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EU Security Policies towards the Mediterranean: The Ethical Dimension

What do we know and what else should we know?

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The European Union's concerted efforts towards the Mediterranean have gone through two important phases: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (2003).[1] While the EMP went further than any previous Euro-Arab scheme and sought to unite the security practices of signatory states, the failure of the Middle East Peace Process at the end of 1990s stalled further progress in the implementation of its various aspects. Through the adoption of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2003, the EU sought to bring under the same framework policies towards their neighbours in the East and the South, *and* devise an instrument, short of extending membership, to bring about transformation in its neighbourhood.

The ENP was a response not only to the failings of the EMP but also to the changing security environment in Europe and beyond, as well as the global ambitions of the European Union. The latter crystallised in the form of the European Security Strategy (ESS), published in 2003. The ENP's relation with the ESS was clarified in its emphasis on cross-border cooperation on terrorism, environment, immigration and trafficking. What is referred to as 'externalisation' in EU literature is a process that took off in the post-9/11era but also as an extension of pre-9/11 and post-2004 enlargement dynamics in EU-wide efforts to address the problem of migration. This way of managing migration, also referred to in the literature as security 'outsourcing', 'sub-contracting' or 'remote control' has expanded in the last decade. As migration came to be considered in relation to terrorism (i.e. military security) as opposed to a threat to 'Europeanity' (i.e. societal security) the security practices of the Union began to take a (para)military turn.

Yet, advances in security technologies have not been matched by thinking about their ethical consequences. It is the lag in the latter that INEX has put at the centre of its agenda. The emerging lag between practices of security through increasing use of advanced technologies and thinking about security practices as regards their ethical dimensions is particularly important, given the ways in which "Europe's security has historically revolved around the presumption of a distinct set of European values".[2] The EU's security practices are judged by the very standards it once set for itself and others.

The EU's relationship with the Mediterranean neighbours constitutes an instance of this ethical quandary that the EU has found itself in. The following clarifies the nature of the ethical quandary as reflected in the scholarly and policy literature on the EMP and ENP. This review of the literature highlights the limits of 'what we know' and 'what we need to know' on the subject, cognisant of the implications of the advances in security technologies for various insecurities in the Mediterranean neighbourhood and their ethical consequences for the EU.

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[1] There is also the Union for the Mediterranean. See Policy Brief prepared by Eduard Soler i Lecha.

[2] INEX Project text, p. 7.

The literature on EU security policies

The literature shows consensus in underscoring the fact that, while there is a long and rich history to the Mediterranean, from the mid-1990s onwards the European Union has, almost single-handedly, revitalised the Mediterranean as a framework for thinking and action. Duke (2004) pointed to how this attempt marked the EU's difference from the US – an instance of EU casting itself as a 'normative power'. Marfleet (2000) and Volpi (2004), on the other hand, were more sceptical, maintaining that the EMP was not intended to support human rights and democracy but narrowly defined the self-interests of the EU.

There are four main arguments in the literature regarding the success/failure of EU policy-making toward the Mediterranean:

1. It was European policy-makers' indecision that rendered the EMP still-born

Bengtsson (2008) maintained that, while the EMP was designed as an ambitious scheme, it was not always clear, not even to its most ardent supporters, how it was going to be brought into action, given the sensitive and unexplored nature of dialogue on matters of politics and security. Schmid (2004) considered the Mediterranean aspect of EU policies, like any other aspect, as being plagued by what Hill (2003) referred to as the "capability-expectations gap".

2. The Mediterranean neighbours have had different priorities from the start

Bensaad (2007), Bayoumi (2007) and Darbouche (2008) argued that in line with their liberal assumptions, the architects of the EMP offered Mediterranean neighbours something that was a priority for them (economic aid and access to EU markets) and in return asked for something they themselves prioritised – i.e. improvements in democratic rights and freedoms. Yet, what was expected to be a productive tension between the priorities of Mediterranean neighbours and their EU counterparts did not transpire.

3. The ENP addresses many of the EMP's problems

Joenniemi (2007) maintained that the way in which the ENP was set up made it fit for the purposes of all sides. After all, the EMP had fallen short of achieving multilateralism even when EU policy rhetoric called for it. That the ENP gave up this ambition was not a weakness, but a meeting of rhetoric and action, Joenniemi maintained. Dannreuther (2008) saw what the ENP was doing differently: to change the instruments so that deeds could match with words. He praised the ENP not in terms of its philosophy but the precision of its new instruments. Comelli et al. (2007) considered the new policy to be an improvement on the EMP for different reasons. They wrote: "the ENP can be viewed as an attempt to respond to two potentially contradictory border-related demands: first, the efforts to define where the 'final borders' of the EU lie, second, the challenge to transform the EU's external borders from boundaries into borderlands". Further, they considered the ENP as the right kind of framework for the EU to finally realise its aspirations to become a normative power.

4. The ENP has inherited the EMP's problems

Joenniemi (2007) argued that the ENP could also be viewed as 'regressive' because while the EMP was about 'common security' and 'community' and others learning from the EU's own experiences in terms of seeking security, the ENP is about closing the door not in terms of membership alone, but also in terms of the potential from a security community. Schmid (2004) argued along similar lines. With the EMP, she argued, the rhetoric and aspirations were there even if they remained unfulfilled; with the ENP, the rhetoric has gone. Regarding the EU's security policies towards the Mediterranean, the literature concurs on one thing – the centrality of the tension between security and democracy to the EMP and ENP. While there is disagreement as to whether it is democracy or security that has been given priority, this tension is considered characteristic of EU policies.

The literature on official EU discourse

There are three main lines of argument present in this literature.

1. EU discourse is characterised by a paternalistic attitude towards the Mediterranean

EU President Romano Prodi's use of the term 'responsibility' towards the Mediterranean referring "to a father's responsibility for the education of his kids" (Holm, 2005); the use of the term "the logic of generosity" (Dannreuther, 2008) in reference to the European Union's stance toward the Mediterranean neighbours, is viewed by Bayoumi (2007) among others, as "paternalistic interference" in the literature and indicative of a paternalistic attitude toward the Mediterranean.

2. The EU has adopted a double-discourse on the Mediterranean/security

In EU discourse, argued Holm (2004), the concept of the Mediterranean is sometimes defined as a common sphere of shared values, of shared civilisational identity, and sometimes as a conflict-ridden zone. While it could be and indeed has been argued that such duality in representations of the Mediterranean reflect the EU's lack of sincerity in its engagement with the Mediterranean, others have pointed to confusion and/or tension within the EU as the source. The difference between the Mediterranean neighbours and EU members, according to Malmvig (2006), is not merely one of different conceptions of security as Bayoumi (2007) has suggested, but indicative of different and competing conceptions of Mediterranean/security within the Union itself.

3. EU discourse has distinguished between Eastern and Southern neighbours in terms of cultural distance to 'Europe'

What some scholars found problematic was not that the European Union has had a dual discourse on the Mediterranean/security per se, but that its discourse on the Eastern neighbours did not show such signs of 'confusion' or 'tension'. While during the early 1990s an alarmist discourse coloured public debate on the 'East' as well, observed scholars, it did not seem to find a similar resonance among EU officials. What was different in the case of migrants from the East versus the South was that in the case of the latter, EU policy-makers' rhetoric followed and fed into public perceptions. While it was not always EU officials but also (perhaps more so) politicians and the media that helped produce an alarmist discourse about Muslim migrants, the Union's differentiated treatment of its neighbours to the East and the South did not escape the attention of analysts.

The duality in EU discourse is identified by Bilgin (2004) and Haddadi (2004) as not merely one of security v. democracy, but a more complex tension made up of several competing conceptions of security and its relationship to democracy and difference. Bicchi and Martin (2006) argued that while some in the EU (especially at the 'domestic' level) may indeed be operating with assumptions of cultural distance, others (especially at the EU level) are seeking to prevent such assumptions from influencing policy – to the extent that they are cognisant of them.

The literature on EU security practices

There is now a sizeable body of work detailing the evolution of EU border management and its country-specific aspects, as well as aspects of their ethical implications. Whereas some have pointed to the human costs of EU security practices for migrants on the move (and asylum-seekers), and others have highlighted the societal costs for the Mediterranean neighbours who subcontract for the EU, others have looked at the issue from the Union's perspective as regards EU identity as a 'normative power'. The following identifies four main arguments.

1. EU security practices vis-à-vis the Mediterranean have transformed in tandem with EU's own transformation

The turning point in terms of EU practices vis-à-vis the external world in general and the Mediterranean in particular is the merging of internal and external dimensions of security, which has been going on for a while but gained pace in the last decade. Wolff (2008) pointed to the 1999 Tampere summit and the emergence of the Justice and Home Affairs external dimension (JHAE) as the beginning of this transformation, external events such as 9/11 being mere 'catalysts' in this process. As the second turning point, she identified the publication of ESS, which "inaugurated a change in the traditional approach to JHAE".

2. The development of an external dimension to EU security practices has had 'human costs'

Lutterbeck (2006), Mazzella (2007), Monzini (2007), Spijkerboer (2007) looked at the issue of the development of the external dimension to EU security practices in terms of its costs and benefits for the Union itself, as well as the human costs. Lutterbeck (2006) maintained that the surveillance approach to migration, which has also brought the re-emergence of gendarmerie-type efforts to the borders of the EU and subcontracting to the Mediterranean neighbours have '(para)militarised' EU policy-making, which has not been as effective as the numbers seem to suggest.

3. The externalisation has had implications for the EU's identity as a 'normative power'

Some have pointed to how the Union's identity as a 'normative power' is at stake in the way in which externalisation is managed. "The proximity of countries with a high degree of relative poverty and the presence of authoritarian governments represents both a developmental and moral challenge" to the EU, argued Dannreuther (2008). Bensaad (2007) argued that it is one thing if the Union fails to transform its neighbourhood for the better; it is another thing entirely if the Union makes use of the Mediterranean neighbours' lagging behind in terms of democratic transformation to further its own security interests while running the risk of exporting its societal insecurities, which play out differently in different settings.

4. Externalisation has given rise to societal insecurities among Mediterranean neighbours

The EU is frequently criticised for the way in which it leaves migrants at the mercy of authoritarian governments, since such practices are costly for society as well as individual human beings. Among others, Holm (2008: 27) claimed racism against Sub-Saharan migrants to be on the rise in Mediterranean neighbour societies. As a result of the subcontracting of border management, the EU borders have moved southwards. This is a process summarised by Bensaad (2007: 52) as Schengen '[exporting] its tensions'. As part of this process, Maghreb governments seem to have internalised EU security concerns while importing some of their security practices. Benantar (2006) underscored that this is different from the 'North-South securitisation' in that it involves security concerns of the North being exported to the South. He reported "spectacular repressions taking place in the Maghreb in the last couple of years".

Conclusion

Two gaps can be identified in the literature.

First, there is very little information about or reflection upon the Mediterranean neighbours' perspectives on EU security policies. Mediterranean countries are mostly viewed as the subjects of this policy and given very little agency in analyses. Yet different Mediterranean neighbours have adopted different stances toward EU security policies. Some have used this opportunity to upgrade their relations with the European Union; others have utilised the new EU discourse on terrorism to frame their new/old policies on existing (internal/external) security concerns.

Second, there is very little research that specifically focuses on the value premises embedded in EU policies. While there is some critical literature that points to the gap between what the EU purports to do and what it ends up doing, stress is placed on what else the EU is expected to do – not what it already does. What often remains under-examined is the already existing cooperation on security matters. While both the EMP and ENP have failed to deliver what they promised, security practices across the Mediterranean have already begun to converge. The literature's emphasis on divergence does not seem to allow for the scrutiny of already existing security policy convergence. Research that looks at the implications of such a convergence for human security is a scarce commodity indeed.

It is in filling these twin gaps in the literature that INEX project would be invaluable.

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