Vanda Amaro Dias*

A Critical Analysis of the EU's Response to the Arab Spring and its Implications for EU Security

Abstract

This paper aims at critically analyzing the European Union (EU)'s response to the so-called Arab Spring, focusing on the security dimension. The tumultuous events that have been taken place in the Southern Mediterranean since late 2010 were perceived in the EU as a serious security challenge to its foreign and neighbourhood policies. Recognizing the shortcomings of both the European Neighbouring Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean in contributing to peace and security in the region, the EU has adopted several measures – including a review of the European Neighbourhood Policy – acknowledging the need to offer more benefits to the EU's southern neighbours, and support the processes of political, economic and social transformation in the region. However, the EU's response to the events is often portrait in a seemingly erratic fashion, suggesting that the Union has to adopt a more coherent and pragmatic approach towards the region in order to assure peace and stability at its borders: the ultimate goal of its foreign and neighbourhood policies. In

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order to tackle these issues the paper uses a critical constructivist framework of analysis, focusing on discourses and practices, that enables a broader mapping and understanding of the EU's response to the Arab Spring. To do so, the paper starts by presenting the critical constructivist approach that frames the research. Secondly, it provides an overview of the EU's frameworks for relations with countries in the region prior to the Arab Spring. Thirdly, it explores the (perceived) impact of these events on EU security and critically analyses the EU's overall response to the events and its contribution to assure peace and stability at its borders. The paper finishes with some conclusions regarding the discussed topic.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Critical Constructivism, European Union, Security.

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A   Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the importance of the Southern Mediterranean for the EU's security has grown in scope and depth, especially in the political, economic and energetic fields. This was due to a number of factors, including Portugal's and Spain's membership in the Union in the mid-1980s and the rise of political and socio-economic crises in several countries in the south of the Mediterranean.[2] Notwithstanding, relations with the neighbourhood were always of pivotal importance to the EU's foreign and security policies. This follows from the belief that its security starts outside its borders and, thus, it is interested in promoting new frameworks for these countries to come into a gradual integration with the EU. The Union perceives "situations of poverty and under-development as security relevant because they potentially le[a]d to conflict"[3] and create insecurities that can easily affect its internal stability and the main (liberal) principles of the EU's identity. As a consequence, there is a widespread perception that the EU's most visible security challenges – from terrorism to irregular immigration – cannot be properly addressed without external action. Accordingly, the EU has externalized its internal security goals through various forms of foreign and neighbouring initiatives towards the southern vicinity, namely the EMP, the ENP and, more recently, the UfM. The goal is to bring the countries in this region into a gradual integration with the EU economy and boost political reforms to reduce

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[2]   Pace, Michelle, The Ugly Duckling of Europe: The Mediterranean in the Foreign Policy of the European Union, Journal of European Area Studies, 10 (2002) 2, 189-210, at 197.

[3]   Barnutz, Sebastian, The EU's logic of security: Politics through institutionalised discourses, European Security, 19 (2010) 3, 377-394, at 378.

socio-economic imbalances as a mean to reinforce European security.

However, the Arab Spring posed several challenges to the EU's approach southwards and its overall security. The poor economic development and social antagonisms that led to the uprisings in the MENA have soon transcended national systems and are affecting the political order and stability of the region as a whole. Within this broader framework this paper envisages to provide a critical reading of the EU's response to the so-called Arab Spring, focusing on the security dimension. The tumultuous events that have been taken place in the Southern Mediterranean since late 2010 were perceived in the EU as a serious security challenge to its foreign and neighbourhood policies. Recognizing the shortcomings of both the ENP and the UfM in contributing to regional peace and security, the EU has adopted several initiatives – including a review of the ENP – acknowledging the need to offer more benefits to its southern neighbours, and support the processes of political, economic and social transformation in the region. Nonetheless, the EU's responses to the events are often portrait in a seemingly erratic fashion, suggesting that the EU has to adopt a more coherent and pragmatic approach towards the region in order to assure peace and stability at its borders: the ultimate goal of its foreign and neighbourhood policies.

In order to tackle these issues the paper uses a critical constructivist framework of analysis, focusing on discourses and practices, that enables a broader mapping and understanding of the EU's responses to the Arab Spring. To do so the paper starts by presenting the critical constructivist approach that frames the research. Secondly, it provides an overview of the EU's frameworks for relations with countries in the region prior to the Arab Spring. Thirdly, it explores the (perceived) impact of these events on EU security and critically analyses the EU's

overall response to the events and its contribution to assure regional peace and stability. Although several players were involved in this process, for the sake of clarity and explanatory purposes, the paper will focus on initiatives and responses emanating essentially from inter-governmental and supranational levels. The paper finishes with some conclusions regarding the discussed topic.

B   Critical Constructivism: Framing the EU's Security Approach towards the Mediterranean

Critical Constructivism is a strand of Social Constructivism[4] inspired by post-modern authors such as Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard.[5] Although it shares with other variants of Social Constructivism the core assumption that the human world is an artifice, i.e. a social construction, it differs from them in what it assumed itself as an interpretative post-positivist approach. This is expressed by the fact that Critical Constructivism embarked on a double – sociological and linguistic – turn, whereas Conventional Social Constructivism often limited itself to a sociological turn embedded in a positivist

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[4]   Social Constructivism is a social theory applied to IR since the late 1980s. Inspired by the works of Berger and Luckman and Giddens, it advocates the world to be a social construction, while criticizing the material assumptions of traditional IR theory.

[5]   Fierke, Karin and Erik Jørgensen, Introduction, in: Fierke, Karin and Knut Erik Jørgensen (eds.), Constructing International Relations: the next generation, M. E. Sharpe, New York, 2001, 3-10, at 5.

epistemology.[6] Besides the sociological and linguistic turns, Critical Constructivism, one may argue, has also assumed a practical turn, in the sense that it understands the world as the result of "praxis". This focus on practice is helpful for it broadens the scope of analysis beyond text and meaning, interweaving the material and discursive worlds. As practices are understood to be both material and meaningful, it provides important avenues into the analysis of structure-agent interactions and the processes of change and transformation that underpin the social (constructed) realm.[7] Assuming its post-positivist ontology and epistemology, Critical Constructivism makes it possible to look at discourses and actions as social constructions, mirroring agents' power, understandings and interests,[8] therefore enabling a critical analysis of their practical outcomes.

This is deeply related to the fact that Critical Constructivism assumes relations to be time-evolving and mutually constitutive.[9] In this process, discourses perform a key role for it is the ability to communicate that makes it possible to socialise and imprint actions with meaning: diffusing perceptions of the "self" and the "other",

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[6]   Laffey, Mark and Jutta Weldes, Beyond Belief: Ideas and Symbolic Technologies in the Study of International Relations, European Journal of International Relations, 3 (1997) 2, 193-237, at 199-201.

[7]   Adler, Emanuel and Vincent Pouliot, International Practices, International Theory, 3 (2011) 1, 1-36, at 4-5.

[8]   Kratochwil, Friedrich, Constructivism as an Approach to Interdisciplinary Study, in: Fierke, Karin and Knud Erik Jørgensen (eds.), Constructing International Relations: the next generation, M. E. Sharpe, New York, 2001, 13-35, at 16-20.

[9]   Fierke, Karin, Critical Approaches to International Security, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007, at 171.

establishing relations of power and redefining interests.[10]
Accordingly, the idea of discursive practices comes as
central to Critical Constructivism for it perceives
discourses and practices to be intricately linked. On the
other hand, discourses are themselves structures
reflecting a hegemonic understanding of social reality and
they have a constitutive effect, disciplining and making
interaction and decision-making possible.[11] Therefore,
while not underestimating the role of structures in defining
agents' behaviour, Critical Constructivism allows the
possibility of transformation to be included into the
analysis of social reality by arguing that agents are
capable of changing structures.[12]

Overall, Critical Constructivism underlines the
endogenous and exogenous factors that inform the
process of decision-making and influence agent-structure
interactions.[13] Despite recognising the impact of
(discursive) structures on decision-making, structures are
not reified by this approach, but instead interpreted as
social, historical and discursive (and then changeable)

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[10]   Adler, Emanuel, Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in
         World Politics, European Journal of International Relations, 3
         (1997) 3, 319-363, at 332.
[11]   Simmerl, Georg, A Critical Constructivist Perspective on
         Global Multi-Level Governance, Discursive Struggles Among
         Multiple Actors in a Globalized Political Space, Unpublished
         Manuscript, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, 2011. Available at
         http://www.academia.edu/499659/A_Critical_Constructivist_P
         erspective_on_Global_Multi-Level_Governance (6 December
         2012).
[12]   Fierke, Karin, Critical Methodology and Constructivism, in:
         Fierke, Karin and Knud Erik Jørgensen (eds.), Constructing
         International Relations: the next generation, M. E. Sharpe,
         New York, 2001, 115-135, at 123.
[13]   Andreatta, Filippo, Theory and the European Union's
         International Relations, in: Hill, Christopher and Michael Smith
         (eds.), International Relations and the European Union,
         Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, 18-38, at 31.

constructions.[14] From the agent-structure interaction results in a process of social learning whose effects are felt not only in actors' identity formation but also on the perception of their interests.[15] What follows from this line of argument is the understanding of interests themselves as dynamic social constructions that evolve according to actors' perceptions.[16]

Following this logic, power and (in-)security are also seen as dynamic social constructions defined by and changing according to discourses, perceptions and interactions.[17] As a result, threats arise as the output of discursive practices and not as natural or pre-social elements.[18] Changes in (auto-)perceptions allow to track changes in actors' (in-)securities, as well as different dynamics in relations with other actors.[19] For what is more, Critical Constructivism conceives power as having a dimension of productiveness and possibility based on ideas and norms, that becomes meaningful through discursive practices and, thus, is to be found everywhere

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[14]   Copeland, Dale C., The constructivism challenge to structural realism: A review essay, in: Guzzini, Stefano and Anna Leander (eds.), Constructivism and International Relations: Alexander Wendt and his critics, Routledge, London, 2006, 1-20, at 7.

[15]   Checkel, Jeffrey T., Social Construction and Integration, Journal of European Public Policy, 6 (1999) 4, Special Issue, 545-560, at 548.

[16]   Guzzini, Stefano, Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations, European Journal of International Relations, 6 (2000) 2, 147-182, at 161-162.

[17]   Fierke, 2007, 6-7.

[18]   Zehfuss, Maja, Constructivism and identity: a dangerous liaison, in: Guzzini, Stefano and Anna Leander (eds.), Constructivism and International Relations: Wendt, Alexander, and his critics, Routledge, London, 2006, 93-117, at 97.

[19]   Bilgin, Pinar, Identity/Security, in: Burgess, John P. (ed.), The Routledge Handbook of New Security Studies, Routledge, London, 2010, 81-89, at 84-85.

else.[20] In this sense, one may argue, power becomes the imposition of one vision of the world, determining shared meanings that contribute to build actors' interests and discursive practices. The outcome is the ability to establish the rules of the game and persuade others to accept them, resulting in a hegemonic and asymmetrical social order.[21]

Methodologically, Critical Constructivism leans towards CDA. CDA sees discourse as social practices that imply a dialectical relationship between a specific discursive event and the social structures that frame that very same episode.[22] For CDA is mainly interested in the discursive aspects of power and asymmetrical relations it is vital to identify the broader social scenario within which these relationships take place, "who is interacting with whom or who is a source of concern for whom, and begin to piece together a map of identities and practices".[23] Once a detailed and systematic map of context has been provided, CDA enables a critical interpretation of the identified trends and patterns of behaviour. Here it is important to take into account that discourses are structures of signification, which construct social realities and binary oppositional relations of power where one member tends to be – or aims at being – privileged or hegemonic, thus creating asymmetrical relationships. In identifying and explaining these discourses we will be able to critically question and expose the practices they sustain, tackling dynamics that would otherwise remain

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[20]   Burke, Anthony, Postmodernism, in: Reus-Smit, Christian and Duncan Snidal (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of International Relations, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, 359-377, at 363.

[21]   Adler, 1997, 336.

[22]   Fairclough, Norman and Ruth Wodak, Critical discourse analysis, in: Van Dijk, Teun (ed.), Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Vol. 2, Sage, London, 1997, 258-84, at 258.

[23]   Fierke, 2001, 129.

invisible. The use of CDA under a Critical Constructivist reading of social events will allow us to analyse how the EU brings meaning to its identity, practices and interactions, therefore recognising the larger intersubjective context within which it acts, and to draw conclusions based on the analysis of the relationship between European discursive practices and their outcome.

This theoretical and methodological framework, when applied to the analysis of the EU's responses to the Arab Spring and the consequences for EU security, gives us the necessary tools to contextualize EU relations with the Southern Mediterranean. This mapping process further helps to shed light on the evolutionary patterns of this relationship and how it has been constituted since its inception. Furthermore, it opens important avenues into the analysis of how discourses have been (re-)defined throughout the years and the way they have influenced socialization between the two shores of the Mediterranean by projecting identity images, redefining interests and establishing (asymmetrical) relations of power. For discourses are indissolubly linked to power and practices, the paper will also be able to identify the endogenous and exogenous factors inherent to social interactions and the process of decision-making, while tracking changes in perceptions of (in-)security and the changes in words and deeds related to these very same perceptions. The result will be a critical analysis of the EU's approaches towards its southern vicinity and its responses to the Arab Spring, as well as their practical implications on security in the region and in the EU as a whole.

Bearing this in mind, the next section will track the development and evolution of EU policies towards its southern neighbourhood, focusing on the security dimension, whilst the final section will shed light on how the so-called Arab Spring was perceived by the EU by

analysing its response to the events and its overall implications for European security.

C   Contextualizing EU Relations with the Southern Neighbourhood

Relations with the neighbourhood were always of pivotal importance to the EU's foreign and security policies. This follows from the belief that the EU's security starts outside its borders and, thus, it is interested in promoting new frameworks for these countries to come into a gradual integration with its economic and political systems.[24] In the specific case of the southern vicinity, the EU's predecessor, the EC, started to design frameworks for relations with countries in the region in the 1960s. At that time the EC signed bilateral trade agreements with several countries in the MENA, which were followed by the adoption of a Global Mediterranean Policy and the signature of cooperation and association agreements with its southern neighbours in the mid-1970s.[25]

However, at this stage relations with the Southern Mediterranean were essentially bilateral and focusing on technical issues. It was only after the end of the Cold War when the EU developed a foreign policy dimension to deal with international and regional security challenges, which allowed the Union to broaden and deepen its neighbourhood policies and initiatives. Accordingly, the EU's interest in its vicinity was reinvigorated by the

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[24]   Dias, Vanda Amaro, The EU and Russia: Competing Discourses, Practices and Interests in the Shared Neighbourhood, Perspectives on European Politics and Society, 14 (2013) 2, 256-271, at 257.

[25]   Pace, 2002, 196-197.

development of several frameworks for relations with its southern and eastern neighbourhoods. Since then, EU relations with the Southern Mediterranean have become mainly security-driven. In fact, the EMP – institutionalized in 1995 –, the ENP and, more recently, the UfM allowed the EU to develop a wide-range of security-oriented regional policies and tools.[26] The agenda under these frameworks has often been dominated by issues concerning migration control, energy security and the fight against organized crime and terrorism. To achieve its security goals, the EU exports its model of liberal economics, democracy and human rights to its neighbours.[27] In practical terms this means that the EU uses a strategy based on positive conditionality and socialization, by which it offers a stance in its internal market and financial support to stimulate economic, political and social modernization.[28] In exchange, the Union expects the countries in its vicinity to come into a gradual harmonization with its political and economic models, and to take the reforms that best suit the EU's security interests.[29] Closely related to this security dimension is the identity projection of the Southern Mediterranean as the EU's dangerous and threatening

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[26]   Barrinha, André, Pressing the Reset Button in Euro-Mediterranean Security Relations?, Journal of Contemporary European Research, 9 (2013) 1, 203-214, at 204.

[27]   Hollis, Rosemary, No friend of democratization: Europe's role in the genesis of the 'Arab Spring', International Affairs, 88 (2012) 1, 81-94, at 81.

[28]   Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Wider Europe — Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours, COM (2003) 104 final, at 10-15.

[29]   Warwick, Armstrong, Introduction: Borders in an unequal world, in: Armstrong, Warwick and James Anderson (eds.), Geopolitics of European Union Enlargement: the fortress empire, Routledge, London, 2007, 1-8, at 5.

"other", a source of insecurity and instability that poses a challenge to European peace and prosperity. Although this identity construction is something that happens rather subtly, it is possible to identify discourses of "otherness" in several EU documents relating to its neighbourhood. In this regard, the ESS clearly states that "[n]eighbours who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organized crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe", thus it is the EU's task and responsibility "to promote a ring of well governed countries […] on the borders of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations".[30] This, of course, carries important power notions as it portrays the southern neighbourhood as a lesser and frantic region that ought to be civilized by the EU, namely through the adoption and acceptance of the liberal values and norms it represents and exports.[31]

In this context, the EMP envisaged to depart from the traditional pattern of bilateral relations with countries in the region in order to promote stability, security and prosperity at the EU's southern vicinity. For that purpose, it institutionalized relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean, which were supposed to evolve along three key complementary dimensions: 1) political and security; 2) economy and finances; and 3) social and cultural. Furthermore, these relations were based on a joint commitment to human rights and democracy enshrined in the 1995 Barcelona Declaration[32] and the

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[30]   European Council, European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World, Brussels, 12 December 2003.

[31]   Pace, 2002, 203-204.

[32]   Council of the European Union, Barcelona Declaration, adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of 27-28 November 1995. Available at

bilateral Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements. Through them, the EU developed a set of "partnership-based" instruments to foster political dialogue and provide democracy assistance based on conditionality and institutional socialization. Among these initiatives, the EU developed an assistance initiative for the region – MEDA – that was complemented by various programmes under the EIDHR.[33] From its inception, this partnership reflected the neo-liberal belief that economic growth and prosperity is the panacea to security related concerns. However, when analyzing its deliverables, the partnership fell short on expectations. Soon the EU adopted a securitized approach to the South, in which the reduction of irregular migration took top priority in the security agenda. This approach was embraced by political leaderships in the South that saw it as an opportunity to reinforce their authoritarian regimes with Brussels' support.[34] In order to pursue its security interests in the region, the EU has often turned a blind-eye on authoritarian regimes that systematically violated the very political freedoms and human rights that lay at the core of the European project.[35]

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[33]   http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/bd_en.pdf   (16 August 2013).

Van Hüllen, Vera, Europeanisation through Cooperation? EU Democracy Promotion in Morocco and Tunisia, West European Politics, 35 (2012) 1, 117-134, at 119.

[34]   Barrinha, 2013, 205.

[35]   The Libyan case is illustrative in demonstrating the development of close, security-oriented, relations between the EU member states and authoritarian regimes in the region. During the 2000s the Gaddafi regime become a kind of Europe's border guard through several agreements creating joint maritime patrols and providing surveillance apparatus for monitoring Libya's borders. These agreements were signed in total disregard of the political, socio-economic and human rights situation in the country, leading the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to condemn this policy for it undermined access to asylum in the EU for those trying to

This was due to the fact that authoritarianism in the region was perceived by European policy-makers as a bulwark against terrorism, fundamentalism and even as a means to contain migration.[36] Accordingly, democracy and human rights remained largely a rhetorical commitment without practical implementation, whilst the *status quo* in autocratic regimes was being preserved with the political connivance and economic support from Brussels.[37] As a result, not only did the EU contribute to the reproduction of the *status quo* in the region, but it ended up enabling further insecurity and instability in its southern vicinity.[38]

Nonetheless, the EMP contributed to establish a stability partnership that was fairly beneficial to both the EU and Southern Mediterranean regimes. Moreover, it stressed the strategic relevance of the region for stability and security in Europe, something that was reinforced in 2000 by the Common Strategy for the Mediterranean. This document stresses that a "prosperous, democratic, stable and secure region, with an open perspective towards Europe, is in the best interest of the EU and Europe as a whole".[39] It identifies the political, economic and social challenges faced by the region and promotes a political and security partnership between both margins of the

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escape from brutal repression in Libya. Bialasiewicz, Luiza, Borders, above all?, Political Geography, 30 (2011), 299-300, at 299.

[36] Balfour, Rose, The Arab Spring, the changing Mediterranean and the EU: tools as a substitute for strategy?, European Policy Centre Policy Brief, June 2011, 1-4, at 2.

[37] Dadush, Uri and Michelle Dunne, American and European Responses to the Arab Spring: What's the Big Idea? The Washington Quarterly, 34 (2011) 4, 131-145, at 131. Hollis, 2012, 81.

[38] Barrinha, 2013, 207.

[39] European Council, Common Strategy of the European Council of 19 June 2000 on the Mediterranean region, 2000/458/CFSP, OJL 183, 5-10, at 5.

Mediterranean to contribute to the creation of a common area of peace and stability.[40]

This trend was strengthened by the new western security discourse towards the region after 9/11,[41] as reflected in both the ESS and the ENP. The ESS, developed in 2003 and further reinforced in 2008,[42] recognized that the enlargement brought "the EU closer to troubled areas"[43] and the need to promote stability and good governance in the immediate EU neighbourhood.[44] The document also clearly acknowledges that "the internal and external aspects of security are indissolubly linked".[45] As a consequence, EU security interests cannot be untied from its overall approach to the neighbourhood.[46] Following this rationale, the ENP comes as a new framework for relations with the neighbourhood in the context of the EU's Eastern Enlargement. All in all, it aims at creating a "ring of friends" around the EU, "avoid[ing] new dividing lines in Europe", and "promot[ing] stability and prosperity" across the continent.[47] However, the ENP Strategy Paper strictly recognized that this policy "offers a means to reinforce relations between the EU and partner countries, which is distinct from the possibilities available

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[40]   European Council, 2000/458/CFSP, 5-6.

[41]   Barrinha, 2013, 205.

[42]   European Council, Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy – Providing Security in a Changing World, S407/08, Brussels, 11 December 2008.

[43]   European Council, 2003, 8.

[44]   Joenniemi, Pertti, Towards a European Union of Post-Security?, Cooperation and Conflict, 42 (2007) 1, 127-148, at 145.

[45]   European Council, 2003, 2.

[46]   Browning, Christopher S. and Pertti Joenniemi, Geostrategies of the European Neighbourhood Policy, European Journal of International Relations, 14 (2008) 3, 519-51, at 520.

[47]   COM (2003) 104 final, 44.

to European countries under Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union",[48] i.e., the membership process.

In this regard, both the ESS and the ENP represent a shift from passive to active engagement in the EU's neighbourhood[49] with clear security purposes, consolidating a trend that the EU had been developing since the end of the Cold War. To accomplish its socio-economic and political objectives the ENP has provided new policy mechanisms such as the ENPI and the Governance Facility Neighbourhood Investment Fund.[50]

The main political novelty of the ENP are, however, the Action Plans, which are based on (positive) conditionality and intended to frame the EU's relations with each one of its neighbouring partners.[51] In fact, conditionality performs a leading role in this process. While the EU offers a stance in its internal market and financial support to stimulate economic, political and social reforms, as well as security cooperation in the neighbourhood,[52] it also establishes a series of bilateral channels between the EU and each neighbour, where the latter is expected to accept European political and economic values.[53] This comes as a *sine qua non* condition for these countries to be acknowledged as part

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[48]   Communication from the Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper, COM (2004) 373 final, at 3.

[49]   Joenniemi, 2007, 145.

[50]   Andreev, Svetlozar A., The future of European neighbourhood policy and the role of regional cooperation in the Black Sea area, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 8 (2008) 2, 93-108, at 93.

[51]   COM (2003) 104 final, 16.

[52]   COM (2003) 104 final, 10-15.

[53]   Headley, James, Is Russia Out of Step with European Norms? Assessing Russia's Relationship to European Identity, Values and Norms Through the Issue of Self-Determination, Europe-Asia Studies, 64 (2012) 3, 427-47, at 428.

of the EU's "ring of friends", though it does not guarantee accession to the Union at any moment.[54] The overall security-oriented goal is to address the root causes of instability, crisis and conflict at the EU's borders, while creating a *cordon sanitaire* to keep perceived security threats – e.g. irregular migration, poverty and terrorism – from reaching the borders of the Union. Conditionality is, however, often combined with a socialization axis relying on social learning processes resulting from institutional and people-to-people contacts and aiming at creating a collective shared understanding of proper behaviour. The result is a structural foreign policy seeking to influence and transform the political, economic and social systems of the EU's neighbours,[55] a *sine qua non* condition to preserve EU's internal security. Nonetheless, in practice, socialization has not been extensively applied or has been restricted by domestic constraints,[56] lessening the EU's security achievements in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the political and financial offers on the table are much less appealing when compared to the Enlargement process and the costs of reforms promoted by the EU are too high, which, together with the lack of a membership perspective, diminishes the EU's transformative potential and decreases the likelihood of a successful strategy based on

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[54]   Joffé, George, Europe and Islam: Partnership or peripheral dependence?, in: Armstrong, Warwick and James Anderson (eds.), Geopolitics of European Union Enlargement: the fortress empire, Routledge, London, 2007, 90-106, at 97-98.

[55]   Emerson, Michael, Just Good Friends? The European Union's Multiple Neighbourhood Policies, The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs, 46 (2011a) 4, 45-62, at 56-57.

[56]   Boonstra, Jos and Natalia Shapovalova, The EU's Eastern Partnership: One year backwards, FRIDE, Working Paper 99, May 2010, 1-22, at 2.

socialization and conditionality.[57] As a result, the ENP failed to deliver real progress in forging a genuine partnership between the EU and its southern neighbourhood. Instead, it emerged as an instrument developed by Brussels to introduce tailored-made reforms to respond to its perceived security interests,[58] while preserving the *status quo* in the region. This failure propelled the EU to develop regional initiatives aimed at reinforcing its approach southwards.

To respond to this situation, the UfM was created in 2008, based on a French proposal[59] to revive relations with countries in the region. The two major goals of this new framework were to create enhanced institutions and a stronger focus on projects involving the EU and the Southern Mediterranean. This would be particularly relevant in the four priorities identified by the UfM: immigration control and management, environment protection, co-development promotion, and the fight against corruption, organized crime and terrorism. The ultimate purpose, thus, was to create a zone of peace security and prosperity shared by both banks of the Mediterranean. In that regard, the UfM established a bi-annual meeting of the heads of state and government intended to provide political guidance to this process. One important novelty was the introduction of a co-presidency system, by which the UfM is presided by both an EU and a

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[57]   Ágh, Attila, Regionalisation as a Driving Force of EU Widening: Recovering from the EU 'Carrot Crisis' in the 'East', Europe-Asia Studies, 62 (2010) 8, 1239-1266, at 1241.

[58]   Hollis, 2012, 87.

[59]   Relations with the Mediterranean have always been a diplomatic concern in French foreign policy. For more on France relations with countries in the region and its reactions to the events of the Arab Spring see e. g. Sarkozy, Jean-Robert Henry, The Mediterranean and the Arab Spring, Contemporary French and Francophone Studies, 16 (2012) 3, 405-415.

Southern Mediterranean state. This was aimed at changing the nature of relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean and introducing a more egalitarian tone to them. In order to overcome the weakness of the partnership dimension established by the Barcelona Process, the EU has also introduced the notion of co-ownership. However, this pretended equality is more nominal than substantial since it depends heavily on the distribution of political and economic power among the involved players, a balance that is highly favourable to the EU. Countries in the Southern Mediterranean have little bargaining chips to deal with the EU and the little leverage they can exercise is limited to the energy exporting countries in the region. The conditionality mechanisms associated with the UfM have been unilaterally decided by the EU, which along with a weak co-ownership sheds light on the asymmetrical nature of this relationship. Moreover, differences in world views and political options often turn the co-presidency system into an ineffective option to deal with relations between the EU and the Southern Mediterranean,[60] thus revealing the EU's inability to make use of its transformative power in the region.

Likewise, in practice and despite the intended Europeanization, this project was closely related to national security objectives. Together with lack of coherence and deficient implementation, the UfM has quickly lost credit, emerging as a security-driven project whose intention was never to turn the Mediterranean into a shared space along European values, but to secure the EU's borders. This is also related to the fact that the UfM did not imply a deeper reassessment of the EU's strategy towards the region. More than providing answers to the

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[60]   Balfour, Rosa, The Transformation of the Union for the Mediterranean, Mediterranean Politics, 14 (2009) 1, 99-105, at 100-104.

problems in the Mediterranean, it just added a further layer of goals and activities, or tried to reinforce the ones established by the EMP and the ENP.[61] That these frameworks delivered some progresses in EU-Southern Mediterranean relations had more to do with calculations of the political rulers in the region than the attractiveness of these initiatives or the EU's transformative capabilities.[62] The events of the Arab Spring intensified the crisis in Euro-Mediterranean relations and have dealt the UfM a final blow.[63] The next section analyses the EU's response to the events and how the review of existing frameworks for relations with its southern neighbourhood have been translated into practical terms.

D   The Arab Spring as a Challenge to EU Security and Neighbourhood Policies

The Arab Spring is commonly perceived in the West as a set of domestic developments in the MENA intended at bringing authoritarian regimes to an end and implementing democracies throughout the region. In this sense – and despite popular claims for freedom, dignity and justice, which are very much in line with the values the EU propagates in its foreign and neighbouring policies –,[64] the events were perceived by the EU as a security challenge, albeit an external one. However, this view does not take into consideration the strong anti-western feelings in the

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[61]   Balfour, 2009, 105.
[62]   Hollis, 2012, 86.
[63]   Henry, 2012, 409-410.
[64]   Hollis, 2012, 81.

region (revived by Western policies after 9/11),[65] nor the fact that the EU has failed to promote democracy and human rights in its southern neighbourhood. As a consequence, one may argue that not only has the Arab Spring a clear international dimension,[66] but that it also revealed the contradictions in EU policies and the lack of a coherent geopolitical approach towards the southern neighbourhood.

During the initial stage of the Arab Spring little has changed in the EU's security approach towards the region. In fact, reactions to the initial events in Tunisia and Egypt were strikingly slow,[67] divided and incoherent.[68] The Arab Spring made the stark contradictions of the EU's approach towards the southern vicinity and the lack of a coherent geopolitical vision for the neighbourhood visible.[69] Some of the early European responses to the events revealed the EU's connivance of authoritarian regimes in its southern neighbourhood. For instance, European governments offered Tunisia their expertise on crowd control, sold

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[65]   Aliboni, Roberto, The International Dimension of the Arab Spring, The International Spectator, Italian Journal of International Affairs, 46 (2011) 4, 5-9, at 6.

[66]   In fact, there are several international and regional players in the region that influenced the rise and development of the events commonly known as the Arab Spring. These include the United States and western powers, among which the EU is included, that have been pursuing their interests in the region since the Cold War. However, more recently regional powers such as Turkey and Russia have also been trying to play a meaningful role in the MENA and changed the course of events on the ground. Cf. Aliboni (2011), 5-9.

[67]   Echagüe, Ana and Hélène Michou/Barah Mikail, Europe and the Arab Uprisings: EU Vision versus Member State Action, Mediterranean Politics, 16 (2011) 2, 329-335, at 329.

[68]   Koenig, Nicole, The EU and the Libyan Crisis – In Quest of Coherence?, The International Spectator, Italian Journal of International Affairs, 46 (2011) 4, 11-30, at 12-13.

[69]   Bialasiewicz, 2011, 299.

weaponry to regimes that were violently repressing their own people and continued to work closely on security-related matters.[70] Moreover, as the events were unfolding, the first efforts of European member states focused on getting their people out of the region, while the fate of the populations and problems related to (South-South and South-North) irregular migration remained largely invisible from the EU's responses to the events.[71]

Nonetheless, the EU recognized the shortcomings of both the ENP and the UfM in bringing peace and security to the region and the double standards the EU has maintained with many of its neighbouring countries. Gradually, the EEAS became quicker and stricter on its condemnations of the acts perpetrated by the authoritarian regimes in the MENA, while the EU as a whole started to increasingly display a wide range of different tools to respond to the events. After several statements issuing the EU's concerns about the events of the so-called Arab Spring and its support for the transition processes,[72] it has shown flexibility in strengthening and adapting existing policies and using multilateral formats to support its engagement in the region.[73] Statements regarding the situation in Tunisia,[74] Egypt[75] and Libya[76] in 2011 were

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[70]   Barrinha, 2013, 208.
[71]   Bialasiewicz, 2011, 300.
[72]   Echagüe, Michou and Mikhail, 2011, 329-330.
[73]   Balfour, 2011, 1.
[74]   European Union, Joint statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle on the events on Tunisia, Brussels (14 January 2011), A 016/11. European Union, Joint statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle on the situation in Tunisia, Brussels (17 January 2011), A 018/11.
[75]   European Union, Statement by the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the events in Egypt, Brussels (27 January 2011), A 032/11. European Union, Remarks by the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the situation in

very similar in the regard that they expressed the EU's concern with the events on the ground and the use of violence against demonstrators, as well as its support to popular aspirations to democracy and freedom. In January 2011, the EEAS deployed a mission at the level of senior officials to Tunisia, in order to provide "political, legal, technical and material support to the democratic transition" in the country.[77] This included preparation of elections, investigation on corruption and support to the "legitimate aspirations of the Tunisian people".[78] This message was further reinforced by the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, in March 2011, expressing the EU's condemnation against the use of force against citizens, particularly in Libya. He also acknowledged the irreversible change taking place in the EU's southern vicinity and the strategic imperative of turning the events into a new beginning in EU-Southern Mediterranean relations.[79]

Of foremost importance, though, is the production of two communications by the EEAS and the Commission: "A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean"[80] in March 2011 and "A new

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	Egypt ahead of the Foreign Affairs Council, Brussels (31 January 2011), A 037/11. President of the European Council, Statement by Herman Van Rompuy on the situation in Egypt, Brussels (29 January 2011), PCE 020/11.
76	European Union, Declaration by the High Representative Catherine Ashton on behalf of the European Union on Libya, Brussels (23 February 2011), 6966/1/11 REV 1, PRESSE 36.
77	Afterwards, additional missions were deployed in Egypt and Jordan.
78	European Union, EEAS senior officials' mission to Tunisia, Brussels (26 January 2011), A 029/11.
79	President of the European Council, We want to turn this Arab Spring into a true new beginning, Brussels (10 March 2011), PCE 062/11.
80	European Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Communication to

response to a changing neighbourhood"[81] in May 2011. In both documents a stronger commitment to supporting political reforms leading to "deep democracies" is noticeable. They also represent a clear *mea culpa* on behalf of the EU, recognizing the double standards that imprinted its relations with its southern neighbours and its connivance with political repression and violation of human and civil rights in the region. In the same line of argument, the European Commissioner Stefan Füle clearly stated that the EU "has often focused too much on stability at the expense of other objectives and, more problematically, at the expense of our values". Accordingly, "the time to bring our interests in line with our values"[82] has come.

The Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity reinforces the fact that "the EU must not be a passive spectator" of the events in the region. Instead, it ought to support popular aspirations by sharing its own experience and expertise on democratic transitions. For there is a "shared interest in a democratic, stable, prosperous and peaceful Southern Mediterranean", this represents the time for a "qualitative step forward" in the

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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.

[81]   European Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Communication to the European Council, 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.

[82]   Füle, Štefan, Revolutionising the European Neighbourhood Policy in response to tougher Mediterranean revolutions, Round table discussion organised by Members of the European Parliament, 14 June 2011, SPEECH/11/436, Brussels.

relations between the EU and its southern neighbours.[83] This step forward comes as a response to the changing political landscape of the region and should be built on the basis of three key elements: democratic transformation, support to civil society and economic development. The document pinpoints the EU's immediate responses to the events, which included humanitarian aid, facilitation of consular cooperation and evacuation, FRONTEX joint operations, high-level visits by EU representatives to the region and support for democratic transitions and border management.[84] Furthermore, it identifies the fields where the EU is willing to adapt its approach towards the Mediterranean. Among those, particular attention is devoted to the need to review the ENP, move towards advanced status in Association Agreements with countries in the region and enhance political dialogue between both shores of the Mediterranean.[85]

The review of the ENP replicated the discourses on the need to "strengthen the partnership between the EU and the countries and societies of the neighbourhood: to build and consolidate healthy democracies, pursue sustainable economic growth and manage cross-border links".[86] Throughout the document an emphasis on the mutually beneficial nature of the EU's partnership with its neighbours is noticeable. The new approach promoted by the EU is supposed to be founded on the principles of differentiation, joint ownership, mutual accountability and shared commitment to the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.[87] It was meant to be based on "shared values" to bring democratic reforms and

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[83]   COM (2011) 200 final, 2.
[84]   COM (2011) 200 final, 3.
[85]   COM (2011) 200 final, 4.
[86]   COM (2011) 303 final, 1.
[87]   COM (2011) 303 final, 2.

strengthen cooperation with countries in the region.[88]
Moreover, the EU seems willing to become more involved
in the internal political systems of its southern neighbours
by providing a stronger support to governmental and non-
governmental actors. In this regard, the EU has promised
to shift away from business as usual to ensure that
support for human rights and democracy will be central to
its policy towards the southern neighbourhood. For this
purpose, the EU has created two new tools: a Civil Society
Facility and an Endowment for Democracy.[89] On aid and
investment, more money has been made available to
support reforms in the Southern Mediterranean and the
mandates of both the EIB and the EBRD were extended to
include projects in the region.[90]

Supplemented by a set of new policies directed at
the Mediterranean – such as the Dialogue for Migration,
Mobility and Security with the Southern Mediterranean
Countries, and the SPRING programme –, this renewed
approach towards the region offers new incentives to
those countries taking most progress. These include
money, market access and mobility partnerships: the "3
Ms". In practice, this means that the EU is willing to
provide more financial support to the countries
undertaking political reforms in line with European values.
Accordingly, the EU provided 4 billion EUR for the period
between 2011 and 2013 to support the southern
neighbourhood under the ENPI, which was to be
complemented by extra support from the EIB, the EBRD
and private sector investment.[91] On the market side, the
EU is negotiating Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade
Areas as a step to associate the southern neighbourhood
to the EU single market. Finally, the EU is taking a more

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[88]   Henry, 2012, 411.
[89]   Balfour, 2011, 2.
[90]   Emerson, 2011, 2.
[91]   COM (2011) 200 final, 12.

flexible approach to migration aimed at promoting a greater movement of skills and labour between both sides of the Mediterranean. However, concerns in European member states about the likely impact of migratory inflows have been hindering the evolution of negotiations on mobility partnerships between the EU and the MENA.[92] These incentives were seconded by a Task Force for the Southern Mediterranean established in June 2011 aimed at reinforcing the EU's response to the Arab Spring, promoting a clear view of the strategy defined for the region and improving the coherence of the EU's assistance to civil society, democracy-building and economic reconstruction.[93]

On an assessment of the deliverables of the renewed ENP made in 2013, the EU admits that many of the recommendations and challenges identified two years earlier are as valid today. Nevertheless, it is very optimistic in portraying EU financial aid and political support as closely related to the positive developments in the region, such as the successful holding of elections in Egypt, Algeria and Libya, the electoral reforms in preparation in Jordan and Lebanon, and the formation of new governments in most countries.[94] On the other hand, the most striking challenges and sources of concern are

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[92]   Dennison, Sun, The EU and North Africa after the Revolutions: A New Start or 'plus ça change'?, Mediterranean Politics, 18 (2013) 1, 123-128, at 123-125.

[93]   European Union, HR Catherine Ashton sets up Task Force for the Southern Mediterranean, Brussels (7 June 2011), A 226/11.

[94]   European Commission/High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, European Neighbourhood Policy: Working towards a Stronger Partnership, JOIN (2013) 4 final, at 16.

projected of being its neighbours' fault. The emphasis of the lack of structural reforms in the region, the rise of fiscal deficits and the growth of unemployment rates is illustrative of this trend.

However, when critically analyzing discourses of and by the EU it becomes clear that the initiatives and incentives offered under this renewed approach are once again more about EU security interests than a vibrant partnership between both shores of the Mediterranean. For instance, the mobility partnerships are about combating irregular migration and implement effective readmission and return policy, rather than "maximising the positive impact of migration on development".[95] Although the need to promote further democratization in the region is hardly contested among EU decision-makers, the initiatives and projects related to democracy assistance in the Southern Mediterranean reflect a "business-as-usual" and "more-of-the-same" rationale[96] for it represents little more than a repackaging of the existing frameworks for relations with the southern neighbourhood. Furthermore, these incentives might prove hard to deliver due to the current financial and economic crisis – that revealed the fragility of the liberal model the EU has sought to export to its neighbourhood[97] –, the EU member states' traditional protectionism of agricultural products and their reluctance towards migration from the South.[98] All in all, the EU's conditionality policy has still to provide credible and deliverable incentives and establish benchmarks in

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[95]   Emerson, Michael, Review of the Review – of the European Neighbourhood Policy, CEPS Commentary, June 2011 (b), 1-4, at 3.

[96]   Boserup, Rasmus Alenius and Fabrizio Tassinari, The Return of Arab Politics and Europe's Chance to Engage Anew, Mediterranean Politics, 17 (2012) 1, 97-103, at 101.

[97]   Hollis, 2012, 81.

[98]   Balfour, 2011, 3.

concrete measures aimed at supporting a bottom-up process of democratization that are attractive to receiving countries.

In addition, this renewed, albeit vague and unspecified in many regards, approach was severely damaged by the EU's failure in managing the migration flows from the Southern Mediterranean. This was clearly reflected on the suspension of the Schengen agreement by a number of Member States (including Italy, France and Denmark) as a mean to prevent instability on the southern shore of the Mediterranean from spilling into the Union. This comes as a striking contradiction with the identity projection of the EU as a "normative power" and a "force for good" relying on a set of common norms and values that are presumably valid internally and externally alike.[99] In this sense, the EU can be better understood as a "civilizing power"[100] imposing its vision of the world and establishing the rules of an asymmetrical relationship aimed at satisfying its security interests and reinforcing its foreign and regional power. As a consequence, not only did this attitude undermined the EU's attempt to put forward a common and coherent response to the events in the region, but it also turned the progresses made on migration and "mobility partnerships" onto shallow labels devoid of any real content or meaning.

Despite the seemingly rhetorical turn in the EU's political discourse, Brussels is still to change its neighbourhood paradigm. In fact, while the EU's proposals are more detailed than in the past and reflect a renewed concern with democracy promotion in the region, neither

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[99]   Manners, Ian, Normative Power Europe: A contradiction in terms?, Journal of Common Market Studies, 40 (2002) 2, 235-258.

[100]   Bicchi, Federica, 'Our size fits all': Normative power Europe and the Mediterranean, Journal of European Public Policy, 13 (2006) 2, 286-303, at 287.

their language nor their substance seems to differ fundamentally from the EU's approach towards the region prior to the Arab Spring.[101] Overall, fears of uncontrolled migration, terrorism and fundamentalism remain at the core of the EU's concerns when dealing with the Mediterranean. Furthermore, it remains based on an one-sided definition and understanding of the challenges both sides faces,[102] therefore not satisfactorily accommodating the perceptions and interests by the EU's southern neighbours. So far, conditions under the framework of EU relations with its southern neighbourhood reflect mostly the EU's interest and its vision on how the region should evolve. The new approach promoted by the EU not only uses the same jargon, but it also maintains the weaknesses of previous frameworks.[103] If the EU wants to be successful in its approach it should realize that conditions should be mutually agreed by Brussels, governments and civil-society in the region. All in all, conditionality must be a matter of dialogue and not of imposition from abroad.[104]

Another challenge relates to the fact that the EU has more to answer than its member states are willing to recognize. In that regard, the Arab Spring has revealed the shortcomings of the EU's foreign policies and the lack of a strong, coherent and consistent response to the events that take place at its borders.[105] The predominance of national interests and (in-)security perceptions, and the

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[101]   Boserup and Tassinari, 2012, 101.

[102]   Barrinha, 2013, 210.

[103]   Schumacher, Tobias, The EU and the Arab Spring: Between Spectatorship and Actorness, Insight Turkey, 13 (2011) 3, 107-119, at 109.

[104]   Oxfam, Power to the People? Reactions to the EU's response to the Arab Spring, Oxfam Briefing Note, November 2011, 1-19, 4.

[105]   Hollis, 2012, 81. Hüllen, 2011, 117.

preference for national solutions to the challenges arising from the Arab Spring, further undermine the EU's leverage and transformative potential in the region.[106] Despite appeals for a paradigm shift in the EU's relations with the Mediterranean voiced by European institutions, in practice national interests and perceptions continue to determine the terms of this relationship. In this context, migration issues figure among European governments' top concerns. The result is an "old wine in new bottles" approach that reproduces and perpetrates the widespread dissatisfaction towards the deliverables of the existing frameworks for relations with the southern vicinity and the deterioration of the political and socio-economic situation on the ground.[107]

One further factor the EU needs to bear in mind when defining its approach towards the region is that the Arab Spring means a shift away from the region's passive alliance with the West towards new regimes with their own agenda and regional interests. New governments in the region are increasingly resistant to comply with terms defined by external powers and are only willing to forge relationships that accommodate their own interests and visions of what these relations should encompass.[108] If the EU fails to realize this and engage in a more egalitarian mutually constituted approach towards the region, it may not only lose an opportunity to foster relations with its southern neighbours, but also may be in itself a source of

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[106]   Bialasiewicz, 2011, 299.
[107]   Balfour, 2009, 104.
[108]   Dennison, Susi and Anthony Dworkin, Europe and the Arab Revolutions: A new vision for democracy and human rights, European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief 41 (2011). Available at http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR41_HUMAN_RIGHTS_BRIEF_AW.pdf (21 August 2013).

new tensions with the potential to widen anti-western feelings at its borders.[109]

For what is more, the EU had been promoting and justifying its neighbouring policies on the grounds, that they create "shared prosperity", thereby improving the political and socio-economic situation in its vicinity. However, the lack of political freedom, gross disparities in wealth distribution and high unemployment were among the factors that triggered the uprisings in the MENA, therefore revealing the EU's inability to deliver stability and prosperity in its neighbourhood.[110] This has broader implications for the EU's security and its neighbourhood policies. By relying on an approach that (re-)produces asymmetrical relations in which the EU strives to impose its own world view and rules and persuade its partners to accept them, Brussels fails to acknowledge the changing nature of social relationships and the need to accommodate perceptions, interests and discourses of the "other". The projection of the EU as a superior part in this relationship and the Southern Mediterranean as its dangerous and threatening "other", together with a long tradition of self-interested security-oriented policies in the region, further undermines its transformative potential and ability to secure its borders and act as a security provider in the neighbourhood. In addition, the mismatch between words and deeds that lies at the core of the unease with which countries in the region perceive the EU's neighbouring policies diminish its leverage southwards. The outcome is that not only does the EU fail to achieve the ultimate goal of its security-driven foreign policies – assure peace and prosperity at its borders –, but it also risks being the one enabling further insecurity and instability in its vicinity.

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[109]   Aliboni, 2011, 9.
[110]   Hollis, 2012, 82.

E   Conclusion

Following the belief that security starts outside its borders, relations with the neighbourhood were always of pivotal importance to the EU's foreign and security policies. However, since the end of the Cold War, relations with the Southern Mediterranean gained a new strategic dimension and have grown in scope and depth, especially in the political, economic and energetic fields. In this context, the EU has become interested in promoting new frameworks for the countries in the region to come into a gradual integration with the EU economic and political systems, in order to reinforce European security.

Nonetheless, the Arab Spring posed several challenges to the EU's approach to its southern neighbourhood and its overall security. Following a theoretical framework based on Critical Constructivism and CDA, focusing on discourses and practices, this paper aimed at critically analysing the EU's response to the Arab Spring by providing a broad mapping and understanding of these responses and its implications to EU security. The analysis revealed that the EU's renewed approach southwards does not seem to differ significantly from the previous ones. Despite an apparent discursive turn acknowledging the EU's past mistakes and its double standards in relations with autocratic regimes in the region, a paradigmatic shift has still to take place. When read carefully the discourses and texts framing EU relations with the Southern Mediterranean since the Arab Spring, one realizes that the EU is reproducing the same jargon and perpetrating the weaknesses of previous frameworks. Security concerns, including migration issues, remain at the top of the EU's agenda towards its southern neighbourhood, therefore reflecting the EU's interests and its vision on how the region should evolve. The paper also demonstrated that this is due to a number of reasons,

including internal dynamics of the EU and the interplay among its member states and the institutions that shape its foreign and neighbouring policies, which contribute to the EU's incoherence, inconsistency and lack of effectiveness in responding to a changing environment at its borders.

Moreover, the EU's approach towards its southern vicinity still relies heavily on positive conditionality and socialization, because the EU wants to promote its norms and values beyond its borders and persuade them to take the reforms that best suit the EU's security interests. In practice, this projects the EU's superiority within this (asymmetrical) relationship, its attempt to establish the rules of the game and impose its vision of the world over the neighbourhood. The consequence is a structural foreign policy seeking to influence and transform the environment at its borders, which comes as a *sine qua non* condition for the EU's extension of power over the shared neighbourhood, in order to preserve its own peace and security.

Nonetheless, the EU's self-interested approach to the region is embedded in contradictions and lacks strategic vision. Before the Arab Spring it overlooked the values that lie at the core of the European project in order to benefit from security arrangements with the autocratic regimes in the Southern Mediterranean. As a consequence, it contributed to reproduce the *status quo* in the region by turning a blind-eye on blunt violations of political freedoms and human rights of the peoples of the MENA. In this regard, the EU not only failed to promote security in the region, but it ended up enabling further instability. The lack of a paradigmatic shift in EU-Southern Mediterranean relations has, nonetheless, broader implications for the EU's neighbouring policies and security. By reproducing asymmetrical relations of power favourable to the EU and projecting the MENA as its

threatening "other", Brussels fails to acknowledge the dynamic and changeable nature of social relationships. Together with the lacking accommodations of the EU's partners' interests and perceptions, this diminished its leverage and transformative potential in the region. As a result, the EU fails to achieve the central rationale of its foreign policies – assure peace and security at its borders –, and risks becoming itself a source of tension, insecurity and instability in the region and in the EU as a whole.

Ultimately, if the EU wants to be successful in influencing the events in its southern vicinity and assuring regional security, it will have to present more than "old wine in new wineskins" and engage in a strategic definition of its neighbouring policies, while recognizing that relations are a two-way process in which interests and perceptions of its partners have to be taken into consideration.