Cavatorta, Francesco, and Paola Rivetti. "EU–MENA Relations from the Barcelona process to the Arab Uprisings: A new research agenda." Journal of European Integration 36.6 (2014): 619-625.

Over the last two decades the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have acquired considerable importance for the European Union (EU). As the process of deepening and enlarging made the Union's external relations more central to EU policy-making, transformations taking place in the MENA region and its proximity contributed to raise the interest of the EU policy-making community towards the region beyond traditional bilateral relations. Along with greater engagement, there has been a significant growth of academic studies on EU-MENA relations.

This article reflects on the state of the art of the scholarship on EU foreign policy towards the MENA to highlight the contribution that it has made, or failed to make, to broader studies on the EU foreign policy and to identify new research developments. This 'state of the art' reflection is urgent today, as the Arab Uprisings created the conditions for a thorough overhaul of EU policies towards the region.

The scholarship on EU-MENA relations

Since the mid-1990s, the focus has been on a number of recurring themes inextricably linked with the policy tools the EU designed for and implemented in the region. The onset of the relevant literature coincides with the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership (EMP) in 1995, the first European attempt to conduct a coordinated foreign policy action towards the region. The partnership had three pillars: the creation of a free-trade area, cultural exchanges and political cooperation. . The rationale behind the partnership was the promotion of regional stability through economic integration and democratization in a multilateral forum, including

Israel. Two main factors motivated the launch of the partnership. First, the Algerian failed liberalisation and civil war in the 1990s, which made EU policy-makers aware of the challenges emerging from instability (Cavatorta 2009). Second, the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians induced the EU to promote multilateralism to bring about broader regional peace.

Following the launch of the EMP, the scholarship was preoccupied mostly with the evaluation of the EU performance. As subsequent policy instruments such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) did not fundamentally differ (Seeberg 2010) from the EMP, the literature maintained its focus on evaluation and performance. Broadly speaking, three clusters of analysis can be identified.

First are studies on the economic dimension of the relationship, with a focus on the costs and benefits of the trade liberalisation (Brach 2007). These studies have been mostly critical of the EU's push for liberalisation (Holden 2010). While the MENA economies as a whole seem to have benefited from it, the necessity to push these measures through despite domestic opposition made the MENA governments more authoritarian (Powel 2009). In addition, only the elite benefited from the reforms (Dillman 2002), leading to the Arab Uprisings' anti-neoliberal ethos (Chomiak and Entelis 2011). Access to energy resources features prominently in these debates because European economies rely on r hydrocarbons coming from the region. The EU therefore adopted a soft approach to authoritarian oil producers, such as Algeria.

Second, a number of analyses deal with the security issues (Youngs 2006) the partnership supposedly addresses. In the context of EU-MENA relations, the main focus has been on the rise of Islamism, perceived as an inherently destabilising factor despite academics' attempts to nuance such perception (Silvestri 2005). Migration and arms race have also attracted attention (Gallina 2007; Tertrais 2005), with a focus on proliferation and Iran's nuclear programme. While the partnership does not include hard security themes and Iran is

not part of it, the member countries' progressive coordination of external relations allowed the EU a leading role in negotiations and advance an alternative to the US position (Pardo 2011). This issue should inform more strongly future studies. Within this broad theme are also the studies dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict. EU engagement was meant to strengthen the Arab-Israeli peace process through peaceful multilateral dynamics (Del Sarto 2007). Offering Israel an Association Agreement and supporting the Palestinian Authority were meant to bring both actors into the normative realm of the EU, diluting mutual suspicions and encouraging cooperation (Peters 2010). Ultimately, this strategy did not work because of the developments on the ground in Israel-Palestine itself, the inability of the EU to take a common stand and because of the complex dynamics of EU-US relations in relation to the conflict (Musu 2010).

Third, an almost endless number of studies focus on democratisation and democracy-promotion, examining EU's attempts to export democracy and human rights in a region where authoritarianism is still enduring. The vast majority of scholars has been critical of EU's strategies of democracy-promotion (Pace 2009), highlighting its failure. This is due to poor policy coordination (Bicchi 2007), inherent contradictions in the policies' design (Pace 2007), to mistaken assumptions of EU normativity (Powel 2009), and to the ability of MENA regimes to withstand external pressure in the knowledge that the EU ultimately preferred authoritarian stability to democratic messiness (Fawcett 2009).

The contribution of EU-MENA studies to EU scholarship

Despite significant limitations, the scholarship on EU-MENA relations contributed to fundamental debates on EU foreign policy-making and on the nature of the EU.

The most significant contribution has been to the debate on the nature of EU power and, specifically, whether the EU displays a normative or realist one (Manners 2002; Hyde-Price 2006; Dandashly 2012). We find few studies confirming the 'normative power' hypothesis

utilising concepts such as Europeanization and multilateral institutionalisation, mostly highlighting how Turkish democratisation is linked to EU positive conditionality (Aydin and Acikmese 2007). We find much greater evidence suggesting that goals and instruments of the EU respond to traditional realist interests. Thus, the weaknesses of the EMP or the ENP are the outcome of the contradiction between the EU's unethical realist goals and its normative rhetoric (). Numerous examinations of EU security policy for instance underscore how it contributed to the strengthening of authoritarianism in the name of the war on terror and control of migration flows (Toje 2005). Thus the vast majority of studies side with the view that the EU is far from being a normative actor. However, over recent years this debate has tended to fade because of its increasing sterility and the more useful approaches offered by constructivism. Moreover, scholars have shifted away from looking at the nature of the EU to what the EU does concretely, painting a more complex picture (Cebeci 2012). The concept that emerges from post-normativism is 'pragmatism', which is informed by normativity, realism and constructivist ideas about the way in which the EU thinks of itself, projects its external relations and how it is capable of adapting to the challenges and circumstances each MENA state offers (Khaliq 2010).

The second debate the scholarship of EU-MENA relations speaks to is about leadership and 'actorness' in EU foreign policy-making. In the MENA, hard and soft security matters are present and the EU has attempted, unsuccessfully, to respond with coherent and unified policies. Specialists have pointed to EU's institutional weaknesses and also to the relevance that bilateral relations have over multilateral dynamics. For instance, scholars have emphasised how the 2003 invasion of Iraq divided the EU member states and how, consequently, the EU was marginalised (Chari and Cavatorta 2003). Security issues have also been approached in a fragmented way, even if, nominally, under the banner of Europe. This is the case of the 'Madrid Quartet' for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Arab Uprisings and the war in Libya have

further highlighted divisions as in the case of France recognising the legitimacy of the Libyan Transitional Council in March 2011, when other EU members were still evaluating the joint position to take (Menon 2011). The scholarship in the field points to the domineering role of some member states when it comes to foreign policy in the region, linking it to similar weaknesses in other policy-areas (Harnisch 2007).

This debate feeds into the third contribution made to the wider scholarship on EU, namely the way multilateralism functions. The EU project is a multilateral one and multilateral external relations have always been privileged. While the scholarship acknowledges a degree of success in some technical areas, it also questions the Union's genuine commitment to multilateralism when concrete interests are at stake (). This feeds into the discussion over the true nature of EU power and the theoretical underpinnings of multilateralism itself (Echague *et al.* 2011).

Finally, a further debate informing broader scholarship on the EU is the transatlantic relation. Since 1989, there has been growing attention on the apparent divergence of interests and values between the EU and the US (Kagan 2002). Even if some differences exist, as for the 2003 war in Iraq, the problem is that this supposed divergence implies that the EU would behave as a unified actor. This was and is far from the reality/diverged. Broadly speaking, the scholarship has empirically validated the argument that the transatlantic rift does not exist, despite the EU utilising at times a different rhetoric and policy instruments (Special Issue – *Journal of North African Studies*, 2009).

After the Arab Uprisings

A more careful analysis of what the scholarship provided could have contributed to modify in part EU's policies and approaches to the region. Policy-makers community have failed traditionally to take on board critical voices and scholarly findings (Teti 2012), but

criticism from academia influenced EU policies after the Uprisings. This is the case, for instance, for the Union's engagement with the Islamists, a move advocated by academics. Furthermore, policy-makers also recognise that economic liberalisation has not delivered the desired results, as neo-liberal reforms in authoritarian contexts are responsible for the rise in social conflicts across Arab countries (Hollis 2012). In addition, there is the realisation that liberal-democracy, so central to the EU model, no longer has the appeal it used to have because of the political and economic failures of recent years. All this contributed to make the debate about EU assistance to the region after the Uprisings more realistic about the possibilities for the promotion of stability. Actual practice might not have yet changed (Tömmel 2013), but the discourse at least has.

These powerful scholarly theoretical and empirical accomplishments should not obscure the weaknesses. Three significant shortcomings can be identified, and can be a useful starting point for a future research agenda. First, the theoretical debate about the true nature of the EU still informs too many studies on EU-MENA relations. While the debate contributed to wider discussions about EU foreign policy, it has become sterile. The prisings across the MENA have highlighted that it is no longer sufficient to question whether the EU is a normative, idealist or realist actor, as policy actions are far more complex and individual countries in the region differ in relation to geo-strategic importance, regimes, socio-economic institutions and resources. What is encouraging is that, increasingly, studies deal with individual countries rather than the region as a whole, or with a specific policy area. This development should be encouraged because it provides better empirical information and theoretical nuance.

The second shortcoming is the paucity of studies dealing with EU-GCC relations. Although some scholars attempted to engage with this (Nonneman 2006), it appears that there is a reluctance to study EU-GCC relations for a number of reasons. First, there is the issue of

the perceived impenetrability of European 'norms and values' in the Gulf. Thus, why focus on countries where it is clear that EU normativity does not play any role? Conversely, why concentrate on the Gulf States when it is clear that realism dominates the EU agenda? While this might indeed be true, it represents a throw-back to what the Arab Uprisings should have taught the EU, as there might be unintended reactions to specific challenges. Second, there is a tendency to look at the Gulf as a coherent whole rather than a number of distinct countries that have differences and rivalries. Thus, studies often ask whether and how the GCC might develop in some sort of EU rather than examining EU engagement with individual countries. Thirdly, the 'energy resources' aspect seems to prevent scholars from looking at factors and actors that have nothing to do with it. The Gulf is increasingly relevant to the power balance in the post-Uprisings MENA. Such growing influence is also relevant for the wider region, including an increasing in the Iran-GCC competition along with existing religious divisions.

Finally, the Arab Uprisings challenged a number of preconceptions about Arab politics and societies that experts of EU external relations should consider. What has found confirmation in Middle Eastern Studies is that the neo-liberal economic reforms have been rejected by the new social movements and political actors in the region, with implications for the EU and the relationship between neo-liberalism and democracy in the wider region (Rivetti 2013). Especially in the case of marginal political and social groups, contentious politics emerged precisely because of the failure of neo-liberalism. This has been a paradoxical outcome, as many studies are based on the assumption that market reforms would generate democracy. They have been proven ironically right for the wrong reason: demands for political pluralism have emerged where economic liberalism has spectacularly failed. Another significant factor highlighted by the Uprisings is the relevance of Islamist actors. Although scholars of the MENA had already advocated EU engagement with them, studies need to go beyond mainstream Islamist parties and violent groups to understand other forms of

religiously-oriented activism, including political and quietist Salafist groups. From a policy-making point of view, there is an acceptance that Islamists have to be part of the solution for regional stability and this is a positive outcome (Behr 2013). The EU engagement for democracy and human rights needs to be re-framed in a new discourse free from Orientalist biases.

Concluding remarks

The most significant contribution of EU-MENA scholarship has been to expose the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of democracy promotion. Today, both scholars and EU policy-makers are aware of the existence of such gap and it is time to begin reducing it. This also means that the scholarly community has to attempt to move beyond institutionalism and critically re-examine its fundamental assumptions. Indeed, the case of the EU-MENA relations in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings highlights that part of the assumptions of institutionalism are wrong because actual political and social dynamics might go beyond institutions' plans and expectations. Institutionalism rests on problematic assumptions also because, as this case demonstrates, there are few concrete efforts for policy coordination following statements of good-will on the part of single European countries.

Bibliography

Aoun, E. (2003). 'European foreign policy and the Arab-Israeli dispute: much Ado about nothing?' *European foreign affairs review*, 8: 289-312.

Aydin, M., and Acikmese, S. A. (2007). 'Europeanization through EU conditionality: understanding the new era in Turkish foreign policy'. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 9(3): 263-274.

Behr, T. (2013). 'EU Foreign Policy and Political Islam: Towards a New Entente in the Post-Arab Spring Era?' *The International Spectator*, 48(1): 20-33.

Bicchi, F. (2007). *European Foreign Policy Making Toward the Mediterranean,* (London: Palgrave).

Brach, J. (2007). 'The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: The Role and Impact of the Economic and Financial Dimension'. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 12(4): 555-579.

Cavatorta, F. (2009). *The international dimension of the failed Algerian transition: democracy betrayed?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

Cebeci, M. (2012). 'European Foreign Policy Research Reconsidered: Constructing an 'Ideal Power Europe' through Theory?'. *Millennium*, 40(3): 563-583.

Chari, R. and Cavatorta, F. (2003). 'The Iraq War: Killing Dreams of a Unified EU?'. *European Political Science (EPS)*, 3(1): 25-29.

Chomiak L. and Entelis, J. (2011). 'The making of North Africa's Intifadas'. *Middle East Report*, 41(259): 8-15.

Dandashly, A. (2012). 'European Integration Revisited—From the Founding Fathers to the Normative Power Europe.' *Journal of European Integration* 34(4): 419-426.

Del Sarto, R. (2007). 'Wording and Meaning (s): EU-Israeli Political Cooperation according to the ENP Action Plan'. *Mediterranean Politics*, 11(1): 59-74.

Dillman, B. (2002). 'International Markets and Partial Economic Reforms in North Africa: What Impact on Democratization?'. *Democratization*, 9(2): 63-86.

Echague, A. et al. (2011). 'Europe and the Arab uprisings: EU vision versus member state action'. *Mediterranean Politics*, 16(2): 329-335.

Fawcett, L. (2009). *International Relations of the Middle East*, (New York: Oxford University Press).

Gallina, A. (2007). 'From Security to Development: Migration Contribution to Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation'. *Mediterranean Journal of Human Rights*, 11(2): 283-313.

Harnisch, S. (2007). 'Minilateral Cooperation and Transatlantic Coalition-Building: The E3/EU-3 Iran Initiative'. *European Security*, 16(1): 1-27.

Holden, P. (2010). 'Developing Polyarchy? The European Union and Its Structural Policies for Middle Eastern Neighbours'. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 15(5): 589-609.

Hollis, R. (2012). 'No friend of democratization: Europe's role in the genesis of the 'Arab Spring'. *International Affairs*, 88(1), 81-94.

Hyde-Price, A. (2006). 'Normative power Europe: a realist critique'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(2): 217-234.

Kagan, R. (2002). 'The US-Europe Divide'. *The Washington Post*, May 26th, 3-28.

Khaliq, U. (2010). 'The European Union and the Middle East: Pragmatism, Post-normativity, and International Law'. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 15(5), 697-715.

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

Manners, I. (2002). 'Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms?', *Journal of common market studies*, 40(2), 235-258.

Menon A. (2011). 'European Defence Policy from Lisbon to Libya'. *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 53(3): 75-90.

Musu, C. (2010). *European Union policy towards the Arab-Israeli peace process: the quicksands of politics*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

Nonneman, G. (2006). 'EU-GCC Relations: Dynamics, patterns and perspectives', *The International Spectator*, 41 (3), 59-74

Pace M. (2009). 'Paradoxes and Contradictions in EU Democracy Promotion in the Mediterranean: The Limits of EU Normative Power'. *Democratization*, 16(1): 39-58.

Pace, M. (2007). 'The Construction of EU Normative Power'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 45(5), 1041-1064.

Pardo, R. (2012). 'Normal Power Europe: Non-Proliferation and the Normalization of EU's Foreign Policy.' *Journal of European Integration* 34 (1): 1-18.

Powel, B. (2009). 'A Clash of Norms: Normative Power and EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia'. *Democratization*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 193-214.

Rivetti, P. (2013). 'Democracy and Secularism in Iran: Lessons for the Arab Spring?'. *Mediterranean Politics*, 18(1): 125-132.

Seeberg, P. (2010). 'Union for the Mediterranean—Pragmatic Multilateralism and the Depoliticization of EU-Middle Eastern Relations'. *Middle East Critique*, 19(3): 287-302.

Silvestri, S. (2005). 'EU Relations with Islam in the Context of the EMP's Cultural Dialogue'. *Mediterranean Politics*, 10(3): 385-405.

Smith, M. (2003). 'The framing of European foreign and security policy: towards a post-modern policy framework?'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 10(4): 556-575.

Special Issue (2009) 'The foreign policies of the EU and the US in North Africa. Converging or diverging dynamics?'. *Journal of North African Studies*, 14(1).

Tertrais, B. (2005). 'The European union and nuclear non-proliferation: Does soft power work?'. *The International Spectator*, 40(3): 45-57.

Teti, A. (2012). 'The EU's First Response to the 'Arab Spring': A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity'. *Mediterranean Politics*, 17(3): 265-282.

Toje, A. (2005). 'The 2003 European Security Strategy: A Critical Appraisal'. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 10(2): 117-133.

Tömmel I. (2013). 'The New Neighborhood Policy of the EU: An Appropriate Response to the Arab Spring?'. *Democracy and Security*, 9(1-2): 19-39.

Youngs, R. (2006). *Europe and the Middle East*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner).