
The Revised European Neighbourhood Policy in the Mediterranean after the Arab Spring

The European Union's relations with its Mediterranean neighbours of North Africa and Middle East have gone through different phases over the last 25 years, swinging between an impetus of idealism and stages of pragmatic realism.

Ugo Gaudino

The end of the Cold War and of a bipolar order marked a shift in International Relations, with a new emphasis posed on multipolar regional schemes. The idea of regional cohesive blocks, united around common historical, geographical and institutional features, gained surprising momentum. The project of the *Euro-Mediterranean Partnership* launched in 1995, during the “Barcelona process”, has fallen short of its ambitious goals, namely the creation of a Mediterranean multilateral dialogue in three crucial fields – economy, security, culture¹. It is worth stressing that part of the agenda seemed to be too much wishful thinking for the period, given the difficulties to boost reforms in the short term: for instance, few achievements have been so far completed for the definition of a regional Free Trade Area (EU-MEFTA), which was

¹ {See Aliboni R. (eds.), *Partenariato nel Mediterraneo. Percezioni, politiche, istituzioni*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 1998, e Attinà F., Stavridis S. (eds.), *The Barcellona Process and Euro-Mediterranean Issues from Stuttgart to Marseille*, Giuffrè, Milano, 2001}.

expected within 2010. The establishment of an area of peace and security met only few hurdles, as all the actors involved in the process agreed on the agenda of Valencia EURO-MED conference of foreign ministers (2002)². The convergence of interests at stake in the security sector paved the way to the success of the meeting, whereas minor consensus has been expressed regarding economic and commercial domain.

All these obstacles resulted in a stalemate in the process of Euro-Mediterranean regionalization at the beginning of the last decade. The impasse encouraged EU institutions to carve out new instruments of partnerships. The *European Neighbourhood Policy* was conceptualized and launched in 2003 for two main reasons: 1) as an answer to the emerging challenges in the broad Mediterranean; 2) as an integration to the “great enlargement” of 2004, which extended EU membership to 10 new States, mostly in the former Soviet sphere of influence. The core strategy at the core of ENP was threefold, as the Communications of the Commission underlined³:

- I. To boost a deeper economic and commercial cooperation, moving beyond the horizon of a regional trade area and opting instead for bilateral trade agreements. The latter would be defined according to *Strategy Papers* tailored for each country and implemented through the financial

² {Mugnaini M., *Fasi e percorsi della politica UE verso l'area mediterranea: dalla Conferenza di Barcellona alla Union pour la Méditerranée*, in Beretta S., Mugnaini M. (a cura di), *Politica estera dell'Italia e dimensione mediterranea: storia, diplomazia, diritti*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2009, p. 199}.

³ {European Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, Brussels, COM (2003), 104 final; European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy strategy paper*, Brussels, COM (2004) 373}.

resources earmarked in the *European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument* (ENPI);

- II. To prevent the formation of an even larger gap vis-à-vis the new EU neighbours, both Eastern (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) and Southern (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine National Authority);
- III. To strengthen the security field through stricter controls at the external borders, prioritized in the aftermath of the jihadi terrorist attacks of 9/11. Part of literature⁴ contends that the ENP drew largely upon the *European Security Strategy* principles, issued in 2003. Accordingly, the external action of European Union in its eastern and especially in its southern border zone was security-driven, finalized at the protection of economic and commercial prerogatives and based on intensive patrolling and selective mobility.

Although the intention to sketch a homogeneous normative framework, the ENP was necessarily implemented with a variable geometry regarding the two macro-geographical areas and the same

⁴ {Hadfield A., *ENP and EMP. The Geopolitics of “Enlargement Lite”*, in Balzacq T. (eds.) - *The External Dimension of EU Justice and Home Affairs. Governance, Neighbours, Security*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2009, pp. 65-107. On the securitization of EU management of migration flows, see Bigo D., *Death in the Mediterranean Sea: The results of the three fields of action of European Union Border Controls*, in Jansen Y., Celikates R., De Bloois J. (eds.), *The Irregularization of Migration in Contemporary Europe: Detention, Deportation, Drowning*, Rowman & Littlefield, New York, 2015, pp. 55-70, and Campesi G., *Polizia della frontiera. Frontex e la produzione dello spazio europeo*, DeriveApprodi, Roma, 2015}.

countries belonging to each of them. This very diversity pursued the EU decision-makers to find a proper balance between declarations of norms and principles, on one hand, and a target-oriented approach more suitable for the single country, on the other⁵. The functional choice to privilege one sector or another depending on the context has sometimes resulted in a certain incoherence with EU core values (promotion of democratic values, respect of rule of law and human rights). The strategy of “positive conditionality” – a swap between financial incentives and gradual convergence with EU *acquis communautaire* – produced positive outcomes in sharing best practices in the public sector (security, economic, environment), which was extolled as a successful path by the theorists of “European external governance” and of “Europeanization” in the neighbourhood⁶. Nonetheless, the focus on regulatory and bureaucratic convergence was not followed by the EU willingness to break the ties with autocratic regimes still far away from the communitarian democratic standards⁷.

As far as the funds are concerned, it should be noticed that the differences between the ENPI and the previous instrument launched in Barcelona 1995 (the MEDA, for the Mediterranean

⁵ {Celata F. Coletti R., *Neighbourhood Policy and the Construction of the European External Borders*, Switzerland, Springer International Publishing, 2015, pp. 4-6}.

⁶ {Lavenex S., Schimmelfennig F., *EU rules beyond EU borders: theorizing external governance in European politics*, *Journal of European Public Policy* 16(6), 2009, 791–812; Schimmelfennig F., *Europeanization beyond Europe*, *Living Reviews in European Governance*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2012}.

⁷ {Del Sarto R., Schumacher T., *From EMP to ENP, What's at Stake with the European Neighbourhood Policy Towards the Southern Mediterranean?*, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2005, pp. 17-38, e Noutcheva G. (2015), *Institutional Governance of European Neighbourhood Policy in the Wake of the Arab Spring*, *Journal of European Integration*, 37 (1), pp. 19-36}.

partners) are very modest indeed⁸. Furthermore, 2/3 of the total amount of financial resources was earmarked for the Mediterranean countries, since the demographic clout was more than double than the Eastern partners⁹. The main sector granted with the majority of the funds is still “economic and development” (40% MEDA, 36% ENPI), whereas a slight inferior percentage has been assigned to “infrastructure” (22% MEDA, 20% ENPI) and to “social sectors” such as health and education (around 20% in both programs). In contrast, it is worth highlighting that these expenditures were significantly higher than the money earmarked for good governance and humanitarian issues.

Hence, if we want to read the ENP as part of the wider EU foreign actorness, some consequences might be elicited:

- Even if the EU tries to “speak with one voice”¹⁰, a concerning fragmentation looms behind every policy and strategy, owing to the cacophony of different bureaucratic voices (the DGs of the Commission, the Council, the EEAS) and to the perspectives of each member States;
- The ENP’s structure is heterogeneous because of the multiple sectors taken into account; however, overwhelming

⁸ {Cugusi B., *Lo strumento Europeo di Partenariato con i paesi vicini: un nuovo quadro di riferimento per gli attori italiani*, Working paper workshop: La politica di vicinato. Quali opportunità per l’Italia, Rome, 26 of February 2007}.

⁹ {Celata F. Coletti R., *Neighbourhood Policy and the Construction of the European External Borders*, op.cit., p. 55}.

efforts has been made to foster economic and commercial cooperation as well as to enhance security coordination, while the promotion of good governance and democratic reforms have been sorely marginalized;

- These matters of facts shape a European *soft power* which appears to be more “civilian”¹¹ rather than “normative”¹², as the aim to prompt free-trade principles and to gain access to international markets has so far dwarfed the idealistic horizon of exporting democratic values.

The year 2011 represented a turning point in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The launch of the *Revised European Neighbourhood Policy*¹³ embodied the attempt to overcome the distortions of the ENP and to rebalance the relations with the Southern partners in a less asymmetric shape. The fresh new start of ENP has to be linked to two influential dynamics, one endogenous and one exogenous to EU.

- I. The reforms brought about by the Lisbon Treaty, which set up the *European External Action Service* and granted new

¹⁰{da Conceição-Heldt, E., Meunier S., *Speaking with a Single Voice: Internal Cohesiveness and External Effectiveness of the EU in Global Governance*, Journal of European Public Policy, 21 (7), 2014, pp. 961–979}.

¹¹{Telò M., *Europe. A civilian power? European Union, Global Governance, World Order*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2006}.

¹²{Manners I., *Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms ?*, Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2002, pp. 235-258; Manners, I., Diez, T., *Reflecting on Normative Power Europe*, in Berenskoetter F., Williams M. J.(a cura di), *Power in World Politics*, Routledge, New York, 2007, pp. 173-188}.

¹³{European Commission, *A new response to a changing neighbourhood*, COM 2011, 303 final}.

leverage to the role of the *High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*;

- II. The outbreak of the Arab Spring and of the following regional turmoil, which was considered as the demonstration of European blindness and misunderstandings in front of the aspirations of local people¹⁴.

The chaotic uprisings blown out in some of the North African countries included in the ENP encouraged the EU to elaborate a counter-strategy undergirded by a twofold necessity: improve the benefits for democratization processes and bolster the security of the external borders – as it was previously stated in the *Internal Security Strategy* of 2010. After a couple of years, the outcome of the Revisited ENP partially belies the alleged will of EU to reshape the partnership on a more equal basis.

- In terms of democracy promotion, the introduction of a “negative conditionality” is worth stressing, since it completes the “more for more” disposition with a “less for less” principle. This conceptual shift prepares the EU to cut financial aid to those who stall or retrench on agreed reform plans. At the same time, the creation of a *Civil Society Facility* and of the *European Endowment for Democracy* was deemed as the sign of a further involvement of local NGOs and of the

actors of civil society, fostering a bottom-up approach¹⁵. Nevertheless, the old *Realpolitik* which lead the relations with autocratic regimes will be hardly abandoned, given the common security concerns about borders and migration flows, energy supply and the fight against violent extremism.

- Dealing with security issues, the Revised ENP follows the path traced by the previous policies. The apparent continuity emerges in relation to the management of migration flows and the stress upon the cooperation with neighbours in the joint patrolling of European external borders. The hopes for innovation ushered in by instruments such as the “mobility partnerships” and the new liberalization policies for visa are very selective indeed, since the channels for legal migration and the opportunities for development show all their limits¹⁶. All else being equal, it would be misleading to dub the EU as an “imperial power” which bear a hegemonic clout amongst the weak neighbourhood¹⁷. Some selected case studies on the deals between EU Member States and a third country government shed light on a situation of asymmetry in favour of the latter. For instance, when it came to the externalization of controls at the Libyan borders and to the

¹⁴ {Pace M., *The EU's interpretation of the 'Arab Uprisings': understanding the different visions about democratic change in EU-MENA relations*, Journal of Common Market Studies 52, no. 5, 2014, pp. 969–84}

¹⁵ {Bouris D., Schumacher T., *The Revised European Neighbourhood Policy. Continuity and Change in EU Foreign Policy*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2017, pp. 15-17}.

¹⁶ {Broczka S., Paulhart K., *EU mobility partnership: a smart instrument for the externalization of migration control*, Eur J Futures Res, 3:15, 2015, pp. 1-7}.

¹⁷ {Del Sarto R., *Normative Empire Europe: The European Union, its Borderlands and the Arab Spring*, Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 54, N. 2, 2016, p. 223}.

use of migrants as “foreign policy tool” championed by Khadafi¹⁸.

- Finally, in terms of economic and commercial trade, the external action of European policy-makers has been more concerted and less fragmented amongst the several DGs of the Commission (Trade, Development, ECFIN). Compared to the first tranche of ENPI budgetary fund (12 billion, 2007-2013), 18 billion have been earmarked for the 2014-2020. This amount goes together with the 350 million budget of the *SPRING Programme* of 2011-2012, launched in turn to support the democratic reforms in third countries. Financial aid is entangled and dependent on the neighbourhood countries’ efforts towards normative convergence with European standards, which some authors consider as a fundamental asymmetric bias¹⁹. Further, the neoliberal receipts do not automatically ensure the development of Mediterranean Third Countries, as the Barcelona process highlighted. Moving towards a *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area*, suggested to Morocco and Tunisia, would be likely to end up in a short-term failure, due to the urgent structural adjustments to their economies, despite the bright promises of the future. Moreover, only Algeria and Libya

¹⁸ {Paoletti E., Pastore F., *Sharing the dirty job on the Southern Front. Italian-Libyan Relations on Migration and their Impact on European Union*, International Migration Institute, IMI Working Papers Series, No. 29., 2010, p. 24}.

¹⁹ {Del Sarto R., *Normative Empire Europe: The European Union, its Borderlands and the Arab Spring*, op.cit., p. 226}.

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Coordinatore sezione Jus : Avv. Domenico Pone

among the Southern ENP countries have boasted a commercial surplus with the EU over the last years. Consequently, removing tariffs would undermine the competitiveness of Third Countries' goods in front of European ones. On the contrary, the EU would keep on excluding from the FTA all the agricultural and industrial products of sensible national interests. This caveat should be carefully scrutinized and put at least on the negotiation table together with the optimistic visions of those who hold that Third Countries will take huge advantages from FTA. In the short term, more benefits will likely occur in other trade and custom unions, such as the *Arab Maghreb Union*²⁰.

To sum up, the innovative contents of the Revised ENP seem to be full of rhetorical hopes rather than concrete facts. The EU main interests coincide with two main sectors, namely security of borders and regulatory convergence in support of free trade. This aligns with a certain asymmetry in the mutual partnership with the Southern neighbours, at least according to the version of some critical literature. In both the sectors, the chosen policies hide a pro-European side, visible in the selective “smart borders”, set up by the “mobility partnerships”, as well as in the trade agreements undergirded in European standards and best practices. In spite of this gap, it would be unfair to criticize *tout court* the EU institutions without bearing in mind the positive intentions and the potential advantages expected in the long term for all the partners.

²⁰ {Gasiorek M., *Introduction and summary*, in *The Arab Spring: Implications for Economic Integration*, Femise-CEPR, 2013, p. 8}

The ambiguity of EU rhetorical principles, however, raises several doubts around its international actorness and justifies the comments of those who take issue with its external governance, too much embedded in security-concerns and commercial interests and less normative-oriented. This longstanding dilemma wouldn't be an ideological short-circuit, if the EU had chosen a more pragmatic and disenchanting way to act in international affairs. The normative agenda so far expressed has fell short of its goals in front of the necessity to deal with the Mediterranean turmoil. A more correct narrative would instead underline the achievements of the EU as a "civilian power", interested in externalizing its economic and commercial model and the benefits of the Single Market – the richest free trade area in the world – and then, at a later stage, committed to endorse democratization process in Third Countries. The recent attempts to introduce a "less for less" conditionality might be read as a more effective strategy.

A proper balance between the European normative impetus and the self-centred promotion of economic and commercial interests can be found as well in the undeniable leadership in global environmental governance and in the policies to mitigate climate change. This domain is worthwhile in terms of core norms to be exported. Besides, the success registered in both European internal and external policies is remarkable²¹. The outcomes will prove to

²¹ {Baker S., *Environmental Values and climate change policy. Contrasting the European Union and the United States*, in Lucarelli S., Manners I. (eds.), *Values and principles in European Union foreign policy*, Routledge, New York, 2006; Wurzel R., Connelly J., *The European*

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useful and effective in the broad Mediterranean and as a tool of enhanced cooperation between the Northern and the Southern shores, with the shared purpose of tackling climate change harshest consequences in the area – droughts, floods, increasing desertification and degradation of the soil.

Union as a Leader in International Climate Change Politics, Routledge, New York, 2011; Adelle C., Biedenkopf K., Torney D. (eds.), *European Union External Environmental Policy. Rules, Regulation and Governance beyond border*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2018}.