



THE MULTI-LAYERED CONNECTION BETWEEN THE MENA REGION AND THE EU

Recent political discourse in the majority of the EU member states has increasingly developed into a direction supposing a radical discontinuity between the European continent, and the MENA region. The development relies on an interplay of cultural, political, and historical assumptions that are in many ways essentialist in nature – and reminiscent of what Edward Said, in his 1978 chef d’oeuvre, called out as *Orientalism*¹. This identitarian paradigm that Said attacks, which proposes a fundamental alterity between the ‘occidental’ Europe and the ‘oriental’ Middle East, has been solidified by contributions from the realm of International Relations in the tradition of Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*² – a mode of reflection that appears to remain at the core of contemporary political discourse, as salient fixations with ideas such as the ‘China Threat’³, or ‘Political Islam’ show. It would undoubtedly be an exaggeration to suppose that there is no alterity at all between the states and societies of the MENA region and the EU member states – last but not least due to the effects of centuries of colonialism, and politics tuned to the premises of civilizational difference. Perceptions form realities, much more than the opposite, it has been argued by many. The argument to be made is that **no matter which level or definition of alterity one is willing to accept, this alterity does in no way amount to a paradigmatic boundary that foreign policy should care to consider.** Any border, beyond its ‘practical’ meaning of demarcating political sovereignties, is only as strong as it is *imagined* to be. The project of the European Union is arguably carried by a radical refusal of the border as anything more substantial than such a demarcation, when it comes to the borders between its member states, and is willing to go even further as the general project of deepening proves. For decades European nationalism relied on

imaginaries of firstly, fundamental political, social (and at times human) alterity neatly divided by national boundaries – which, in its darkest hours, was utilised to instil an imaginary of hierarchy to instigate conflict and destruction. **This imaginary of radical alterity, the assumptions of paradigm and hierarchy, were refused by building a Union based on the political convictions of liberal democracy, rule of law and human rights – while at the same time allowing for alterity in cultural and linguistic practices.**

The story of the European Union is thus, in many ways, the story of the depoliticisation (i.e., a subtraction of any form of normative political command) of the fluid concept of culture, and a gradual weakening of the meaning attached to the notion ‘national border’. However, when it comes to its ‘outward boundaries’, the notion of fundamental alterity still appears to reign – as the ongoing debates on the refugee crisis, and the political spectre of integration show. Müller notes that this dynamic is textualized in European law, which refers to demarcations between member states as frontiers (implying their fluidity), and outer demarcations as borders⁴. The very process which lead to the creation of the inside, appears to be refused when considering the political possibilities of the outside – which, of course, go further than plain accession to the Union. This paper will argue that the Union must overcome this bias, both in order to stay truthful to the ideological content of its foundation, and to face the practical challenges an age of accelerating globalisation has brought. The path to overcome the bias, it will be argued here, leads through the MENA as *intimate neighbour* to the Union, both historically, and in a future-bound perspective.

1 Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Verso (1978)

2 Huntington, Samuel. *Clash of Civilizations* New York: Simon & Schuster (1999)

3 For an influential example, see Gertz, Bill *China Threat*. Washington DC: Regency Publishers (2010)

4 Müller-Graff, P.-C. “Whose Responsibilities are Frontiers?”, in M. Anderson and E. Bort (eds.) *The Frontiers of Europe*, London: Pinter (1998).

JUNCTION OR BORDER: EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE SEA

Generations of schoolbooks have proposed the geography of Europe as being naturally bounded by supposedly ‘natural borders’ of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the North Sea, and the Ural mountains.⁵ The geography of Europe is thus taught as stable, eternal, as *natural* – and indeed in most cases, the political boundaries of European countries appear to overlap with this geographical supposition. What the schoolbooks omit, however, is that this *specific* geography of Europe is, in a historical perspective, but one of many. The navigators of Greek antiquity – an epoch which as a cultural reference has arguably shaped European references of identity at the core – referred to Europe as the collection of shores west of the Bosphorus, while considering most things north simply as undefined barbarian lands. The Romans, whose empire stretched further north than the Greeks ever could have imagined, refused to accord the label of *Europe* to the lands lying beyond the *limes* border, and thus most prominently modern day Germany. Early Ottoman cartographers, on the other hand, considered Europe to be, essentially, the Balkan peninsula. Even Voltaire tended to consider Sweden, Baltic Germany, Poland, and Russia as part of a geography he simply referred to as *The North*.⁶ Today’s Europe, referred to by the geographical order of *Continent*, is only the last in line of a development of geographies informed by considerations of historical, religious, political and economical sort – and all so often inspired by one or another ideological commitment. The European Union’s ideological commitment, as outlined Europe as a Rights Culture, (should) assume a position of silence to all ideological commitments other than a conviction of cooperation on the basis of the universal human rights, liberal democracy, rule of law, and economic convergence. The EU’s strong bilateral relations with the US and Canada have arguably overcome the ‘natural border’ the Atlantic exemplifies in schoolbooks. The case is more difficult when it comes to Europe’s eastern neighbour, Russia – between an

5 Malatesta, Stefano and Squarcina, Enrico. “Where does Europe end?: The representation of Europe and Turkey in Italian primary textbooks” *Review of International Geographical Education (RIGEO)*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Autumn (2011): 113-140.

6 Pocock, J.G.A. “Some Europes in History” in Pagden, Anthony (ed.) *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press (2002)

aggressive foreign policy, and the various EU member states’ commitment to NATO, the Ural stands strong. However, looking south, the situation is all but clear.

A central element in all possible localisations of Europe, if functioning as a *perspective* or *border*, has always been a body of water whose name is in many ways, central: the *Mediterranean*. Populist political discourse appears to consider the Mediterranean as the ultimate boundary demarcating *Europe* from the similarly arbitrary continental definitions of *Asia* and *Africa* – with more than one national leader calling for ‘closing’ the Mediterranean route to refugees, etc.⁷. However, attributing this kind of role to the Mediterranean is by no means a historical constant. Scholarship from the developing field of spatial history agrees that the *meaning* of the Mediterranean Sea has historically fluctuated between the notion of *junction* and *border*. While in classical antiquity, Mediterranean maritime routes were at the core of imperial continuity, the middle ages came to consider it as a divisive line between a christian ‘Occident’, and a muslim ‘Orient’. The era of the enlightenment saw a return to the imaginary of the *junction sea*, through the development of colonial and merchant ties with the MENA, eventually returning to the natural boundary assumption during the high times of nationalism in the beginning of the 20th century.⁸ **The coming of the European Union has seen a debate on the position of the middle sea, with numerous initiatives advocating for a deepening of ties between European countries and its southern neighbours** – the most prominent being a late outcome of the 1995 Barcelona Process, the 2008 *Union pour la Méditerranée*, or Union for the Mediterranean⁹, as a substantially revamped version of the chronologically previous Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). Isaac argues that the EMP’s original outlook included an outright *geographical ambition*, which she terms ‘region building’, and describes as an attempt to create the political, economical, but also social space of the EuroMed – which was then mirrored in the outlook of the UfM.¹⁰ In the above logic, this attempt could be seen to create a form of overlapping ‘junction region’ between the MENA and the EU. Recently, it seems that the pendulum

7 Schmid, Thomas. “Die Zentrale Mittelmeeroute” *Heinrich Böll Stiftung E-Papers* (2016)

8 Blais, Hélène & Florence Deprest “The Mediterranean, a territory between France and Colonial Algeria: imperial constructions” *European Review of History | Revue européenne de l’histoire*, Vol. 19, Nr. 1 (2012): 33-57.

9 Union for the Mediterranean (<https://ufmsecretariat.org>)

10 Isaac, Sally Khalifa “EU Action in the Mediterranean: Structural Impediments Post-2011” *Middle East Policy* Vol. 23, No. 4 (Winter 2016): 92-102. [*it is necessary to note here that Isaac maintains the position that the UfM’s outlook is less ambitious than the original outlook of EuroMed*]

has taken a decisive swing in the opposite direction, when Euro-Mediterranean partnerships are suffocating in the debris of both European, and the MENA region's political instability.^{11 12} The central question is thus, what meaning should be assigned to the Mediterranean in order to reach a stable, prosperous, and just future. The fact of the matter is that the *meanings* of Europe and the Mediterranean are not only intrinsically linked, but also dependent on each other. If the European continent is to be understood as a geographically, politically and culturally stable entity, then the Mediterranean must necessarily be considered as a boundary between Europe, and what lies beyond. If Europe is to be understood in an ideological perspective, i.e. in one that aims to overcome the deterministic ontology of the border as the EU's foundational commitments express, the Mediterranean must be regarded as a junction – as the '*Middle Sea*' that languages north, east and west of it describe it as – and thus treated as such. The diversity that is allowed inside the Union must be acknowledged beyond its borders, too; but it must not impede the commitment *to* and acknowledged potential *for* rule of law, human rights and liberal democracy on both sides of the sea. The emblem of the UfM, the Tifinagh letter ⵍ [yaz] which is mirrored on a vertical angle, somewhat illustrates the notion: a symbol describing the *free man (amazigh)*, which reigns on both shores, if in different colours. Lately, the project of the UfM seems to fail – or to change its original outlook. It will be argued that this situation is unsustainable, both for Europe, and for its presence in the MENA region.

FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD TO PARTNERSHIP IN A GLOBALISING WORLD: CAPITALISING ON PROXIMITY

While the battle over definitions of boundaries and borders continues in European political discourse, it would be wrong to assume that Europe has at any point fully embraced on extreme or the other. However, the battle of definition appears in full force when the prime distinction between two forms of European proximities is regarded: the *European Neighbourhood Policy*, and the *Enlargement Agenda*. The Enlargement Agenda can be regarded as a continuous attempt to fulfil the vocation for geographic continuity in order to make the EU a united continent¹³, and has in many ways been fruitful. The strategy of conditioning membership with structural changes to political institutions and economic policy lies at the heart of the ambition of horizontal integration, and success stories such as Croatia stand as proud examples of the policy paradigm's success. When it comes to EA countries (with the meaningful exception of Turkey), the EU actuates its commitment beyond its boundaries. However, in the case of the ENP, **the potential of proximity is currently not capitalised upon – much rather it is treated as a contingent feature to be dealt with in a reactive approach.**

Thus far, the ENP relies on a tripartite differentiation of 'neighbourhood': the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Initiative, the Union for the Mediterranean and a range of bilateral frameworks ("Action Plans") with countries party to the former, with the meaningful exception of Libya who is neither a member to the EaP nor the UfM. The EaP and UfM follow a regionalist logic, while bilateral agreements are strictly Union-to-country. The EaP aims to react to the continental continuity at the margins of 'Europe' and 'Asia', and represents an ambitious developmental

11 Kausch, Kristina & Richard Youngs "The end of the 'Euro-Mediterranean vision' "
International Affairs Vol. 85, Nr. 5 (2009): 963–975.

12 Youngs, Richard (eds) *Twenty Years of Euromediterranean Relations* London: Routledge (2016)

13 <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5c93a9e3-f5b7-4567-88aa-eea55451a0a1>

programme targeting governance, infrastructure and civil society. Despite having prior limitations for EaP members to access EU membership, this has progressively been changing with select members of the EaP, especially from the Western Balkans, being offered membership perspectives. The reason for this limitation has traditionally been security concerns stemming from the sustained influence of Russia in the region¹⁴ – a dynamic which has led to somewhat of a vicious circle, or path dependency, weighing heavily on the foreign policy decisions of the states in question.¹⁵ It is however necessary here to acknowledge the complexity of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, and the conflictual relationship of post-soviet democratization and re-surfing Russian interventionism. Belarus and Azerbaijan, to cite two prominent EaP countries, are clinging to authoritarianism, whereas Armenia has only recently revamped its democratic potential.

The Union for the Mediterranean was indeed ambitious in outset, but has in recent years increasingly lost its drive, and its scope became ever limited. **The problem at the core of the ENP when it comes to the MENA region could perhaps be illustrated by the deeper meaning of the notion of *Neighbourhood*.** Per Walzer, the neighbourhood is by all intents and purposes, a “random community”¹⁶ – it is this ‘randomness’ that the European Union appears to now embrace in its dealings with its Mediterranean neighbours, with no clear goal of what the ENP truly strives to achieve is in sight. At best, the ENP appears to serve the EU to contain the negative externalities resulting from political instability, by producing incentives for governments to comply with EU proposals: the recent European initiatives in tackling migration, fittingly described as ‘containment-and-storage’ by some, are a clear example of this dynamic.¹⁷ Initial ambitions resulting from the democratic spark that the Arab Spring represented quickly shifted towards a logic of securitization, and the policy goal of *democratization* was, as Harders argues, replaced by the paradigm of *resilience*.¹⁸ What results is a form of top-down approach to foreign policy, where the rich homeowner pays for

his poor neighbour’s fence to keep the dogs at bay. The initial goal of the UfM, which aimed at installing a Euro-Mediterranean regionalism based on a ‘more-for-more’ (i.e. conditional approach), was replaced with a number of bilateral agreements promising technical, short-term relief from the side-products of political turmoil.

The proximity of the MENA with Europe is however by no means random, and allow for a far greater potential than the current securitization paradigm allows for. Indeed, many current security concerns on the agendas of the EUMS are in some way or another linked to the MENA countries: Terrorism, both home grown and imported, is either referencing rogue religious ideologies who blossom in the instability of MENA states, or is instigated by hatred against individuals with presumed ties to MENA countries (and, of course, beyond). MENA ports are furthermore the main departure point for illicit substances and weapons with direction Europe.¹⁹ Also, the MENA remains a prime source for petroleum and natural resources, with security issues inadvertently leading to price shocks and/or shortages. Yet, the security-resilience-stability nexus ignores more sustainable outlooks that are specifically tied to energy, migration, and Environmental protection.

The EU’s energy demand is on an increasing surge upwards, and the question of energy security will be increasingly tied to the possibilities of transition to ‘clean’ (i.e., carbon free) power sources. Numerous studies have outlined the opportunities arising for the EU to achieve such a transition through tapping into the vast potential of the MENA region when it comes to wind, solar and hydro-powered energy.²⁰ The potential is exacerbated by Europe’s proximity to the region, as technologies aiming at minimising losses through large-scale grid energy transport are steadily improving, and trans-mediterranean cables are becoming an ever more valid option.²¹

Migration between the MENA and the EU is haunted by a dual, malicious dynamic: Firstly, migrant flows (both stemming from the MENA, and using the region as a way of passage) are unidirectional, and often uncontrolled upon departure. This leads to avoidable loss of life *en route*, and hinges an equally avoidable burden on the EU’s southern-shore countries, as the task to control

14 George Christou “European Union security logics to the east: the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership” *European Security*, Vol. 19 Nr. 3 (2010).

15 Kerikmäe, Tanel & Archil Chochia (eds.) *Political and Legal Perspectives of the EU Eastern Partnership Policy*. Heidelberg: Springer (2016)

16 Walzer, Michael. *Spheres of Justice*. London: Basic Books (1983): p 36

17 “EU and the failure of ‘containment-and-storage’ policies” *Mediterranean Affairs* (March 6, 2016)

18 Harders, Cilja *et al.* “Europe and the Arab world: neighbours and uneasy partners in a highly conflictual context” *International Politics* Vol. 54 (2017):434-452.

19 Barzoukas, Georgios “Drug trafficking in the MENA” *EUISS* (November 2017)

20 Haller, Markus & Sylvie Ludig, Nico Bauer “Decarbonization scenarios for the EU and MENA power system: Considering spatial distribution and short term dynamics of renewable generation” *Energy Policy* Vol. 47 (2012): pp 282-290

21 For the recent project: <https://www.euroasia-interconnector.com>

immigration is (through the regulations stipulated in the Dublin Regulation) left to the first-receiver countries. Secondly, labour migration is unbalanced between the EU and the MENA countries, with labourers fleeing high unemployment in the MENA to increasingly saturated economies in the EU. A similar imbalance is prevalent when it comes to the migration of highly skilled labour, resulting in avoidable brain drain effects weighing heavily on the economies and institutional stability of MENA countries.²² Nowhere is the issue of the securitization paradigm more visible than when it comes to migration: efforts are almost uniquely focused on stemming migrant flows (which are centered around an extended jurisdiction to ensure containment paradigm), and have proven either useless or ethically untenable. However, there are virtually no initiatives from the EU's side to curb the effects of brain drain and skilled migration. To reach a sustainable approach to migration, the EU must look beyond its boundaries, and beyond the security paradigm. Resilience and stability are certainly key, but the long term perspective must prevail – and ethical tenability is crucial.

Climate change and environmental degradation are a global challenge – and water, both in its maritime and sweet-water dimension, is at its core. The Mediterranean sea, source of income and pleasure for individuals on all its shores, as well as central feature of ecosystems south, east and north, is at the breaking point of pollution – with MENA countries' impact standing in no comparison to European counterparts.²³ In order to attain a sustainable regime to curb environmental degradation, an approach adapted to economic and social practices on both sides of the basin must be achieved; protection must be incentivised, and civil mobilisation encouraged.

Where challenges are common, common solutions must be sought. **The challenges of Europe are common (if not throughout the bank) to the challenges of the MENA, yet Europe is engaging into a politics of neighbourly containment as opposed to a sustainable partnership.** Proximity, by itself, is seen as a challenge, and not as a means to *face* the plethora of challenges shared. It is time for Europe to capitalise on its proximity with the MENA region, as opposed to seeing it as a contingent feature of its geographical position. **Partnership must reign as paradigm, not the securitized neighbourhood.**

22 Docquier, Frederic & Luca Marchiori “The impact of MENA-to-EU migration in the context of demographic change” *PEF* Vol. 11, Nr. (2 April, 2012): pp. 243–284

23 Rajeev K. Goel, Risto Herrala, Ummad Mazhar “Institutional quality and environmental pollution: MENA countries versus the rest of the world” *Economic Systems* Vol. 37, Nr 4, (2013): pp. 508-521.

However, cooperation with the MENA must not only be seen as a necessity, but as an opportunity, too.

A POWERHOUSE FOR UNITED, PRINCIPLED, EFFECTIVE AND AUTONOMOUS FOREIGN POLICY

The MENA has recently been portrayed as the ‘Powerhouse’ of foreign policy²⁴, describing it as necessary for striving global power to engage the region in order to take one's place in the international theatre.²⁵ As it has been the case since WWI, control of the resourceful and strategic MENA region is disputed among world powers, including European countries, partly in reminiscence of their late colonial domination. While there is a crucial need for the introduction of a post-colonial perspective in this special relationship outlined above, EU foreign policy drastically needs to gain autonomy. As it is still often held hostage of a ‘Cold War-thinking’, it deeply lacks the true capacities of action required to establish an autonomous foreign policy, notably in the MENA region. Only the development of a ‘True European Defence Union’²⁶ would provide the necessary capacities for the EU to intervene outside, and regardless of, the NATO framework and thus develop a genuinely European-bred strategic culture. As Asseburg argues, it was precisely the turmoil of the Arab Spring that demonstrated the problematic dependence of the EU countries on the US when it comes to safeguarding geopolitical interest²⁷ – a dependence that, in the current state of affairs, is untenable.

However, it is not only mere presence that is needed **to actuate a truly independent foreign policy of Europe** – the desired result is contingent on the nature of this presence. The EU, more than any other global player of the same importance, incorporates notions of a democratic rights culture, and societal compromise,

24 Filiu, Jean Pierre & Stephane Lacroix eds. *Revisiting the Arab Uprisings*. Paris: CERI/ SciencesPo (2018)

25 Filiu, Jean Pierre, Personal Communication, October 2016.

26 Howorth, Jolyon. “For a True European Defence Union” *European View*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2018

27 Asseburg, Muriel. “The Arab Spring and the European Response” *The International Spectator* Vol. 48, Nr. 2 (2013): 47-62

as opposed to ‘pure’ national interest. While unity in foreign policy within the EU remains a mirage, reactive, securitized policies may serve the short-term interests of individual member states. However, in the long run it sustains autocratic regimes in the region; a method of conducting foreign policy that currently shreds the region to pieces, as it is ferociously employed by the US and Russia alike. Schlumberger goes as far as arguing that the current European policies – through its exclusion of societal voices in favor of a uniquely government-centered approach, and the resulting depoliticization²⁸ of partnership – served as a ‘triple victory’ for Arab autocratic regimes.²⁹ Seeberg comes to similar conclusions by quoting Eberhard Kienle: “In practice, the Union has frequently preferred immediate stability in the south, and thus authoritarian rule and repression, to slow and possibly messy regime transformation”.³⁰ The fact of the matter is that Europe is in the unique position to engage into a different foreign policy that goes beyond geopolitical interest, as it is itself the very outcome of such a dynamic. In a minimalist reading, the Arab Spring was a call for negotiation between governments and population – the EU’s economic power could be more coherently used to enhance dialogue between governments and constituency, through incentivization of participatory processes, and pluralist governance. Manners’ much disputed conceptualization of European soft power could find a true example in the contemporary MENA. Such an approach of encouraging compromise, is in many ways the luxury of the European Union, as it is itself the product of a collection of such negotiations and processes – as the EA showed. As outlined in *Europe as a Rights Culture*³¹, the set of values on which the very foundation of the EU rests is enlisted in art. 2 of the Treaty on European Union (2007): respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, in a framework intertwined by the conjunction of pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and gender equality. Given it is gifted with decisive tools such as mandatory conditionality of aid and cooperation, including defence cooperation, these

28 Understood as a subtraction of normative commands of democratic participation and egalitarian socio-economic values achieved through regime development imposed in partnerships (or, in EU speak, conditionality). For a similar definition, see: Seeberg, Peter. “Pragmatism and depoliticization in European-Mediterranean relations” DJUCO - Working Papers No. 3 (December 2011).

29 Schlumberger, Oliver “The Ties that do not Bind: The Union for the Mediterranean and the Future of Euro-Arab Relations” *Mediterranean Politics* Vol. 16, No. 1 (2011): 135-153

30 Kienle, Eberhard. “Introduction. Democracy Building and Democracy Erosion.” in *Political Change North and South of the Mediterranean*. (Kienle eds.) London: Saqi Press (2009): 9-18. in Seeberg, Peter. “Pragmatism and depoliticization in European-Mediterranean relations” DJUCO - Working Papers No. 3 (December 2011).

31 Sine Qua Non “Europe as a Rights Culture”, 2018.

values are to be the lighthouse guiding the principled foreign policy the EU should deploy in the MENA region, should a true political will emerge to uphold it.

Additionally, the EU is not only in the unique position of being able to overcome pure, national interest convincingly by uniting its members states behind a common set of principles and normative convictions, but also finds itself in the face of a unique opportunity – that of a benevolent regard of local populations. Recent surveys show that, especially the inhabitants of MENA region, are looking favorably at the Union.³² There is the not only a necessity for the EU to engage itself thoroughly in the MENA, but also a fruitful soil to do so – a benefit that no global players appear to have at the moment.³³ Despite these appealing figures, **the current security-resilience nexus paradigmatically enforced in the EU-MENA relationship forbids European countries from seizing this opportunity of rethinking their relationship with their southern neighbors.** As counterterrorism or defence cooperation activities such as intelligence-sharing remain key to Europe’s security, effective and principled development policies in the MENA are just as vital to its long-term security, in the framework of a reborn relationship.

CONCLUSION: A EUROPEAN PARADIGM OF FOREIGN POLICY, ACTUATED IN THE MENA REGION

The European Union’s core principles give a clear guideline on how to claim its place in the world. (As outlined elsewhere, it is indeed key that it does.) Europe’s proximity to the MENA makes the region the first and foremost priority in this necessary process. The recent development of European political discourse into the direction of regarding the MENA as a place of radical alterity in the face of a stable European ‘continental’ politico-cultural monolith are not only historically misinformed, but also untenable when regarding the principal identity of the Union as a project aiming to

32 Arab Barometer 2018 Survey (<http://www.arabbarometer.org/topics/international-relations/>)

33 *Ibid.*

sacrifice the paradigmatic meaning of the border for a higher common ideal. Furthermore, the proximity of the MENA to the European project gives rise to a presence of a common set of challenges, which can only be addressed through a notion of partnership on equal terms opposed to the current securitization paradigm. The notion of partnership is at the core of the European project, so it must prove this commitment beyond its outer boundaries. Yet, the partnership must go beyond government-to-government accords: if a European foreign policy is to be truly independent, and coherent with its principles, it must engage civil society, and if necessary intervene (in peaceful terms) to protect it from repression. The MENA region's civil society is in utter need of a partner in the world, and the EU is in the unique position of offering support. In short, the MENA region exemplifies the untapped potential of a coherent European foreign policy — and a true commitment to such an approach could reap benefits for all sides involved. And still, there is a last point to make, pertaining to responsibility. The EU overcame nationalist tensions inside the 'continent' - indeed, this maneuver lies at the core of the project.

However, the injustices of nationalism were not only felt within the space the Union aims to unite, but also (and at times perhaps more so) beyond, through the spectre of colonialism. The renewal of Europe's face in the world has apparently lead to a forgiving attitude in its periphery — it is this attitude that is the historical chance the EU has to capitalize on the most. **Thus, where responsibility, commitment to principle, and proximity meet, a unique opportunity arises for a coherent European Foreign Policy, starting in the MENA region.**

