



NEAR EAST BULLETIN
No. 01/2021

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR: TWO CHEERS FOR THE BARCELONA PROCESS AT 26: STEPPING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

The year 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process, and a flurry of statements were released to celebrate its achievements from its inception in 1995 on a premise to strengthen the relations between countries on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

The years that followed the signing of the Barcelona Declaration saw numerous institutions and a collection of actions, but also various lapses which led to the founding of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), a broad inter-governmental framework with 43 member countries, to “inject a renewed political momentum into Euro-Mediterranean relations”.



Dr. Mustafa Çıraklı

Asst. Prof. of International Relations
Director, Near East Institute

In the meantime, the European Union’s European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched in 2004 to help the EU support and foster stability, security, and prosperity in its closest neighbourhood. To bring some clarity into its priorities regarding the ENP but also the Mediterranean region, the Commission at the time, noted that “[t]he ENP and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership are mutually reinforcing, [however] the bilateral frameworks of the ENP are better suited to promoting internal reforms, while the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation framework provides the regional context”.

This emphasis on internal reforms stemmed from the EU’s intention to induce the partner states to engage in policy reforms that were to a degree modelled on the *acquis communautaire* or derived some inspiration from it. For some, this would also strengthen democratic norms without demanding full compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria,

But stimulating political reforms in the Mediterranean has not been an easy task for the

region continues to face immense challenges: conflicts, geopolitical competition and external interference, migration, terrorism, and climate, in addition to governance and corruption. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis has put further pressure on the region and fundamentally questioned the process of regional integration, with the enforcement of lockdowns, mobility restrictions and the overall disruption to the domestic infrastructures.

This fact was also highlighted in the bitter assessment of the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in their recent Communication on a new programme for the Mediterranean, published in July 2021. The so-called new Agenda for the Mediterranean includes a dedicated Economic and Investment Plan to spur the long-term socio-economic recovery in the Southern Mediterranean. Under the new EU's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), up to €7 billion for the period 2021-2027 is set to be allocated to its implementation, which is expected to mobilise up to €30 billion in private and public investment in the region in the next decade.¹

As the EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi further elaborated: “with the Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood we are presenting a new beginning in our relations with our Southern partners. Based

on common interests and common challenges; developed together with our neighbours. It shows that Europe wants to contribute directly to a long-term vision of prosperity and stability of the region, especially in the social and economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. In close dialogue with our partners, we have identified a number of priority sectors, from creating growth and jobs, investing in human capital or good governance. We consider migration to be a common challenge, where we are ready to work together to fight irregular migration and smugglers together with our partners as it is a risk for all of us. We will work together to bring real change on the ground for the benefit of both our neighbours and Europe”.²

That sounds like an interesting proposition but needs qualifying. In other words, the question for the EU to decide is how to reconcile the dual objectives of economic and political liberalism with a migration-focused security agenda in its neighbourhood. What should be the sequencing of priorities?

The following set of briefs that are included in this issue of the Near East Bulletin each take a turn to respond to this timely, overarching question, taking stock of what has been achieved during a quarter of a century of dialogue and cooperation as well as reflecting on the future of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

Nur Köprülü's work starts the discussion by

¹“Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood: A new Agenda for the Mediterranean”, European Commission, JOIN (2021), 9 February 2021 https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/joint_communication_renewed_partnership_southern_neighbourhood.pdf

²“Remarks by Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi at the press conference presenting the Joint Communication on the Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood”, European Commission, 9 February 2021 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/varhelyi/announcements/remarks-commissioner-oliver-varhelyi-press-conference-presenting-joint-communication-renewed_en

providing a critical assessment of how the Arab uprisings could offer a starting point to explain the uncertainty which now faces the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. More specifically, Köprülü suggests that it is essential to pause and assess the apparent reluctance of the EU to engage with the region's well-known fault lines, including the role of the Islamist parties, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the refugee crisis for a better understanding of the limitations of its Mediterranean policy, cloaked under a normative guise.

This normative dimension of the EU policy toward the Mediterranean is the focus of the brief penned by our guest contributor Çiğdem Üstün. Üstün notes that the fallout from the Arab uprisings and the EU's self-centred response to the ensuing refugee crisis damaged the image that the EU hoped to create. As she puts it, the EU's normative actorness has been questioned severely while the dream of the EU creating a ring of friends around its borders did not come true. For Üstün, the response of the EU to the increasing tension in the Eastern Mediterranean and the EU's preferences in these diplomatic rows have reinforced the image of the EU as an interest-oriented entity. Üstün's piece also suggests with regret that the difficulty in defending the EU as a normative actor stems from the intergovernmental character of the integration project, driven by interests and security concerns which extends beyond the Mediterranean into other areas of foreign policy.

Sait Akşit's brief also engages with the normative dimension of the EU's Mediterranean policy in tackling the policy initiative with regards to Turkey-EU relations and the approach of the parties towards the region. As Akşit too underlines, the EU's approach had an inherent emphasis on the

normative dimension, prioritizing good governance, democracy, rule of law, and human rights, but that this approach has been trumped by the return to the *realpolitik*, which prioritizes security over the promotion of values. In this regard, the EU approach overlaps with that of Turkey in its intent to focus on national interests, but the two have diverged significantly in recent years on key areas that came with these realist pursuits. Akşit warns that despite the renewed agenda, the EU approach towards the Mediterranean region will fall short of expectations in the face of new global problems that may exacerbate the already existing problems, not least regarding the Union's relationship with Ankara.

In his brief, Erdi Şafak follows a similar line of inquiry in examining the Turkish perspectives on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. For Şafak, Turkey has been an active and avid supporter of the strengthening and development of cooperation in the Mediterranean, but the EU enlargement has significant bearings on Turkish perspectives toward the region. As Şafak argues, the recent souring of the relations, and the hesitant attitude of the EU towards Turkey, often serve to muddy the waters over whether Turkey is a candidate country for EU full membership or a partner whose main place is in the Mediterranean policy. However, the stalling of the accession process and the recent diplomatic skirmishes between Ankara and some EU capitals, for the author, should not prevent Turkey from taking part in the Euro-Mediterranean Union. In contrast, a more robust engagement with the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership from Ankara and indeed from the EU can prevent the further escalation of tensions but also offer solutions on pressing issues.

Our second guest contributor, C. Akça Ataç rounds off the discussion by reminding us of the contrast between Fernand Braudel's infamous conception of the region as a scene of co-existence in "a common destiny" and the region of open and hidden conflicts that we have today. For Ataç, the will to foster further cooperation has been replaced by the attempts at redefining the power relations along the shores of the Mediterranean, and the recent hydrocarbon discoveries have paved the way to the revisionist designs by actual and aspiring hegemon. Nonetheless, Ataç is optimistic that there is the chance for conflict resolution over the expeditions in the region should the sides take heed. As she argues, recent wildfires that engulfed the region, but also the looming climate crisis may offer the way forward from the days of "waning"

toward co-existence in a region of collective destinies that require collective actions.

As this collection of policy briefs demonstrate, the "Barcelona Process" remains an important institutional framework in fostering regional dialogue. It also boosts numerous institutions and an impressive record of "successfully completed actions". But these only merit two cheers. To face the immense challenges that are highlighted in each of these briefs, a reinvigoration of strategic orientations to focus on the cultural and the human dimensions of the Mediterranean, hence a return to the normative agenda that once offered a genuine partnership based on common values, remains essential.



STABILITY FIRST, DEMOCRACY LATER?

THE EURO-MED PARTNERSHIP REVISITED IN LIGHT OF THE ARAB UPRISINGS

The 2011 Arab Uprisings, or the public protests which first erupted in Tunisia in December 2010 with the self-immolation of Mohammed Ben Bouazizi — a university-educated street vendor — and spread swiftly to almost all the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, did not only alarm the region's authoritarian regimes, but also the extra regional actors, in urging them to take necessary actions when the dust of the public revolts settled. In this regard, the role and potential normative soft power actorness of the EU came under deep scrutiny due to its decade-old policy-making towards the Mediterranean region. Today, engagement with the Mediterranean remains an important litmus test for the European Union (EU) as well as its foreign policy-making in progress.

One major question that became apparent from the outset of the post-Arab Spring era was related to the



Dr. Nur Köprülü

Assoc. Prof. of International Relations
Board Member, Near East Institute &
Head of Politics, Near East University

extent of which the EU would display the competence and the willingness in pursuing a normative role in taking action(s) with regard to the popular calls for political change, tackling unemployment, and battling corruption. The toppling of the long lasting authoritarian regimes, such as in Egypt and Tunisia, and the new political and socio-economic realities of the region continue to urge the EU to pursue a decisive role in reinforcing and strengthening peace, democracy and prosperity in the Mediterranean region. Yet the EU's response to the Arab Uprisings has, so far, failed to meet such expectations, and remains contentious for arriving 'too late' and 'doing too little', i.e. playing only a minor and a rather marginal role with regard to the drastic changes taking hold in the region. An important paradox in this sense also relates to the fact that the EU remains engaged with the region, both through a common institutional framework, but also through bilateral dialogue for the last three decades.

The EU's endeavour to devise and institutionalize a common foreign policy is as old as the European integration project itself. Having said that, the goal



of building a coherent foreign policy became evident especially after the end of the Cold War. And following the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the idea of maintaining regional dialogue and cooperation among the Maghreb countries as well as Mashreq became a major policy area that fell within the scope of the interlocked goals of deepening and widening. This, in turn, underscored the significance of both social stabilization and provision of security in the region for the EU's own security and prosperity. In line with this understanding, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership that was solidified with the Barcelona Declaration (1995) paved the way for setting up of the Euro-Mediterranean Policy (EMP) which then offered the EU and the regional participants the necessary institutional framework to work together for the stability, peace and prosperity of the Med region.

12 of the Euro-Mediterranean signatories are those countries which were either partly affected or

engulfed by the Arab riots; i.e. Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and the Palestinian Authority. On the part of the EU, all members including the still-divided Cyprus, and Turkey as a candidate country, are also members. This is noteworthy since one of the key baskets of the Euro-Med Partnership is the 'Political and Security Partnership' which would be achieved through a common Euro-Med area of peace and stability — based on fundamental principles including respect for human rights and democracy.

On the ground too, the EU's response to the toppling of the authoritarian rulers, such as Zeynel Abidin bin Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, articulated in a joint communication by the Union's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policies Catherine Ashton and the Commission March in 2011, centred on the same theme, proposing a "partnership for democracy and shared prosperity in the Southern Mediterranean", and

stressing Brussels' support for political participation, freedom and employment opportunities.¹ EU Foreign Policy Chief Ashton also made two significant visits, first to Tunisia where she stressed that the EU "want to be Tunisia's strongest ally in their move towards democracy", and later to Egypt, underlining that the EU "stands ready to accompany the peaceful and orderly transition to a civilian and democratic government".²

In spite of these initial calls however, the EU member states have hardly displayed a coherent approach toward promoting democratization in the region despite the data provided by the World Values Survey (Wave 7) clearly showing that the popular demand for democracy as well as political and economic change, set in motion by the Arab Spring, still retains its significance. This is more the remarkable when considered together with the fact that almost half of the Arab countries' population is below 25 years of age, educated, but also predominantly unemployed.

The controversial role of the EU during and after the Arab popular protests, and the lack of a common approach in EU's democracy promotion in the region is rooted in several intertwined reasons but four main obstacles and/ or dynamics are particularly noteworthy: democratic deficit; the role of Islamist movements in the region; the ongoing Palestine-Israeli Conflict accompanied by the new geopolitical realities of the region; and finally, the influx of millions of Syrian refugees to the neighbouring countries.

Since the Cold War years, the main focus of the Western countries (including the United States) regarding the region has been on the uninterrupted flow of oil, and on stopping the spread of communism. As a matter of fact, it was only in the late 1980s that the European countries became more interested in the Palestine-Israeli dispute. In this regard, the EU has traditionally pursued a rather passive policy of supporting the relevant United Nations (UN) Resolutions. From this perspective, the Arab Uprisings demonstrated that the Union could hardly devise a broader policy to cover the entire region, and thus its opting to follow a bilateral approach instead. In this regard, it is possible to suggest that the EU could not have gone beyond the established parameters of the US policy towards the region.

A corollary of this reluctant actorness of the EU in democracy promotion in the region is also linked to the lack of a common understanding towards Islam and the Islamist parties. The victory of Hamas in Palestine in 2006, and later, the electoral victory of some Islamist affiliated parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin) in Egypt in the post-Arab Spring era, have reignited scepticism among EU member states, in relation to whether the Arab revolts were hijacked by the Islamists. Yet it is important to note that despite the empowerment of the Islamists in the early stages of the transition in the region, the toppling of Morsi and the JDP in Egypt have reversed the clock at the expense of the Islamist movement in the region. The declaration of the Ikhwan as a "terrorist organization" by primarily Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates have drastically led to the hitherto exclusion of the

¹European Union (2011), "The EU's response to the 'Arab Spring'" https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_11_918

²C. Ashton (2011a). https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_11_101;
<https://euroalert.net/news/11793/it-is-to-egypt-to-determine-its-future-high-representative-ashton-in-her-visit-to-egypt>



movement from the regional political scene.

Another obstacle that makes the EU to act as a reluctant actor in the post-2011 era has been the new geopolitical realities of the region and but also the radical revamp of the US policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict under the Trump administration. Firstly, the Arab Spring has led to the emergence of two divergent camps at the regional scale. On the one hand, we have Qatar and its bloc supporting Arab protests; on the other is the anti-Arab Spring bloc, comprised of Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt. Secondly, the increased rivalry between Israel and Iran has generated a new waves of peace treaties that resulted in Israel normalizing its relations with Bahrain as well as the UAE, under what became known as Abraham Agreements. And lastly, the US

policy towards the region particularly with respect to Palestine and Israel, unpacked the regional remnants and spill-over effects of the unsettlement of the Palestine-Israeli conflict. In this regard, Former President Donald Trump's decision to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and accepting Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel has had significant repercussions on the geopolitics of the region. What is more, the declaration of the so-called "Deal of the Century" under the auspices of the US administration — immediately rejected by the Palestinian side for nullifying "two-state solution" to the settlement of the problem — eventually caused another split among the countries in the region. Under these circumstances and increased tensions among the actors in the region, the EU was faced with a major dilemma, to either act as a normative actor — promoting democracy, human rights and



peace in the Med region — or to pursue a realist policy, with reference to the maintenance of stability and order in the region.

In parallel to these, the Arab Spring posed yet another test for the EU when the latter was faced with the influx of more than 6 million Syrian refugees, displaced as a result of the war in Syria. The Refugee Crisis became the one of the toughest challenges that faced the Union in terms of acting coherently, and ultimately resulted in a split among the member states on whether to accept or refuse to host the refugees. Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon are now hosting the largest number of refugees who were displaced by the outbreak of the war in Syria, as the division among the EU member states led to the failure of Dublin Agreement which was ironically

designed to serve as the refugee framework of the Union at all times.

For some, the policy-making of the EU towards the Mediterranean, which embraces the Euro-Med Partnership and the EU's Med policy as a whole (including Global Med Policy as well as the Union for Mediterranean (UfM), is either “too ambitious” or “too vague”.³ While attempts have been made to promote prosperity, peace and democracy in the region, the current situation indicates that these have had very limited impact. According to reports published by the Freedom House, this year marks the 15th consecutive year of decline in global freedom for the MENA region.³ The status of Kingdom of Jordan is particularly worrying for having declined from “partly free” to “not free” due to the

³Emerson, M. & G. Noutcheva (2005). “From Barcelona Process to Neighbourhood Policy: Assessments and Open Issues”, CEPS Working Documents No. 220, (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies).

introduction of harsh new restrictions on freedom last year. With the exceptional democratic transition in Tunisia, these figures are far from encouraging and despite efforts and popular movements towards democratization, the Med region remains reputed for representing the least democratic region in the world.

For some, the policy-making of the EU towards the Mediterranean, which embraces the Euro-Med Partnership and the EU's Med policy as a whole (including Global Med Policy as well as the Union for Mediterranean (UfM), is either "too ambitious" or "too vague". While attempts have been made to promote prosperity, peace and democracy in the region, the current situation indicates that these have had very limited impact. According to reports published by the Freedom House, this year marks the 15th consecutive year of decline in global freedom for the MENA region. The status of Kingdom of Jordan is particularly worrying for having declined from "partly free" to "not free" due to the introduction of harsh new restrictions on freedom last year. With the exceptional democratic transition in Tunisia, these figures are far from encouraging and despite efforts and popular movements towards democratization, the Med region remains reputed for representing the least democratic region in the world.

At this point, one can recall Peter Seeberg's critical intervention, and paraphrase him in asking whether the EU was still a realist actor in "normative clothes" in the Mediterranean.⁴ Indeed, Seeberg originally posed this question over a decade ago, but it retains its salience on the 26th anniversary of the

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. It thus remains worthy to discuss EU actorness in the Mediterranean by re-addressing, and perhaps re-dressing (as Seeberg would suggest) the notion of "EU conditionality" in promoting democracy and human rights that the region still desperately needs.



⁴Freedom House (2021). <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-undersiege/countries-and-regions>.

⁵Seeberg, Peter (2009). "The EU as a realist actor in normative clothes: EU democracy promotion in Lebanon and the European Neighbourhood Policy", *Democratization*, 16(1): 81–99.

THE EU IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: IS IT STILL A NORMATIVE ACTOR?



Dr. Çiğdem Üstün

Assoc. Prof. of International Relations,
Nişantaşı University, Turkey

Even before the initiation of neighbourhood policies (ENP) in 2004, the Mediterranean had been a priority in the EU's external relations through the Barcelona Process since the mid-1990s. As part of EU efforts to create a "ring of friends" in its neighbourhood, developmental assistance, support for democratization and establishment of rule of law, shared prosperity, creating a common area of peace, and increasing people to people contact were the main targeted aims back then.

After the 2004 enlargement, the number of Mediterranean EU member states increased, as did the region's importance in not only the EU's external policies but also its domestic affairs. French President Sarkozy, at the time, proposed a Mediterranean Union in 2007, quite different than the current Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). His proposed Union was a separate organization from the EU, bringing together the Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries, including Turkey not as an EU member but a Mediterranean Union member. As it was expected, this proposition was contested by Turkey. Also, Germany, as an EU member state invested in the Barcelona Process for over a decade, opposed the establishment of a separate institutional mechanism excluding the EU member

states which do not have Mediterranean borders. At the end of deliberations, the UfM as a part of Euro-Med partnership was established and continued to highlight 4 main priority areas: political and security matters, economic prosperity, social cooperation and, since the 2000s, migration. The emphasis on these priority areas aimed to stop (potential) threats coming from the region towards the EU through measures which would get to the root of the problems. Thus, it is believed that security has been always at the forefront of the Mediterranean policies of the Union, but the approach in creating a secure environment altered through the years.





Arab Uprisings changed the status quo in the whole region. At first, a tendency to perceive these demonstrations and revolts as steps towards more democratic systems was visible. However, soon enough, securitization became the main approach towards the region as it was clear that changes in the status quo meant increased security threats, i.e., migration. Since the mid-2010s, one of the most controversial policies of the EU towards migration has been the “deal” with Turkey. Especially issues regarding collective expulsion of migrants, Turkey’s status as a “safe country” due to its application of the Geneva Convention using a geographical limitation for those not coming from Europe, migrants’ right to fair asylum-seeking process and their right to appeal

generated controversial debates on the issue. In addition to this “deal”, the roadmap outlined in Malta, together with the MoU signed between Italy and Libya in 2017 have been condemned by human rights activists.¹ In addition to these, the readmission agreements and mobility partnerships with the neighbourhood countries have been tools for externalization. All these securitization and externalization policies, especially in the last decade, damaged the image that the EU hoped to create: a benign and trustworthy security actor prioritizing norms and values. At this stage, the EU’s normative actorness has been questioned severely while the dream of the EU creating a ring of friends around its borders did not come true.

¹For more information on this matter please refer to Ç. Üstün, “The Impact of Migration Policies on the EU’s Image as a Value-Driven Normative Actor”, December 2019 <https://www.euromesco.net/publication/the-impact-of-migration-policies-on-the-eus-image-as-a-value-driven-normative-actor/>

Lately, the use of military means, cooperation between NATO and FRONTEX in the Aegean Sea, and the use of hard power tools to prevent migrants reaching the EU borders added to the EU's image as an interest-oriented security actor rather than a normative one. There were three main operations in the region: the EU Naval Force Med Operation Sophia, Frontex's Operation Triton, and NATO's Standing Maritime Group 2 deployment in the Aegean Sea. The budget of FRONTEX has been steadily increasing since the 2010s and its existing and future mandate will be up to €11 billion for the 2021-2027 period.²

To cap it all, the increasing tension in the Eastern Mediterranean and the EU's preferences in these diplomatic rows have reinforced the image of the EU as an interest-oriented entity. A series of tension escalating events followed the discovery of gas in the Calypso field in the Eastern Mediterranean, i.e., establishment of the EMGF, Turkey's drill ships escorted by warships heading towards the region, and France's support to Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus. The Council, in its 2019 July meeting, decided to impose sanctions on Turkey. Following up this decision, in November, the EU Council adopted the framework for these sanctions, stating that "the sanctions will consist of travel ban to the EU and asset freeze for persons and entities. In addition, EU persons and entities will be forbidden from making funds available to those listed."³

As a response, Turkey and Libya agreed on a treaty to establish an exclusive economic zone in the



Mediterranean and a security and military cooperation agreement, including cooperation in military training and consultancy. The tension further increased when France, Italy, and Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus conducted a 3-day naval exercise, while the US passed the EastMed Security and Energy Partnership Act, authorizing assistance to Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus and Greece, lifting the arms embargo on Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus at the end of 2019.

In 2020, the tension decreased as diplomatic talks started between Greece and Turkey, even though they could not reach a settlement. By the end of 2020, the Council welcomed the de-escalation, and offered a positive EU-Turkey agenda "covering the areas of economy and trade, people to people contacts, high level dialogues and continued

²European Court of Auditors, *Frontex, Audit Preview, January 2020* https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/AP20_02/AP_Frontex_EN.pdf

³Council of the EU, "Turkish drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean: Council adopts conclusions", 15 July 2019

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/07/15/turkish-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-council-adopts-conclusions/>

cooperation on migration issues.”⁴ In March 2021, Council Conclusions highlighted the strategic interests by stating that they “recall the European Union’s strategic interest in a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey.”⁵ And once again, Turkey’s hosting Syrian refugees and continuation of financing for refugees come to the fore.

In the light of these conclusions and emphasis on the words, strategy and interests, it becomes difficult to defend the EU as a normative actor, even for the sincere “normative EU” believers, in the region. In the 1990s, when the EU took to the stage and claimed to be a foreign policy actor, the international order was welcoming normative actors emphasizing

values more than the strategic hard security interests. However, as the years passed, we have witnessed -once again-that the international liberal-institutionalist ideals highlighting the norms lost its popular support at the global level. One cannot assume that the EU will be exempt from these systemic changes in its relations with neighbouring regions, where the strategic interests shape the relations between not only states but non-state actors as well. We must admit that it is creating frustration and disappointment, since the EU portrayed itself as a normative actor from the start, but then again one should always remember the intergovernmental character of the Union bringing interests and security concerns forward. This may also prevent us from falling into the expectations-capabilities gap when we consider the EU’s external affairs not only in the Mediterranean but also in the Eastern neighbourhood.



⁴European Council, *European Council meeting (10 and 11 December 2020) – Conclusions*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47296/1011-12-20-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>

⁵European Council, *“Statement of the Members of the European Council”, 25 March 2021* <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48976/250321-vtc-euco-sftatement-en.pdf>

TURKEY AND THE EU IN THE MEDITERRANEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD: PARTNERS OR RIVALS?

It has been more than 25 years since the European Union (EU) established its policy initiative towards the Mediterranean region, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), also known as the 'Barcelona Process'. The policy framework was reconsidered and reframed within the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) that was launched in 2004. The review of the ENP in 2015 brought yet a further change to the cooperation framework and proposed ways to build more effective partnerships in the Neighbourhood, attaching greater emphasis on stability (in security and economic terms); more differentiation in relations with neighbouring countries (i.e. doing more with 'partners'); and greater emphasis on shared interests.

Arguably, the new focus was a response to the uncertainty, both over the EU's own role and effectiveness as a 'normative actor' (see Üstün's commentary in this issue), and in the region which found itself in turmoil following the Arab uprisings. This short commentary aims to discuss the policy initiative with regards to Turkey-EU relations and the approach of the parties towards the region given



Dr. Sait Akşit

Assoc. Prof. of International Relations
Board Member, Near East Institute &
Head of International Relations,
Near East University

that the region is the common neighbourhood for both and an area of common interest. Do we observe convergence or divergence in the orientations and policies of Turkey and the EU vis-à-vis their neighbourhood? There is no direct or easy answer to this question.



The Barcelona process intended to create dialogue, cooperation, and an area of peace, security, and prosperity in the Mediterranean region, constituting a 'ring of friends' around the EU. EU's approach had an inherent emphasis on the normative dimension, prioritizing good governance, democracy, rule of law, and human rights. The normative approach would form the basis for the overall aim of achieving security and stability in the EU's immediate neighbourhood.

The initiative was established at a time when the EU was going through a process of accelerated deepening and widening and enjoyed a transformative role given the transition from communism to liberalism in the Central and Eastern European countries. The success in the enlargement process encouraged the EU to launch the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 and embed the EMP into the ENP. The ENP assumed a similar approach to the accession process less the membership.

The policy approach was renewed in 2015 following the Arab uprisings and most recently in February 2021, 25 years after the Barcelona Declaration, aiming for “sustainable long-term socio-economic recovery and job creation in the Southern Neighbourhood”¹ given perhaps the difficulties that are further exacerbated by the global pandemic.

Turkey and the EU have not always been on the same page regarding the Mediterranean. Turkey was indifferent towards the EMP when it was first launched in 1995 primarily because Turkey was perceived as a peripheral, neighbouring country to the European Union.² Turkey was interested in benefiting from the development funds provided through the EMP, however, the Greek veto and the EU conditions attached prevented extension of such benefits to Turkey.

A common point of interest was to improve relations with the countries of the region. Turkey pursued a

process of transformation aligning its domestic and foreign policy approach with the EU, especially after it received the status of a candidate state at the EU Helsinki summit in 1999. Indeed, one of Turkey’s aims was to start and further the negotiations for membership in the early 2000s. The 2000s are largely seen as a period of convergence between the EU and Turkey due to the Europeanization of Turkey’s foreign policy and/or its neighbourhood policy, partly in line with the requirement of good neighbourly relations. This change can also be associated with Turkey’s intention to diversify its foreign and economic partners to further Turkey’s national foreign and security interests, primarily in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

But the interests of Turkey and the EU began to diverge significantly in the late 2000s, due partly to differences on the Cyprus issue and mixed signals from the EU concerning Turkey’s status of membership. The 2007 French initiative on the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was perceived by Turkish officials as an alternative to Turkey’s full EU membership, adding to discussions on the idea of a ‘privileged partnership’ with Turkey.

From the late 2000s onward, Turkey has become more involved in the political and security dimensions in the broader Mediterranean region using soft power instruments resembling the EU approach. However, the changing international political and security environment in the Mediterranean region with the Arab uprisings and Turkey’s deteriorating relations with Israel and

¹ See the European Commission, “European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations”
https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/european-neighbourhood-policy_en

² M. F. Tayfur, “Security and Co-Operation in the Mediterranean”, *Perceptions*, Volume 5, September-November-2000.



Egypt have created more and more problems with some of the EU member states and the EU. Indeed, this was related to the very different security perceptions Turkey and the EU had vis-à-vis the Mediterranean region and the changing alliance structures that have brought Turkey to an adversarial position with some EU member states, primarily Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration.

Although Turkey and the EU cooperated on certain issues, most remarkably on migration in the context of the Turkey-EU Refugee Deal, to address the problems stemming from and exacerbated by the Syrian case, their relationship is marred with challenges that surround, but are not necessarily

limited to, the Turkish-Greek problems. Turkish-Greek relations have entered into a more conflictual phase due to the stand-off on the eastern Mediterranean energy and sovereignty-related problems and the new phase of the Cyprus negotiations. The EU and some of the EU member states, most notably France, have extended unwarranted support to and declared solidarity with the Greek and Greek Cypriot positions on the negotiations for settlement and the new initiatives taken by the Turkish side on the opening of Varosha.

The world, and indeed the Mediterranean region, are going through a far different international context than when the Barcelona process was

initiated in 1995 or the ENP was launched in 2004. It may well be put forward that the EU's intent to transform the Mediterranean region through a normative, liberal peace approach has failed. Indeed, the financial and political shortcomings of the EU approach are more visible than ever. Besides, the EU approach shifted towards a pragmatic approach that prioritizes security over the promotion of values in an international context where realpolitik prevails. The EU approach is largely focused on finding quick solutions to problems of migration and terrorism whereas Turkey's focus centres around its rivalry with Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration which has broadened to include the issues of energy and above all sovereignty in the eastern Mediterranean region. Turkish officials perceive the EU as a biased actor, increasingly presenting Turkey as an adversary, a competitor, and a state to be excluded from the regional developments.

EU member states' individual policy choices in the Mediterranean region indicate a stronger approach emphasizing national interests and an exclusionary adversarial approach, especially with respect to Turkey. At best, Turkey is seen as a buffer zone, a peripheral state with which there is a need to cooperate on a case-by-case approach to deal with immediate security problems.

The recent unfortunate statements by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Austrian Chancellor Stefan Kurz are indicative of this increasingly dominant approach in the EU.³ Indeed, despite its

renewed agenda that was communicated in February 2021, the EU approach towards the Mediterranean region will fall short of expectations in the face of new global problems that are likely to exacerbate the already existing problems and conflictual relations in the region and the immediate concerns of the European Union.



³A. Simsek, "Merkel: Germany wants very good relations with Turkey", Anadolu Agency, 22 July 2021

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/merkel-germany-wants-very-good-relations-with-turkey/2311593>; "Austria's PM says Turkey is a better place for Afghan refugees than Europe", Bianet English, 26 July 2021

<https://bianet.org/english/world/247707-austria-s-pm-says-turkey-is-a-better-place-for-afghan-refugees-than-europe>

EU-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP: THE TURKISH PERSPECTIVE



Dr. Erdi Şafak

Asst. Prof. of International Law
Deputy Director, Near East Institute

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, also called the Barcelona Process, is a process that began with the 'Barcelona Declaration' adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers Conference held in Barcelona in November 1995. The overall aim of the partnership is to promote stability and integration throughout the Mediterranean region. Europe – The Mediterranean Partnership is an association between the two shores of the Mediterranean for the discussion of regional strategic issues based on the principles of joint ownership, joint decision-making, and joint responsibility. The other objectives of the partnership are to support the socio-economic development of the countries and to ensure stability in the Mediterranean region, both in the North-South and in the Mediterranean region. to increase South-South integration.

Turkey is an important actor for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and utilises this platform to discuss regional strategic issues in the Mediterranean and to ensure stability in the region. For its part, the European Union is also aware that failure to integrate Turkey into the process and in

furthering the integration of the Mediterranean region may cause significant shortcomings in the realisation of the aim of this cooperation. This recognition rests on the fact that Turkey has emerged as a regional actor that has a significant impact, but also clout on the countries of the region, especially Libya. Similarly, Turkey's failure to take part in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership may also mean that Turkey will find it difficult to maximise its current potential in the region. It is in this vein that this brief looks at the importance of the Euro-Mediterranean process for Turkey, highlighting its potential but also some important pitfalls that require the careful consideration of Turkish policymakers in Ankara.





Turkey has been an active and avid supporter of the strengthening and development of cooperation in the Mediterranean. In this context, Turkey contributed to the development of cooperation in the Mediterranean since the inception of the Barcelona Process in 1995. And in parallel to conducting its own accession negotiations with the European Union (EU), Turkey has often reiterated its willingness to contribute to the subsequent "Europe-Mediterranean Partnership" initiative, which was established to make the Barcelona Process stronger and more effective, in line with this understanding.

As recently stated by Faruk Kaymakcı, Deputy

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey and Director for EU Affairs, "Turkey is located at the very heart of the Euro-Mediterranean region. As a [EU] candidate, Turkey has always contributed to both the activities of the EU and the secretariat of the European Mediterranean Partnership".¹ Expressing that the EU has proven that it can improve its institutional capacity and contribute to regional cooperation, Kaymakcı said, "The 25th anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership¹ is a good opportunity to reflect on experiences and draw a new roadmap for our future cooperation [...] We must set aside our differences and disagreements, adapt to new realities and work together. To minimise the effects of the pandemic and to coordinate and harmonise recovery

¹"Turkey always contributes to Union for Med: Official", Anadolu Agency, 28 November 2020
<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-always-contributes-to-union-for-med-official/2058563>

strategies, the solidarity of all Euro-Mediterranean partners is more necessary today than ever before".²

Though initially feared as a marginal project, that could derail Turkey's EU accession process, such anxieties regarding the Union for the Mediterranean have since faded. Turkey is considered within the scope of Mediterranean countries in its relations with the EU, as was in the case of the placing of Greece, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, and Malta within the Mediterranean regional policy to the EU in the process leading up to the full membership. This also shows that the evaluation of Turkey as a Mediterranean Basin country does not push the country to the position of a peripheral country against the EU.

As a matter of fact, by securing a candidate status in the Helsinki Summit of 1999, Turkey is in a place so different that it cannot be compared with non-EU Mediterranean countries in the eyes of the EU. But the recent souring of the relations, and the hesitant attitude of the EU towards Turkey, often serve to muddy the waters over whether Turkey is a candidate country for EU full membership or a partner whose main place is in the Mediterranean policy. However, the stalling of the accession process and the recent diplomatic skirmishes between Ankara and some EU capitals should not prevent Turkey from taking part in the Euro-Mediterranean Union.

Both the domestic and foreign policies of the

countries of the Mediterranean basin are complex. And such complexity has so far made it difficult for the EU to formulate policies to create a meaningful relationship with the region. This situation gives Turkey the opportunity to take an active role in the formation of a new Mediterranean policy based on the mutual interests that it shares with the most Mediterranean countries. It is even possible to suggest that Mediterranean countries can draw on the experiences of Turkey to better understand the EU. Similarly, it is also possible to say that the EU could benefit from Turkey's support to realise its goals for the Mediterranean.

Turkey is a country with different geographical features due to its location in Asia and Europe and its coast to the Mediterranean. By making good use of this difference, Turkey can bring a unique perspective to its Mediterranean policy. In this context, Turkey can help realise the EU's Mediterranean policy depending, based on the opening up more, developing trade and strengthening the economy of the countries in the Mediterranean region. This was recently articulated in a comprehensive Motorways of the Sea project, to link the port of Izmir (Turkey) to ports in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya, and it was partially realised.³

It is not difficult to suggest that within the newly emerging geostrategic triangle, consisting of Europe, the Mediterranean and the Caucasus, three strategic commodities are soon to come to the fore: pipelines, water, and the new silk road. And it should come as no surprise that Turkey will sit at the heart

²*ibid*

³"Motorway of the Sea (MoS) Turkey-Italy-Tunisia Project", *Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat*
<https://ufmsecretariat.org/project/motorway-of-the-sea-mos-turkey-italy-tunisia-project/>



of these geographically connected markets, holding significant economic potential for the Mediterranean basin. This perspective also explains why Turkey is primarily headed towards the Eastern Mediterranean. The energy resources discovered in the region, together with Turkey's existing maritime rights there, are among the main reasons why the Med has become a priority for its foreign policy. Though the current positioning of Turkey remains contested (and feared), a more robust engagement with the country on practical/tangible goals through the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership can prevent the further escalation of tensions and a possible crisis.

It will also be in favour of Turkey to collaborate more in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership whilst signing bilateral free trade agreements with the Mediterranean countries, as it has done so far, so that it can carve a unique Mediterranean policy and become a valued actor in the region. Such free trade agreements for the EU, do not pose a problem per se; on the contrary, the economic benefits emanating from these can contribute significantly to Turkey's support for refugees, which is likely to remain an important dimension of the EU's policy toward the Mediterranean.

FROM 'WANING'* TO GLOWING? AN OVERVIEW OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN CRISIS



Dr. C. Akça Ataç
Assoc. Prof. of International Relations
Çankaya University, Turkey

Although the Mediterranean continues to harbor all the historically entangled identities from millennia-long encounters, interactions, conflicts, agreements, irreconcilable differences and inclusive dialogues, recently, it no longer depicts a scene of co-existence in “a common destiny,”¹ which was the Mediterranean recounted to us by Braudel. Instead, as the “quintessential properties”² of this civilization change from vine and olive to natural gas and petroleum, the will to foster further cooperation has been replaced by the attempts at redefining the power relations along the shores. Turkey, Greece, both sides in Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, France and Italy...they are all involved in this new power game and the US and Russia, the traditional hegemons of geopolitics everywhere and everything, stay close enough to interfere when they see fit. The Mediterranean, now decorated with

multiple seismic-survey ships and navy vessels and repartioned by immediate NAVTEXes instead of the silent interwoven civilizational rapproachments has in the last decade become a region of open and hidden conflicts .



The 2008 economic crisis was another Pandora's box for the global political economy and when it opened, bail-outs, austerity measures,

*'Waning' is the word used by the late historian Faruk Tabak to define the seventeenth-century Mediterranean.

¹F. Braudel (1972), *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, 2 vols., New York: Harper&Row, p. 14

²F. Tabak (2008). *The Waning of the Mediterranean, 1550-1870: A Geohistorical Approach*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, p. 14.

bankruptcies, market freezes and acute unemployment escaped. National economies shrunk and states have begun to seek new alternative resources to surmount this impasse. The acceleration of drilling for natural gas across the Mediterranean coincided with this financial shock and the turmoil of the 'Arab Spring' has justified, in the eyes of the states, that a new scramble for the Mediterranean should begin. The discovery of the Tamar gas field in 2009 in Israel's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) launched the first chapter of this unfolding new story and the discovery of the Leviathan gas field again in Israel's EEZ followed. Having thus gained an upper hand in the region's geopolitics, Israel became the "main beneficiary"³ until the discovery of the Aphrodite gas field in southern Cyprus's EEZ and the Zohr gas field in Egypt's EEZ. In this way, the new vast reserves of natural gas have promised incessant access to energy and given the breath of life to the states in the region, which are wrecked by financial crisis or political upheaval. However, those discoveries have, at the same time, altered the already-fragile balance of power in the Mediterranean and paved the way to the revisionist designs by actual and aspiring hegemons.

Turkey, especially subsequent to the 'Arab Spring,' has been aspiring to restore itself as another hegemon in its immediate and larger neighborhood. In response to the southern Cyprus's discovery of natural gas with its contested maritime sovereignty, Turkey has begun to pursue a revisionist Mediterranean policy by claiming under the concept of Blue Homeland that the Turkish administration in northern Cyprus, too, has rights over the unearthed natural gas and Turkey would help it retrieve that right over its continental shelf. When the Greek



Cypriots' new discovery, which was the Calypso gas field, was blocked by Turkey, the Eastern Mediterranean is once again emerged as a sphere of competition, conflict and rivalries. As Turkey seeks to establish its consent as a pre-condition for drilling within the legally problematic maritime borders and the EEZs along the Mediterranean shores, Ankara's apparent involvement with the Muslim brotherhood since the Tahrir-Square protests in 2011 and zero diplomatic relations with Israel have caused it to be excluded from the negotiations and co-operations in the making. In January 2019, Israel, Italy, Palestine, Cyprus (the GASC), Egypt, Jordan and Greece established the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) in Cairo. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are also included through their close anti-Muslim brotherhood liaison with Egypt. Turkey in its once pursuit of traditional foreign policy observing strict balance of power and non-adventurism would not have been left out of such a strategic regional agreement, but this time, it was.

As retaliation, Turkey signed an agreement for military cooperation and securing maritime boundaries with Libya's UN-recognized

³Y. M. Zhukov. 'Trouble in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea: The Coming dash for Gas,' *Foreign Affairs*, 20 March 2013
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/cyprus/2013-03-20/trouble-eastern-mediterranean-sea>

Government of National Accord (GNA) in November 2019. Although this agreement enabled Turkey back in the game, it, at the same time, dragged the Muslim brotherhood issue further deep into the Eastern Mediterranean crisis. Also, Turkey has emerged as a hard power beyond coastal deterrence, ready to intervene in Libya –and, if necessary, anywhere in the Mediterranean- by providing unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). With such a militarized position, Turkey would have difficulties in conducting negotiations with the EMGF, which aims to be the cooperation platform for the Mediterranean. It is after the dronization of the Turkish foreign policy in the region that the EU has implemented sanctions against Turkey in December 2020 as result of the pressures from France, Cyprus, and Greece. Even though promoting the Turkish Cypriots' sovereignty rights is a just cause for Turkey; in this way, Ankara has been temporarily deprived of cooperation and diplomatic negotiations with the Eastern Mediterranean states. Because the EU has not demonstrated uniformity against Ankara, the chance for conflict resolution over the expeditions in the region persists. Turkey's compliance with the decisions of the Second Berlin Conference on Libya, which was held on June 23, 2021, and the withdrawal of the Turkish forces from Libya could initiate a new framework for just, legal and peaceful access to the natural resources.

Summer is the season in which thousands of wildfires erupt across the Mediterranean and devastate more land each year. As the climate change continues, the number and damage of these fires would multiply. Combat against them requires genuine trans-border cooperation and a regional

policy. Frozen diplomatic relations, rivalries and isolation would help no state with similar climate and vegetation. The Eastern Mediterranean has been a region of collective destinies that require collective actions. The competition over natural gas must not overshadow this vital necessity of the region to co-exist and grow in harmony. Cultivating the "civilizational crops"⁴ of the Mediterranean is still as important as probing for energy resources. Otherwise, autumn, which is the harvest season, would induce "dismal depression and sordid melancholy,"⁵ as once the Mediterranean did in its days of waning in the seventeenth century. Still, one thing we have learned from the Mediterranean's history is that it promises recurring renewal and the states have no choice but to recreate well-being for all.



⁴Braudel, *op.cit.*

⁵J. Klein (1920), *The Mesta: A Study in Spanish Economic History 1273-1836*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 105.



NEAR EAST INSTITUTE