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EU International Actorness in the Mediterranean: a 'Consistent Inconsistency'

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the international actorness of the European Union (EU) and in particular its (in)consistency. This will be done by analysing case-studies such as the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity (PfDSP), the application of EU sanctions and the EU relations with its neighbours. The paper is divided into three main parts. First, the initial response of the EU to the Arab Spring, the PfDSP in particular, will be investigated. Second, the EU (in)consistency will be analysed in the case of EU sanctions, which will be taken as an empirical case study to develop an insight into *how* the EU actorness is (in)consistent. For this reason, the analysis of the EU sanctions will be made by focusing on the model proposed by Brummer (Brummer: 2009). Third, the paper will highlight the relevance of the EU actorness and agency in its relation with the Mediterranean neighbours and its actors, considering EU criteria for choosing its partners, as it has been the case with the Islamist actors. In conclusion, the paper will argue and discuss possible solutions for the improvement of EU actorness and agency.

Keywords: EU actorness; inconsistency; sanctions; Arab Spring; neighbourhood

1. Introduction

The actorness of the European Union (EU) is to be analysed through two criteria, namely the ethics in norm diffusion and the actual practice of norm diffusion (which can be found in international law or in the principles of multilateralism). The EU has several instruments at its disposal in its normative power: political dialogue, clauses inserted in international agreements or outreach, and support activities in third countries. Yet, the EU does not use these instruments with the same effectiveness in all its policy domains, with some areas being more effective than others, thus lacking consistency. For example, they are used more effectively in the domain of policies against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction but not in policies of counterterrorism or when EU external action is more coercive than cooperative (e.g. EU relations with Iran). The inconsistencies in EU policies undermine the role of the EU as a normative power – which is therefore viewed as a non-effective normative actor in the international arena- and allows for much criticisms against the EU's normative approach as a default policy. More specifically, the EU is often more reactive than proactive and rarely takes effective and relevant initiatives. The EU is perceived as a weak force that does not act promptly and that reacts to events with decisions that do not seem to produce visible and immediate effects in light of long term objectives which are often hard to be defined and assessed. Hence, in light of this deficiency of the system, can the EU be considered as a real normative power? To address this question, the role of the EU as an international actor must be investigated and the analysis focused on the long- and short-term impact of EU normative approach in target third countries, i.e. in variegated and different geo-political contexts. Taking policy as a starting point of the analysis, it could be suggested

that two main stages should be followed by the EU to raise and improve its image as an actor whose role can be trusted.

First of all, the EU should work to construct a more comprehensive image of itself in the southern Mediterranean neighbourhood - and more generally worldwide - by making policies that are more coherent to the role of the EU as an effective normative power. Some coherence is necessary (albeit not sufficient) if the EU is to overcome the problems raised by the high degree of inconsistency in its policies, given that arguably this would make these policies more appealing also to the eyes of other actors that may be the recipient.

Secondly, the EU may pursue a *double strategy* by mixing long term and short-term policies. This, for example, has been the case with the situation of the Syrian civil war in 2014. The situation required short-term measures given the major human rights violation, sheer geopolitical interests, potential dangers and instabilities that the war caused, and which alone would have been sufficient to justify military involvement. The EU resorted to diplomatic isolation and sanctions against the Assad regime, these being short term actions that were pivotal to the long-term process of region building in post-crisis areas and that were in line with the EU normative power in the same way as long term actions are. By mixing both short and long-term approaches, the EU would continue to act as a normative power without limiting its actions unnecessarily (Kienzle, 2014).

One of the problems that hinders the improvement of EU actorness is rooted in the change of perspective and framing that its security policy underwent since the start of the century. This change of perspective originated in the domain of security policies and then *spilled over* other policy areas. If the security of a region

is taken into consideration, this security depends on both internal and external factors, where the former derive from the mechanisms of security cooperation over which (almost) all countries agree upon, while the latter derive from foreign relations and alliances (i.e. military, economic and political). Cooperation at regional level is achieved when the states of the region pursue co-management even in case of conflictual interests (Attinà, 2013). In the EU case, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is an enlightening example to show how security concretely works. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) - the ENP's predecessor – sought to achieve a Euro-Mediterranean cooperation which was hindered and eventually stopped when events like 9/11, the rise of global terrorism and illegal migration brought new elements on the table. When the 2004 EU enlargement was achieved, the ENP was adopted to overcome the failure of the EMP challenging what Schumacher calls the EU *narratives* (Schumacher, 2015). More specifically, the perspective of the EU towards Mediterranean countries changed and the building-process of a security partnership was halted. This stall is something that nowadays seems far from changing given that the terrorists' threats are on the top of the security agenda and that the *threat/risk narrative* is constantly influencing the related policy making.

This paper seeks to address the relevant literature pertaining to the EU's actorness, by highlighting the problems that research has observed as far as EU actorness and consistency is concerned, specifically as to how inconsistency hinders an effective policy making as well as the role and image of a reliable EU on the world stage. For this reason, the EU's relation with the Middle East after the Arab Spring will be analysed by focusing on the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity (PfDSP) as the first step that the EU decided to take in order to tackle the upcoming change in the region. i.e. The attention will then

be placed on the causes of inconsistency behind EU policy making by relying upon Brummer's (2009) inconsistency model. Finally, the last part will take into consideration the process that led to a change in EU narratives and the effects of this new perspective in terms of the inconsistencies that characterised the EU relation with the Mediterranean neighbours and the deficiency of EU actorness in the neighbourhood.

The conclusion will focus on the fact that the EU underwent a narrative change which is indeed a limit that can and must be surpassed. The empirical examples show that if the EU is to achieve real stability and security, a change in narrative is due. This, as will be further developed below, depends on the fact that the EU has the potential to create an environment of stability both in the neighbourhood and beyond. This potential though is hindered by the mistrust that the non-European actors have toward the Union resulting in the latter not being able to fully express its resources (social, economic and geopolitical). This is something that cannot be ignored in the process of promoting stable peace, security and prosperity.

2. The EU's actorness: Arab Spring, PfDSP and the EU answer

The case of the Arab Spring is one of the most relevant cases to study EU's actorness. The beginning of the Arab uprisings in 2011 marked the start of a high degree of regional change which has been putting under test EU's actorness ever since. For the EU, failing to address the issue effectively would have resulted in a serious economic crisis and likewise security issues.

The EU had to implement an external policy that had to be fine-tuned to address all the possible outcomes of the Arab Spring, be they positive or

negative. Moreover, the event required a prompt action and a short term strategy to address the immediate problem, as well as a long term strategy to create an effective plan for the post-uprisings emerging balance of power. Thus, a *double strategy* was needed. Should the uprisings succeed and result in democratisation, the EU has to be ready to use this window of opportunity and to play an active role in the region by supporting democratisation and region-building. If, on the other hand, the Arab spring failed, the EU had to be ready to have a highly effective security policy to face any migration waves of people running away from a destabilised region. Both best and worst-case scenarios had to be kept in mind when addressing the situation. The first step was therefore a crucial one which would have determined the pace and scope of EU's external action in the region as a whole.

The 2011 PfDSP was exactly this first step. The program that the PfDSP proposed was based on three main general principles related to three main issues, i.e. democracy, transition and delivery mechanisms. The principles beneath these elements are ‘the hope of a better life for the people of the region and for greater respect of human rights, pluralism, rule of law and social justice’; a ‘demand for political participation, dignity, freedom and employment opportunities’ and a (shared) ‘commitment to democracy, human rights, social justice, good governance and the rule of law’ (Teti, 2012).

The PfSDP document sees the building of democracy in the post-Arab Spring context as based on institution-building and reforms on the one hand, and the role of civil societies on the other. The document states that:

A thriving civil society can help uphold human rights and contribute to democracy building and good governance, playing an important role in checking government excesses. A range

of non-government (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) can provide much-needed support for the reforms (COM(2011) 200 final).

Hence, in the short term importance is given to civil societies as actors that can pave the way to the long term objective of reforms.

Pertaining to development, the short and long-term approaches of EU are even more manifest and ought to be highlighted. The PfSDP document puts the emphasis on the economic issue, and more particularly on the non-effectiveness of the pre-existing reforms, which resulted in low growth. The document says in this regard that:

The unrest in several Southern Mediterranean countries is clearly linked to economic weaknesses [...]. There is a need for the countries of the region to re-invigorate their economies to deliver sustainable and inclusive growth, development of poorer regions and job creation. Small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) have a critical role to play in job creation (COM(2011) 200 final, p. 7).

Thus, in the short term, the EU's action is framed as a question of 'acceleration and intensification of reforms' (Teti, 2012). The provisions that the document proposes are divided into short and long term. The short term provisions propose to accelerate the trade liberalisation agreements and the active bilateral negotiations on the liberalisation of trade in services (COM(2011) 200 final, p.9). The long-term provisions focus on conventional financial strategies for a sustainable support of small and medium enterprises, including educational training, systems and development of poorer regions (COM(2011) 200 final, p.2).

Finally, the delivery mechanisms that the PfSDP proposes are related to the problematic question of positive and negative conditionality. The former could be defined as a *more for more* approach where the support of the EU increases with the increase of reforms in partner countries. The latter is by contrast embodied by a *less for less* approach, where the EU can decide to reallocate- or even halt support- to third countries that stall on the agreed reform plans. The convoluted question here arises specifically with negative conditionality. The EU never really applied negative conditionality and has always opted for alternate ways to by-pass normative commitments. The EU has traditionally preferred to let the door of *ad hoc* decision making open to be less constrained by normative commitments and be able to act more freely. Yet, this is one of the main issues why EU actorness as a trustable normative power in the region has been highly debated and criticised (Teti, 2012).

This openness allowed third countries to choose those alternate ways to receive support from the EU instead of undergoing costly reform processes. This is clear also in initiatives such as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) (2008). The general statement behind the UfM was that the countries that agreed to the new partnership share the conviction that this initiative can play an important role in addressing common challenges facing the Euro-Mediterranean region [...] as well as promoting dialogue between cultures (UfM Paris Declaration (2008), p.8

This ambitious project was set to be the successor of the EMP's multilateral approach, which failed in light of the new challenges that the region had to face at the beginning of the century. The UfM cooperation was to be a format in which the new challenges could be addressed by both the EU and a wide range of actors - 43 countries were involved including EU members, EMP partners,

Arab League - through non-imposed projects. In line with a functionalist approach, the preferred areas for cooperation could be chosen by the single countries following what is more commonly known as *à la carte cooperation*. Moreover, according to the logic of *co-ownership*, not just the EU but also the other Arab countries had to allocate resources to the UfM. This change of perspective could be interpreted as a signal that the EU had understood the main weakness of the EMP, i.e. a univocal approach that saw the EU as the only dispenser of resources and projects.

Not even the UfM, though, was enough to face the greater challenges that the Arab Spring brought to the table. The *à la carte cooperation* concept was further developed into the approach of regional differentiation, which continued to be at the core of the revised ENP. The region-building process in the Middle East had already been abandoned before the Arab Spring (Bicchi, 2014) and the UfM was innovative in this sense because it did not attempt to create a new region but to stabilise the existing one. After the uprisings, regional destabilisation called for a new approach, with *more for more* coupled by *less for less* (negative conditionality). The EU decided to support neighbouring countries only in the case in which these committed to implement (costly) reforms. Depending on the type of reform chosen by the single neighbour, the EU would support that specific area and not another one. This actually led to *less of the same approach* because what the ENP demanded in order to receive support was often too much, with less funds being in fact disbursed than before (Bicchi, 2014). At this point, it is clear why the EU actorness was criticised and its effectiveness questioned. The EU's narrative as a *democracy and human rights promoter* was not much credible anymore.

3. The inconsistency model: the EU's sanctions as empirical cases of a deficient actorness

The definition of normative power of Europe 'focuses on processes of norm diffusion, by which the EU is perceived to be "living by example", and is bound by the rule of law and principles of democracy, human rights, order, and justice' (Ferreira, 2011). The critics that EU's actorness and EU's normative power receive stem either from the processes of norm diffusion or the 'living by the example' concept, which views the EU as a dispenser of ideals that are then bypassed, thus decreasing credibility. The first type of critics can be found in the analysis of American scholars who question the EU's alleged overreliance on soft power after 9/11 and the following wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. They view the cause of the non-effectiveness of the EU's policies as being related to the little focus being given to hard power and the excessive one being given to soft power. This does not consider the fact that what guides EU's policymaking and actorness is a different *narrative* than the American one. The frame is more a cosmopolitan one (Ferreira, 2011) which seeks to obtain prosperity and security by achieving stability in the neighbourhood, and more generally in third countries. This approach successfully notices the dependence of domestic security on foreign security. This is even truer in the case of the EU, who has to deal with a highly differentiated number of actors, both in the southern and the eastern neighbourhood. It could be argued that the geographical 'advantage' that the US has, allows to opt for a more *inside-out* approach without fearing any unexpectedly threatening *outside-in* repercussions which could destabilise the country. The US can freely choose the actors with which it wants to interact on the other side of the Atlantic and which actors to ignore. The EU cannot do that and must deal with all actors in a way that guarantees the safeguard and the stability of the region. Initiatives like the EMP,

the UfM and the ENP are examples of this attitude. The EU must develop tune policies able to cope with both short term and long term repercussions, and at the same time it must consider the best and the worst-case scenarios. This means on the one hand the possibility of building a region which comprehends the highest amount of actors, and on the other hand the management of different and multiple threats, ranging from illegal migration to human trafficking or even terrorism.

The second criticism regards the EU as not being coherent and not 'living by example'. To assess this matter, the empirical case of the sanctions enforced by the EU is taken into account. Brummer argues that the values with which the EU policies (and more specifically sanctions) are made are often by-passed in favour of security and economic interests, which contradict those very same guiding-lines (Brummer, 2009). The values that the sanctions should protect are taken from the UN Charter and from the CFSP. The EU guiding values for the CFSP are taken from the Treaty of the European Union, article 11, but they can also be found in more general terms in the 'Basic Principles on the Use of Restrictive Measures (Sanctions)' (Council document 10198/1/04).

The choice to pass legislation on the EU level instead of the national level leads to a more coherent application of the legislation without the risk of friction between the different interpretations, framing and *narratives* that each EU member state may adopt. The basic principles (Basic Principles on the Use of Restrictive Measures(Sanctions) [Council document 10198/1/04 Rev 1], 2004) explicitly point out to this interconnection between EU and UN as stated in points 1, 2, 5 and 10 which assert that the Council will 'continuously support the UN and the implementation of the UN Charter'; will 'ensure full, effective and timely implementation by the European Union of measures agreed by the

UN Security Council'. Similarly, 'the Council is committed to using sanctions [...] and could even involve, as a last resort, the use of coercive measures in accordance with the UN Charter'; 'the European Union [...] will work to further develop the instrument of sanctions [...] and to improve their implementation, both internally and within the UN'. Against this background, Brummer recognises three main inconsistencies in the EU's imposition of sanctions: the *selection* of countries against which sanctions are imposed; the *triggers* for autonomous European sanctions and the use of *exemptions*.

The first inconsistency is that of the selection of the countries eligible to be sanctioned. The guiding lines in this sense should be taken from the previously mentioned values, but Brummer shows how not all the countries worth of a sanction are eventually actually sanctioned (Brummer, 2009: 198).

What emerges is that the EU is more inclined to use sanctions to foster democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, whereas it devotes less attention to the sanctions for the preservation of peace and security against those states who wage violent conflicts (Brummer, 2009). Libya is a glaring example in this sense.

In 2004, Ghaddafi renounced to the project of starting a nuclear weapon programme and Libya became an important partner for many European countries such as Italy, France and UK. When the Arab Spring started in 2011, the EU was cautious and did not take a firm position against Ghaddafi, with the consequence that not only military intervention but also sanctions were excluded (with the exception of Germany who was pushing for sanctions against Libya since the beginning). The EU was split even more when the strategy for an intervention in Libya entered the agenda. On the one hand, the

president of the European Council wanted the intervention to change regime (Fabbrini, 2014: 184), while the HR/VP Catherine Ashton was asking for a less direct strategy because of the diverging interests of the member states in North Africa. Interventions were delayed until the forces of Ghaddafi took the upper hand by conquering Benghazi. French president Sarkozy sent the French air force to strike Ghaddafi's army in the name of R2P after the emergency meeting of 20 March 2011 between Paris, European leaders, US representatives, UN and representatives of the Arab countries (Fabbrini, 2014).

The second inconsistency is related to the triggers for autonomous European sanctions. The EU can trigger sanctions partially depending on the resolutions that the UN Security Council (UNSC) decides to adopt. Brummer (2009) argues that the instances of sanctions against Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia depend on those UNSC's resolutions justified through the frame of the sanctions against threats to security. Whereas the UNSC cannot sanction for democratic wrongdoing, yet it can allow the EU to act autonomously in some cases. Thus, the EU can either choose to work to make more effective the UNSC sanctions by adding measures, or it could impose sanctions independently from the UN. In examples like Lebanon and Côte d'Ivoire the EU did not impose any autonomous sanction despite the lack of liberties and human rights. To push the EU in this sense, the UN had to intervene directly by framing the problem as a security issue and bringing the EU to take action. In cases like Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe the EU did impose autonomous sanctions because of violation of the values of the EU. Sanctions in Uzbekistan were enforced after the 2005 Andijan massacre where Uzbek Interior Ministry and National Security Service troops fired into a crowd of protesters in Andijan. In Zimbabwe, the sanctions were not enforced because of a specific violent

conflict, but because of liberty abuses and little economic and democratic transformations. In both cases, we find violation of human rights that led the EU to act (Brummer, 2009). In Brummer's work, and more specifically looking at the group of countries that Freedom House deemed as deficient in their political rights, the attention is put on the countries that received sanctions from the EU. The answer as to why Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe figure among the sanctioned countries while others like Tunisia are not is to be found in the interests that the EU has with some countries and not with others. The values of the CFSP should have led to the adoption of sanctions against the Ben Ali's regime, yet this did not happen for economic reasons. Mouhib says in this regard:

'In the Maghreb, the EU's democracy promotion appears to display two kinds of behaviours: active promotion, with the launching of programmes and projects devoted to democracy and human rights, and a much more restrained position, where the EU almost seems to have given up any democratization goal' (Mouhib, 2014).

Thus, it can be said that the EU does indeed decide in which cases sanctions can or cannot be triggered depending on the kind of interests with third countries. This is surely the main reason why the EU's actorness is being criticised by the international community. Yet, to have a fuller picture the third type of inconsistency must be taken into account.

The third inconsistency is linked to exemptions, which can be defined as voluntary inconsistencies applied to diminish the detrimental effects that may be brought about by the indiscriminate application of sanctions to all countries that violate key values. This is something that characterises all sanction-enforcing in the international arena, and this is done to diminish and avoid the

detrimental effects that a sanction against a third country may cause. The exemption, may also be used to foster new relations. The problem arises when sanctions are enforced to promote particular interests of the EU member states. In this regard, Brummer (2009) mentions the EU-Africa summit of 2007. In this empirical case some frictions in the EU were raised because of the question of whether Zimbabwe president Mugabe had to be invited to the summit or not. From a political point of view, there was no hope of initiating a talk on human rights and democratisation with Mugabe, but some heads of state of the African Union (AU) threatened to boycott the summit should not they be invited. In the end, President Mugabe was invited on condition that chancellor Merkel was allowed to deliver a speech on human rights violation.

The speech did not produce any real positive effect and Mugabe did not show any active interest in the questions raised. The Britain Prime Minister Gordon Brown meanwhile, decided not to attend the summit because of Mugabe's presence. This shows that even if the EU firm position against Mugabe's invitation was shared, the fact that the other side (the AU) would have hindered the summit (leading to far greater problems than the mere presence of Mugabe) made the EU's common decision worthless. Thus, a third case in which the EU may be inconsistent is the one in which it is forced not to apply decisions consistent with its basic principles and values because of external factors. The final question in this regard is the same raised by Brummer, namely

Is there a way out? chances are that the EU's sanctions policy will continue to oscillate uneasily between interests, norms and values – with interests trumping norms and values when push comes to shove. Moreover, as long as single elements of the EU's foreign and security policy are ripe with inconsistencies, there is also little hope of becoming a true normative power (Brummer, 2009).

4. The EU's *narrative* change: the beginning of the end of the EU's relevant actorness with the MENA countries

The European answer to the start of the Arab-Israeli war (which after the peace deal with Jordan and Egypt became a more localized, Palestinian-Israeli conflict), following the 1948 Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, was subject to the interests of the whole international community. The reasons were mainly two: security on the one hand and democracy and human rights on the other. These two driving forces could be defined as the two main *narratives* that after WWII were guiding the framing of decision-making. Between these two *narratives* the focus on human rights was the one that gained more importance after the rapprochement of the 1990s. The first Intifada of 1987, in fact, was followed by the Oslo agreements that led respectively to the recognition of the State of Israel by the Palestinians and the recognition by Israel of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the representative of the Palestinian people. The political environment was filled with positivity and this led the EU to put forward a project of multilateral cooperation that could have resulted in the building of a stable and prosperous unified region. This project was the EMP. The focus on human rights and democracy, though, faded in light of a reignited conflict in Israel with the 2000 second Intifada, and the threats of terrorism and illegal migration led to a change in *narrative* toward a focus on security, or *Threat/Risk narrative* (Schumacher, 2015). The problems that in the 1990s were framed as democracy and human rights issues were now starting to be framed as security issues. Europe diminished its interests in engaging Islamist forces in North Africa, and more generally with the Islamic world. Suffice it to say that the European initiative of 'engaging with the Islamic

world' was later integrated in the counterterrorism unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Kausch and Young's, 2009). The predicaments of promoting - and not imposing - change and of building multilateral partnerships were exchanged with predicaments of security, *à la carte* cooperation (as is the case with the UfM) and differentiated integration (as is the case of the ENP).

Hence, the focus of the EU has shifted towards an exclusive security, which aims to protect the region from external threats. With the increasing threats posed by terrorism the EU's engagement with Islamic political movements in North Africa has slowed down to such a degree that it could be considered halted. Arguably, this closure toward Islamic political movements also closes the door to a greater consensus in the Middle East. The main issue of this approach is the following: the differentiated approach often leads to engagements with the single countries, something which do result in some financial and economic benefits. These engagements though are more limited to North Africa and are not such for the Middle Eastern countries. As Kausch and Youngs highlight in fact

The 'Mediterranean' basis of European relations with North Africa looks increasingly at odds with the political dynamics of the broader Middle Eastern region. While Gulf states' presence in the region is increasingly noted, the EU still declines to link North African policy into broader Middle East development initiatives (Kausch and Youngs, 2009).

For the good or for the bad, Islamists represent the main actor as far as social and economic change in the Middle East and North Africa are concerned, but these actors are left aside because of the EU's security approach. This is at the basis of the *selection* inconsistency, which leads the EU to actively engage with

some Islamist organisations and not with others. In Morocco the Justice and Development Party has regular contacts with the EU (Kausch and Youngs, 2009: 968), who in some cases even keeps contact, through the embassies and diplomats, with non-violent Islamist movements (like with the Justice and Charity organisation). In Algeria and Egypt the contact with Islamic movements is sporadic and pretty much non-existent, yet in Egypt the EU decided to keep a high level of contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood. In Tunisia contacts with Islamic actors have been very limited, and they only took place in the case of Islamist movements localised in Europe and which were out of the scope of the Arab security services' control before 2011. This type of approach is not only failing to address radicalisation, but it is also keeping off the possibility to have a more comprehensive approach with these countries. In fact, in the areas where the levels of poverty are higher, the radical Islamist movement represents a form of hope for those people who have to choose between starvation on the one hand, or the promise of stability that the radical movement offers on the other. This is most clear when viewing what ISIS offers to whosoever wants to join them, namely a high salary, a house, wives and the social dignity that is due to jihadi fighters in the Islamic context. The ideal of a positive spill-over seems nowadays farther than ever.

The inconsistency (and inadequacy) of the EU's relation with the Islamist movements represent one of the main limits that the current EU's *narrative* is imposing on positive and effective region-building and peace-building processes. As some have already highlighted, it is impossible to have an effective relation with North African (and Middle Eastern) countries without adding the Islamic factor and movements to the stew (see, for instance, Pahwa, 2013; Haynes, 2013; Donker, 2013).

The political actors with which the EU interacts, in this context, can be categorised into secular or religious actors. The first group, of course, has always been interacting with the EU because of the higher amount of shared values that secularisation brings with it; the relationship with this type of actors has always been present and the higher/lower amount of active relationship has been depending on interests. The religious actors, on the other hand, are only interacted with if they show a willingness to accept the values and reforms that the EU considers pivotal to start a relation; if these actors do not represent a threat to the EU; and if the EU views a possible relation as an investment that could bring more benefit. This last point in particular deserves attention as it is arguably the reason why the EU interacts inconsistently by deciding with which countries to interact and when to trigger support procedures such as investments and the likes. The EU's decision on whether to promote democracy in the region or not depends on two questions: 'should the EU promote democracy in the region?' and 'can the EU promote democracy in the region?'. Moreover, it must be recalled that democracy promoters usually have a conception of democracy that is different from that of the target societies. The way in which democracy is understood by the EU changes depending on interests and the way it interprets the situation of a target country (Pace, 2014).

This inconsistency should not be taken lightly because the policies that result from it might cause negative effects in the long run. The fact that the Arab uprisings could be considered as failure, save some exceptions (Tunisia), is to be traced back to the failure to which the (inconsistent) EU policies have dealt with MENA (Middle East and North Africa) countries. An interesting insight is given by scholars such as Cavatorta and Rivetti (2014) who point out to the fact that the weakness that characterises the EU's actorness and relation with the MENA countries is to be linked to an excessive focus on the institutionalist

approach. They argue that the excessive focus on institutions is what leads the EU to make wrong and inconsistent choices. This inconsistency is what they define as ‘the contradiction between the EU’s unethical realist goals and its normative rhetoric’. They address the failure of the EMP and ENP, but it could be argued that this is also behind the failure of EU’s actorness and EU’s response to the Arab Spring. They add that:

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 (Cavatorta and Rivetti, 2014).

Conclusion

According to this analysis, the answer to whether the EU is a reliable actor would most likely be a ‘no’. Yet, more must be said. It would be more correct to say that the EU has the potential to be a reliable actor, because of instruments such as EMP, ENP, UfM and PfDSP. These instruments involved a large number of actors both from the EU and the neighbourhood. This was actually possible only because the EU came to be perceived as an actor with a relevant agency in the region. As already shown, article 11 of the TEU states that the EU aims to ‘safeguard the common values, fundamental interests, independence and integrity of the Union in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter’ (Treaty on European Union, Article 11, Point A:1). Hence, it could be argued that the root of EU inconsistency lies in an excessive focus on ‘fundamental interests’ (see, for instance, Brummer, 2009, and Pace,

2014). At the moment, the EU chooses when to intervene and in which way, depending on the interests at stake. This is not something that should be criticised, as it is the nature of all political entities. What can be pointed out though, is that when this *selection* of interests takes place at the expense of a third country or at the expense of EU coherency, then this *selection* damages the image of the EU itself. This in turn leads to a diminished agency in the region and to the reluctance of the neighbouring actors to relate with the EU. Arguably, what the EU may need to resolve this issue is to develop a more ethical approach to policy making. As Kohlberg highlighted ‘a higher or later stage of moral judgement is *objectively* preferable to or more adequate than an earlier stage of judgement according to certain *moral* criteria. [...] these criteria of adequacy are those central to judgement at our most advanced stage’ (Kohlberg, 1973: 630). To put it differently, judgements are more effective when made with a higher degree of morality and sense of ethics.

In conclusion, the two areas in which the EU must work are those of the (re)construction of its image as a reliable and consistent actor in the Mediterranean on the one hand, and the adoption of policies which keep in mind both the short term and the long term results on the other. More specifically, the EU should develop an active presence in the neighbourhood with immediate concrete results and it should make sure that long term results go beyond short term interest related policymaking. All this, of course, should be accompanied with more consistency (Kienzle, 2014) and possibly a higher degree of *moral judgement*.

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