CHAPTER 11

Rethinking the EU Approach

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INTRODUCTION

This volume shows that the historic interconnectivity between the shores of the Mediterranean endures and yet there are shifting sands as to where and how interactions occur. At the macro level and due to changes in the international order, the EU and the states of the Southern Neighborhood are part of a more complex multipolar system. The Southern Neighborhood is receiving more attention from a number of local, regional and international actors due to political contentions (including conflict), energy issues, and partnership opportunities. Concurrently, non-rentier MENA states remain relatively dependent on external partners for aid, trade, investment and labor remittances. Beck’s chapter shows that the Gulf and Levant in particular are linked. However, there is also evidence that the Gulf and North Africa are linked too for reasons mostly related to the political influence of some Gulf states (Ayesh 2020). Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE could be viewed as employing their own Truman-style doctrines to contain the regional influence of Qatar and Turkey. Egypt plays a vital role as a local allied state in this endeavor.
The chapter by Yahia and Lounnas shows the interconnectivities between North Africa and sub-Sahara Africa. Further regionalism might be fostered by state alliance building on major policy issues such as the issue of Western Sahara on the Moroccan side, and for example, Israeli attempts to garner more Arab state recognition (Jacobs 2020). However, since Algeria remains weakened by internal protest, and considering resistance in Morocco toward any normalization of relations with Israel, combined with popular Moroccan support for the Palestinians, transformed relations with Israel will remain unlikely until there is a common and fair peace proposal on offer similar to that which existed in the 1990s. Nevertheless, regionalism should be reconsidered and especially in the context of the complex interregionalism taking place which recognizes the cross winds of influences, the relative autonomy of these states, and the reality on the ground in the Southern Neighborhood and beyond.

While it is preferable for the EU, a regional organization, to engage multilaterally with the Southern Neighborhood, in practice this is still not a viable option. The Arab League members have failed to create a collective security community which could provide a sound basis for enhanced interaction, negotiation and cooperation. Indeed, partners in the south have different forms of policy engagement with the EU and generally prefer to deal with the EU and member states bilaterally rather than as a coherent group. This complicates any regional approach that the EU can take. Therefore, a regional dialogue is urgently required to set up a format, approach and priorities that work. Centuries on, history, identity, and nationalism resonate through orientalist and occidentalist visions of the “other” on either side of the Mediterranean whether through divisive populist policies, Islamophobia or racism. But it is the disconnect in systems of governance that truly undermines personal connections, shared goals and more formal cooperation.

This book finds that some MENA states are too big to fail, which affects ENP calculations regarding engagement and reform orientated policies. The book finds that the political economy of many states, even those with relatively high GDP growth, have significant employment challenges, show signs of growing poverty rates, and that IMF packages and domestic growth strategies remain compromised by patrimonial networks, lack of governance, and an array of structural constraints. Counterterrorism cooperation is proven to be most effective in Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan, and Iraq, although there is more work that needs to be done in all cases. Even where cooperation is deemed necessary and possible,
our research suggests it might compromise the EU on values and so it is always worth a full assessment as to whether counterterrorism cooperation will deliver results. Fundamentally, the conditions for radicalization and terrorism remain ever present across the region and little is being done to address many of its socioeconomic drivers.

Some states are using migration as a form of leverage over the EU. Security-oriented measures have come to dominate humanitarian considerations and although a Common European Asylum System aiming at substantial harmonization among Member States is found to considerably contribute to legal certainty and clear/unitary rights, it is deemed unlikely given the persistent hesitance of Member States to make real sovereignty transfers in this area. On energy, EU participation in the EastMed pipeline could support better relations with regional states and contribute toward regional stability. LNG and the oftentimes contentious issue of Exclusive Economic Zones/continental shelf is found to have raised tensions between Turkey and Cyprus, Israel and Lebanon, and Turkey and Greece. Furthermore, energy cooperation is expected to be one of the first victims if relations deteriorate further. The EuroMed pipeline is useful for littoral states around Mediterranean but it is not a game changer, especially as the EU aims to decarbonize its economy by 2050 and as demand and prices tend to be higher in Asia.

Russian reengagement in the MENA region is found to be an ongoing mission for regional and global relevance and influence. President Putin’s motivations are related to domestic counterterrorism concerns and the Russian economy. The actual strategy is unknown and the authors question whether, similar to the EU and US Middle East policy, a definable strategy exists at all. Certainly, there are tactical relations between Russia and its counterparts in the region which tend to focus on Russia offering hard power assistance such as missile defense, arms, and mercenaries. Whether the foothold in Syria translates into broader influence, especially in the Gulf, is yet to be determined. The trajectory of Russian policy is found to be closely linked to the role President Putin continues to play in Russian politics and how the USA might impinge on Russian interests, as well as other threats and opportunities presented by MENA state and non-state actors. The situation continues to evolve.

For Turkey, the Eastern Mediterranean has been conceived as part of its identity from the Ottoman period to its current national security, especially in dealing with threats from south. Turkey wants to be part of EastMed group for a range of economic reasons, from reducing its
energy import burden to the benefits and prestige of being an energy hub. Through its exclusion from EastMed, Turkey has formed closer relations with Libya and Tunisia and taken unilateral measures which have created tensions with European states such as France, as well as within the vicinity, including Israel, Greece, and the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus. Ankara’s energy tensions with Cairo have created a new layer of complexity in their relations beyond political problems with Egypt which have existed since 2013. But, instead of forming relations with a small community of states that condone political Islam, Turkish policy could enhance the prospects for broader relations with allies that contribute to the prospect of a new subregional grouping in a sensitive regional environment.

The EU has been found to have securitized the North Africa (and the Sahel) region more than promoting genuine economic development. Its major policy concerns revolve around terrorism, migration, and transnational trafficking (drugs, weapons, etc.) and have generally overlooked the nature of the incumbent regimes. The chapter on the Maghreb argues that the fight against terrorism and migration will not cease as long as the socioeconomic problems in the region have not been addressed because these problems play directly into the hands of terrorists, smugglers, and narco-traffickers. In effect, the EU is found to have often sacrificed its norms and values to engage with authoritarian regimes in order to protect the external border. It is neither a leading promoter of democracy or human rights. The blame for this cannot be entirely leveled at Brussels. As long as authoritarian states fail to make good governance and socioeconomic development their top priority, the threat from terrorism will persist. It is up to the EU not to fall into the trap of unconditionally supporting regimes which continue to use security and terrorism as sole components of political legitimacy, justification for draconian security measures, and cause for the removal or indefinite extension of presidential term limits.

**Addressing the Autocratic—Democratic Divide on Conflict and Development**

Since states such as Egypt increasingly focus on nonintervention in the Arab World (El Tawil 2019) and self-reliance in the AU (Egyptian State Information Service 2019), and given the current socioeconomic context,
it is vital to get the EU to engage in most effective way possible. The way forward could include the following:

**Building a Foundation for a Partnership**

The EU might be able to do more to build on common areas of interest within the existing Association Agreements through the leverage of soft power resources. When we compare the EU Association Agreement with Morocco and with Egypt versus the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between China and Morocco and China and Egypt, the following is evident:

**EU–Morocco Association Agreement**

- Framework for political dialogue covering issues of common interest
- Conditions for trade liberalization (EUR LEX 2000)
- Bilateral trade reached $37.4 billion in 2017
- In 2018, the Western Sahara was incorporated into the EU–Morocco trade protocol, but Sweden announced that it was not happy with the consultation process and specifically the requirement for consent as defined by a judgement of the European Court of Justice in 2016 (Western Sahara Resource Watch 2018)—the agreement went ahead in 2019 to ‘help the Western Sahara develop’ (European Parliament 2019).

**China–Morocco Strategic Partnership**

- China and Morocco signed a partnership agreement in 2016
- After France and Spain, China is Morocco’s third-largest trade partner with bilateral trade worth $3.8 billion in 2017 (Nyongesa 2018)
- Morocco offers gateway into Europe
- Morocco is becoming an aerospace contracting hub and aims to develop the auto sector
- Alternative energy will also be important—the $3.9 billion Noor 1 project is the largest solar farm in Africa
- Tourism is also important and will be one of China’s top 20 destinations by 2020 (ibid.).

**EU–Egypt Association Agreement**
• Provides a framework for political dialogue to help foster economic and social relations
• Encourages regional cooperation and promotes common areas of mutual interest
• In force since 2004, it creates a free trade area between the EU and Egypt especially fuel and mining products, chemicals, textiles and clothing imports from Egypt, and machinery, transport products, chemicals, fuels, mining products and agricultural imports from the EU
• Services are also becoming a more important part of the export mix on both sides
• In 2004, Egypt along with Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia also signed the Agadir Agreement which removes trade barriers between them and harmonizes rules on standards and customs
• Trade has more than doubled trade to reach €27.9 billion in 2017 (European Commission).

The China–Egypt Comprehensive Strategic Partnership entails:

• China supporting Egypt’s national development path
• Support for their respective core interests
• Strengthened exchanges at all levels
• Aligned BRI with Egypt’s Vision 2030 and Suez Canal Corridor Development Project
• Counterterrorism and security cooperation (MFA China 2018)
• Bilateral trade reached $13 billion in 2018 (Egypt Today 2019).

By comparing these agreements, the following observations can be made: (a) the EU agreements can be further extended to support diplomacy on contentious issues; (b) there is room for a political dialogue in the Association Agreement versus an expectation of political support on all core interests in China’s (Comprehensive) Strategic Partnerships; (c) there is room for internal dissent and legal challenge in the multilateral (EU) versus the bilateral (China) framework; (d) the EU remains an important trade partner, but there is potential for China to rapidly expand lower-level trade relations by focusing on new or existing industries and initiatives such as tourism and mega-projects according to local development objectives. Although there is some bandwidth for further economic
cooperation with the EU, rapid growth in trade and investment relations will require a considered mix of aid, trade and investment, coupled with sensitivity and initiative in how to avoid state-led development opportunities which may not deliver for the whole population. The following points could be useful in building relations: addressing xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe which obstruct social ties, ramping up jobs training and exchange opportunities for youth, diversifying the Algerian economy, building on Morocco’s desire to differentiate itself from other North African states through a raft of impactful security and economic initiatives, and stabilizing Libya. While some policies may be more successful than others over varying timescales, the EU should primarily be more ambitious in its attempts to manage conflicts in order to re-establish regional stability.

Against a backdrop of conflict, Middle East tensions and lack of political will in many quarters, regional integration efforts through the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) also looks to be in trouble. At the time of writing, Syrian membership was suspended and Libya was an observer (European Union External Action Service 2016). Although UfM provides an important forum in which states such as Israel and Palestine and Turkey and Cyprus can engage and potentially cooperate, it in no way addresses or resolves existential issues such as conflict which bar regional cooperation.

From Conditionality to Dialogue

Conditionality in particular has not been received well in the Southern Neighborhood, nor indeed have any policies which appear to exhibit neocolonial superiority and unequal partnerships. The dilemma for EU policymakers is how best to “…encourage political and economic reform in each individual country in due respect for its specific features and regional cooperation among the countries of the region themselves and with the EU” (European Union External Action Service). In 2014, the then Greek Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras, announced that Greece and Cyprus would use their EU membership to promote European–Egyptian relations in the new Sisi era (Shama 2019: 99). The diplomatic support was vital to Egypt which was temporarily isolated for some of the tactics employed during the 2013 military coup, and has cemented relations including denouncing Turkish incursions into the Cypriot EEZ (Hellenic MFA 2014). The Nicosia Declaration (Hellenic MFA 2015) covers
aspects such as counterterrorism cooperation, concern over regional conflicts, migration and other challenges, as well as joint cooperation on tourism. Egypt and Greece are important to each other as trade partners, with Greece seeing itself as a gateway for Egyptian products into Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Shama 2019: 100). Through this sub-regional grouping it appears that interests and incentives are likely to drive relations more fruitfully than with the EU as a whole.

As Egypt invests in maritime capabilities and builds up relations with some Eastern Mediterranean states as well as closer relations with Eritrea, with the possibility of an Egyptian military base on Nora island giving it more influence in the Red Sea (The Arab Weekly 2020), the EU would be wise to reengage Egypt as fully as possible. The EU does appear to have taken that approach with Egypt and other regional strongmen, arguing it’s easier to influence through an engaged relationship, including on human rights (Peel 2019). The EU–Arab League Summit held in Cairo in February 2019 is one such example. But there is scant evidence that a more engaged relationship will have any effect on human rights and could simply embolden autocrats. Tensions will inevitably remain.

What we do know from other research is that sanctions don’t work. The USA embargoed Cuba and cut diplomatic relations for 50 years without any change to Cuba’s policy. Sanctions on Iran have not worked in terms of changing its revolutionary foreign policy (Mason 2014). Sanctions didn’t bring down a regime, help people, or moderate a state’s foreign policy, whereas engagement enables regimes to see the limits of their own system and at least avoids conflict (Walt 2020). So the question remains how to shift from conditional to dialogue. A good place to start might be in encouraging leaders to reconceptualize governance beyond the narrow remit of regime and national security. By utilizing a pragmatic approach to appeal to a regime’s narrow security agenda and its developmental needs, it may be possible to help mitigate against some of the least desirable aspects of conflicts and authoritarian upgrading measures, whilst enhancing human security and prospects for future generations.

**Enhancing Human Security in Conflict Zones**

The UN defines human security as “… widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people.” It
calls for “people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-orientated responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people” (United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security). The emphasis is therefore on social emancipation and a growth of civil society initiatives. While most EU supported projects and efforts do not necessarily compromise national security in the Southern Neighborhood, they are nonetheless often curtailed or constrained by authoritarian regimes on the basis of such a rationale and discourse.

The most recent incarnation of the EU foreign policy is EU Global Strategy (EUGS)—the updated doctrine of the European Union to improve the effectiveness of the defense and security of the EU (European Union External Action Service 2019). Within this update, security of the member states, building resilience in the east and south, integrating approaches to conflicts (including multilateralism), building a global order based on international law, and cooperation, all put forward as key features (ibid.). Building resilience in the MENA region has been a key part of EU engagement in the Southern Neighborhood since the ENP update in 2015. Yet, it remains vague, built on a narrow and short-term sense of self-interest, and unable to adapt to the geopolitical realities in many situations in which it is supposed to be active.

Where MENA states fail to substantially engage, the EU could take a more direct approach to mitigate the possibility of more failed states and humanitarian disasters. It should do this by concentrating on health, education, and poverty reduction. The latter is especially important since many of these populations are “moving targets” incorporating population growth, unemployment, and environmental degradation (Mason and Hendy).

In conflict situations such as Syria, policy emphasis should be on ending the conflict, enhancing and securing human rights (including stemming and stopping the number of forced disappearances, arbitrary detention and torture) and reversing the massive internal and external displacement that has occurred. The EU needs to be more creative, less risk averse and explore more political and diplomatic options beyond UN diplomacy (ECFR 2020). The EU could also take measures to make the Astana track irrelevant, by engaging Iran, working more closely with the Small Group on Syria (Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UK, and USA) and providing more robust support for NGOs which make a difference on the ground in Syria (ibid.). In light of Covid-19 and temporarily closed EU borders at the time of writing in March 2020,
the EU could develop a new set of workable options for Syrian refugees. These should focus on beefing up medical and humanitarian work and enhancing the number of safe, secure, and hygienic (in light of Covid-19) facilities in neighboring states, while establishing a workable timeline for repatriation back to safe spaces in Syria. We know this can be done since the Excel Centre in London was transformed into a field hospital in nine days through a combination of public–private enterprise including the army, NHS staff and contractors (BBC News 2020). The EU should also look again at sanctions against the Assad regime which sometimes don’t work and can make the humanitarian situation worse, for example, by affecting fuel prices for domestic heating and cooking.

Socioeconomic Conditions, Terrorism, and Revolution

Youth bulges and socioeconomic conditions are not directly correlated to episodes of internal political violence or terrorism. Indeed, Krueger and Maleckova (2003) find little evidence to support a causal link between socioeconomic conditions and terror group recruitment or support, at least in Israel and Palestine. But more recent publications do show that relative deprivation and labor market conditions, if not causal, can at least be a factor for individuals being mobilized under the banner of violent Islamism across the MENA region (Gambetta and Hertog 2016: 55). There is also some evidence to suggest in Jack Goldstone’s revolution theory that population cycles can lead to political rebellion and revolution (Hamanaka 2016: 74). The revolts of 2011 have been theorized as a rupture in this social contract, a natural conclusion to what happens when the provision of basic social services are neglected by the commanding regimes (Kamrava 2014). Therefore, the EU might be able to mitigate against some of these effects by implementing a deeper policy in states of particular vulnerability and concern.

Far better, one might argue, to enhance futures within local contexts under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the EU is attempting to do than experience mass migration which rates high on most EU member state political agendas. But the €96.8 billion for EU external cooperation assistance 2014–2020 focused on Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe (European Commission 2015: 8) as the source of most migration into Europe and appears to have omitted the Middle East and North Africa. The deal with Turkey pales in comparison. Yet in places
such as Tunisia, 31% of Tunisian youth considered illegal migration in 2016 (Observertoire Maghrebin des Migrations 2017: 5).

Beyond population and socioeconomic circumstance, the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder across the region is high, no doubt highly correlated to the frequency of political violence, repression and conflict. It ranges from 24% among young people in Lebanon to 69% in Gaza (Afifi et al. 2012: 178–187). In the MENA region, preventable diseases also form a major challenge. Environmental pollution, including air pollution, cost an estimated 125,000 lives in the Middle East in 2013 and an estimated $9 billion (The World Bank 2016). The EU could help address this partly by carrying out more stringent checks on vehicles being exported to the Southern Neighborhood from Europe but which would fail most European emissions tests and partly through targeting aid in areas such as urban and industrial planning, waste disposal, clean energy and the green economy.

Water and energy demand in the MENA region is rapidly increasing which, when coupled with poor city and resource management, has resulted in widespread soil, land and marine degradation. A waste crisis began in Lebanon in 2015 when residents near the Naameh landfill site forced the government to shut it down, more than a decade after it was scheduled to close. The protest was due to trash being left in the street from July 2015 to August 2016. It subsequently became a cause around which a mass mobilizations developed, and spurred the Lebanese government to open a new landfill at Bourj Hammoud on the outskirts of Beirut (Broom 2018). In Egypt, Only 30–60% of waste is collected with much of the rest scattered in the environment without being treated (ibid.). While the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is requesting proposals to develop a Hazardous Waste Management Programme—Phase 1—it is still in the early stages of addressing this fundamental health-related issue.

In PWC projections out to 2050, North Africa will need to create more than 68 million new jobs, with 20 million in Egypt alone. The certainty surrounding the response to such pressures looks less than assured. The EU might work more closely with partners, especially from Asia where there is a precedent of rapid economic growth within authoritarian but market-orientated contexts. A combination of education objectives, strategic investments, industrial, tax and export policy advice, joint ventures and entrepreneurial support, might help address the immense challenge. The only incentive for the EU to take such a
coordinated approach is if the challenge is reconceptualized not only in
development terms but also in security terms as well, especially related to
European security.

**Reviewing Efficacy of Decision-Making and Policy Implementation**

The 2003 invasion of Iraq, including the destruction of state institutions and widespread insecurity, contributed to state and pan-regional turmoil over the following decade. Although the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran provided a basis for headway on other regional issues, the lack of engagement with Iran on containing ISIS has been unfortunate. Democratization, as part of the G. W. Bush’s rolling justification for the intervention, has made the term a dirty word and synonymous with destruction, enduring political violence, sectarian or tribal responses and a lack of national reconciliation. The number of civilian deaths in Iraq is estimated to be around 183,967 to 206,642 since the 2003 invasion (Iraq Body Count). It has enabled and emboldened Iran which has become a dominant preoccupation for many Arab states across the Middle East, encouraged by US support for the creation of Arab NATO; the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA). The discourse of insecurity from Iraq, Syria, and Libya has played right into the hands of autocrats who define their national security and sweeping counterterrorism measures as sole justification for their continued, often extended or indefinite, rule. Iraq shows that the ENP has been misconceptualized, that the EU needs a common and joined up approach to deal with threats, opportunities and alliances that exist across the entire Middle East, taking into account drivers of economic or military intervention (such as Arab Gulf support for policies against the Muslim Brotherhood, e.g., in Egypt), transnational security threats, and often personal rather than highly institutional relations along the way.

Recent revelations that Gaddafi may have made illicit payments to President Sarkozy’s 2007 presidential campaign undermine the whole pretext of NATO intervention in Libya in 2011. President Obama pointed to Libya as his “worst mistake” in not planning to rebuild a society that lacked civic direction, allegedly privately calling the situation there a “s***t show” (Tierney 2016). The instability after the NATO intervention has led to estimates of between 2000 and 30,000 civilians having been killed in Libya in 2011 (BBC News 2011). However, there is difficulty in
separating out general violence from deaths associated with the uprising and then broader conflict and clashes (Salama 2018). Clashes between warring parties, such as those recorded between April and July 2019, exceeded 1000 civilian causalities (Associated Press 2019).

The Centre for European Reform (CER) has identified that a poorly implemented EU arms export policy is undermining European security, foreign policy and its defense industry (Besch and Oppenheim 2019). This was clearly illustrated by the divergent policies of Germany on the one hand which suspended arms sales to Saudi Arabia, after the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, versus France and the UK which did not. It took court action and a ruling decision that UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia were unlawful before the government temporarily suspended them in June 2019. There is little consensus on issues of national interest or security threats to member states or the EU at large. Without the prerequisite trust between EU states, a common European defense industry is bound to remain small. A common approach to risk could help align arms sales and sanctions against common threats, control end use and “dual use” product destinations, and reach binding commitments which could affect all EU member states (ibid.).

Policy u-turns, including association with US policy u-turns, a lack of unity and inconsistencies are one of the more damaging areas to EU foreign policy credibility. From the Arab uprisings in 2011, and especially following the Mediterranean refugee crisis in 2015, the EU has struggled to formulate a coherent response which reflects its diverse member state interests and those in the Southern Neighborhood. The beleaguered Turkish accession process to the EU, the Mediterranean refugee crisis and attempted military coup in Turkey in 2016, have all served to undermine EU reform efforts in Turkey and forced the EU to pursue a form of bilateral transactional diplomacy instead.

The lack of willingness of the Cameron government in the UK to take decisive action against President Assad in Syria and sending the issue to a House of Commons vote which failed to pass, clearly led to the Obama administration to do the same by sending the issue to Congress, which also failed to pass in August 2013. The lack of movement gave Russia a chance for intervention and an opportunity to enhance its credentials in the Middle East, including in Libya. Although the USA, UK, and France did conduct military strikes against Syrian targets in April 2018 for Assad’s chemical weapons use, Germany did not due to the pacifist Social Democrats (SPD) being part of the ruling coalition in Berlin and
polls suggesting such action would not be widely supported (Martin and Shalal 2018). Amid continued uncertainty in the region and a lack of surety about EU implementation measures, some scholars argue that the catch all and vague policy about resilience conceals a shift from a transformative regional agenda back to the status quo (Badarin and Schumacher 2020: 63–87).

Rory Stewart, former Secretary of State at the UK Department for International Development (DFID), spoke about how not to fix failed states, including war torn states such as South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen, at Yale University in 2018 (Rory Stewart 2018). Although none of these are in the Southern Neighborhood, half of the world’s population will be from sub-Sahara Africa by the end of the century, thereby affecting the security and development of all the states surrounding it, including those of North Africa. Stewart highlighted the sheer range of issues that affect aid and foreign policy choices globally, from health infrastructure to security, coupled with variables such as language capabilities of foreign military and officials, shifting policy priorities and interests of a bureaucracy, rapidly rotating tours of duty (including ministers), information and resource shortcomings that combine to undermine existing approaches (ibid.). All these should be considered by the EU going forward.

**The EU as a Normative Power**

While an ENP for the Southern Neighborhood needs reforming, the EU and UK cannot afford to be complacent about its own record on key issues such as human rights, prisons, and the economy. Human rights issues abound in Europe. Journalist freedoms are curtailed, data privacy is at risk from state surveillance, and the threat from terrorism continues. In 12 months to March 2019, there were 317 deaths in UK prison custody (of which 87 were self-inflicted), up from 18 the previous year (UK Ministry of Justice 2019). The issue is becoming a major policy problem which has been obscured by Brexit. Economies across the Eurozone remain moribund in low level or negative economic growth under structural and cyclical conditions. Although Christine Lagarde will introduce more confidence when she takes over the ECB in 2019, some of the conditions in Europe and parts of the Southern Neighborhood appear to match what is called “stall speed growth” (El-Erian 2019). This is the condition whereby economic growth remains positive but not enough to accommodate national debt, increasing demand for social
services, need for better infrastructure, and result in a deepening anger and marginalization (ibid.).

Whether the EU could bring its normative power to bear as an ideational and idealist actor in the Southern Neighborhood versus the authoritarian upgrading of Southern Neighborhood states and the *riyal politik* of many EU member states remains to be seen. Should the idea of a new global council of democracies gain traction, the EU will be better placed to at least implement a more robust strategy to address failures in the neo-liberal economic system, global warming and inability to meet the Millennium Development Goals which underpin human security at the macro level. Since the term ‘normative power’ remains only part of the zeitgeist of contemporary international affairs, it is entirely possible that analysts will dispense of the term with reference to the EU as the regional and global environment changes or that it becomes redundant as the EU assumes a different role.

A NOTE ON COVID-19

The Coronavirus, Covid-19, which spread around the world in late December 2019 from Wuhan, China, has impacted the developed and developing world alike. While its long term impacts remain obscure, Covid-19 could complicate the environment in which the EU takes decisions and the ENP itself. The virus might make states in Europe and the Southern Neighborhood more isolationist since the benefits on offer from globalization will shrink. This could embolden China to capitalize on its growing soft, technological, and economic power and shift the international balance of power in its favor. This would have dramatic consequences for the EU and European policy. Still, there are also signs that states such as Germany are returning to business as usual.

As states such as Italy face the biggest crisis they have faced since the Second World War, some Italian politicians have questioned Italy’s membership of the EU, and the EU generally as a going concern given its alleged lacklustre performance on Covid-19 (Johnson et al. 2020). Notwithstanding this rather stark assessment, Covid-19 will likely entrench populism and make policy convergence between northern and southern EU states more difficult to sustain, as well as between the EU and Southern Neighborhood states. National interests will almost certainly push concerns about the Southern Neighborhood down the
foreign policy priority list and possibly give authoritarian states and violent non-state actors greater autonomy in the short term.

The EU could do more to help Southern Neighborhood states to combat Covid-19 by boosting public health clinical capacity and responses, and particularly in dealing with major disease outbreaks. Even taking a security-centric perspective, health-related euros will help prevent infections back in the EU. There may also be some reciprocity in Southern Neighborhood through participation in antiviral platforms and in future germ games. Like other parts of the world, rates of infection are unlikely to be fully reported across the MENA region for reasons related to capacity and fear, since the information flow on what Covid-19 is and how to deal with it was limited at the time of writing. Middle East refugee camps are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19. Healthcare systems have been adversely affected by conflict, particularly in Syria, and many refugee camps have few if any health services (*Die Welt* 2020). Some camps on the frontier of Europe, such as the Greek island of Lesbos, have already been affected by right-wing attacks (ibid.).

It is imperative that once a possible immunization solution is found, probably in the USA, that it be transferred quickly and efficiency to the global market. However, the virus is just one threat among many in the Southern Neighborhood. Health outcomes in conflict zones depend as much on ceasefires and medical access as they do on medicines. EU diplomacy with key states such as Russia and Turkey is therefore as important in some cases such as Syria as any public health response.

Since new strains of coronavirus could return in future, the EU could look to its policies in dealing with successive Ebola outbreaks in DRC in 2015–2018 and its preparedness responses in neighboring countries. Assessments so far show that although the EU had ample resources and opportunities for humanitarian and medical action, it did not coordinate a rapid and coordinated approach (Quaglio et al. 2015). This time, the UK missed the deadline to participate in an EU-wide ventilator scheme due to a communication problem, leaving itself open to accusations of putting Brexit before lives (Gallardo and Deutsch 2020). The supply of medical material such as face masks has also become a form of diplomacy as states such as China and Italy seek international providers quickly. China has already imported some 200 million from Egypt (*Al-Masry Al-Youm* 2020) and shipped at least 500,000 masks to Italy (*Euractiv* 2020).

The economic impact of Covid-19 will be felt for years to come. It is already feared that the economic fallout will be worse than the Great
Recession following the 2007/2008 financial crisis and possibly as bad as the Great Depression of the 1930s. In March 2020, economic growth forecasts for Asia Pacific and advanced economies were slashed by half to 1.5%, and even this looks to be optimistic (OECD 2020). While jobs and businesses are already a worry for many in the MENA region, Covid-19 will make matters worse. It has impacted on demand for oil, reaching record lows in April 2020. The knock-on effect for the Arab Gulf States will likely be more austerity and limits to “riyal politik” including generous support to central banks, discounted energy supplies and relatively large scale investments in allied states such as Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco. IMF debt forgiveness may help the situation, but the concern is that if Southern Neighborhood states are unable to deliver on economic promises or at least maintain some economic growth, it may increase the likelihood for further mass protests and authoritarian upgrading measures in response.

**Conclusion**

While the imperatives of EU engagement with the states of the Southern Neighborhood remain clear to see, especially tackling migration, conflict and terrorism, none of these can be defeated on the basis of short-term securitized approaches alone. The EU should learn lessons from NATO commitments to Afghanistan and Iraq and search for alternative security development hybrid solutions (smart power) which better fits the task. While the security imperative has hitherto been narrow, recent troop deployments by the UK and France to the Sahel illustrate how the War on Terror is playing out across the wider region. Reconceptualization of the challenge could put the EU and Southern Neighborhood states in a much stronger position to deal with both hard and soft security issues going forward. That appears to be beginning with new jobs efforts in Africa but more efforts and initiatives will be required on trade (keeping supply chains open), health and education, especially during and in the immediate aftermath of Covid-19. For the EU, this will accompany the need to reconceptualize the region and resources to support its existing, and possibly new, ENP priorities in turn. This volume also notes the other challenges that the Southern Neighborhood face, including from corruption, conflict, and poorly regulated industrialization. The emphasis is therefore on southern neighbors to reconceptualize
their role in addressing public policy challenges and rethink the participation of legitimate non-state actors which have so often been marginalized in official decision-making processes.

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