Mediterranean*, edited by Robert Mason, Middle East Studies Center, The American University in Cairo, 2021

appears to be the EU's most favored option. It is a 10 billion cubic meter project linking the Levant Basin to the EU market via Cyprus and Greece, with a final landing point in Italy through connection with the IGI Poseidon pipeline project. The EastMed project was granted Project of Common Interest (PCI) status by the EU in 2015, signaling the EU's first targeted to accede to eastern Mediterranean resources. In 2017, Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding to promote the pipeline²⁰². Three years later, the EastMed pipeline agreement was signed by Greece, Israel and Cyprus in response to the delimitation of their respective EEZs contested by Turkey and Libya²⁰³. From the EU's perspective, the EastMed pipeline would avoid any route through potentially unstable territories. It would also diminish the strategic value of Turkey's geographic position as the only gateway for non-Russian gas supply to Southeastern Europe. While technically, the project faces a complex seabed geology, politically, strong local opposition in Italy to other more advanced projects, such as the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), would complicate a firm commitment by Rome to build additional infrastructure²⁰⁴.

However, it should not be forgotten that these new discoveries of gas basins have fueled Russian interests in the eastern Mediterranean region. In this context, Russian energy companies Rosneft and Novatek have a presence in the Egyptian and Lebanese offshore. In addition, Russia's increased naval presence and installation of land-to-air batteries have enabled it to exert influence over maritime activities in the region. Moscow also has strong financial ties with Cyprus and good relations with all countries in the region. This shows how the development of energy connections between Europe and the eastern Mediterranean can be negatively affected and boycotted by the role of external powers²⁰⁵.

²⁰² Geropoulos, K. (2017). Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Israel Sign MoU for EastMed Gas Pipeline. New Europe. <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/greece-cyprus-italy-israel-sign-mou-east-med-gas-pipeline/>.

²⁰³ Koutantou, A. (2020) Greece, Israel, Cyprus Sign EastMed Pipeline Deal.Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-cyprus-israel-pipeline/greece-israel-cyprus-sign-eastmed-gas-pipeline-deal-idUSKBN1Z10R5>

²⁰⁴ Upstream. (2020). Energean and DEPA Sign Deal for EastMed Pipeline. <https://www.upstreamonline.com/production/energean-and-depa-sign-deal-for-eastmed-pipeline/2-1-731413>

²⁰⁵ E.Eiran, & G.Mitchell, "The Gas Effect: Assessing Hydrocarbon Development's Impact Upon Eastern Mediterranean Politics", In Goren N. (ed) The Eastern Mediterranean: New Dynamics and Potential for Cooperation. Euromesco Joint Policy Study n. 9, 2018

Chapter 4: European foreign policy failures: the case study of the Libyan crisis

4.1 Understanding EU crisis management in Libya

After the approval of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the development of a common foreign policy, as envisaged by the second pillar (CSDP), has been rather complicated due to the willingness of Member States to maintain their sovereignty. Within this framework, crisis management can be seen as a useful foreign policy tool. At the European level, it emerged only in 2010, after the institutional reforms launched by the former HR, Catherine Ashton. Basically, it could be defined as the stabilization or containment of a crisis, and is also often used as a generic term for all types of intervention in crises. It recognizes that a crisis is on-going and aims to prevent further deterioration, contagion or spill-over into other forms of crises²⁰⁶. In a nutshell, EU Crisis Management is aimed at preserving the integrity of the core Union at a primary level, patrolling its external boundaries and contributing to rather than initiating, stabilization measures where crises on its peripheries threaten both²⁰⁷. By adopting the 2013 Comprehensive Approach to crisis management, the EU sought to increase its internal coordination and flexibility to address emerging threats in the neighborhood.²⁰⁸ Moreover, the adoption of the 2016 Global Strategy further accelerated this model based on an integrated approach to conflict prevention, crisis response and peacebuilding.

Although the ENP is the main tool used by the EU to deal with the neighborhood, recently the outbreak of regional security crises, for instance in Ukraine and Libya, has prompted Brussels to deploy CSDP missions, highlighting a trend favoring securitization.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, figuring out when and how to intervene in a crisis became much more challenging for governments because engaging in these conflicts meant engaging in “wars of choice” and not “wars of necessity,” which made it more difficult to

²⁰⁶ Brecher, M. and J. Wilkenfeld (2000) *A Study of Crisis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press).

²⁰⁷ N. Pirozzi, “Eu Crisis Management After Lisbon: A New Model to Address Security Challenges in the 21st Century?” Intersentia, 2015

²⁰⁸ European Commission and High Representative (2013) ‘The EU’s Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises’, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, JOIN (2013)

explain an intervention to the public²⁰⁹. Therefore, in order to increase their legitimacy, it is no coincidence that the United Nations has increasingly played a central role in endorsing such missions since the 1990s. Indeed, also the Treaty of the European Union includes a reference to the principles of the United Nations Charter, according to which the Union undertakes to preserve and strengthen “peace ... and international security, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations” (TEU art. 21). As a result, the EU undertook UN Security Council-authorized humanitarian interventions in northern Iraq and Sierra Leone during the 1990s. However, crucial issues, such as the coercive use of force, were not part of the EU's strategic culture, causing in many cases the EU's inability to prevent escalations and even massacres, including the famous Srebrenica slaughter in 1995²¹⁰. The lack of this strategic culture could be seen as an implicit feature of the so called Normative Power coined by Ian Manners to describe the EU capacity to promote its stated norms and universal values through the principle of ‘living by example’²¹¹. According to him, the EU has the ability “to shape conceptions of the «normal»”, that is, to define what is normal and in so doing it can change the normative convictions of others²¹².

As far as EU Crisis Management is concerned, relations between Libya and the EU have remained dominated by a security agenda. The absence of a legitimate central authority to deal with and the growing threat posed by the 2015 migration crisis have pushed the EU to follow a short-term security-based agenda instead of focusing on more long-term solutions like capacity-building. This occurred due to the fact that both the EU and NATO prioritized legitimacy over strategy. Such pattern was reinforced by a tendency to operate under “coalitions of the willing”, as we will see.

In this regards, the EU has endorsed two CSDP operations in Libya: the naval operations EUNAVFOR MED (Operation Sophia) and EUBAM Libya. Both missions aim to “undertake systematic efforts to identify, capture and dispose of vessels and enabling assets used or suspected of being used by migrant smugglers or traffickers, in order to contribute to wider

²⁰⁹ H. Strachan, “The direction of war. Contemporary strategy in historical perspective”, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013

²¹⁰ Coker, C., 2013: ‘A farewell to arms: Europe’s meritocracy and the demilitarization of Europe’, in Matlary, J.H., and Petersson, M. eds., *NATO’s European Allies. Military Capability and Political Will* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

²¹¹ Manners, I., 2002: ‘Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40 (2), June, pp. 235–258

²¹² Björkdahl, A., 2011: ‘Normative and military power in EU peace support operations’, in Whiteman, R.G. ed., *Normative Power Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan)

EU efforts to disrupt the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Southern Central Mediterranean and prevent the further loss of life at sea²¹³. Furthermore, the EU has created a Trust Fund for Africa and Libya to give a rapid and flexible answer to crisis, which was criticized for its top-down approach that avoided confrontation with the Libyan interlocutors. Despite its efforts, EUNAVFOR MED operation was not so successful due to a twofold reason: the lack of authorization to operate inside Libyan waters and the training of Libyan coast guard that was not implemented systematically due to the lack of UN approval²¹⁴.

In general, the EU and its Member States have been criticized for protecting European interests and not those of local people²¹⁵. Moreover, the EU crisis response in Libya has been characterized by a huge gap between intentions and actual implementation, and thus also a gap in expectations. For example, the principle of “local ownership” pursued by the EU, was never successfully implemented. Local stakeholders felt marginalized, believing that they had to sign up for projects that had already been planned at the table, without effective consultation of their needs and priorities. Although the EU tried to support local municipalities in light of the principle of “local ownership,” this proved to be a double-edged sword in the midst of a civil war fueled by multipolar competition. In fact, cooperation with local entities has stimulated competition and opportunism among local actors, which has produced a negative impact on the economy. In contrast, other international actors have pursued a different strategy. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), for example, promoted the involvement of municipal governments in stabilization programs, always in conjunction with central government institutions. This helped to improve relations between national and subnational levels while simultaneously strengthening the legitimacy of the Government of National Accord (GNA)²¹⁶.

Secondly, the tools used by the EU to achieve its security objectives have damaged its reputation, so much so that it prompted the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mi-

²¹³ EUNAVFOR MED <https://www.operationsophia.eu/about-us/#mission>

²¹⁴ Loschi, C., L. Raineri and F. Strazzari (2018) ‘The implementation of EU crisis response in Libya: Bridging theory and practice’, EUNPACK Working Paper D.6.2, EUNPACK project.

²¹⁵ Amnesty International, “Accusa i governi europei di complicità in terribili abusi contro i rifugiati e i migranti in Libia”, (December 2017) <https://www.amnesty.it/amnesty-international-accusa-governi-europei-complicita-terribili-abusi-rifugiati-migranti-libia/>; Human Rights Watch, “L’inferno senza scampo: le politiche dell’Unione Europea contribuiscono agli abusi sui migranti in Libia”, (January 2019), <https://www.hrw.org/it/report/2019/01/21/326624>

²¹⁶ *Ibidem*

chelle Bachelet, to condemn the EU in 2018²¹⁷. In fact, since 2016 the EU has helped fund the establishment of detention camps for migrants attempting to reach European shores. These camps, run by various militias, did nothing but encourage the strengthening of an illicit economy. Various NGOs have documented the dreadful conditions in Libya's detention centers, which at worst can be seen as a direct result of the EU's migration policy. Thirdly, both NATO and the EU failed to understand the nature of the Libyan crisis due to a lack of sufficient information and intelligence. This has created a simplistic view, in which the two organizations have appeared more hostage to their Member States than leading actors.

On February 15, 2021, the volume by the HR Josep Borrell, edited by the European External Action Service (EEAS), was published. It occurred exactly ten years after the uprising that led to the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime²¹⁸. Borrell offered two noteworthy observations: the first was that Europe must "learn to speak the language of power," and the second was that: "it must find an institutional mechanism to overcome the divisions among Member States that for years have slowed down or paralyzed EU decision-making"²¹⁹. According to the HR, the power of the EU lies in its ability to use "its economic tools in a coordinated way"²²⁰. In addition, to avoid paralysis, he advocated the adoption of a qualified majority veto system in foreign policy matters. "For decades, we have agreed that foreign and security policy must be decided by unanimity, with every country holding a veto"²²¹ he stated. However, the progressive enlargement of the Union has increasingly complicated the achievement of unanimity. In an increasingly unstable neighborhood, the adoption of a new decision-making mechanism appears necessary to block the veto power of individual Member States. The case of Libya is an obvious example of the need to reform European foreign policy.

²¹⁷ OHCHR (2018) 39th Session of the Human Rights Council, Opening statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, Geneva, 10 September 2018.

²¹⁸ Borrell, J., 2020: 'Europe must learn quickly to speak the language of power', *Iconnect*, 29 October: <http://www.icconnectblog.com/2020/10/europe-must-learn-quickly-to-speak-the-language-of-power-part-i/>.

²¹⁹ *Ibidem*

²²⁰ *Ibidem*

²²¹ *Ibidem*

4.2 Understanding Libyan complexity: What the country looked like before the 2011 uprisings

Libya has never been a unified country. There are profound differences among geographic, ethnic, and tribal dimensions. In addition, also foreign interference played a role in shaping the country. Geographically, of the three Libyan regions (Tripolitania in the West, Cyrenaica in the East and Fezzan in the South) Cyrenaica is by far the richest in natural resources: the Sirte basin possesses 85% of Libya's oil reserves and 70% of its gas reserves. Indeed, five of the six Libyan oil terminals are located in Cyrenaica. The population is unevenly distributed: 90% of the population lives along the fertile coastline, while most of Cyrenaica and the entire Fezzan are poorly populated²²². On the contrary, about half of the 6.8 million Libyans live in Tripolitania, notably in the capital area of Tripoli²²³. The Cyrenaica and Fezzan regions are ethnically more homogeneous: for example, most of Cyrenaica is populated by Arab-Berber. Fezzan is largely inhabited by Tuareg, Tebu and some Arab tribes. In Tripolitania, however, things are very different. Arab, Berber (Amazigh), Arab-Berber and Tuareg groups live here. Thus, regions that are richer in natural resources and more ethnically homogeneous must follow the political directives of a smaller, genealogically diverse but demographically more numerous region. Not surprisingly, intra-Libyan clashes have been further fomented by Libya's tribal-based social structure. The country is divided into 142 main tribes. In this framework, tribal identities represent a common sense of thought and action in Libya²²⁴.

²²² Bobin, F., 2016: 'En Libye, l'incessante bataille du pétrole', *Le Monde*, 26 September.

²²³ UN 2019 'World population prospects': <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

²²⁴ Varvelli, A., 2013: 'The role of tribal dynamics in the Libyan future', *ISPI analysis*, 172, May: https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/analysis_172_2013.pdf.

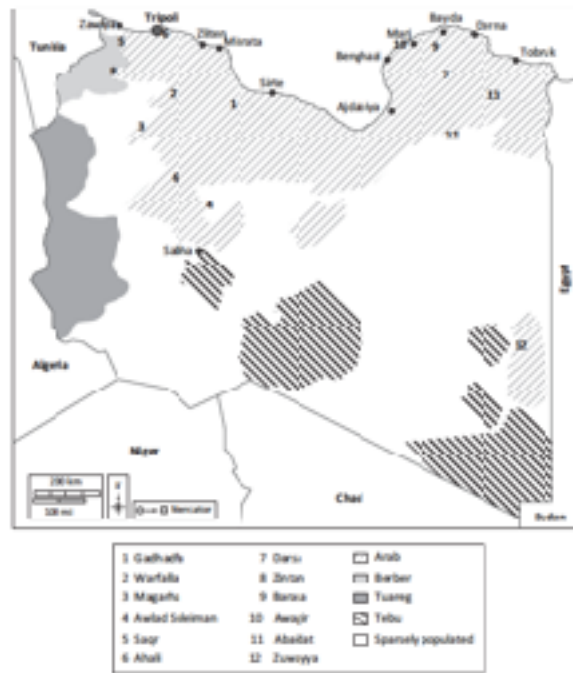


Fig.7 Main Libyan tribes and ethnic groups. Source: adapted with data from Fanack 2020 and <https://d-maps.com/m/africa/libye/libye18.gif>

The tribalistic dimension of the country plays a role in understanding its deep interethnic fragmentation. Tribalism could be identified as both a cause and an outcome of the 2011 uprising. Indeed, in today's Libya, tribes play a notable role in providing social services such as security, health, and education. However, it is worth mentioning that politically the country was united for the first time after the occupation by the Italians in 1934²²⁵. Although the country gained independence as a monarchy after the end of World War II, this did not prevent internal divisions from arising. When discontent soared, King Idris was overthrown and on September 1, 1969, Colonel Mu'ammar Qaddafi took power²²⁶.

As seen, power management in Libya has always been based on a tribal tradition and co-optation. Since the time of Ottoman domination, and then with Italian rule, the creation of patronage networks between tribal entities and a stronger external actor has always characterized the political dimension of the country. This is another Libyan characteristic that has proved remarkably resilient despite the changes that history has brought to Libyan po-

²²⁵ A. Del Boca: "Gli italiani in Libia", Mondadori, 1996; E. Ertola, "Colonizzazione demografica e progetti di italianizzazione della Libia e dell'Alto Adige", *Passato e Presente*, 2019.

²²⁶ Cricco, M., and Cresti, F., "2011: Gheddafi. I volti del potere" (Rome: Carocci).

litics.²²⁷ With Qaddafi's arrival in power, the end of monarchical tribalism were publicly proclaimed. Between 1975 and 1981, the dictator would instead propose a populist experiment in “direct democracy”. Maintaining only the title “Guardian of the Revolution,” and renouncing all political office, he gave birth to the state of the masses (*Jamahiriyah*). In reality, this was not the case. In fact, both political parties and labor unions were abolished²²⁸.

However, the most successful policy pursued by Qaddafi was the anti-Western rhetoric that forced Western oil companies (with the exception of Italy's ENI) to leave the country. The same fate was shared by British and American troops deployed in the North African country. Interestingly, Qaddafi was also perceived as a controversial partner also by Arab countries. For instance, the peace agreement signed between Egypt and Israel in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur war, plummeted diplomatic relations between Cairo and Tripoli. In addition, funding to terrorist groups, such as the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, led the country to be labeled as a sponsor of global terrorism.

However, in the 1990s, Libya's defeat in Chad and the end of the Cold War increased Tripoli's international isolation. This was compounded by economic problems due to low crude oil prices. As a reaction, discontent spread across the country from Cyrenaica. A change of course therefore became necessary. In 1999, UN sanctions were lifted when the country participated in the Barcelona Process. Greater centrality was gained in the same year when the Sirte Declaration established the birth of the African Union, enshrining Qaddafi's pan-African policy.

In 2006, full diplomatic relations were reestablished between Libya and the United States. The following year, a Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation was signed with Rome. It also included the payment of EUR 5 billion over 25 years as reparations from colonial damage²²⁹. Interestingly, Qaddafi was deeply opposed to the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean, perceived by him as a “new form of ‘colonialism’ perpetrated by the

²²⁷ Al-Shadeedi, A., and Ezzeddine, N., 2019: ‘Libyan tribes in the shadows of war and peace’, *CRU Policy Brief*, February.

²²⁸ Weighill, R., and Gaub, F., 2018: “The Cauldron. NATO's campaign in Libya” (London: Hurst & Co.).

²²⁹ Klepp, S. (2010). Italy and Its Libyan Cooperation Program: Pioneer of the European Union's Refugee Policy? In J. P. Cassarino (Ed.), *Unbalanced Reciprocities: Cooperation on Readmission in the Euro-Mediterranean Area*, pp. 77–93. Washington: MEI

Europeans.”²³⁰.

At the European level, the Commission launched negotiations for an EU-Libya Framework Agreement in 2007 to formalize bilateral relations. This cooperation focused mainly on migration and economic development cooperation, avoiding human rights and democratization. However, in light of the 2011 uprising, the EU decided to suspend all technical assistance under the ENP and froze the negotiations on the EU–Libya Framework Agreement. On the contrary, in line with the U.N. Security Council resolution, the EU instituted a much heavier sanctions regime than that envisioned by the UN. Indeed, an embargo on Libyan oil was passed. In the meantime, the EU was also the largest humanitarian donor in the Libyan crisis.

Interestingly, at the beginning of the crisis, the initial EU response was characterized by tensions between the European Commission and the newly established European External Action Service (EEAS) on the one hand, and within the EEAS crisis management structures on the other. This happened because of overlapping competencies²³¹. However, an informal division of labor soon arose between the HR and the Commission. The former was in charge of the more political aspects of the ENP, while the latter was competent for the more technical ones. Despite this, problems of vertical and horizontal coherence emerged.

4.3 The 2011 Libyan uprising

In December 2010, protests broke out in Tunisia against the oppressive regime of President Abidine Ben Ali. The same pattern struck Egypt, Yemen and Syria. Two days after the overthrow of Egyptian President Mubarak, unrest also erupted in Libya. After nearly 40 years of Qaddafi's rule, the country was facing a severe economic crisis, with an unemployment rate of 19.01%.²³². In particular, the triggering event was the arrest of a human rights activist, Fethi Tarbe, that took place in the city of Benghazi. Mass protests exploded throughout the country. Large demonstrations in all Libyan cities were planned for Feb. 17, the “Day of Anger” as it was called by the protesters. That day, 15 demonstrators were

²³⁰ Varvelli, A., & Mezran, K. (Eds.). (2012). “*Libia. Fine o rinascita di una nazione?*” Roma: Donzelli.

²³¹ Koenig, N. (2011) ‘The EU and the Libyan Crisis: In Quest of Coherence?’, *The International Spectator* 46(4):11–30.

²³² Adly, F., 2012: *La rivoluzione libica. Dall’insurrezione di Bengasi alla morte di Gheddafi* (Milan: 2012)

shot dead in Bayda and 14 in Benghazi. People's rage led to the occupation of a barracks and later the liberation of the city of Benghazi on February 22²³³.

Interestingly, such uprisings were not coordinated by a common authority. On the contrary, a multi-polar and unified entanglement of militias and groups mushroomed all over the country. Mobilization mainly occurred through tribal or family network. Indeed, in Libya, a coherent and alternative system of governance was never created after 2011. While in other Arab countries the Arab Springs did not overwhelm state institutions but only their leadership, in Libya it happened. This is way the Libyans often say that theirs was “the only real revolution” of 2011²³⁴. On February 27, rebel militias created a National Transitional Council (NTC) led by Mustafa Abdul Jalil, Qaddafi’s former Justice Minister, who promptly resigned.



Fig.8 The Libyan uprisings between 17 and 24 February 2011. Source: adapted from Pack 2013a; <https://d-maps.com/m/africa/libye/libye18.gif>

Since the beginning of the Libyan crisis, both the EU and NATO have been criticized for being inconsistent and contradictory. A common denominator for solving the crisis has not been found by the Member States. While France and the UK supported the revolution, Italy, Germany and Nordic countries were much more prudent. France was the first country that recognized the NTC as ‘the’ legitimate representative of the Libyan in early March.

²³³ Human Rights Watch (2011): ‘Libya: Government Should Demand End to Unlawful Killings’, 20 February: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/20/libya-governments-should-demand-end-unlawful-killings>.

²³⁴ Cole, P., 2015: ‘Bani Walid. Loyalism in a time of revolution’, in Cole, P., and McQuinn, B. eds., *The Libyan Revolution and its Aftermath* (London: Hurst).

This unilateral initiative created friction with European chancelleries, so much so that Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte called the French one “a crazy move”²³⁵. We can find numerous motivations behind the French political move: first and foremost, President Nicolas Sarkozy's desire to change the trade balance with Libya in favor of France and at the expense of Italy, with which the North African country had recently signed a friendship treaty and strengthened relations partly due to personal sympathies between then-Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi and the Libyan dictator²³⁶. Second, Sarkozy wanted to increase France's prestige on the international stage to counterbalance the decline in domestic unpopularity²³⁷. Ultimately, he wanted to refute accusations made in Euronews by Saif Al-Islam that his presidential campaign was financed by illicit funds directly from Qaddafi²³⁸.

At this stage of the crisis, EU was paralyzed due to its vertical (between Member States and institutions) and horizontal (between Member States) incoherence. Different national interests clashed without any common ground being found. While the constant search for legitimacy has forced the EU to play a secondary role to the uncoordinated initiatives of its Member States, the slow decision-making process has shown the lack of flexibility of the Brussels bureaucracy.

However, Paris' unilateral action prompted the European Council to adopt a declaration on March 11 calling on Qaddafi to step down and welcoming the NTC as a “political interlocutor.”²³⁹ Among others, the Italians were the most frustrated at not being consulted.

When Qaddafi loyalist forces had regained control of most cities along the route to Benghazi by mid-March, Paris and London returned to press for the creation of a no-fly-zone (NFZ) so as to support the rebels. However, the EU was against intervening without the legitimacy of a U.N. resolution. The latter was released on 17 March 2011 (Res. 1973/2011) and was approved by 10 countries with 5 abstentions (including China, Russia,

²³⁵ *The Guardian* 2011: ‘Nicolas Sarkozy calls for air strikes on Libya if Gaddafi attacks civilians’, 11 March.

²³⁶ Davidson, J. W. (2013). France, Britain and the intervention in Libya: an integrated analysis. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26(2), 310–329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2013.784573>

²³⁷ Northern, R., and Pack, J., 2013: ‘The role of outside actors’, in Pack, J. ed., *The 2011 Libyan Uprisings and the struggle for the post-Qadhafi future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

²³⁸ *Euronews* 2011: ‘ESCLUSIVA: Saif al-Islam Gheddafi: Sarkozy è un pagliaccio’, 16 March: <https://it.euronews.com/2011/03/16/saif-al-islam-gheddafi-sarkozy-e-un-pagliaccio>.

²³⁹ EU Council, ‘Extraordinary European Council, 11 March 2011, Declaration’.

and Germany). Qaddafi's diplomatic isolation did not persuade Moscow and Beijing to use their veto power. Therefore, under the new established principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), the resolution authorized to take "all necessary measures... to protect civilians and civilian populated areas... while excluding a foreign occupation force"²⁴⁰. For these purposes, arming anti-Qaddafi forces was legalized, de facto suspending the UN-sanctioned arms embargo. Moreover, a NTZ was created. Furthermore, the role of Arab countries was absolutely relevant. Western countries, notably the US, had expressed reservations towards a NATO intervention that was not backed by at least some regional players²⁴¹. Fortunately for the interventionists in Paris and London, such support came from the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League, and individual Arab states (Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt) that decided to join the NATO mission. On March 23, NATO launched its mission Operation Unified Protector (OUP). Initial Turkish opposition was overcome when a promise was made "to keep the Alliance politically out of the operation while involving it militarily"²⁴². In a nutshell, the mission had three main objectives:

- 1) To enforce an arms embargo in the Mediterranean sea, in order to avoid any transfer of arms to the Libyan regime, pursuant to UNSC Res. 1970/2011;
- 2) To enforce the NFZ;
- 3) To conduct air and naval strikes against Gaddafi's forces involved in attacks against civilians or threatening to do so.

Interestingly, in just few weeks, its goals shifted. Since in a short time the mission had succeeded in knocking out the dictator's forces, the foreign ministers of the NATO countries, in agreement with the partners in the "coalition of the willing," decided to stay until attacks on civilians ceased. Faced with such a broad international coalition, U.S. President Barack Obama felt compelled to participate in the operation, but not wanting to replicate another Afghanistan. In fact, only 47% of Americans supported the operation in Libya. Americans did not want to have a leading role²⁴³. This made the OUP mission primarily European-led, but not EU-led. "We thought it was going to be quick," a White House source acknowledged-

²⁴⁰ UNSC Res. 1973/2011

²⁴¹ Hastings, M. (2011, October 27). Inside Obama's War Room. *Rolling Stone*.

²⁴² Weighill, R., and Gaub, F., 2018: *The Cauldron. NATO's campaign in Libya* (London: Hurst & Co.).

²⁴³ Jones, J.M., 2011: 'Americans Approve of Military Action in Libya 47% to 37%: Support is Lower than for Other Recent U.S. Military Actions', *Gallup Politics*, 22 March.

ged²⁴⁴. However, Even Barack Obama admitted that his support given to the intervention was a “mistake [...] despite all that was done, Libya is now in chaos”²⁴⁵. EU officials later regretted: “France didn’t really give the EU the full possibility to mobilize. A few more days were needed to actually activate stronger EU mechanisms, but it seemed that: after the initial call for EU action, what France really wanted was a coalition of the willing under a Franco-British directorate. It was a question of path dependence: the EU was unprepared for rapid and sharp military action”, while France and Britain could already rely on enhanced military cooperation under the St. Malo Agreement (1998) ²⁴⁶.

What is even more interesting was that, in a short time, European air forces found themselves short of pilots, ammunition and aircraft. As noted by General Vincenzo Camporini: “The Libya operation²⁴⁷ was an extraordinary opportunity to uncover European deficiencies. The Europeans didn’t have sufficient aircraft capability, carrier capability, or even targeting capability in terms of intelligence to generate target selection. Aircraft refueling also became an issue. In sum, the operation was weak in almost all respects critical to sustain an air-led operation for more than one or two days”²⁴⁸. Further American involvement was therefore necessary. Finally, despite its high costs, the EU decides to establish a CSDP mission (EUFOR Libya), with the battlegroups supporting humanitarian assistance. Based in Rome, the mission was to be activated at the request of the United Nations.

By now it was clear that Western powers were aiming not only to protect civilians but to topple the Qaddafi regime. This triggered an indignation from Russia.

With NATO air support, between August 21 and 22, rebels in Tripoli joined opposition forces moving into the city. At this point, the NTC lost control of the situation. As Qaddafi fled to Sirte, several rebel formations poured into Tripoli. Each competed to seize key areas, buildings, and infrastructure it sought to control in the post-Qaddafi era. Government sto-

²⁴⁴ RollingStone, “Inside Obama’s War Room” October 2011, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/inside-obamas-war-room-238074/>

²⁴⁵ Avvenire, “Washington. Obama: un errore i raid in Libia nel 2011” March 2016, <https://www.avvenire.it/mondo/pagine/obama-libia-errore-nato-2011>

²⁴⁶ S. Marcuzzi: “The EU, NATO and the Libyan conflict: anatomy of a failure”, Routledge 2022

²⁴⁷ F.Coticchia & M.Ceccorulli, “Multidimensional threats and military engagement. The case of the Italian intervention in Libya”, “Mediterranean Politics” vol 20, issue 3, 303-321, (2015)

²⁴⁸ *Ibidem*

res of weapons and ammunition have been looted²⁴⁹. Alarmed, the NATO Secretary General pressed for the Alliance to maintain its presence in the country to protect the Libyan people and ensure a “smooth and inclusive transition” to a united state “based on reconciliation and respect for human rights”²⁵⁰. This was an implicit request to move from an R2P to a Responsibility to Rebuild (R2R). Without an international peace-building force to implement disarmament, the NTC was powerless. Despite this, several countries decided to step back. Remarkably also the EU did the same. The real problem seems to have been that, without U.S. assistance, Europe's already strained resources were insufficient for a lengthy peace-enforcement effort. Unlike the mission in Afghanistan, in Libya there was no sense of moral obligation on the part of States to continue their efforts.

Qaddafi was killed on October 20 while fleeing his hometown. At the end of the month, NATO ended Operation OUP²⁵¹. NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen described OPU as the “most successful” operations in the history of the Alliance, completed without a single casualty²⁵². Many in NATO started to think that this could be somehow the paradigm for future intervention. However, despite the enthusiasm, some important limitations can be noted. NATO's initial reluctance to engage in crisis management prevented an adequate operation. The Libyan crisis, like any war, required robust Intervention coordination between military means and political ends. However, since the Alliance was depoliticized, it was unable to have a relationship with military forces.

Furthermore, the EU's poor performance in 2011 led to the conclusion that: “high-risk military crisis management operations under the CSDP instrument will not be a viable option until some fundamental questions about Europe's strategic identity are resolved”²⁵³. As a result, Libya was called a wake-up call for the EU.

²⁴⁹ Schinella, A.M., 2019: *Bombs without Boots. The limits of Airpower* (Washington, DC: Brookings).

²⁵⁰ NATO (2011): ‘Statement of the NATO Secretary General on the situation in Libya’, 22 August: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_77345.htm

²⁵¹ NATO (2011) ‘Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR Final Mission Stats’, 2 November: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/sede/dv/sed_e200_312fActsheetunifiedprotector_en.pdf.

²⁵² BBC (2011): ‘NATO Chief Rasmussen “proud” as Libya mission ends’, 31 October: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15516795>

²⁵³ Brattberg, E., 2011: ‘Opportunities lost, opportunities seized: The Libya crisis as Europe’s perfect storm’, *EPC*, June: http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_1310_opportunities_lost.pdf.

4.4 The second Libyan civil war (2014-2019)

In the aftermath of Qaddafi's fall, Libya appeared even more unstable and insecure than before due to extreme intra-ethnic or inter-community rivalries. In two years, six prime ministers took turns. A process of “nation-building” that included a reconciliation dialogue to create a common history has been lacking²⁵⁴. Under the invitation of the Prime Minister Zeidan, the EU was able to establish a new CSDP Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) in May 2013. Since its inception, the latter has been characterized by several impediments. These included the fact that Libya was too unsafe to host EU personnel, who in fact were headquartered in Malta. In addition, the broad objective of the mission did not make it easy to achieve. Basically, everything had to be done with limited resources. Furthermore, militias controlling the territory were less interested in Integrated Border Management, thus EUBAM Libya progressively discarded its original mandate, turning to a more operational capacity-building activity. Such pattern was reinforced by the fact that the Libyans were skeptical about EU's emphasis on human rights and democratization. Thus, in open violation of the 2012 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy that foresees the EU always to include human rights in the planning of missions, human rights have been excluded from EUBAM Libya mandate²⁵⁵. In short, the mission had to increase the border management capacity of the Libyan central authority. On the contrary, it led to the opposite result: the rise of local militias at the expense of central authority and the growth of a sub-regional illicit economy among Libya, Chad, Niger and Algeria.

From an economic prospective, the EU tried to foster Libyan economy through the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument, managed by the Commission. Through the use of conditionality, the EU sought to trigger a virtuous economic cycle by establishing a free trade agreement that included services. Among the main priority areas, we can identify: health, education and infrastructure. The Commission provided €85 million for humanitarian assistance during and immediately after the conflict, increased to €155 million thanks to bilateral aid by the Member States. These funds were mainly aimed at supporting civil society, communities and migrants at risk in Libya. Additionally, €50 million were destined for health and education. Not surprisingly, the EU confirmed itself as the leading

²⁵⁴ Varvelli, A., & Mezran, K. (Eds.). (2012). *Libia. Fine o rinascita di una nazione?* Roma: Donzelli.

²⁵⁵ Marcuzzi: 'Libya and the EU', in Tomić, N., and Tonra, B. eds., *Conflict Resolution and Global Justice. The European Union in the Global Context* (Abingdon: Routledge) 2021

humanitarian donor²⁵⁶. Furthermore, the EU sought to modernize Libya's oil-based economy by launching new renewable energy programs. The approach pursued by Brussels was ambitious, and soon it showed its limits. Indeed, in fact, it failed to identify key objectives for each priority area, while failing to realize that the main problem of the Libyan economy lied in corruption and the partisan nature of its institutions.

In 2013, the GNC tried to extend its mandate over one more year. Imminent riots broke out all around the country. It is in this framework that the controversial figure of General Khalifa Haftar emerged. The dimension of the protests pushed the government to announce elections for a new House of Representatives in June 2014. One month before the elections, Haftar led an uneasy coalition of former Qaddafi supporters (notably those kicked out from the security apparatus) and tribal forces with the aim of rooting out terrorist groups from Benghazi. This led to an escalation of violence between Haftar's personal army (Libyan Arab Armed Forces or LAAF) and all Islamists²⁵⁷. Within this framework, elections were celebrated in June. Islamist parties were overwhelmingly defeated, but fearing losing control over the government, Islamist and Misrata militias launched Operation Dawn of Libya on July 13, 2014. Contrary to what might have been expected, the elections accelerated the country's political crisis. Increasing instability in Tripoli led newly reappointed Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thani to choose Tobruk, instead of Tripoli, as the institutional seat of government. In contrast, in Tripoli, the same blocs that had lost the June elections created an independent government with Omar al-Hassi as Prime Minister. In this context, on 1 October 2014, the EEAS published the Political Framework for a Crisis Approach to Libya which aimed at building "a deep and sustainable democracy, based on an inclusive constitution", as well as "to assist the UN in its mediation efforts" toward a "cessation of hostilities" and the creation of a "government of national unity"²⁵⁸. Finally, the EU was in charge of supporting the funding of UNSMIL. Despite all the adversity, the EU's contribution to negotiations has been important, succeeding in promoting cohesion among Member States. Indeed, in Libya the situation remained unchanged until December 2015, when represen-

²⁵⁶ ENP (European Neighborhood Policy) 2012: MEMO/12/338: 'ENP Package – Libya', *Brussels*, 15 May.

²⁵⁷ Abou-Khalil, N., and Hargreaves, L., 2015: 'Perception of security in Libya. Institutional and revolutionary actors', *USIP*: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/04/perceptions-security-libya>.

²⁵⁸ EEAS: 'Libya, a political framework for a crisis approach', 1 October: <https://www.statewatch.org/media/documents/news/2014/nov/eu-council-libya.pdf>.

tatives of the two parliaments, political parties, civil society and local governments signed the Skhirat Accord in Morocco. The latter created a Government of National Accord (GNA) with Fayez Al-Serraj as Prime Minister. Despite the efforts of the international community, Haftar refused to recognize the legitimacy of the GNA, prolonging instability in the country.

In the meantime the Italian government launched Operation Ippocrate. The latter aimed at providing humanitarian and medical assistance to Libya. This mission was part of Italy's efforts to stabilize Libya by supporting local forces, particularly those in Misurata, against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The operation included the establishment of a field hospital and the deployment of medical and military personnel to offer medical care and train local forces in medical support²⁵⁹. During the same period, the Renzi government faced a request from the United States to contribute a larger contingent of troops to stabilize Libya, estimated to be around 5,000 soldiers. The Italian government, however, declined this request, citing concerns over the complexities of the Libyan conflict and the potential risks of a large-scale military intervention. Such decision reflected Italy's careful balancing of its military, political, and diplomatic priorities in a volatile and complex environment²⁶⁰.

In 2015, the EU was even more certain that its ambition to establish good neighborly relations with its “ring of friends” was deteriorating into a “ring of fire.” The Syrian civil war and the spread of ISIS across the Middle East produced an unforeseeable humanitarian and security emergency for Europe. Soon both migration and terrorism also became the EU's main concern in Libya, where 153,842 people tried to reach Italian shores in 2015 alone²⁶¹. Meanwhile, ISIS had occupied the area between Derna and Sirte²⁶². Furthermore, Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 opened a new geopolitical front of instability. In June 2015, the EU launched Operation EUNAVFOR MED (later renamed Sophia)

²⁵⁹ Ministero della Difesa: https://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni_oltremare/pagine/libia-operazione-ippocrate.aspx

²⁶⁰ Varvelli, A. (2010). Italy and Libya: Renewing a Special Relationship. *The International Spectator*, 45(3), 117–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2010.504627>

²⁶¹ Ministero dell'Interno, 2016 <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/stampa-e-comunicazione/dati-e-statistiche>

²⁶² UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) 2018: 'Central Mediterranean route situation', March: <https://www.unhcr.org/5aa78775c.pdf>.

in the Central Mediterranean²⁶³. It aimed to cope with human trafficking routes in the Mediterranean Sea. However, the GNA declined permission for Sophia ships to operate in Libyan territorial water, thus impeding the operation to be effective. Overall, the EU has failed to supplement its soft power measures with any meaningful enforcement tools such as sanctions.

However, since 2016 both the EU and NATO approach to the crisis changed. Such strategic shift first appeared in the 2016 Global Strategy issued by the Commission. Basically, the EU moved from state-building initiatives to containment policies. In addition, the EU-NATO Joint Statement was published in the same year, which reinforced this new strategic direction. It emphasized the need to strengthen “resilience” and improve “the coordination and mutual reinforcement of our activities in the Mediterranean and elsewhere”²⁶⁴. Within the EU, “resilience” was identified as “the guiding principle of EU external action”²⁶⁵. This shift at the European level has led to the South being seen as an irreversible threat. The new European pragmatism fostered internal cohesion among Member States about the goal of containment. The latter became an end in itself, allowing for greater influence of other international actors.

In the meantime, a new UNSC resolution (2292/2016) pushed the international community to enforce the Libyan arms embargo and to tackle the threat posed to Libya and neighboring countries by ISIS and other jihadist organizations²⁶⁶. With such legal basis, the EU Council reinforced Operation Sophia’s mandate in the Mediterranean with further two objectives: training the Libyan coastguard and navy and contributing to the implementation of

²⁶³European Council (2016): ‘EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia: Mandate Extended by One Year, Two New Tasks Added’, 20 June: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/06/20-fac-eunavfor-med-sophia/?utm_source=dsms-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EU_NAVFOR_MED_Operation%20Sophia%3A_A%20mandate%20extended%20by%20one%20year%2C%20two%20new%20tasks%20added

²⁶⁴ EU and NATO 2016: ‘Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’, 8 July: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21481/nato-eu-declaration-8-july-en-final.pdf>.

²⁶⁵ Cusumano, E., and Cooper, N., 2020: ‘Conclusions’, in Cusumano, E., and Hofmaier, H. eds., *Projecting resilience across the Mediterranean* (London: Palgrave Macmillan). — — — and Hofmaier, H. eds., 2020a: *Projecting resilience across the Mediterranean* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

²⁶⁶ UNSC 2016: Resolution 2292, 14 June: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/s/res/2292-%282016%29>.

the UN arms embargo. Despite its goodwill, in Italy training was slow, and equipment was scarce. Therefore, the EU called for NATO support. The latter launched Operation Sea Guardian (OSG). However, this commitment has been weak, and analysts agree that it has been more symbolic than anything else. Indeed, OSG-Sophia operation failed both in disrupting the network of human smugglers in the Central Mediterranean and in deterring them. According to data, irregular migration into Europe through the Central Mediterranean route increased by 18% in 2016 and by another 19% in the first semester of 2017²⁶⁷. In order to cope with this dire context, Italy unilaterally signed Memorandum of Understanding with the GNA so as to address the root causes of illegal migration, human trafficking and contraband. This led to a downfall in arrivals of 80% in one year and nearly 98% by 2019²⁶⁸. EU support for the Italian maneuver has fomented blame on the EU for pursuing a policy based on double standards. According to critics, financial support for Libyan detention camps only strengthened Libya's "stable instability"²⁶⁹.

Finally, it was at this time that the EU began to support Libyan municipalities on the principle of "local ownership". This has had a twofold effect: on the one hand it has shown that the EU is not suited to work at the micro level, while on the other hand it has run the risk of funding the wrong group due to lack of information.

It would seem reasonable to think that the origins of the second Libyan civil war are also rooted in France's recognition and support of Haftar in 2016. Determined to stop Islamists from "gaining a foothold in the Mediterranean or threatening French interests in the Sahel," Paris considered the General a "useful partner"²⁷⁰. Newly elected President Emmanuel Macron, thought he could handle the Libyan crisis quickly. This once again aroused protests from other European countries. In this context, it is relations with Italy that have soured since the Paris meeting between Haftar and al-Sarraj. Not surprisingly, the French President was defined by the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luigi Di Maio, as the "n.1

²⁶⁷ Marcuzzi: 'NATO-EU maritime cooperation: For what strategic effect?' *NDC Briefs*, 7, December. 2018

²⁶⁸ Ministero dell'Interno 2019: 'Sbarchi e accoglienza dei migranti: tutti i dati': <http://www.interno.gov.it/it/sala-stampa/dati-e-statistiche/sbarchi-e-accoglienza-dei-migranti-tutti-i-dati>

²⁶⁹ Badi, E., 2019: 'General Hiftar's southern strategy and the repercussions on the Fezzan campaign', *MEI*, 7 March

²⁷⁰ Wehrey (2018): "The burning shores: Inside the battle for the New Libya" (New York: Ferrar, Straus & Giroux)

enemy of Italy”²⁷¹. The Yellow-Green government attacked Paris for its “anti-Italian” role in Libya²⁷². Therefore, in response, Rome organized a parallel conference in November 2018. However, what should be noted is the secondary, if not marginal, role played by the EU. Brussels was completely paralyzed due to internal frictions. This has paved the way for the strengthening of other international players. Rumors began to circulate that Haftar had promised Moscow an oil deal and a naval base in Cyrenaica in exchange for Russian support²⁷³. On the other hand, Turkey and Qatar supplied the GNA. A proxy war was about to start.

On April 4, 2019 Haftar's forces launch an attack on Tripoli. The general was confident that the international community would not respond, and that militias close to al-Sarraj would turn against the president himself. Effectively, the UNSC did not approve any condemnation because of the veto exercised by Moscow and Paris in support of the General. Symbolically, the attack begun when the UN Secretary General was in Tripoli on an official visit to the GNA. Even the meeting between Haftar and Guterres failed to end the operation²⁷⁴. Without the support of the international community, the GNA turned to Turkey, which sent equipment capable of resisting Haftar's attacks. When Tripoli was about to capitulate, two strategic agreements were signed with Ankara. These granted Turkey rights to explore and drill Libya's offshore hydrocarbon resources. As mentioned earlier, Turkey is the only country in the eastern Mediterranean that does not have its own offshore gas reserves. The decision by Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Italy to exclude Turkey from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in June 2019, prompted Ankara to find alternative ways to emerge as a regional energy hub. However, the Turkish-Libyan agreement drew an unanimous chorus of rejection from most European capitals, prompting the EU to impose sanctions on some Turkish officials and entities involved in gas drilling in waters claimed by Cyprus.²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ Bressanelli, E., and D. Natali. 2019. Introduction. *Contemporary Italian. Politics* 11 (3): 208–219

²⁷² F. Coticchia, “A sovereigntist revolution? Italy’s foreign policy under the “Yellow–Green” government”, *Comparative European Politics* (2021), October 2021, 19:739–759 <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-021-00259-0>

²⁷³ *Ibidem*

²⁷⁴ *Ibidem*

²⁷⁵ Wintour, P., 2019: ‘Greece expels Libyan ambassador in row over maritime boundaries’, *The Guardian*, 6 December: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/06/greece-expels-libyan-ambassador-row-maritime-boundaries>

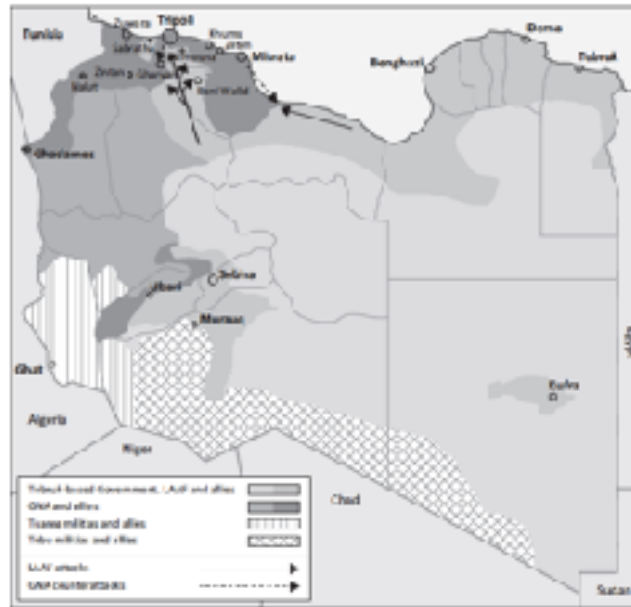


Fig. 9 Haftar's offensive on Tripoli (2019). Source: adapted with data from Dassù 2020; https://pbs.twimg.com/media/E1U_d5bWUkovBU?format=jpg&name=large

Both Turkey and Russia proposed a ceasefire, which lasted 24 hours but was enough to allow Ankara to supply the GNA with new weapons. Syrian mercenaries and Turkish officers were also sent to the front²⁷⁶. Meanwhile, the ceasefire imposed by Russia and Turkey sowed panic throughout the EU. For the first time, it became clear that the Libyan crisis could be resolved without the full involvement of the EU. In response, thanks to the mediator role played by Germany, the EU launched a new CSDP operation, EUNAVFOR MED Irini. Its goal was to support the implementation of the arms embargo through aerial, satellite and maritime assets²⁷⁷. However, the most serious problem hindering Irini lay in the regulatory approach underlying both its mandate and operations. Indeed, Irini was mandated to conduct inspections of ships on the high seas suspected of carrying weapons or related material, in accordance with UNSC Resolution 2292 of 2016. If the flag nation denies consent, no action can be taken. For example, deterrence blatantly failed when a Tanzanian-flagged merchant ship, known to have already been used by the Turks to supply the GNA with weapons, approached Libya escorted by Turkish warships. On June 10, 2020, the Turkish escort radioed the Greek frigate in charge of patrolling that area that the

²⁷⁶ Alageli, A.R., Badi, E., Eljarh, M., and Stocker, V., 2020: 'The development of Libyan Armed Groups Since 2014 community dynamics and economic interests', *Chatham House*, March: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/03/development-libyan-armed-groups-2014>

²⁷⁷ Irini (CSDP Operation) 2020: 'About Us': <https://www.operationirini.eu/about-us/>.

merchant ship was under Ankara's protection. According to some reports, the Turks threatened to use force if the Greek frigate insisted on inspecting the cargo, at which point the Greeks surrendered. A few hours later, a French ship was faced with the same dilemma and withdrew. The convoy landed in Tripoli unopposed on June 11.

Under pressure from Russia and Turkey, a ceasefire was formalized in August 2020. This led to the opening of a UN-led negotiating table in October, with the goal of creating a roadmap to new national elections to be held on December 24, 2021. According to a EU official: “the ceasefire has revealed that these patrons have sufficient control over their proxies to freeze the conflict, at least for now”²⁷⁸. Furthermore, the agreement allowed both Moscow and Ankara to enlarge their respective spheres of influence. Indeed, Turkish air forces were deployed to the Al-Watiya airbase while Turkish navy obtained concession to remain in Misrata naval base²⁷⁹. On the other hand, Russia reinforced its control over the country through the presence of the mercenary group Wagner. When the deadline for their withdrawal of foreign armies expired on 31 January 2021, those forces were still in Libya.

Some final considerations are necessary. After the overthrow of Qaddafi, no real attempt at a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program (DDR) was made by the International community to restore the State's the monopoly of force. In particular, there has been a lack of a process that builds a common national identity as well as the transformation of rebels into political leaders. This was not possible because of the Western countries' decision to exclude the rebels from the negotiations. This was a short-sighted decision that did not take into account the complexity of the Libyan chessboard. Indeed, armed non-state actors have replaced the state in the provision of services and security in large parts of the territory. This has opened up even more room for external actors with specific interests to deal with selected militias, alone and secretly²⁸⁰.

4.5 The role of the Gulf States in the Libyan crisis

Since the beginning of the new millennium, a new form of development cooperation typical

²⁷⁸ S. Marcuzzi: “The EU, NATO and the Libyan conflict: anatomy of a failure”, Routledge 2022

²⁷⁹ Bertolotti, C., 2021: *Libia in transizione Guerra per procura, interessi divergenti, traffici illegali* (Lugano: START InSight).

²⁸⁰ Alaaldin, R. (2018). *Armed Groups, Governance and the Future of the Middle East*. In A. Colombo & P. Magri (Eds.), *ISPI Annual Report 2018: Global Scenarios and Italy*. Milano: Ledizioni.

of the Gulf countries has begun to take hold. This cooperation has focused more on the Arab world as far as the South-Saharan area with a preference for bilateral relations. However, support for multilateral initiatives has also increased in recent years. With the advent of the Arab Springs, there was a change in the Gulf countries' approach to regional security issues. In particular, the Libyan crisis marked a shift from the use of soft-power instruments to hard-power ones through which each Gulf State intended to pursue its own security vision and satisfy its national interests. The increase in development cooperation aid has been accompanied by a considerable increase in military assistance²⁸¹. Indeed, Arab Gulf countries have provided training and support to foreign military forces from crises countries. From a political perspective, the Gulf Arab States have increased their legitimacy by hosting several international meetings to mediate in regional conflicts. This is true, for example, for the Libyan civil war, when the UAE played an active role in supporting the UN process. As already mentioned, the vacuum left by the EU and NATO was soon filled by other international and regional actors with conflicting interests. The case of Libya highlights the divisions between actors in the Arab Gulf regarding the issues and aims of stabilization efforts.

In Libya, Qatar was initially the most proactive in defining a new role and direction for its foreign policy. Qatar was the first Arab State to abandon the Qaddafi regime and to recognize the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC) and played an important role in pushing other Arab League countries to follow it²⁸². Not only was Qatar also one of the first countries that provided several militias with weapons in order to overthrow the Qaddafi's regime, Qatari Special Forces has also been deeply involved on the ground so as to provide training and logistics support to rebel forces. Indeed, the former Qatari chief of staff, Major-General Hamad bin Ali Al Atiya, acknowledged as much, stating that: "hundreds of Qatari forces had been deployed"²⁸³. Interestingly, Qatar's political and military support was mainly directed at Islamist groups, even extremist ones.

On the other hand, the UAE similarly played a central role in the Libyan crisis. Like Qatar, the UAE had also endorsed the fall of Qaddafi through the creation of a NATO-led NFZ.

²⁸¹ Reuters, "Saudi, Kuwait, UAE to Sign \$10 Billion Bahrain Aid Deal: Kuwait Newspaper," 4 October 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bahrain-economy/saudi-kuwait-uae-to-sign-10-billion-bahrain-aiddeal-kuwait-newspaper-idUSKCN1ME0GC>.

²⁸² Barakat, Sultan. "The Qatari Spring: Qatar's Emerging Role in Peace-Making." LSE Research Paper, No. 24, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, July 2012

²⁸³ *Ibidem*

Although there is no evidence of direct involvement of Emirati troops in the conflict, the UAE provided important logistical and training support. With the end of the regime, the UAE sought to hinder the rise of Islamist groups, which it considered incompatible with and opposed to efforts to build a modern nation-state. Diplomatically, when the crisis became more acute, the UAE erected itself as a central interlocutor by hosting key meetings in Abu Dhabi²⁸⁴. In this framework, Saudi Arabia has instead preferred to play a secondary role, endorsing the UAE's positions. Following a realist approach, both Qatar and the UAE have sought to further their national interests and enhance their international prestige. Significantly, the regional division that characterizes the Middle East has been projected into Libya through the creation of two blocks. On one hand Qatar with Turkey to favor the rise of an Islamist government; on the other hand UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, hostile to the rise of Islamists.

When discussing the role played by the Gulf Arab countries in the stabilization of Libya, it is important to note that their use of soft and hard power was not integrated effectively. In other words, their civilian and military efforts were not mutually reinforcing. Indeed, there has been very little input from the GCC states on the civilian aspects of crisis management in Libya. None of the GCC states has joined the efforts to manage the challenges of migration and human trafficking, including through the EU's Operation Sophia. Real cooperation on issues such as border management, coast guard and police training has been limited. Secondly, although these actors have been supportive of multilateral efforts, bilateral relations have always been favored so that they can exert greater leverage. For instance, GCC States have made no contribution to the UN's Stabilization Facility for Libya, rather preferring to provide assistance directly and to selected groups²⁸⁵. Generally, the selection of partners was done in a way that favored those who had religious, political, ethnic or ideological ties with sponsor countries²⁸⁶.

The Libyan crisis sheds light on the role played by regional and international actors in the

²⁸⁴ TheNational, "Libyan PM and Commander Khalifa Haftar Agree to National Election at Abu Dhabi Meeting," 28 February 2019. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/libyan-pm-and-commanderkhalifa-haftar-agree-to-national-election-at-abu-dhabi-meeting-1.831556>.

²⁸⁵ UNDP, "Germany Contributes e15 Million More to the Stabilization Facility for Libya," 26 February 2019. <http://www.ly.undp.org/content/libya/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2018/Germany-contributes-15-million-more-to-the-Stabilization-Facility-for-Libya.html>

²⁸⁶ Villanger, Espen. Arab Foreign Aid: Disbursement Patterns, Aid Policies and Motives. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI Report), 2007

strategic dynamics of the region. In this context, China's presence has strengthened in the Mediterranean basin over the past decades. With the launch of ambitious new infrastructural projects and a diplomacy based on soft-diplomacy, Beijing is looking at the Mediterranean region with increasing interest. Such relations will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: A sea of strategic competition: China in the Mediterranean region

5.1 An introduction to Chinese engagement in the Mediterranean basin

Although China has not yet formulated a comprehensive strategy, its involvement in the Mediterranean region is growing at a fast pace. What is clear is that, alternating between bilateral and multilateral engagement, Beijing prefers to look to the Mediterranean subregions (North Africa, Southern Europe, or the Balkans)²⁸⁷. Since the launch of the “going out” policy in 1999, China has moved from been an export-oriented growth model to one based on home consumption and external investment. In this framework, infrastructural diplomacy occupies a relevant position as we will see in the next paragraph.

When in 2013 Xi Jinping became the fifth President, China has just become the world’s largest trading nation, surpassing the US. Not surprisingly, the same year, Beijing rolled out a new ambitious foreign policy strategy to revive the ancient Silk Road known as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Overall, the BRI aimed at connecting China with Southeast Asia, Europe and Africa by land, sea and through digital infrastructure projects. Since the Mediterranean basin is one of the main global trade hubs, Chinese appetite for infrastructural projects has increased. While on the one hand China is providing new opportunities into a region featured by deep inequalities, on the other hand its engagement is also rising growing concerns, notably in the northern shore of the Mediterranean. Indeed, European countries, as well as the EU more generally, are skeptical about Beijing's real geopolitical intentions in the area. Such unease was confirmed by the “China’s 21st Century Maritime Silk Road”. The latter is a project that aims to build numerous ports on both shores of the Mediterranean. Furthermore, Beijing is also deeply involved in rail connections with a view to reduce shipping costs and times to make “Chinese products more competitive in the European market”²⁸⁸. A good example is the railway connecting the port of Piraeus (Greece) to Budapest (Hungary).

In order to better understand the role of countries in foreign policy, scholars have developed the so called “Role Theory”. The latter is rooted in sociology, social psychology and

²⁸⁷ Pairault, T., and Richet, X. 2021 *Présences économiques chinoises en Méditerranée 2021* (Paris: L'Harmattan) 126 978-2-343-24871-4

²⁸⁸ Casarini, N. (2016). When All Roads Lead to Beijing. Assessing China’s New Silk Road and its Implications for Europe. *The International Spectator*, 51(4), 95–108. [https:// doi.org/ 10.1080/03932729.2016.1224491](https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2016.1224491)

anthropology and is based on the analogy of theatre in which an actor plays a role according to a script²⁸⁹. This theory makes it possible to demonstrate how individuals and social structures are dynamically related. The theory was adapted by foreign policy analysts in order to explain “the relationship between a state’s identity and its foreign policy behavior”²⁹⁰. Indeed, national role conceptions (NRC) influence the way in which the State operates within the international system. Three dimensions can be identified: (1) *internal conceptions of the role*, i.e., the actor's self-perception, ideas about his place in the international system and appropriate behavior (the ego dimension); (2) *external expectations of the role*, i.e., the prescriptions of the role, the implicit and explicit demands of other states, and the structural characteristics of the international system (the alter dimension); and (3) *the performance of the role*, i.e., the actual foreign policy behavior of a state when it plays the role in international society (the interaction dimension)²⁹¹. Therefore, roles are not static, rather they are constructed through a process of interactions between the actor (ego) and others (alters).

An actor can change his beliefs and actions by increasing or decreasing the use of certain instruments. When it occurs, a new identity is formulated and therefore we have a role change. Furthermore, Shih argues that three core elements constitute a State's NRC: “a description of the State mission in the world; specific notions about interstate relations (notably the relationship with significant others); and stability over time”²⁹². Therefore it is possible to understand a change in foreign policy by looking at how different identity discourses enhance them or not particular roles.

Over time, China has played different NRC by presenting itself as an opponent of hegemonism or as a peaceful developer. Interestingly, in the Southern shore of the Mediterranean, China has strengthen its ties with Algeria and Egypt, two countries with which Bei-

²⁸⁹ Aggestam, L. (2006). Role Theory and European Foreign Policy: A Framework of Analysis. In O. Elgström, and M. Smith (Eds.), *The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis*. London: Routledge 11–29 .

²⁹⁰ Aggestam, L. (1999). Role conceptions and the politics of identity in foreign policy. ARENA Working Paper, https://www.sv.uio.no/arena/english/research/publications/arena-working-papers/1994-2000/1999/wp99_8.htm

²⁹¹ Holsti, K. (1970). National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy. *International Studies Quarterly*, 14(3), 233–309. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3013584>

²⁹² Shih, C.-Y. (1988). National Role Conception as Foreign Policy Motivation: The Psychocultural Bases of Chinese Diplomacy. *Political Psychology*, 9(4), 599–631. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791530>

jing shares the same NRCs. In fact, the three are eager to boost their independence in the international arena. Moreover, sharing the same background as a colonized country, they present themselves as opponents of colonialism by Western countries advocating the principle of non-interference in countries' internal affairs. From this perspective, the southern Mediterranean shore states, like most of the Global South, expect China to fulfill its commitment to represent and defend them in international organizations. A key example is the United Nations Security Council, of which no African country is a permanent member and of which China is the only permanent representative from the Global South.

As far as the relations between China and the Northern shore of the Mediterranean are concerned, while Beijing has tried to promote cooperative relations, over time increasingly more countries are looking at China as a competitive partner. Overall relations between the EU and Beijing could be divided in six phases. The former (1995-2002) was characterized by a strategic partnership which led to the second one (2003-2005) where good relations reached the peak. On the contrary, in the third phase (2006-2009) the relationship eroded, until a fourth phase led to the restoration of the partnership, this time featured by a much more realistic approach. After 2010 it was even more clear that China, with no intention to abandon its authoritarian one Party-State system, represented both an opportunity and a challenge for the international liberal order endorsed by the UE. The last phase, the current one, started as a reaction to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. The pandemic represented a critical juncture between the two powers also for their relations in the Mediterranean basin. Indeed, Beijing pursued its health diplomacy thanks to the so called Health Silk Road. While the latter was welcomed with enthusiasm in MENA region and African countries, European were much more skeptical about the geopolitical implication of such generosity²⁹³.

In order to better explain Sino-Mediterranean relations, an analysis of the concept of “trust” could clarify how China is perceived. According to sociologists, trust is one of the most important element for economic, political and social interactions. In the field of international relations, the study of trust has only recently emerged. Before that, it was neglected and considered only as by-product of cooperation among sovereign States. However, trust is an important component to explain foreign policy decisions. Trust is defined as “a belief

²⁹³ Zoubir, Y. H., & Tran, E. (2021). China's Health Silk Road in the Middle East and North Africa Amidst COVID-19 and a Contested World Order. *The Journal of Contemporary China*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2021.1966894>

that the other side is trustworthy, that is, willing to reciprocate cooperation”²⁹⁴. IR literature has conceptualized trust as a rational choice calculation, a social and cultural phenomenon, or with a psychological dimension. Interestingly, Daria compared Western “post industrialism in economy and post-existentialism in philosophy” with Eastern “traditionalism in values and non-Western ways of development”²⁹⁵. What emerged is that trust between East and West is constantly declining. However, in the face of the serious challenges facing the international community, think for example of climate change, trust is a key element that enables countries to cooperate. In the Mediterranean region, a lack of trust towards China is expected, particularly by France and Spain. Indeed, recently in 2021 the French government released a report about Chinese influence politics overseas, and presented China as a “Machiavellian power”²⁹⁶.

Interestingly, China is perceived by the most powerful countries in the European Union as a disruptor of the international order, but also as an ambitious global actor; while according to the most disadvantaged members of the European Union and by some countries on the southern shore, China would be a responsible actor²⁹⁷. Beijing was able to involve the Southern Mediterranean countries into the New Silk Road thanks to the signing of bilateral relations, strategic partnerships, and the development of interconnectivity not only in the Southern Mediterranean but also in the Sahel. For instance, in 2014 China and Algeria signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership²⁹⁸. As they attempt to reduce their dependence on Western players, China offers developing countries on the southern shore opportunities for economic development through large infrastructure projects to create ports, bridges, highways and railways. This growing Chinese presence in the Mediterranean is leading the EU to change its approach towards the region to remain competitive. The 2015

²⁹⁴ Kydd, A. H. (2005). *Mistrust in International Relations*. Princet: Princeton.

²⁹⁵ Daria, Z. (2015). The measure of trust in international relations. West - East relations case. *The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies*, 1(7), 30–36 doi:10.12775/ cjps.2015.01.02

²⁹⁶ Charon, P., & Jeangène Vilmer, J.-B. (2021). *Les Opérations d’influence chinoises : un moment machiavélien*. Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l’Ecole Militaire. <https://www.irsem.fr/rapport.html>

²⁹⁷ Jones, C. (2021). Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative in EU-China relations. *Journal of European Integration*, 43(7), 915–921. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.1985764>; European Parliament, “Study EU-China relations: De-risking or de-coupling -the future of the EU strategy towards China”, March 2024

²⁹⁸ Zoubir, Y. H. (2021). China’s Relations with Algeria: From Revolutionary Friendship to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. In A. Abdel-Ghafar (Ed.), *China and North Africa: Between Economics, Politics and Security*. I.B. Tauris.

ENP review goes in this direction. Leaving its civilizing mission, the EU has embraced a more pragmatic approach based on greater political realism²⁹⁹.

5.2 China's infrastructure diplomacy

Infrastructure has a broad meaning. On the one hand it refers to material public capital such as roads, railways and airports, on the other to the non-material dimension of power³⁰⁰. Over the past decades, a new form of “infrastructure diplomacy” has emerged within the soft-power toolkit of powerful States such as China. In this regard, Beijing has devoted more attention to the material dimension of infrastructures by promoting contracts of infrastructural projects than to the non-material aspects of infrastructure. According to many, infrastructure diplomacy is part of broader economic diplomacy, on par with other tools such as economic sanctions. Economic diplomacy refers to “the use of economic means for political ends”³⁰¹. Since the 1970s, Beijing has developed such approach, that has been reinforced and reshaped recently. The turning point came under the presidency of Xi Jinping. While Xi has followed the path of his predecessors by accessing the global market and expanding China’s economic growth by all means, he also introduced new concepts such as “Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics” (zhongguo tese daguo waijiao) and “New Type of Great Power Relations” (xinxing daguo guanxi). Overall, its change in foreign policy was characterized by the introduction of values and morality fueled by a new revitalized nationalism³⁰². This new form of diplomacy takes place in closed partnerships of Chinese state-owned enterprises (SEOs) operating around the world under Beijing's will. To sum up, China hopes to use its economic power as political leverage.

President Xi is trying to pursue a specific foreign policy aimed at transforming China's role on the international stage. This is confirmed by the fact that several Chinese official media

²⁹⁹ Emilie Tran & Yahia H Zoubir (2023) China in the Mediterranean: An Arena of Strategic Competition?, *Mediterranean Politics*, 28:5, 685–703

³⁰⁰ Nijkamp, P. (2000). Infrastructure and suprastructure in regional competition: A Deus Ex Machina? In P. Batey & P. Friedrich (Eds.), *Regional competition* (pp. 87–107). Springer.

³⁰¹ Zhang, S. (2014). *Beijing’s economic statecraft during the Cold War, 1949–1991*. Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2014.

³⁰² Blackwill, R., & Campbell, K. (2016). *Xi Jinping on the global stage*. Council on Foreign Relations.

have referred to “China’s new role” in international affairs³⁰³. The political aims include improving the Chinese government’s international image, and extension of its political influence in international affairs. As regards China’s engagement in the Mediterranean, its infrastructure is mainly guided by three key priorities. Firstly, Beijing has a constant need for energy to fuel its economic growth. Therefore, the construction of new pipelines, such as the China-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey energy corridor, serves China’s energy security and reduces its dependence on traditional energy transportation routes, such as the one dominated by the Malacca Strait³⁰⁴. Second, working in the Mediterranean basin offers an opportunity for Chinese companies, eager to make money by investing in infrastructural projects in developing countries. In this way, Beijing hopes not only to absorb its own construction overcapacity, but also to build a positive image as a reliable and peaceful partner, focused only on business and loyal to the principle of non-interference at home. Finally, by establishing infrastructure cooperation in the region, China wants to gain the diplomatic support it needs to avoid challenging Beijing’s positions on its internal affairs and territorial disputes with neighboring countries. This need has become increasingly clear in light of the trade war with the United States under President Trump, following the violation of the human rights of ethnic Muslim groups in Xinjiang, and over the issues of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

As far as the infrastructure diplomacy is concerned, China’s engagement in the Mediterranean basin dates back to the 1970s when China State Construction Engineering and China Road and Bridge Corporation signed construction subcontracts with Egypt. Thereafter, its presence in the region would have strengthened at a fast pace. However, the launch of the BRI in 2013, marked a new phase in Sino-Mediterranean relations. This ambitious plan involves investments of more than \$1 trillion over 10 years³⁰⁵. Thus, infrastructure diplomacy needed to become more institutionalized. In doing so, China has established a mechanism that brings together the resources of various institutions and requires coordination between different government agencies, between central and local governments, between governments and SOEs, and between enterprises and multilateral state-owned financial

³⁰³ People’s Daily (2016) President Xi Jinping’s Trip to the Middle East: Highlighting China’s new role in the Middle East, 20 January

³⁰⁴ Guo, F., Huang, C.-F., & Wu, X.-L. (2019). Strategic analysis on the construction of new energy corridor China–Pakistan. *Energy Reports*, 5, 828–841. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.egy.2019.06.007>

³⁰⁵ Hillman, J. E. (2018). *How Big Is China’s Belt and Road?* Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Commentary, 3 April 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-big-chinas-belt-and-road>

institutions³⁰⁶. What emerges is interesting. SOEs, in their actions, must prioritize the policy preferences of the central government, rather than their own economic gain. It is also their job to take care of risk assessment in the countries involved in the BRI. Finally, they must safeguard the safety of Chinese citizens abroad.

The centrality of infrastructure diplomacy is also confirmed by the high-level bilateral meetings that feature it. For example, during Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's visit to China in December 2014, Premier Li Keqiang discussed deepening China's cooperation with Egypt in the construction of high-speed railways, submarine tunnels, nuclear power plants and other infrastructure facilities; at the same meeting, he urged Egypt to push ahead with the Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone. This led to Chinese President Xi Jinping's State visit to Egypt in January 2016. On this occasion, Beijing promoted agreement on four projects in Egypt's new administrative capital worth \$2.7 billion³⁰⁷. To promote the realization of the new Silk Road, China has relaunched cooperation in the region not only through bilateral instruments, but also multilateral ones. Some examples are the Summit of Heads of Government of China and Central and Eastern European Countries (China-CEEC Summit), the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the Forum on China-Arab States Cooperation (CASCF).

When analyzing the success of China's infrastructural diplomacy, one quickly notices some notable differentiations between the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean. This analysis focuses on both the position of governments and the perception of the population. The position of Mediterranean governments toward China is measured mainly by three indicators: the presence or absence of high-level representation in international events organized by China, such as the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation; the signing or absence of BRI Memoranda of Understanding with China; and the positions of Mediterranean governments on public occasions on the issues of human rights, Taiwan and Hong Kong. To date, the Chinese approach has been almost a success. Indeed, 16 Mediterranean countries have already responded positively to the Chinese invitation by signing memoranda of understanding with Beijing for cooperation on BRI. The value of contracts grew between 2013 and 2015, allowing China to penetrate the Balkans and particularly Greece, Montenegro, and Bosnia. A similar trend was observed in North

³⁰⁶ Xue, D., Wan, Y., Yang, R. (2018). Spatial-temporal evolution pattern and mechanism of China's construction of overseas hydropower stations. *Acta Geographica Sinica*, 73 (10), 1942–1953. doi:10.11821/dlxb201810009.

³⁰⁷ People's Daily (2016) Achievements of Xi Jinping's visit to Egypt, 24 January.

Africa over the same period of time, especially with countries such as Morocco, Egypt, and Tunisia. For example, in November 2017 Morocco signed a memorandum of understanding for joint construction under the BRI.

Such strategic partnerships have paid off for Chinese efforts in building a positive image in the eyes of its interlocutors. According to the Arab Barometer, “China remains relatively popular in almost all the MENA countries. Overall, people have a positive view of China, notably in places like Algeria (65%), of Morocco (64%), and Mauritania (63%)³⁰⁸. Moreover, people in Israel, Lebanon and Tunisia increasingly have a favorable view of China³⁰⁹. This also had no small political impact. For example, most Arab countries preferred not to comment about Beijing's violation of human rights committed against the Muslim Uigur minority. Furthermore, in July 2020, Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco were among the countries that approved Beijing's treatment of Hong Kong at the UN Human Rights Council³¹⁰.

As far as Chinese relations with the northern shore are concerned, Beijing managed to exploit the 2008 economic crisis and the subsequent sovereign debt crisis with foresight, which threw division and skepticism into the European Union. It was mainly in the European Mediterranean countries (notably in Greece, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia) where China invested the most, exploiting local discontent and the feeling of abandonment towards the rest of the European partners. It is no coincidence that Rome and Athena were the only European countries to join the BRI. Such cooperation has led the above-mentioned countries to be soft on China on human rights issues, and inclined to recognize the “one-China policy”. For example, in 2017, Greece blocked the EU's attempt to draw attention to China's human rights problems at the UN Human Rights Council.

However, there was no shortage of disagreements, as in the case of the port of Trieste. After the majority shares passed into the hands of the Chinese, rifts were created between Rome and Beijing. While the former wanted to prioritize the development of the port of Genoa in which the government had already invested a lot of resources, China saw Trieste

³⁰⁸ Arab Barometer and Perceptions of China in MENA, October 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/china-mena-podcast/arab-barometer-and-perceptions-of-china-in-mena/>

³⁰⁹ China Global Investment Tracker: “The value of China’s investments and construction contracts in the Mediterranean region from 2005 to 2019”

³¹⁰ Tiezzi, S. (2020). Which Countries Support China on Hong Kong’s National Security Law? The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/which-countries-support-china-on-hong-kongs-national-security-law/>

as the central gateway of its Maritime Silk Road in Europe³¹¹.

However, in three northern Mediterranean countries (Italy, France and Greece) public approval of China dropped between 2016 and 2019. A similar, though less negative, trend characterizes relations on the southern shore. Unexpectedly, relations with Algeria are the most controversial. When asked their opinion on China's engagement in national infrastructure projects, only 36.3% of Algerians gave a positive response, much lower than that of Tunisia (62.5%), Libya (62.8%) and Morocco (48.7%)³¹². This comes as a surprise, considering the long historical bonds between China and Algeria. It is clear that China is a champion in government-to-government relations, but not in relations with the civil society public. This is confirmed by the fact that China has no relations with civil society organizations such as NGOs. Although Chinese State media has recently paid increasing attention to “promoting people to people communication and building a humanistic community”, it still has a long way ahead to build trust³¹³.

Favourable view of China among Mediterranean countries (%).

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Spain	48	39	41	28	43	42
France	42	47	50	33	44	41
Italy	28	26	40	32	31	29
Greece	59	49	-	57	50	43
Turkey	27	21	18	-	33	-
Israel	38	49	55	-	53	55
Lebanon	-	53	52	-	63	-
Egypt	45	46	-	-	-	-
Tunisia	63	64	-	63	63	70

Fig. 10 Source: The Pew Research Center Studies

In the eastern Mediterranean, Beijing has a deep interest in establishing good relations with two non-Arab countries, Turkey and Israel. Due to their geographical location, the two countries are of crucial importance for the successful construction of an energy corridor

³¹¹ Wheeler, A. (2020) Trieste's shattered Chinese Dream, *Marine Traffic*, 9 June. [https:// www.marinetraffic.com/en/maritime-news/article/29560](https://www.marinetraffic.com/en/maritime-news/article/29560)

³¹²

³¹³ People's Daily (2020) Promoting people to people communication and building a humanistic community', 14 November

that feeds China's growing demand. Indeed, the two Middle Eastern countries are eager to establish new partnerships with one of their largest economic partners. However, some concerns have emerged. Indeed, Israel is skeptical about China's cooperation with both Syria and Iran, two countries that have always denied Tel Aviv the right to exist. Moreover, in light of the trade war between the US and China, Israel does not want to alienate American vital support in the region. Consequently, although Israel has accepted investments in some BRI projects, such as the ports of Haifa and Ashdod, it has not signed any BRI MoUs or sent high-level leaders to participate in the BRI Forum.

As regards Turkey, the latter is willing to reap the benefits of the BRI by transforming its country into an energy hub. However, China's ties with Moscow and Tehran have prevented President Erdogan from signing a BRI MoU. In addition, the issue of the Uyghur has raised new concerns, in particular the fact that the Uyghur are a Turkish minority³¹⁴.

Although it is clear that China has established a broad infrastructure diplomacy in recent decades to spread its influence, some problems could undermine its flagship program, the BRI. The first is financial. Although Beijing has diversified its economy, the BRI is mainly financed by Chinese State banks. According to Youxin Wang, a researcher affiliated with the Institute of Finance at Bank of China, in the case of many BRI infrastructure projects, “more than 80% of investment comes from the Export-Import Bank of China and China Development Bank”³¹⁵. Uncertainty about the ability to finance these projects has increased in the aftermath of economic tensions with the US and the economic slowdown caused by Covid-19. Moreover, according to scholars, China has not developed a comprehensive political vision and psychological preparedness to replace the US as the leading global power. Despite this, as argued by role theorists, its rhetoric and ambition have raised expectation in the Global South for the establishment of a new global order.

5.3 The case study of Sino-Egyptian relations

2014 was the year Abdel Fattah al Sisi became the new Egyptian president, overthrowing President Morsi. Since taking office, al Sisi's main concerns have been twofold: reducing Egypt's dependence on Western actors and curbing political Islam perceived as a threat.

³¹⁴ People's Daily (2019) People's daily refutes Turkey's Remarks on Xinjiang Issues, 13 February.

³¹⁵ Qi, Q. (2018) How to solve the financing difficulty of One Belt one road construction? Shanghai Finance, 4 July. https://www.financialnews.com.cn/shanghai/201807/t20180704_141398.html

In this way, President al Sisi established a secular, authoritarian and non-aligned regime, not too far from that of China. Although Egypt was financially dependent on the United States and Saudi Arabia, Sino-Egyptian relations gained new momentum from that same year. As we can see from the table below, Beijing has established different kinds of relations in the MENA region. It was exactly in 2014 that China upgraded Sino-Egyptian relations from a strategic partnership (level three) to comprehensive strategic partnership (level one). Two years later, the Egyptian President was invited to attend the G20 Hangzhou summit, while in 2018 he was welcomed at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit (of which Egypt had become a member in 2016) and at the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing. Unlike the US, or even more so the EU and the instrument of conditionality used to deal with its neighborhood in order to promote the democratization process, China prefers economic relations, without officially interfering in domestic policy decisions. This is viewed positively by the authoritarian regime of Al Sisi.

Hierarchy of China's partnerships in the Middle East.

Partner state	Ranking of partnership	Year	Category of partnership
Nigeria	Level one	2014	Comprehensive strategic partnership
Egypt	Level one	2014	Comprehensive strategic partnership
Saudi Arabia	Level one	2016	Comprehensive strategic partnership
Iran	Level one	2016	Comprehensive strategic partnership
United Arab Emirates	Level one	2018	Comprehensive strategic partnership
Israel	Level Two	2017	Innovative comprehensive partnership
Sudan	Level Three	2014	Strategic partnership
Qatar	Level Three	2014	Strategic partnership
Iraq	Level Three	2015	Strategic partnership
Jordan	Level Three	2015	Strategic partnership
Morocco	Level Three	2016	Strategic partnership
Djibouti	Level Three	2017	Strategic partnership
Kuwait	Level Three	2018	Strategic partnership
Oman	Level Three	2018	Strategic partnership
Turkey	Level Four	2010	Strategic cooperation relationship

Fig. 11 Source: The website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/1179_674909/

To explain this improvement in bilateral relations, we can note that the national role conceptions of both countries are quite compatible. This increases trust between the two of them in the pursuit of their national interests. Their compatibility is reflected first and foremost by the fact that both aspire to become independent players on the international stage. Both countries are the heirs of ancient civilizations, and both managed to free themselves from the colonial yoke. Consequently, as victims of colonialism, they particularly cherish the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Secondly, their roles within the MENA region are compatible. While China proclaims itself as an

“economic promoter” and “peace contributor”, Egypt has always played the role of “leader of the Arab nation” and “regional mediator”. For example, both Beijing and Cairo support the two-state solution to end the Palestinian issue; while they advocate the use of political and diplomatic means under UN auspices to end the Yemeni, Syrian and Libyan crises. According to President Xi: “Turmoil in the Middle East stems from the lack of development, and the ultimate solution will depend on development, which bears on everyone’s well-being and dignity”³¹⁶.

Finally, the two countries share the same interests in shaping the global international order, primarily by reforming the UN Security Council, increasing the representation of the Global South. In this framework, the two of them have recognized each other as crucial rising powers. In their Joint Statement released in 2014, it is clear that the two countries are dissatisfied with the current order characterized by Western domination.

Domestically, both China and Egypt have engaged in an intense fight against radical Islam. President al Sisi, who took power after the coup against the Islamist leader Morsi, considers the Islamists a threat maneuvered by Qatar. As a reaction, he banned the Muslim Brotherhood, which fomented the revolution in 2011. In this confrontation, Xi's China showed solidarity not only in words, but also by sending sophisticated security and surveillance equipment, such as Wing Loong 2 and CH-4s³¹⁷. In return, Egypt supported Beijing's attempts to deradicalize the Xinjiang region³¹⁸. Indeed, together with 36 countries, Egypt defended Chinese policies in the Xinjiang region at the UN Human Rights Council in July 2019³¹⁹. However, Egypt has played a far more important role in enabling China to strengthen its relations with the Arab world. This has been done through a series of regional forums and platforms including the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and G77. Figure 12

³¹⁶ Xi, J. (2016, January 22). Work together for a bright future of China-Arab Relations: speech by Xi Jinping at the Arab League headquarters. *People's Daily*.

³¹⁷ Harsono, H. (2020, June 18). *China's Surveillance Technology Is Keeping Tabs on Populations Around the World*. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/chinas-surveillance-technology-is-keeping-tabs-on-populations-around-the-world/>

³¹⁸ Berlinger, J. (2019, July 15). *North Korea, Syria and Myanmar among countries defending China's actions in Xinjiang*. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/15/asia/united-nations-letter-xinjiang-intl-hnk/index.html>

³¹⁹ Putz, C. (2019, July 15). *Which Countries Are for or Against China's Xinjiang Policies? The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/>

clearly explains the Sino-Egyptian relations within different international and regional organizations.

China-Egypt complementary partnerships in the regional and global institutions.

Regional and global Institutions	Global/Regional	Nature	China as a more Influential player	Egypt as a more Influential player
The UN Security Council	Global	Comprehensive	√	
SCO	Regional	Political	√	
G20	Global	Economic	√	
BRICS	Regional	Political	√	
AIB	Regional	Financial	√	
CICA	Regional	Political	√	
Arab League	Regional	Comprehensive		√
African Union	Regional	Comprehensive		√
Organization of Islamic Cooperation	Regional	Political		√
G77	Global	Political		√

Fig.12 Source: Degang Sun & Ruike Xu (2023) China and Egypt's comprehensive strategic partnership in the Xi-sisi era: a 'role theory' prism, *Mediterranean Politics*, 28:5, 764-784 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2022.2035139>

Despite the complementarity between the two countries, there is no shortage of areas of conflict. Some dossiers are particularly thorny, such as the different view of Iran, perceived by Beijing as a strategic ally and by Cairo as a constant threat to regional stability; the construction of the Ethiopian Grand Renaissance Dam in which Beijing has invested and which is perceived as a threat to Egyptian national security; and finally the Turkish proposal to share the natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean with Libya, for which al Sisi had threatened armed intervention in Libya in order to prevent it.

Regarding economic cooperation between the two countries, the BRI and the “Egypt Vision 2030” promoted by the Egyptian government are compatible³²⁰. Due to its stability, Egypt is an excellent partner to support BRI expansion in the region. On the other hand, “the Egypt's Vision 2030” aims to focus investment on the Suez Canal area, and to promote its enhancement of sea and land transport. This goal intersects well with the broader vision of uniting China with Africa and Europe pursued by Xi³²¹. In addition, China's industrial growth model, placed under the dependence of an authoritarian state, is being wat-

³²⁰ Kinninmont, J. (2012, April). Bread, dignity and social justice: the political economy of Egypt's transition. *Middle East and North Africa Programme*.

³²¹ Alterman, J. (2019). Chinese and Russian Influence in the Middle East. *Middle East Policy*, 26(2), 129–136. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12427>

ched with interest by al-Sisi, who would like to revitalize the manufacturing sector. The revival of economic cooperation is well evidenced by the total trade volume. Under the al-Sisi government, China has become Egypt's main trading partner, although the balance of payments is markedly in Beijing's favor.

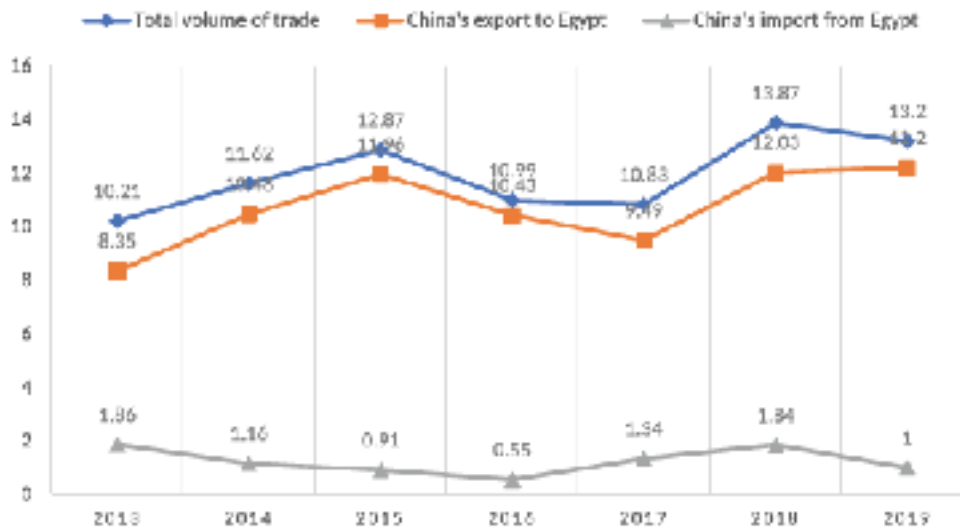


Fig.13 China-Egypt trading relationship, 2013–2019 (US \$ billion)
Source: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2022.2035139>

It should also be noted that in recent years, China has become the sixth largest investor in Egypt, and the first in the MENA region. Between 2013 and 2023, 140 Chinese enterprises have invested in Egypt, mainly in industry (51%), construction (20%, and services (19%)³²². For example, the Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone (SETCZ) is by far the largest Chinese production program in Egypt in terms of investment volume, which has enabled Egypt to become the world's third largest producer of fiberglass³²³. By pursuing its infrastructure diplomacy, China has enabled the construction of major infrastructure in the energy, industry and transportation sectors. In this context, Beijing financed the project to build the Central Business District (CBD) of Egypt's new administrative capital³²⁴. Also in

³²² Hassanein, H. (2019, August 19). *Egypt takes another step toward China*. The Washington Institute. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/egypt-takes-another-step-toward-china>

³²³ Xinhua net. (2019, 8 October). *Interview: Chinese companies pioneer development of Suez Canal region. new Chinese projects underway*. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/08/c_138454230.htm

³²⁴ Mubasher. (2019, October 11). *China's CSCEC to build 20 towers in Egypt's New Administrative Capital*. <https://english.mubasher.info/news/3169810/China-s-CSCEC-to-build-20-towers-in-Egypt-s-New-Administrative-Capital>

the field of science and space, China is helping the Egyptian plan to develop remote sensing and communication satellites.

Of course, there is no shortage of skepticism on the part of Egyptian policymakers toward China. The current balance of payments shows the obvious risk that Egypt is running in flooding its market with Chinese products, thus disadvantaging the growth of a local industry that would be beaten by the low cost of Chinese products. In addition, there is concern that China could transfer its highly polluted industrial capacity to Egypt, causing serious damage to the health of the population. Furthermore, alongside Tunisia and Morocco, Egypt's textile sector is threatened by growing Chinese competitiveness. Indeed, while in the past these countries were the main exporters of textiles and clothes to the EU, they have recently been overtaken by China, which offers more competitive prices³²⁵. Furthermore, according to experts, Egypt runs the risk that Chinese investments will generate profits and benefits only favorable to China.

Finally, there is the risk of the debt trap, which Beijing has repeatedly used with various developing countries to wrest control of strategic infrastructure such as ports, airports, and railways, due to the local government's inability to repay its debt to China. This concern focuses especially on the Suez area, a national asset of global strategic importance, which allows Egypt to have control over trade routes connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian one. Thus, China's investments along the Canal are strictly controlled due to Egyptian sovereignty security concerns³²⁶.

5.4 Toward a greater competition in the Mediterranean region?

Of the five, the last Prince of Peaceful Coexistence at the heart of Chinese foreign policy refers to the principle of non-interference³²⁷. However, maintaining a neutral foreign policy in an unstable region such as MENA is far from easy. Not surprisingly, China's involvement

³²⁵ Sidlo, K. W. (2020). *The Chinese Belt and Road Project in the Middle East and North Africa*, in *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2020*, The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), https://www.iemed.org/recursos-compartits/pdfs/China_Belt_Road_MENA_Sidlo.pdf

³²⁶ Chaziza, M. (2021). Egypt in China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative: Relations Cannot Surmount Realities. In J. F. Blanchard (Ed.), *China's Maritime silk road initiative, africa, and the middle east* (pp. 255–284). Palgrave Macmil

³²⁷ Duchâtel, M., Bräuner, O., & Hang, Z. (2014). Protecting China's Overseas Interests: The Slow Shift away from Non-interference, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Policy Paper*, No. 41, June 2014, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRI41.pdf>

in Mediterranean Basin security cooperation emerged from both the White Paper on African Policy and the White Paper on China's Arab Policy³²⁸. Over the last few years, China has increased its contribution to UN peacekeeping operations, including in active combat threats, such as those in Mali and in South Sudan. In addition, Beijing has provided financial support to the African Union Rapid Reaction Force and, more recently, established a China-Africa Defense and Security Forum³²⁹. In 2017, China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti, a strategic enclave based in the Horn of Africa in front of the Aden Gulf. This change in approach began from the outbreak of the Arab Springs in 2011. Setting aside momentarily the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, Beijing promoted an extraordinary rescue mission aimed at protecting and rescuing Chinese citizens who were in Libya at the time³³⁰. From that crisis, China understood even better how economic development is associated with the geopolitical stability of a region, and that its own economic participation needed to be protected by military and security cooperation as well. A case in point is Beijing's proposed offer to join the BRI to the National Unity Government stationed in Tripoli.

However, it is interesting to note how China's international rise and growing influence in the MENA region have threatened the EU, forcing it to change its international role. Beijing is promoting an alternative model of government. In particular, the Chinese principle of the “no-strings-attached” approach directly undermines the EU's principle of conditionality and its position of regulatory power in North Africa. This presents the EU with both geo-economic and geopolitical challenges. What is clear is that we are facing the creation of a growing discrepancy between the EU's self-conception as a normative power and changing external expectations³³¹. Unlike the liberal approach promoted by the EU, China follows a highly centralized economic model in which state-owned enterprises (SOEs) are a mere

³²⁸ Barton, B. (2018). China's security policy in Africa: A new or false Dawn for the evolution of the application of China's non-interference principle? *South Africa Journal of International Affairs*, 25(3), 413–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2018.1526707>

³²⁹ Fung, C. J. (2016). *China's Troop Contributions to U.N. Peacekeeping*, US Institute of Peace (USIP), Peace Brief, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2016/07/chinas-troop-contributions-un-peacekeeping>

³³⁰ Chang, J. (2014). Chinese Policies on the Arab Spring. In R. Mason (Ed.), *The International Politics of the* (pp. 177–191). Popular Unrest and Foreign Policy, Palgrave Macmillan.

³³¹ Gurol, J., & Starkmann, A. (2020). New Partners for the Planet? The European Union and China in International Climate Governance form a Role-Theoretical Perspective. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 59(3), 1–17. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jcms.13098>

tool in the hands of Beijing. Furthermore, faced with China's challenge to increasingly involve the southern Mediterranean countries in the BRI project, the EU has put connectivity back at the center of its Southern Neighborhood commitments³³². This approach was reaffirmed by the 2015 ENP Review. In it, it announced, for example, Brussels' willingness to support priority regional infrastructure projects for a future Trans-Mediterranean Transport Network (TMN-T) and to explore opportunities to extend the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) to neighboring countries³³³. Furthermore, in 2017 the European Commission launched a new financial tool, the EU's External Investment Plan, to boost infrastructure investments in North Africa.

Surprisingly, the recent Covid-19 pandemic has paved the way for a new open confrontation between China and the EU in light of so called "health diplomacy". Although China was initially in an underdog position due to the Chinese origin of the virus and the alleged theories that have been theorized behind its spread, Beijing still managed to emerge at the forefront with a global health campaign³³⁴. By distributing vaccines and essential health devices, it has set itself up as a champion of world health, beginning with that global south often forgotten by the West. This allowed it to build a new narrative in which vaccines were used as a soft power tool to enhance its international reputation. Such commitment culminated in the launch of the "Health Silk Road," reminiscent of the broader BRI, when President Xi Jinping signed an MoU with World Health Organization (WHO). In the MENA region, the health diplomacy initiated by China has enabled it to strengthen relations with Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya through the delivery of individual medical devices such as masks and testing kits. However, it is with Morocco that Beijing has achieved the greatest degree of cooperation. In fact, an agreement with China to produce the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine for distribution in other African countries has been signed by the two go-

³³² Colombo, S., & Soler I Lecha, E. (2020). Infrastructures and Power in the Middle East and North Africa, The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), *EuroMesco Joint Policy Study*, (17). https://www.euromesco.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/JPS_Infrastructures-and-power-in-the-MENA.pdf

³³³ European Court of Auditor (2020). The EU's response to China's state-driven investment strategy, *Review*, No. 3, https://www.euractiv.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/ECA_EU-China-review_EMBARGO-THU-10-SEP-09H00-CET.pdf

³³⁴ Chen, A., & Molter, V. (2020). *Mask Diplomacy: Chinese Narrative in the COVID Era*, Stanford University, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Blog, 16 June 2020, <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/covid-mask-diplomacy>

vernments³³⁵. There is no doubt that China's "vaccine diplomacy" has helped challenge the EU's leadership in terms of global solidarity. Add to this the disinformation campaign against Europe waged by Beijing at the height of the pandemic, which prompted former EU HR, Josep Borrell, to speak of a "global battle of narratives"³³⁶.

In 2020, the European Commission published the new 2020 Africa Strategy³³⁷, through which Brussels aims to strengthen its strategic alliance with African countries. Although China is never mentioned in the document, it is obvious that the European strategy aims to contain China's aggressive foreign policy, and in particular aims to rebalance Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in the continent. As for the MENA region, 2019 saw the first EU-Arab League summit. The summit was also attended by North African heads of state and government and was interpreted by many as an EU response to China's strategic emergence in the region. Even more recently, in 2021, the EU launched a "New Agenda for the Mediterranean" accompanied by a new economic instrument aimed at strengthening European engagement in the southern shore. With a budget of 79.5 billion euros, the New Agenda for Neighborhood, Development, and International Cooperation (NDICI) aims to strengthen a more pragmatic and aware European foreign policy³³⁸.

³³⁵ China Daily (2017). *WHO, China sign pact establishing 'Health Silk Road'* 19 January 2017, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017wef/2017-01/19/content_27993857.htm

³³⁶ Borrell, J. (2020). *The Coronavirus pandemic and the world it is creating*, European External Action Service (EEAS), Statement, 24 March 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/76401/eu-hrvp-josep-borrell-coronavirus-pandemic-and-new-world-it-creating_en

³³⁷ European Commission (2020). *Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa*, COM (2020) 4 final, Brussels, 9 March 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0004&from=FR>

³³⁸ European Commission (2021). *European Commission welcomes the endorsement of the new €79.5 billion NDICI-Global Europe instrument to support EU's external action*, Press release 19 March 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_1267

Conclusion

Through this thesis an attempt was made to analyze the role of the European Union within the Mediterranean region. Specifically, it sought to highlight the historical evolution of the political-financial approach used by Brussels in dealing with the southern shore. The results obtained are part of the debate on the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), in an attempt to broaden the framework of knowledge on European foreign policy.

The ENP, promoted since 2004, represents an important innovation within the common foreign policy. Like most of the policies promoted by Brussels, its overambitious goals have proven to exceed the actual capabilities of the Union. Indeed, through the establishment of the ENP, the EU has sought to create a region of economic, political and cultural influence outside its borders. In this context, the ENP can be seen as an instrument aimed at extending European leadership beyond its natural borders, so as to forge a “ring of friends”. However, the events of the Arab Springs that began in 2011 led to a real geopolitical earthquake, redrawing the regional balance. This thesis shows the attempts made by the EU to manage this far-reaching crisis, which led the EU and its Member States to distance themselves from what has since been renamed a “ring of fire”.

In a little more than a decade, between the publication of the first ENP and its latest version of 2015, the EU has completely twisted its approach toward the Southern Neighborhood. Initial aspirations aimed at democratizing the neighborhood through the use of conditionality quickly faded, giving way to a much more security and stability-oriented approach. The EU found itself a victim of an existential dilemma in which it had to choose between supporting the civilian population in their quest for greater rights and freedoms while generating chaos throughout the region, or continuing to do bargains with dictators while promoting its own vital interests such as security, stability, combating terrorism and controlling migration routes. This border security-oriented approach became even more evident with the establishment of EU coastguard cooperation as of 2016 and the strengthening of the European agency Frontex to deal with the migration crisis. Moreover, around the same time, regional tensions also flared up again in the eastern neighborhood, with Moscow's occupation of Crimea in 2014.

Finally, the deterioration of relations with the US under the Trump administration, and the increasing competition posed by China, especially through the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative, with which it seeks to emerge as a new dominant player, should not be down-

played. As pointed out in the thesis, this arc of regional instability, combined with other external factors, led the EU to draft the 2016 Global Strategy. In it, the EU sought to dictate the guidelines for its own strategic autonomy.

However, some inconsistencies within the EU regarding the ENP have emerged. First of all, there have often been overlaps in competences between the various EU agencies and bodies. A striking case with regard to the ENP concerns the overlapping competences between the Commission and the EEAS created in 2010. These conflicts of responsibility were only overcome by the reform of the former HR Ashton, which allowed the EEAS to dictate policy guidelines, while the Commission would remain competent for more technical matters.

Nor should the role played by Member States in obstructing the adoption of common foreign policies be underestimated. As highlighted in the Libyan crisis, the clash between Italian and French national interests paralyzed the EU, preventing it from playing a leading role in its own backyard. According to HR Borrell, “For decades we have agreed that foreign and security policy must be decided by unanimity, without any country having a veto”³³⁹. However, the progressive enlargement of the Union has made it increasingly difficult to achieve unanimity. In an increasingly unstable neighborhood, the adoption of a new decision-making mechanism seems necessary to block the veto power of individual Member States. This implies a new reform of the treaties. According to Borrell, Europe must “learn to speak the language of power”³⁴⁰.

However, it is worth mentioning that the research conducted has some limitations. First, the ENP analysis focused only on the southern Neighborhood, not taking into consideration the Eastern Neighborhood. In the latter side, in some ways, European conditionality has been far more incisive, thanks to the promise, albeit remote, of future eastward enlargement. Therefore, this thesis cannot be called a comprehensive study of ENP, but rather of its impact on the southern neighborhood.

In the second analysis, it should be mentioned that this thesis focuses on a few specific cases identified on the basis of their relevance in the current international context. Indeed, it would have been possible to more accurately analyze cooperation between the two

³³⁹ Borrell, J., 2020: ‘Europe must learn quickly to speak the language of power’, *Iconnect*, 29 October: <http://www.icconnectblog.com/2020/10/europe-must-learn-quickly-to-speak-the-language-of-power-part-i/>.

³⁴⁰ *Ibidem*

shores in the areas such as: migration flows, security and counterterrorism. Moreover, in analyzing the EU's failures in the region, the focus has been on the Libyan case, completely leaving out the Syrian affair. The latter was actually a decisive turning point in European foreign policy, with obvious repercussions on its domestic policy as well. Let us not forget the exodus of Syrian refugees trying to reach Greece from the Turkish coast, or trying to walk the Balkan route to Northern Europe. Let us not forget the impact that German Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision had in opening the doors to about 1.2 million Syrian refugees. Through these events we can partly try to explain the rise of far-right populist parties that, by riding on people's fear and fomenting ethnic hatred, achieved unprecedented electoral results.

Finally, this thesis discussed the competitive role of China in the Mediterranean, and only partially that of Turkey and Russia in the Libyan affair. However, these countries have also played a central role in the Syrian civil war, and still are attempting to expand their influence. Moreover, the thesis only hints at the prominent role that regional Gulf powers have been assuming for the past decade, undermining historic leaders such as Egypt.

Nor should the central role played by the United States be forgotten in this regard, which under President Trump succeeded in leading to the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020, and the subsequent establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, and Sudan. In the face of these global and regional actors, the EU still struggles to play a directing role, as evidenced by the recent conflict in Gaza that erupted in the aftermath of the October 7 terrorist attack.

Exactly 20 years after the launch of the ENP, the EU has still failed to realize the ambitious project of building a “ring of friends” in the southern neighborhood. The 2015 ENP Review and the 2016 Global Strategy call for the EU to act more prudently and pragmatically. However, it should not be forgotten that many of the mistakes made by Brussels are related to miscalculations or a lack of knowledge of the local context, as highlighted by the Libyan case study. Faced with an increasingly complex world, the EU is called upon to develop its strategic autonomy in order not to succumb to the game of foreign powers. This strategic development must be accompanied by economic development in the Mediterranean region. As Borrell recalled, the power of the EU lies in its ability to use “its economic tools in a coordinated way”³⁴¹. If economic integration was the key to opening an unprecedented century of peace on the European continent, this development could be ex-

³⁴¹ Ibidem

tended to the entire neighborhood to foster economic prosperity and thus the strengthening of democratic institutions according to a purely liberal reading. Through greater vertical and horizontal coherence, the EU can aspire to become a true regional leader. For this to happen, the EU must be able to strengthen its foreign policy, seeking to put the interests of the Union at the centre without them being hostage to the national interests of individual Member States.

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