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Thirty years of EU-Mediterranean Policies (1989-2019): an assessment

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(1) Introduction¹

From the EU's perspective, 1989 was an *annus mirabilis*. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War were events of great historical and geopolitical importance, not only for international relations, but more specifically for relations between the EU and the Mediterranean. This is not to say that the southern shore of the Mediterranean had been ignored, but the Cold War had overshadowed many of its problems and challenges. The southern Mediterranean had only served as a 'security chessboard' for the policies and strategies of the US and the Soviet Union. From a Western perspective, the southern Mediterranean was not seen as a region per se, but simply as a line of communication and a route for trade and oil flows that could be threatened by the presence of the Soviet Union. In short, the Mediterranean was perceived simply as a secondary theatre of antagonism between the superpowers.

In the early 1990s the EU or some of its member states were involved in multilateral policies (Renewed Mediterranean Policy) or smaller cooperation initiatives (Dialogue 5+5 and Foromed), or even NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue. However, with the end of the bipolar system, the EU shifted its focus to the North-South divide. It considered that the Renewed Mediterranean Policy was not ambitious enough to prevent a possible destabilisation derived from socio-political and economic disparities. As a consequence, the EU felt the need to forge a more comprehensive policy towards the Mediterranean. The shift in emphasis came at a time when some controversial but influential political thinkers, such as Samuel Huntington, raised the question of the cultural dimension of security, arguing that the 'clash of civilisations'² occurs along the lines of religiously-inspired militancy against Western values.

Such a thesis is particularly pernicious because it builds on old stereotypes and reinforces them under the guise of critical scholarship. Indeed, the idea of confusing Islamist fundamentalism with Islam as a religion is not new. As early as 1979, Edward Said, in his seminal book *Orientalism*, observed that trend. He stressed that 'negative images of Islam are very much more prevalent than any others, and that such images correspond not with what Islam "is" [...] but to what prominent sectors of a particular society take it to be'.³ But the timing of the publication of Samuel Huntington's article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, just after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was undoubtedly a factor that contributed to the worldwide spread of the 'clash of civilisations' thesis, where 'Islam' (and not just Islamist groups) is presented as a kind of scapegoat for everything the West does not like in the world's political, social and economic spheres.

¹ A Spanish version of this working paper was published as a chapter in J.M. Beneyto Pérez (Dir.), J. Maíllo González-Orús & B. Becerril Atienza (Coord.) (2020), *Tratado de Derecho y Políticas de la Unión Europea (Tomo X): Las Relaciones de la Unión Europea con Áreas Regionales y Terceros Estados*, Editorial Aranzadi, January.

The authors would like to thank Adelaide Isaacs for her assistance with the editing and proofreading of this document.

² S. Huntington (1993), 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, nr 3, summer, p. 22-49.

³ E. Said (1981), *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Pantheon Books, 1981, p. 144. See also E. Said (1979), *Orientalism*, Vintage Books.

Concerned about the fallacy of such a thesis, the EU felt the urgency of demonstrating the dangers that can result from such a simplistic diagnosis that overemphasises the notion of a clash of civilizations. For the vast majority of Europeans, it was clear that many of the security-related concerns in the southern Mediterranean were not military in nature or culturally based, but were primarily 'soft security issues'.⁴ These included economic disparities, the demographic divide, migratory flows and the persistence of authoritarian regimes. The idea of a 'new partnership' emerged in this context of conflicting views about security in the Mediterranean.

This working paper seeks to present a critical overview of the EU's latest major Mediterranean policies, analysing the context, the text and the pretext of each of these policies.

(2) The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: the Barcelona Process (1995)

(2.1) The European and international context

To understand the EU's adoption of a major new policy, called the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), it is of the utmost importance to take into account the local, regional and international geopolitical transformations resulting from the following events:

- The fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and its corollary: the implosion of the Soviet Union, the German reunification process and the geopolitical reconfiguration of Central and Eastern Europe.
- The Gulf War (1991) to liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion, and its regional spill-over.
- The Algerian crisis (since 1992) and the dangers it entailed for the viability of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), established in 1989, and for security in the Mediterranean.
- The Madrid Peace Conference (October 1991) and the Oslo Process (1993), and the wind of optimism that seemed to blow over the Middle East.
- The development of militant Islamism fuelled by the persistence of closed political systems and the deterioration of the economic landscape.

Against this backdrop, the EU felt an urgent need to refocus on the Mediterranean and the Arab region and to revamp its policies towards the area. The idea of 'partnership' began to circulate within the EU institutions, but the partnership project was initially limited to the Maghreb countries. The April 1992 Communication on 'The Future of Relations between the Community and the Maghreb'⁵ underlined the need to move towards building a Euro-Maghreb Partnership. Meanwhile, secret negotiations between

⁴ S. Stavridis & N. Fernández Sola (Coords.) (2009), *Factores políticos y de seguridad en el área euro-mediterránea*, Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza.

⁵ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the Future of Relations Between the Community and the Maghreb (SEC/92/401 final).

Palestinians and Israelis were under way and concluded in Oslo, culminating in the official signing of an 'interim agreement' at the White House on 13 September 1993. A few days before the signing ceremony, the Commission published a Communication on the 'Future Relations and Cooperation Between the Community and the Middle East',⁶ followed by a Communication at the end of September on the 'EC Support for the Middle East Peace Process'.⁷

The new developments in the Middle East led the EU to transform its 'Euro-Maghreb Partnership' into a 'Euro-Mediterranean Partnership', embodied in the Communication⁸ of 19 October 1994. A year later, a Conference was held in Barcelona on 27 and 28 November, under Spanish Presidency, to launch the new Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, as set out in a joint declaration known as the 'Barcelona Declaration',⁹ and signed by the then 15 EU member states and 12 countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean (eight Arab countries –Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Territories, Syria and Tunisia–, as well as Cyprus, Israel, Malta and Turkey). Libya, with its 1,770 kilometres of Mediterranean coastline, was not invited because of the sanctions imposed on it.

The Barcelona Process was based on the high hopes that the Peace Process would lead to a lasting solution to the Middle East conflict, and that the EU should contribute to its success as a peace facilitator by bringing Arabs and Israelis together.

(2.2) Structure and objectives

In contrast to the EU's previous Mediterranean policies, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was intended to be a 'comprehensive cooperation', structured around three pillars: a political and security pillar, an economic and financial pillar and a third social and cultural pillar. A central objective was the creation, by 2010, of a Free Trade Area in the Mediterranean, through economic liberalisation, in order to transform the region into a common area of peace, stability and prosperity. To achieve these objectives, the EU proposed two types of financial instruments: budgetary resources and loans from the European Investment Bank (EIB).

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was underpinned by a threefold scenario:¹⁰

- (1) In the eyes of EU officials, the partnership would open up a new 'virtuous dynamic'. It was assumed that free trade and the adoption of liberal policies by southern countries would attract local and foreign investment, thus paving the way for the dynamisation of the local productive structure, the promotion of regional integration

⁶ Communication from the Commission on the Future Relations and Cooperation Between the Community and the Middle East (COM (93) 375 final).

⁷ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EC Support for the Middle East Peace Process (COM (93) 458 final).

⁸ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Strengthening the Mediterranean Policy of European Union: Establishing a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (COM (94) 427 final).

⁹ See the Barcelona Declaration, adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference held on 27 and 28 November 1995, https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/policy/barcelona_declaration.pdf.

¹⁰ B. Khader (1997), *Le Partenariat Euro-Méditerranéen après la Conférence de Barcelone*, l'Harmattan.

and the creation of new employment opportunities. Higher growth rates would stabilise the growing numbers of Mediterranean youth, reduce the factors that lead to migration (known in sociological jargon as 'push factors'), weaken religious fundamentalism and favour regional stability. In short, free trade was seen as a catalyst that would drastically change the environment for doing business.

- (2) This optimistic scenario of stability through liberal policies and economic growth was combined with another scenario, equally optimistic or even 'angelic'. The scenario aimed at achieving stability through democracy. The initial hypothesis was that higher growth rates would end up expanding the middle class and contributing to the emergence of a local bourgeoisie, both dynamics considered to be the twin pillars of democratic transformation. In other words, development would prompt political reform and the end of authoritarianism.
- (3) The third optimistic scenario was based on peace as a vehicle for stability. After the signing of the Oslo Agreement, the EU considered that peace negotiations were on the right track and that they would herald a new era of peace, with the end of the Israeli occupation and the creation of a sovereign, viable and contiguous Palestinian state. Such an outcome would consolidate regional stability.

Thus, the EU's real concern was the insecurity on its southern flank, represented by the prolonged Israeli-Arab conflict and its regional and international spill-over, the Algerian crisis and its repercussions on European territory and irregular migratory flows. The then British Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, acknowledged that 'one of the most important ways in which we can achieve political security is economic growth', so the EU should help the countries of the Maghreb and the Middle East to develop their economic potential. He concluded that 'political stability will flow from that'.¹¹

From 1996 to 2000 the EMP developed without major setbacks. The Association Agreements were signed and ratified, with the exception of the Association Agreement with Syria. One billion euros were allocated annually to Southern partner countries. Civil society organisations were encouraged to create networks. Research institutes established their own networks such as the Euro-Mediterranean Forum of Institutes of Economic Sciences (FEMISE) and the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo). Economically, tariff barriers were reduced or dismantled and many public sectors were privatised. But privatisation often meant the transformation of the 'plan economy' into a 'clan economy' and profits, in terms of job creation or per capita GDP growth, remained limited. As Nathalie Tocci and Jean-Pierre Cassarino rightly pointed out, 'in countries such as Tunisia, economic modernization seemed to proceed apace, but so was a deepening of corruption and an exacerbation of authoritarian rule'.¹²

¹¹ M. Rifkind (1995), 'British Initiative in investment barriers', *British Foreign Secretary Briefing at the Barcelona Conference*, British Foreign Office.

¹² N. Tocci & J.-P. Cassarino (2011), 'Rethinking the EU's Mediterranean policies post-1/11', *IAI Working Paper 2011/06*, p. 4.

(2.3) Difficulties and deficiencies

Over the years, regional integration around the Mediterranean stagnated. Intra-Maghrebi and intra-Mashreqi trade remained ridiculously low. Maghreb exports to the EU were at least 10 times the volume of intra-Maghrebi exports, and EU imports were nine times greater than intra-Maghrebi trade flows. This was also the case for intra-Arab trade as a whole. The Agadir Agreement, launched in 2004 between Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, was unable to give a major boost to regional cooperation.

Ten years after the launch of the EMP,¹³ the economic balance sheet was meagre. The prosperity gap between the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean had not narrowed. More importantly, the southern shore of the Mediterranean remained a captive market for the EU with a significant trade surplus in favour of the EU. In fact, the EU's total trade with Mediterranean countries totalled €181.6 billion in 1995 (€112.3 billion in exports and €69.3 billion in imports, with a €43 billion trade surplus). In 2003 trade increased substantially to €303.5 billion (€169 billion in exports and €134.5 billion in imports) with a trade surplus for the benefit of European countries of €34.5 billion.

Due to the asymmetric and vertical nature of relations between the EU and the less developed and diversified economies on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, there was a 'suck effect'¹⁴ in favour of European exports, as trade barriers in the Mediterranean countries were progressively reduced or dismantled. The loss of income from import taxes was immediate and was not offset by the increase in new forms of taxes (such as value added taxes), or by the increase in tourism, workers' remittances or foreign investment flows. As a result, balances of payments became skewed and a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises disappeared. This meant that the damage caused to large social sectors in the South by opening up their markets was not compensated in the form of economic or political gains,¹⁵ which proved to be problematic.

The poor economic performance of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was no surprise. From its inception, there were many sceptical voices, including those of these authors,¹⁶ about the expectation that further economic integration with the EU was the only way out of economic stagnation, and that it was the most promising means of prompting change. Scepticism was not only due to ideological resistance to the neoliberal paradigm, but also to a total disbelief in an EU-Mediterranean free trade agreement that would lead to a win-win situation.

The difference in the productive, administrative and allocative efficiency between the EU and the southern countries, the asymmetry in the economic structure and the extreme dependence of the southern Mediterranean on European markets (the verticality of relations), combined with very low levels of South-South relations and the exclusion of

¹³ See H. Amirah-Fernández & R. Youngs (Eds.) (2005), *The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: Assessing the First Decade*, Elcano Royal Institute & FRIDE.

¹⁴ E. Rhein (1998), 'Euro-Med Free Trade Area for 2010: whom will it benefit?', *Perspectives on Development: The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership – A special issue of The Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 3, nr 2, p. 14.

¹⁵ See E. Kienle (2005), 'Political reform through economic reform? The Southern Mediterranean States ten years after Barcelona', in Amirah-Fernández & Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 23-34.

¹⁶ Khader (1997), *op. cit.*

free trade in agriculture, severely restricted the scope and positive impact of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. As expected, the verticality and asymmetry of trade relations led to the generation of a regional hub-and-spoke trade pattern. These factors produced two effects:¹⁷ first, the system worked to the benefit of the EU's strongest economies; and, secondly, the benefits of economic growth in the Mediterranean countries themselves did not trickle down to larger segments of society to alleviate the high levels of unemployment and poverty.

The other pillars of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership did not turn out to be more successful. After 2000 the regional geopolitical landscape deteriorated severely. The failure of the Camp David negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians (July 2000), the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada (September 2000), the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the invasion of Afghanistan (2001), followed by the US invasion of Iraq (2003), with the support of three major Mediterranean countries (Spain, Italy and Portugal), poisoned the overall Mediterranean climate and revealed the ambiguity inherent in the entire Barcelona Process.

It should not be forgotten that the assumption underpinning the EU's Mediterranean policy was to contribute to the Peace Process by putting Israelis and Arabs around the same table, while, at the same time, distancing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership from the parallel Middle East Peace Process in which the US was the dominant player. This philosophy was challenged by hard realities: by putting Israel and the Arab countries under the same umbrella before the resolution of the pending conflict, the EU made a fatal mistake, which can be described as a 'methodological inversion'.¹⁸ In other words, the EU forced the Mediterranean Arab countries to participate, together with Israel, in its Association before the end of the conflict, something that is in total contradiction with the EU's own integration process, which was preceded by three previous steps: (1) reconciliation between Germany and France; (2) the normalisation of relations between European countries; and (3) the recognition of the borders inherited from the Second World War. By involving Israel in its Mediterranean policies, together with Arab partners, not only did the EU not act as a 'peace facilitator', but it also allowed the political conflicts in the Middle East to weigh heavily on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, so much so that they eventually contaminated and even derailed it.

As a 'reform promoter', the EU's record is not much better. Although the issue of democracy, human rights and reform was not absent from the Barcelona Declaration, it became clearer than ever, over time, that the Barcelona Process was not primarily aimed at promoting reform in the southern Mediterranean, but at promoting 'order' and 'stability'.¹⁹ As Mona Yacoubian candidly writes: 'Europe launched the Barcelona Process in order to erect a cordon sanitaire, to protect itself from potential instability'.²⁰ In other words, the modernisation and liberalisation of Mediterranean economies were

¹⁷ Z. Torun (2012), 'The European Union and change in the Middle East and North Africa: is the EU closing its theory-practice gap?', *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, vol. 4, nr 1, July, p. 84.

¹⁸ B. Khader (2009a), *L'Europe pour la Méditerranée: De Barcelone à Barcelone (1995-2008)*, l'Harmattan.

¹⁹ A. Bin (Ed.) (1996), *Cooperation and Security in the Mediterranean: Prospects after Barcelona*, The Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, University of Malta.

²⁰ M. Yacoubian (2004), *Promoting Middle East Democracy: European Initiatives*, Special Report 127, United States Institute of Peace, October, p. 7.

not pursued as objectives per se, but as instruments to reduce the desire to migrate, to diminish the attractiveness of radical movements and to create a less turbulent environment, considered by the EU its immediate border.

The EMP contributed little to the dialogue of cultures. The EU funded the organisation of hundreds of seminars on cultural issues, but unfortunately this plethora of initiatives did not prevent the advance of mutual ignorance and the spread of Islamophobia in Europe. Although the EMP provided some general rules, it could not develop a common set of mutually accepted norms. In this respect, the ambitions of the third pillar of the EMP on social and cultural relations were not fulfilled, which led Romano Prodi, then President of the European Commission, to create in 2003 a 'Group of Wise Men for the Dialogue of Cultures in the Mediterranean',²¹ with the aim of injecting some new ideas to promote mutual understanding. This led to the creation of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures, based in Alexandria, Egypt. The Foundation has had active times, but this has not prevented the proliferation of negative images on both shores of the Mediterranean, poisoning the entire Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

As for the security pillar, the intended Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Security, which was supposed to be an 'exercise of pre-emptive diplomacy'²² and a 'confidence-building measure', was never signed. This was reflected in the failure of the Second Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference, held in Malta on 15 and 16 April 1997.²³ As known, the objective of the Malta Conference was to endorse a Euro-Mediterranean Charter, but since then no progress has been made in that direction due to the lack of a common language and divergent perceptions and priorities.

Moreover, none of the conflicts that were already present in the Mediterranean has been resolved. On the contrary, the Peace Process has been completely derailed. Cyprus remains divided into two. The conflict in Western Sahara remains unresolved. In 2006 Lebanon was the scene of a devastating war between Israel and Hezbollah, in which the EU remained on the sidelines. Two years later, Israel launched its Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip, which lasted almost a month. Many of the EU-funded infrastructures and facilities were reduced to rubble. The EU protested, but did not have the guts, means or will to play a useful role in conflict-resolution diplomacy. Limited by a vacillating Common Foreign and Security Policy and the conflicting views and priorities of member states, its policy towards the Mediterranean was trapped by the 'lowest common denominator' paradigm.

(2.4) Inconsistencies and lack of political will

On the political reform front, the results of the EMP were also disappointing, despite the 2003 European Security Strategy declaration underlining the link between internal and external security. It also stressed that 'the best protection for our security is a world of

²¹ Of which one of the authors of this paper (Bichara Khader) was a member.

²² D. Xenakis (2004), 'The politics of order-building in Europe and the Mediterranean', *Themata: Policy and Defense*, Defense Analysis Institute, p. 126.

²³ S. Calleya (1997), 'The Euro-Mediterranean process after Malta: what prospects?', *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 2, nr 2, fall, p. 1-22.

well-governed democratic states', through a process of transposition of the EU's own experience in democratisation, development and integration. Roberto Aliboni and Abdallah Saaf described the rationale behind the European Security Strategy as follows: 'If good governance can be fostered in neighbouring states –i.e. if they can be helped to become democratic, prosperous and internationally cooperative– the resolution of regional crises will be easier and regional factors of instability, with their spill-over effects, can be brought under more effective control. This should make it easier for the EU to preserve its own stability'.²⁴

Unfortunately, subsequent events on the ground revealed the emptiness of this illusion. The southern Mediterranean states have not seriously committed themselves to cooperative security, to the introduction of significant reforms or to progress towards regional cohesion. The EU continued to deal with authoritarian regimes with no problems. Political conditionality, which is an integral part of the Association Agreements, has never been applied. Worse still, some European leaders even applauded the superficial and shop-window reforms of some Arab regimes, such as that of the Tunisian autocrat Ben Ali. Hence the criticism of the EMP by many civil society organisations, which consider that their voices have not been sufficiently heard because the EU continues to maintain cosy relations with authoritarian regimes and, often, also with elitist civil society organisations that lack a real social base in their countries, but are 'in line with European tastes'.²⁵

All this inconsistency stems from a general process of 'securitisation'. The fear that Islamist parties would come to power through free elections led to a general shift in European priorities from promoting democracy to ensuring the stability of friendly regimes. And those same regimes played with that fear, presenting themselves as bulwarks against international terrorism, as gatekeepers against irregular migration, or simply as security providers, while undertaking cosmetic reforms to mask their authoritarian grip on power.

From the year 2000 it became evident that the initial strategy of 'cooperative security' was being transformed into 'policies of security cooperation'. The first signs of the shift were visible during the Algerian crisis (1992-99) but became even more evident after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the US invasion of Iraq (2003) and the 2005 Egyptian elections (in which the Muslim Brotherhood won 88 of the 454 seats) and the strong presence of the Hezbollah party in the 2005 Lebanese general elections. But its most spectacular manifestation was the EU reaction to Hamas' victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, where an atavistic fear of the Islamist alternative far outweighed the democratic imperative. All these Islamist incursions through democratic processes took the EU by surprise and finally convinced it to retreat and abandon its emphasis on democracy.

²⁴ R. Aliboni & A. Saaf (2010), 'Human security: a new perspective for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation', *10 Papers for Barcelona 2010*, ISS & IEMed, February, p. 12.

²⁵ L. Fioramonti (2012), 'Promoting human rights and democracy: a new paradigm for the European Union', in J. Peters, *The European Union and the Arab Spring: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East*, Lexington Books, p. 28.

With growing trends in irregular migration, the EU invested more time and resources in negotiating readmission agreements, managing human mobility and externalising border controls with Mediterranean partners than in promoting the rule of law. In short, the predicament of regional construction and the logic of partnership in the Mediterranean was replaced by the strengthening of control and order. European ideals of 'well-governed partners' were overtaken by the need for stable and well-controlled partners.

In his remarkable book,²⁶ Stephen Calleya does not minimise the need to combat real threats such as drug and human trafficking, terrorist networks, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or protracted and poisoning conflicts such as the Israeli-Arab conflict, but insists on the urgency of addressing issues such as economic imbalances, regional disparities, lack of education and training, uncontrolled urbanization, shortage of jobs and the lack of regional integration. He adds a kind of declaration of faith: 'The peoples of the Mediterranean need to believe that they share more than a common history, but that they also share a common destiny [...] To date, this is not the case'.²⁷

On all these issues, whether political, economic or cultural, Arab countries demonstrated incompetence and lack of commitment. The EU certainly did not take up the challenge either. Obsessed with security issues, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership lost momentum and attractiveness.

This being said, 'we should not over-burden the camel's back'. What often appears as the failure of the EU is often much more linked to the conflict between values-based European policies and the interest-based policies of member states. After all, the EU lacks the sovereignty enjoyed by its member states. Admittedly, the EU has always been described as a 'gentle power', 'normative power', 'soft power' or 'civilian power'²⁸ that relies on persuasion, partnership and multilateralism to achieve its objectives. But these noble principles do not necessarily guide the much more immediate and interest-based conduct of member states.

(3) The European Neighbourhood Policy (2004-19)

(3.1) Origins of the new policy

At the beginning of 2000, negotiations for the fifth enlargement of the EU were ongoing. They concerned 10 countries, eight of them from Central and Eastern Europe and two islands in the Mediterranean: Cyprus and Malta. To this enlargement, which took place in 2004 and was the biggest ever, should be added the countries of the sixth enlargement (Bulgaria and Romania in 2007) and the seventh (Croatia in 2013). With these enlargements, the EU increased its total population by more than 103 million (reaching a population of 500 million), added 13 new languages to the existing 11 (totalling 24), increased its territory by 42% and expanded its land borders by 6,700 km. Thus, the EU's obsession, around 2003-04, was how to protect its external borders from new

²⁶ S. Calleya (2013), *Security Challenges in the Euro-Med Area in the 21st Century*, Routledge.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁸ A.Ú. Noi (2011), *The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Competing or Complementary Projects?*, University Press of America, p. 10.

neighbours. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was supposed to be the answer.

At the end of 2002 the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, clarified the central philosophy of the new initiative. Two central elements were highlighted: 'ring of friends' and 'all but the institutions'. These elements were further developed in the Commission's Communication of 11 March 2003 titled 'Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours'²⁹ and in the 'European Security Strategy'³⁰ of 12 December 2003.

By 'ring of friends', the European Commission meant, in reality, the construction of a 'ring fence' whose main objective would be to promote the good-neighbourliness of prosperous and well-governed states. To this end, the EU would lend its financial assistance, its technical expertise and its political support.³¹ The countries that did well would be rewarded with greater access to the single market: they would get everything but would not participate in the institutional decision-making process. In other words, as Ulla Holm argues, the EU believes that 'a dialogue across the hedge can be established but the hedge will always be there'.³²

Like the EMP, the ENP is a supply-driven policy: it is the EU's strategic response to changes in Europe's geopolitical landscape. Rather than a policy *with* the neighbours, it is a European policy *for* the neighbours, in the sense that the EU offers its values to its neighbours. It is therefore an 'inside-out policy' aimed at preventing the import of external (outside-in) risks and instabilities. The EU 'represents itself as responsible for inner stability in the EU and for the outer stability in the neighbourhood'.³³ Thus, responsibility, engagement and socialisation are the cornerstones of this new policy.³⁴

Is it fortuitous that the ENP Communication was published in March 2003, the same month as the US invaded Iraq? Although the ENP was not conceived as a European response to 'muscular American diplomacy', there is no doubt that the EU tried to distance itself from Huntington's essentialist discourse, the 'theory of creative destruction' of the neoconservatives and dangerous notions such as 'good against evil' and the 'war on terror', which in many Muslim countries were understood as a new crusade of the West against their religion. The EU, which was divided on the issue of the US invasion of Iraq, considered it vitally important to explain its own vision of security. It is not surprising, therefore, that in those two years (2003 and 2004) the EU published

²⁹ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours (COM (2003) 104 final).

³⁰ Communication to the Council: A secure Europe in a better world, Brussels, European Commission, 2004. See also Alvaro Vasconcelos (Ed.) (2009a), *ISS Report: The European Security Strategy 2003-2008: building on common interests*, Institute of Security Studies, Paris.

³¹ A. Vasconcelos (Ed.) (2009b), *The European Security Strategy 2003-2008: Building on Common Interests*, ISS Report nr 5, European Union Institute for Security Studies.

³² U. Holm (2005), *EU's Neighbourhood Policy: A Question of Space and Security*, DIIS Working Paper no. 2005/22, Danish Institute for International Studies, p. 17.

³³ Holm (2005), *op. cit.*, p. 18.

³⁴ M. Emerson & G. Noutcheva (2005), *From Barcelona Process to Neighbourhood Policy*, CEPS Working Document nr 220, March, p. 20.

two important documents: 'Strengthening the EU's Relations with the Arab World'³⁵ and the report on the 'EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East'.³⁶ These two documents insist on the importance of preserving the EU's soft power (in contrast to US hard power), the promotion of multilateralism (in contrast to Washington's unilateralism), the need for a global foreign policy strategy and, above all, the commitment to democratic reform. In the same period, the US presented the 'Greater Middle East Initiative' (April 2004)³⁷ and, shortly afterwards, the G-8 adopted the modified 'Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa' (June 2004).

This plethora of initiatives following the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and the fifth EU enlargement in May 2004 reflected a common Euro-Atlantic consensus on two points: (1) authoritarian regimes in the Arab world are the problem and not the solution to instability; and (2) the West has an interest in focusing on reform and civil society organisations as actors of change.

(3.2) From multilateralism to bilateralism

Notwithstanding the above, the philosophy and general architecture of the ENP contradict the proclaimed intentions of a gradual bottom-up reform. In fact, the ENP is an intergovernmental policy based on a core-periphery relationship and a hub-and-spoke model of bilateralism.³⁸ Its main pillar is the Action Plan, drawn up by each neighbouring state and debated with European officials. Each Action Plan would imply a joint ownership that supports the idea that each partner state (the neighbour) contributes, together with the EU, to the design and implementation of a reform policy. Obviously, the concept of 'joint ownership' is a rhetorical exercise because, ultimately, it is the EU itself that sets the benchmarks of what needs to be done. Moreover, the very notion of 'shared values' is also problematic because the EU is the 'value-setter'.

The principles of differentiation and positive conditionality are inherent in the Action Plan. Differentiation means that, depending on the progress made, some neighbours will be good friends, while others will remain just 'other neighbours'. This mode of action has been called 'variable geometry'³⁹ in the sense that the ENP would not be a 'one-size-fits-all' policy, but rather a differentiated framework reflecting the specific situation of each neighbouring country.

The first distinction between neighbours is geographical. Thus, the EU's relations with its eastern neighbours (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) are based on Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, while the EU's relations with its southern neighbours are

³⁵ See the strategy paper on Strengthening the EU's Relations with the Arab World, transmitted by the Commission and the High Representative on 4 December 2003 (D (2003) 10318).

³⁶ See the Communication 'The EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East', adopted by the Council in June 2004.

³⁷ For a critical assessment of the US initiative, see B. Khader (2009b), 'Grand Moyen-Orient: entre télé-évangélisme et destinée manifeste', in B. Khader, *Le Monde Arabe expliqué à l'Europe*, l'Harmattan.

³⁸ Aliboni & Saaf (2010), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

³⁹ P. van Elsuwege (2012), 'Variable geometry in the European Neighbourhood Policy: the principle of differentiation and its consequences', in E. Lannon (Ed.), *The European Neighbourhood Policy's Challenges*, Peter Lang, p. 59-84.

based on Association Agreements. The differences between the two types of bilateral agreements include, inter alia, 'the legal basis, the institutional framework and the objectives of the partnership'.⁴⁰ This distinction also applies to the other three Caucasus neighbours (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), where EU relations are less developed, and also to the southern Mediterranean neighbours (Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia)⁴¹ and to the eastern Mediterranean neighbours (Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the Palestinian Territories).

The second differentiation concerns the final ambitions: it is clear that the countries of Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) and the Caucasus states (Armenia, Georgia and, to a lesser extent, Azerbaijan) have expressed their desire to join the EU. In the southern periphery, however, the incentive to join the EU is simply excluded.

(3.3) The dilemma between values and interests

Positive conditionality means that a neighbour is rewarded if he behaves well and makes progress in reaching the benchmarks of reform.⁴² The reward may be an 'advanced status', a 'privileged partnership' or a 'reinforced relationship'. Thus, Jordan and Morocco⁴³ were rewarded with an 'advanced status'. In 2007 a scientific and technical agreement was reached between the EU and Israel,⁴⁴ and the question of an 'upgraded relationship' was raised on the eve of the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip at the end of 2008. This issue was frozen for a while, as inappropriate, and was finally resolved under the pretext of creating a 'reinforced partnership'. Countries lagging behind (Syria) or reluctant (Algeria) were not rewarded with increased financial assistance or political dialogue. Thus, in the ENPI (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument) €300 million were allocated to Tunisia for the period 2007-10, €187 million to Lebanon, €130 million to Syria and only €8 million to Libya. Around €558 million were allocated to Egypt, €632 million to the Palestinian Authority and €654 million to Morocco. Algeria only received €220 million, but this is a special case because it is an oil and gas exporting country.

Since the principle of conditionality is based on 'the image of a competition where all participants join the race', neighbouring countries compete with each other to project a reformist image, even if the reform is superficial, limited or even cosmetic. Here is the problem of the ENP: many neighbours to the East and South are 'unwilling to pay the price for alignment with the proposed EU model of governance'.⁴⁵ Indeed, it is hard to imagine authoritarian regimes voluntarily giving up or even agreeing to share power and sincerely guaranteeing the rule of law. In their eyes, true democratic reform would simply mean the political suicide of repressive regimes. Here is the great paradox of the ENP:

⁴⁰ For further detailed information, see Van Elsuwege (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 60-61.

⁴¹ The Agreements with the Maghreb countries contain more detailed provisions on cooperation in the field of labour.

⁴² See M. Marescau & E. Lannon (Eds.) (2001), *The EU's Enlargement and Mediterranean Strategies: A Comparative Analysis*, Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴³ On the Advanced Status of Morocco see L. Jaidi (2012), 'Le "Statut Avancé" Maroc-Union Européenne: Quelle Valeur Ajoutée par Rapport à la Politique Européenne de Voisinage?', in E. Lannon (Ed.), *The European Neighbourhood Policy's Challenges*, *op. cit.*, p. 249-282.

⁴⁴ Agreement on scientific and technical cooperation between the European Community and the State of Israel, 25/VIII/2007.

⁴⁵ Van Elsuwege (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 64.

how can the EU contribute to the democratisation of authoritarian regimes with their own will?⁴⁶

After the terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), and with the increase in irregular migratory flows to the EU, the security paradigm returned to the forefront. Pro-reform pressure lost momentum. The notion of 'governance' eclipsed that of 'democratic reform' so as not to upset the Arab regimes participating in the ENP. Very cleverly, the regimes themselves introduced some insignificant reforms as a minimal response to European demands. Some created their own 'human rights organisations' and co-opted some civil society organisations that did not question the established power distribution or were financially dependent. This was the case with some trade unions, chambers of commerce and non-governmental organisations serving the regime. In contrast, genuine NGOs, whether Islamist, liberal or otherwise, were severely repressed on numerous occasions.

Clearly, the EU continued its 'business as usual' with its neighbours, moving away from the objective of promoting democracy towards security. But the EU itself was not satisfied with its own performance. In a Communication published in 2005,⁴⁷ the EU criticised the prioritisation of security over reform. In reality, the EU was faced with the following dilemma: if it wanted to be true to its values, it would have to press for genuine democratic reform, but if it tried to defend its immediate interests, it would have to maintain friendly relations with autocracies.

Until the so-called 'Arab awakening' of 2011, the EU remained trapped in this uncomfortable dilemma and its policy was marred by incoherence. Thus, in 2005, it pressed for an end to the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, while at the same time strengthening its relations with Israel, whose occupation of Arab territories dates back to 1967. It punished Hamas for its victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, imposing conditions on it that it had never imposed on Israel regarding compliance with international law. Nor did the EU listen to the diversity of voices in southern societies, such as those of Islamist organisations that are part of civil society.⁴⁸

With so many inconsistencies, the ENP had rather disappointing results, not achieving significant changes, internally or regionally. The EU's call has been challenged by the unequal treatment of its neighbours to the east and south, as well as within each region, and by 'the projection of a Fortress Europe image'.⁴⁹

It seemed necessary to take a leap forward in order to give more content to the ENP, to encourage maximum cohesion between Southern partners, to avoid creating new

⁴⁶ R. Youngs (2004), *Europe's Uncertain Pursuit of Middle East Reform*, Carnegie Papers nr 45, June.

⁴⁷ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the Tenth Anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: a work programme to meet the challenges of the next five years (COM (2005) 139 final).

⁴⁸ See K. Kausch (2009), 'Europe's engagement with moderate Islamists', in M. Emerson, K. Kausch & R. Youngs (Eds.), *Islamist Radicalization: The Challenge for Euro-Mediterranean Relations*, Centre for European Policy Studies and FRIDE, p. 129-150. See also N. Mikhelidze & N. Tocci (2009), 'How can Europe engage with Islamist movements?', *Ibid.*, p. 151-169.

⁴⁹ E. Soler i Lecha & E. Viilup (2011), *Reviewing the European Neighbourhood Policy: a weak response to fast changing realities*, Notes internacionals, nr 36, CIDOB, June, p. 2.

dividing lines between good and bad neighbours and, finally, to create shared values. In June 2007, the Council of the EU recognised the need to strengthen the ENP.⁵⁰

(4) The Union for the Mediterranean (2007-19)⁵¹

(4.1) Proliferation of initiatives towards the Mediterranean

While the EU was conducting its twin policies (EMP and ENP), and while sub-regional initiatives followed their own course, Nicolas Sarkozy, France's presidential candidate, surprised everyone by announcing in February 2007 a new exclusively French initiative called the 'Mediterranean Union'.

As we shall see later, the French idea was progressively Europeanised, in the sense that the European Council approved the initiative in March 2008 after several modifications. This paved the way for the organisation of the first summit of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which took place in Paris on 13 July 2008. Four months later in Marseilles, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the 43 participating states agreed on a work programme, and in 2009 a General Secretariat was created in Barcelona.

The idea of a Mediterranean Union was launched by Nicolas Sarkozy in a speech delivered in Toulon on 7 February 2007 during his presidential campaign. The tone was lyrical, the style flowery, but the content was simple and somehow blunt. It is enough to quote a few extracts to understand the logic underlying the initiative: (1) 'the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue imagined 12 years ago has not met its targets'; (2) the Mediterranean countries should 'take their fate into their own hands'; (3) France takes the initiative 'with Italy, Spain and Greece' (Malta is not mentioned) to launch a Mediterranean Union to 'work closely with the EU'; (4) the Mediterranean Union will offer a significant role to Turkey, which 'has no place in the EU because it is not a European country'; and (5) the Mediterranean Union should help to 'rethink what we, at one time, used to call "France's Arab policy"'.

The first message is clear: EU policies towards the Mediterranean have failed, Turkey has no place in Europe and France's Arab policy is a thing of the past. The second part of the speech presented the mission and objectives of the proposed Mediterranean Union: selective immigration policies, co-development, environmental protection, regulation of free trade, water management, renewable energies and education.

After his election as President of France in May 2007, Sarkozy clung to his project. In a speech delivered in Tangier on 23 October 2007,⁵² he assured his European partners that their policies were heading in the right direction, but that it was necessary to move 'to another level'. He added that his project, the Mediterranean Union, would become an 'original and unique experience' as the 'world's largest incubator for co-development', as it is not a 'union project' but a 'union of projects' based on co-ownership and equality.

⁵⁰ See the Presidency Progress Report on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy, 18-19 June 2007.

⁵¹ Khader, (2009a), *op. cit.*, p. 173-232.

⁵² Discours de M. Nicolas Sarkozy, Président de la République – Tanger, 23/X/2007, <https://jo.ambafrance.org/Discours-de-M-Nicolas-Sarkozy>.

To understand the reasons for Sarkozy's initiative, the Avicenna Report⁵³ offers some useful clues. Written by French intellectuals and ex-diplomats, the report makes a threefold diagnosis: (1) the marginalisation of the Mediterranean area in the world economy; (2) the inadequacy of the EU's Mediterranean policies; and (3) the erosion of France's position as a geopolitical actor in the Mediterranean. The latter point is probably the most important. With German reunification and the fifth enlargement of the EU to eight central and eastern countries, the French had the impression that their country was losing weight and stature in the European institutional architecture and that its role in its 'natural geographical reserve', the Mediterranean, was diluted in the EU's Mediterranean policies. Sarkozy's initiative should be understood as a response to German reunification and its reinforced role in Eastern Europe. For this reason, the perimeter of the Mediterranean Union project was limited to the coastal states of the Mediterranean, including the Balkans.

(4.2) Reactions to the French initiative

The French initiative triggered an avalanche of exasperation and criticism. The EU felt insulted and harshly criticised. The President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, censured President Sarkozy for 'having ignored the European Parliament'. External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner warned that any project should be managed by the EU. Turkey was frustrated. The governments of Spain and Italy were stunned that they had not been consulted. Germany was irritated by what appeared to be a 'French solitary ride' financed with German money. In fact, German Chancellor Angela Merkel considered that the French initiative could divide the EU.

For the Turkish Foreign Minister, the initiative was a non-starter. Arab governments were simply surprised by this proliferation of European initiatives aimed at their region. The French initiative caught them off-guard: some countries were astonished that the project was presented as a substitute for France's Arab policy. Others half-heartedly supported the idea but preferred to strengthen the 5+5 Group (as was the case in Tunisia). Morocco, for its part, was more interested in the negotiations on an 'advanced status', but supported the project. A different reaction was that of Algeria, which was reluctant and critical of France's patronising attitude. More enthusiastic was the then President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, who considered that this was an excellent proposal that deserved to be examined. Israel shared the same view in support of the French initiative, but in its case the reason was that it gave Israel the opportunity to debate with countries with which it did not find it easy to speak.

Despite often harsh reactions, President Sarkozy did not backtrack, but he had to tone down his initial idea. In response to the EU's objections, he made it clear that the French project was 'neither against the Barcelona Process nor part of the Barcelona Process, but something outside the Barcelona Process'. To calm and overcome the opposition of Italy and Spain, Sarkozy met in Rome on 20 December 2007 with the President of the Italian Council of Ministers, Romano Prodi, and the Spanish Prime Minister, José Luis

⁵³ *Rapport Avicenne – Maghreb – Moyen-Orient: Contribution pour une politique volontariste de la France*, 23/IV/2007, https://blog.mondediplo.net/IMG/pdf/Rapport_Maghreb.pdf.

Rodríguez Zapatero. There the three signed the Rome Appeal which stated that the Mediterranean Union project was 'a common initiative of France, Italy and Spain', but under a new name: the Union for the Mediterranean. In the Rome Appeal, the three leaders managed to assuage Turkey's fear by stating that its EU accession project was disconnected from the UfM initiative. They also reaffirmed the centrality of the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Some stumbling blocks had been removed, but the Germans were still furious. The bone of contention was about membership in the UfM. The exclusion of non-coastal European states was badly perceived by Germany. This prompted the French President to meet the German Chancellor in Hanover on 3 March 2008 at her request. At that meeting it was agreed that all EU states would have the right to participate in the UfM. Shortly afterwards, at its meeting on 13 and 14 March, the European Council endorsed the revamped initiative. In this way, the French idea was Europeanised. The first UfM summit took place in Paris on 13 July 2008. Sarkozy became its first President and Mubarak of Egypt became the first co-President.⁵⁴

(4.3) The complicated logic of the 'union of projects'

In sharp contrast with the EMP and ENP, the UfM was presented as a 'union of projects'. Its architecture differs from the 'three pillars' of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the 'action plans' of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Its objective was to develop projects in six priority areas aimed at promoting regional integration. These priority areas are: water and environment, transport and urban development, business development and employment, energy and climate action, higher education and research and social and civil affairs. But the UfM is no different from the other initiatives that preceded it, since it also includes Arab countries and Israel in the same format.

The rationale behind the UfM is that regional integration can only be promoted through useful, pragmatic, visible and important regional projects. And the general philosophy is based on equality, ownership, gradualism, co-responsibility and multilateral partnership. In a way, the UfM restored multilateralism, which was almost absent in the ENP, but this multilateralism is based on 'inter-state conventional relations rather than a community-like model of relations'.⁵⁵ That is why the principle of conditionality, which was present in both the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy, was abandoned. In order to avoid unnecessary clashes between members, political issues were also shelved, although it could be argued that it is almost impossible to depoliticize the UfM completely.

Due to its intergovernmental nature, the UfM can easily become a hostage of conflicts between its members and, in particular, between countries that are still in conflict or that do not have diplomatic relations.⁵⁶ To partly reduce this risk, there was consensus that participation in any regional project would remain a 'sovereign decision' of each state.

⁵⁴ Since 2012 the co-presidencies have been held by the EU and Jordan.

⁵⁵ Aliboni & Saaf (2010), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁵⁶ S. Florensa (2010), 'Union for the Mediterranean: Challenges and Ambitions', *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*, p. 63.

Israel has been a member and partner of all European Mediterranean policies, along with neighbouring Arab states. Israel's participation was intended to be a vehicle for the normalisation of relations between Israel and the Arab countries prior to the resolution of the conflict with the Palestinians. What actually happened was the opposite: not only did the EU's Mediterranean policies fail to bring Israelis and Arabs closer together, but the Israeli-Arab conflicts hijacked much of Europe's Mediterranean policies, producing periods of semi-paralysis that are reproduced every time tension between Israel and one of its neighbours rises.

Because of the focus on the 'flagship projects', the issue of the rule of law and human security has been neglected. Political reform is hinted at but is far from being the cornerstone of this new policy. Such an approach could prove counterproductive because, as Gonzalo Escribano points out, political reforms 'are, in the end, what will sustain the production structure'.⁵⁷ In other words, if big projects are to bear fruit, they simply cannot be carried out in an institutional vacuum.

But, again, 'we should not over-burden the camel's back'. The UfM was designed to complement other EU policies. This new institution cannot punch above its weight: its mandate is to deliver on its promise to build the region through highly visible and concrete projects. If it succeeds in doing so, it will have fulfilled its task.

(5) The EU and the 'Arab awakening' of 2011

(5.1) A neighbourhood that calls for change

In 2011, revolts against authoritarianism in the EU's southern neighbourhood caught many inside and outside the region by surprise, including European governments and institutions.⁵⁸ The rapid spread of the social mobilisations initiated in Tunisia at the end of 2010 to almost all Arab countries exceeded the capacity for foresight, analysis and reaction of European institutions and national governments. This resulted in hesitant, late and uncoordinated responses to the democratic demands of Arab societies.

Since its creation, never before the so-called 'Arab awakening' had the EU faced such a far-reaching and profound transformation in its southern neighbourhood as that produced by the anti-authoritarian uprisings that began in Tunisia. Under different circumstances, but with the same underlying feeling, millions of Arabs took to the streets to demand dignity, opportunities and good governance. The profound demographic, economic and cultural changes that are taking place in the Arab world in recent years are giving rise to multiple forms of social mobilisation against authoritarianism, corruption and lack of opportunities after decades of apparent resistance to change and deceptive stability.

⁵⁷ G. Escribano (2010), 'Means and sectors for Euro-Mediterranean integration', *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*, p. 89.

⁵⁸ H. Amirah-Fernández & E. Soler i Lecha (2011), 'Towards a paradigm shift in Euro-Mediterranean relations', *Análisis del Real Instituto*, nr 76/2011, Elcano Royal Institute, June, http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ari76-2011.

The results of social revolts in the Arab region have differed greatly from country to country. Since the beginning of 2011, the world has witnessed the emergence of alarming phenomena generated in the Arab region. These include civil wars, regional warfare, proxy wars, arms races, migration crises, waves of refugees, the use of weapons of mass destruction, the rise of sectarianism and religious extremism, the emergence of totalitarian projects such as the self-proclaimed Islamic State, the strengthening of repressive authoritarianism and the deterioration of relations between states and societies. However, there have also been democratic advances and a consolidation of civil society in some countries. A paradigmatic case is the democratic transition in Tunisia. The Tunisian revolution can be understood as a profound change in the political system, with new rules of the game arising from dialogue and the search for consensus, which has resulted in the drafting of a democratic constitution, more political freedom and a peaceful alternation of power.

The fact that, since the beginning of 2019, the populations of Algeria and Sudan have gone out to demonstrate massively and civically against their systems, which they label as corrupt, suggests that the 'Arab awakening' is far from over. There are reasons to believe that transitions towards a new relationship between state and society and towards new models of governance are already underway in the southern and eastern Mediterranean, although it is a process that will take time and is not free of dangers and shocks.

(5.2) The accentuated dilemma and the EU's lost opportunity

The EU responded to the challenges arising from its southern neighbourhood in 2011 with a major review of its neighbourhood policies. Though hesitant and initially divided, EU policymakers quickly developed a new regional strategy by understanding the strategic importance and far-reaching consequences of the protests. The fundamental principles of this new approach were initially set out in the document 'A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean',⁵⁹ of 8 March 2011. This was followed by other communications such as 'A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood',⁶⁰ of 25 May 2011, and 'Delivering on a New European Neighbourhood Policy',⁶¹ of 15 May 2012, as well as a large number of official EU documents.⁶²

⁵⁹ Joint Communication from the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Council, the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 'A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean' (COM(2011) 200 final).

⁶⁰ Joint Communication from the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 'A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood' (COM(2011) 303 final).

⁶¹ Joint Communication from the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 'Delivering on a New European Neighbourhood Policy' (JOIN(2012) 14 final).

⁶² For a critical analysis of these documents, see B. Khader (2013), 'The European Union and the Arab World: from the Rome Treaty to the Arab Spring', *Papers IEMed*, nr 17, IEMed and EuroMeSCo, p. 32-43.

Taken together, these documents outlined a new list of strategic priorities for the EU's Neighbourhood Policy, which was largely based on the fundamental demands of protest movements. The first of these was the creation of a 'deep democracy' that went beyond formalist electoral processes and respected fundamental liberal principles. Secondly, the creation of 'associations of peoples' capable of fostering pluralistic civil societies and engaging with the new and diverse spectrum of civil actors in the Mediterranean. Finally, the EU was committed to promoting 'inclusive growth' leading to sustainable development and greater socio-economic equality. With these measures, the EU sought to promote 'sustainable stability' and strengthen ties with Arab populations calling for democratic change.

The approach presented by the EU in 2011 and 2012 was a change from its previous policies, which, deliberately or not, favoured 'authoritarian stability'. That idea was based on the precept that political change could only result from gradual social and economic transformation. While the shift from authoritarian stability to sustainable stability was a long-awaited course correction, time has since shown that the EU, faced with its dilemma between values and interests, has chosen to maintain friendly relations with autocracies, even when some of them have intensified their repression and human rights violations on a large scale.

It is clear that the uncertainties and difficulties inherent in transitions from authoritarian regimes to participatory systems will mark much of the Euro-Mediterranean agenda for the future.⁶³ Therefore, over a period that may last for years or even decades, it will be difficult to apply a common approach from the EU to its southern neighbourhood, as the changes put in place may lead to very different scenarios. For the time being, three basic scenarios can be envisaged in the Arab region: (1) majority evolution towards democratic transitions, something that today seems unlikely; (2) very different situations from country to country combining democratisation and repression; and (3) counter-revolutionary processes from the forces of the 'old guard' or by pro-status quo regional actors that jeopardise the trend begun in 2011. It remains to be seen how events evolve, but the scenario that materialises will depend, to a large extent, on whether the EU contributes to creating a 'democratic, stable, prosperous and peaceful Southern Mediterranean',⁶⁴ for that is what their populations are seeking.

The geopolitics of the Mediterranean region have been altered and the EU risks paying a high price in terms of security, influence and access if it opts for a passive and wait-and-see approach. Prudence is needed, given the rough road ahead of the current Arab transitions. However, there is a growing sense that the EU is wasting precious time by not acting decisively to help shape a more democratic future in its southern neighbourhood. European countries are the Arab region's main trading partners and creditors. It would be incomprehensible if the EU did not play a central role in supporting the democratic aspirations of those who made immense sacrifices to rid themselves of dictatorship.

⁶³ See R. Youngs (2013), *Living with the Middle East's Old-New Security Paradigm*, Policy Brief nr 152, FRIDE, March.

⁶⁴ COM (2011) 200 final, p. 2.

Tensions and conflicts are nothing new in Europe's southern neighbourhood. To speak of the Mediterranean is all too often to refer to situations of instability, crises, inequalities, conflicts and threats, both real and perceived. However, the extent and consequences of the most recent upheavals go beyond the Middle East and the Maghreb. Some events that have taken place in that part of the world in recent years, such as the wars that have generated waves of refugees and the extreme violence shown by jihadist groups, have had a direct impact on EU member states. The rise of extreme right-wing and national-populist movements in Europe has been accentuated by events in the southern and eastern Mediterranean in recent times. The evolution of these movements would not have been the same without the violent decomposition of countries such as Syria, Libya and Iraq as a result of bloody conflicts that neither the EU nor its member states have been able to prevent, contain or mitigate. The psychological impact on European populations of events such as the emergence of the self-proclaimed Islamic State and the proclamation of the 'caliphate' in 2014, and the accentuated migratory crisis from 2015 onwards with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees, mainly Syrians, fleeing war and destruction, is undeniable.

(5.3) Pending lessons from the 'Arab awakening'

Europe has had more than eight years to draw some lessons from what has happened since the beginning of the 'Arab awakening'. It seems evident that neither the appearance of stability in some countries, nor the continued support they receive from abroad, nor relatively good macroeconomic results are sufficient guarantees for the survival of authoritarian Arab regimes, as long as there is social unrest and the reforms that guarantee good governance are delayed. Stability imposed by force through repressive methods and manipulated elections can yield temporary results, but when the model is broken, the instability that is then unleashed is much more difficult to manage. Authoritarianism is a *sine qua non* condition for generating unrest and hopelessness, and it is a brake on the development of a culture of civility and respect for diversity of opinion that is also open to the outside world. In the absence of greater levels of freedom and development, Arab societies will be plunged into greater frustration and chaos within and around their borders. One wonders whether the EU has reached similar conclusions and, if so, what it plans to do, beyond conducting business as usual.

It would be a mistake to believe that the so-called 'Arab awakening' came to an end with the imposition of the paradigm of 'authoritarian stability', which was the norm before 2011 and is still widespread today. The causes of unrest that existed at the beginning of the current decade have not been successfully addressed. On the contrary, many of them have even been accentuated. Unless the Arab region as a whole soon achieves a new state-citizen relationship based on effective governance, it seems quite likely that more social instability and political turbulence will ensue throughout the Middle East and the Maghreb. For Europe, this should be a matter of concern.

The social mobilisation launched in Algeria on 22 February 2019 is an encouraging development that could inspire a more than necessary optimism in the Mediterranean environment. Initially, the Algerian population massively demonstrated its rejection of a fifth mandate of the old and absent President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. After several weeks of mass peaceful mobilisations, the Algerians managed to get rid of the visible head of a

regime that many described as corrupt. Over the following months, the same population continued to demand profound changes in the nature of the political system, dominated by the military, in order to found a second republic that responds to the model of a civil state, with free and transparent elections, where the old guard that represents the abuse of power and rampant corruption is excluded. The fact that millions of Algerians have been demonstrating peacefully for months and showing high levels of civility suggests that in the southern Mediterranean there are societies that are politically mature, guided by a desire for emancipation and have gone through a process of learning, both from the traumas of their recent past and from the mistakes made by other societies around them.

(6) Conclusions

Since 1957 all policies of the European Economic Community (EEC) and, subsequently, of the EU were supply-driven, in the sense that Europe has always taken the lead. In other words, the EU has always proposed initiatives, had the financial instruments at its disposal and imposed its agenda, priorities and objectives. To a certain extent, Mediterranean initiatives and structures are artificial because 'the Mediterranean as a would-be integrated region is an intellectual construct rather than a reality', and because it is a geographical reality, but 'not a distinct region from a political point of view'.⁶⁵ In fact, the EU's Mediterranean policies have sought integration between strange travelling companions, while at the same time separating some Mediterranean countries from their natural partners.

Although eight Arab states participate in the EU's Mediterranean policies, 'there is no Arab Mediterranean policy',⁶⁶ but simply an Arab interest in the EU itself: in its political support, in its financial resources, in its market, in its investments, in its technical assistance and as a destination for surplus labour. Arab Mediterranean countries seek all these objectives (the *carrots*) but without the *stick* of 'conditionality' in issues such as democracy, human rights and transparency. Such an ambivalent attitude puts the EU in an uncomfortable position, as democracy promotion policies have been an objective for decades. The EU sees itself as a great peace project through economic integration, but also as a democracy promoter working together with Mediterranean countries to form a 'community of values'.⁶⁷

From an EU perspective, democracy promotion was perceived not only as a springboard of efficient institutions, but also as a guarantee of transparency, accountability and, ultimately, active citizenship. Democratic states, according to EU discourse, are not only a shield against corruption and instability, but also a prerequisite for regional cooperation and conflict resolution through dialogue and compromise.

Moreover, as Richard Gillespie and Richard Youngs have rightly pointed out, 'in the European experience, democratisation was additionally perceived as being integrally interlinked with economic modernisation' and 'political change both flows most naturally from underlying economic modernisation and is necessary to sustain market-based

⁶⁵ G.A.G. Soltan (2010), 'Arab States and the UfM', *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*, p. 68-69.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁶⁷ I. Menéndez González (2005), *Arab Reform: What Role for the EU?*, Egmont Papers nr 8, Academia Press, May, p. 6.

development'.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, in the Arab world, this sequence has not worked. There has been some growth, but no development. This has been due to the prevalence of crony capitalism, widespread corruption and the predatory practices of the regimes in power. In such a context, neither the middle class nor the national bourgeoisie, supposedly the twin pillar of democratic transformation, could flourish and gain momentum.

This brief review of European policies in the Mediterranean and the Arab region does not suggest that the EU, as a democracy promoter, has had a record of success. The EU is certainly not interested in antagonising authoritarian regimes in power. After launching ambitious projects such as the Barcelona Process, the EU, instead of pushing for progress towards efficient and democratic systems of government, opted to reorient its discourse towards good governance. The principle of conditionality, although never applied, was gradually replaced by that of co-ownership, which subordinates reform to the agreement of the partners themselves. Obviously, regimes in the southern and eastern Mediterranean have been too reluctant to undertake real reform or to accept full normative convergence, for reasons that are easy to understand.

It is therefore not surprising that, after more than 50 years of European cooperation and association agreements with the Mediterranean and Arab countries, only one new democratic state (Tunisia) has emerged, and not precisely because of the EU's resolute support for a population demanding freedom from an authoritarian system. On the contrary, what have emerged after decades of European cooperation and association agreements with the Mediterranean have not been liberal market economies, but rather 'modernised illiberal autocracies' that cultivate crony capitalism with a very unequal distribution of power and wealth. The defect did not lie in the methods, instruments or means used by the EU, but in prioritising security over political reform (also known as the 'dilemma between security and democratisation').⁶⁹ In fact, while the EU saw itself as a 'transformative power', in practice, EU policies were geared towards 'preserving the status quo'.

The Mediterranean is one of the areas in which the EU has made the most effort and in which it has devoted a great deal of creativity and imagination to rethink cooperation frameworks. However, it is also one of the areas in which most frustration has accumulated. The 'Arab awakening' initiated in 2011 was a wake-up call for the EU to reconsider its past policies, define a new political approach and readjust to the new realities that are emerging in the Mediterranean and the Arab world in general. Europe's credibility as a global actor, but also its own security and well-being in the future, will largely depend on the EU's ability to accompany democratic transitions in its southern neighbourhood and to contribute to the progress of its societies.

⁶⁸ R. Gillespie & R. Youngs (2003), *Democracy and the EMP: European and Arab Perspectives*, EuroMeSCo Briefs nr 6, December, p. 4.

⁶⁹ H. Malmvig (2004), *Cooperation or Democratization? The EU's Conflicting Mediterranean Security Discourses*, DIIS Working Paper nr 2004/8, Danish Institute for International Studies, p. 22.

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