

THE EU AND THE FORMATION OF A MULTIPOLAR NEIGHBOURHOOD IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Arab transitions have contributed to shaping a multipolar scenario in the Mediterranean in which the European Union (EU) is striving to maintain its role as a leading actor. The emergence of new political regimes, many of them led by Islamist parties, is consolidating a dense network of diplomatic links and alliances that have gone beyond classic elements of international relations in the region.

Key external actors, such as Europe and the United States, currently share a leading role with emerged powers, such as the Gulf countries, China and Turkey, not only in economic and trade terms but also political and diplomatic. North Africa and the Middle East are no longer the backyard of the United States and the European powers. Moreover, the US pivot to Asia and the fact that the European integration model is at a low ebb emphasise the transition towards a transformed strategic chessboard.

This is well reflected in the results of the Euromed Survey 2012. Respondents consider that the EU will have an influence similar to that of the Arab League and Turkey while Saudi Arabia and the United States will be more influential than Brussels. It is notable that around 40% of respondents consider that the EU will have less influence in the region than China – a country with a record of more recent and less dense economic, political and diplomatic relations with southern Mediterranean countries than the EU. The attitude of the Former President of Egypt Mohamed Morsi just after his election reflects this new scenario: his first official trips were to Saudi Arabia, China and Iran rather than to Europe.¹

If we compare this data with that of the 2011 Survey we see that the weight of Iran, Russia and Saudi Arabia has increased with respect to the EU from one year to another. In the case of Iran and Russia, this could be due to the central position of these powers in the Syrian conflict – both developing active diplomacy in favour of Bashar al-Assad's regime. The case of Saudi Arabia reveals the growing influence of the Gulf countries in the region. Along with actively supporting the revolutionary movements of countries such as Libya or Syria, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries are strengthening their diplomatic links with the Islamist governments in the region and, through their foreign policy, contributing to consolidating a regional breach between Shiites and Sunnis.

The case of Turkey deserves a separate explanation. Despite having become a central actor in the region since the outbreak of the Arab Spring,² the results of the 2012 Survey show a

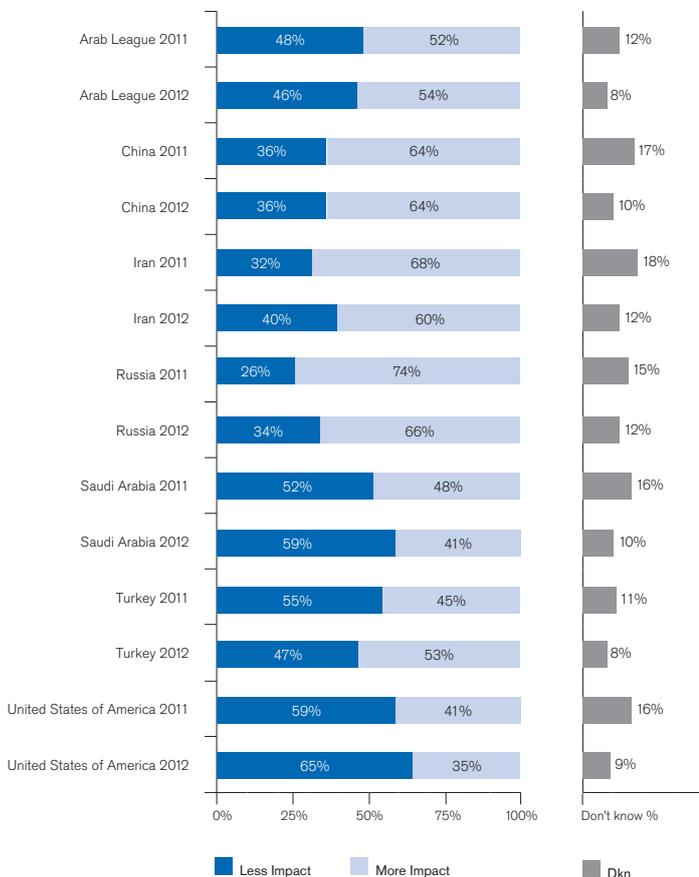
1. E. Soler i Lecha and L. Tarragona, "Self-imposed limitations: Why is the EU losing relevance in the Mediterranean", Notes internacionals 68, CIDOB, February 2013.

2. An example of the intensive activity of Turkey in the Mediterranean is the many times that the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu has visited Egypt since 2011.

decrease in the relative influence of Ankara with regard to the EU (from 55% in 2011 to 47% today). This could be the result, on the one hand, of the end of the idyll between the Arab Spring countries and Erdogan's regime and the AKP as a source of inspiration for a "democrat-Islamist" political system. On the other, the abandonment of the Turkish foreign policy based on the "zero problems with the neighbours" doctrine and its active involvement in diplomacy in the region beyond the Syrian conflict have increased scepticism about Ankara's interventionism in the area. It remains to be seen how far the repression of the uprisings in Taksim Square in Istanbul in June 2013 will decrease the appeal of the Turkish model for many Arab citizens.

Graph 1: Assessing the EU's future role in MPCs compared to other external and regional actors. Comparing 2011 and 2012 survey results³

(the graph below shows the EU's relative capacity to influence regional developments compared)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd and 4th Euromed Survey

In conclusion, the Survey shows the consolidation of a multipolar Mediterranean in which the regional and external powers are vying for space in a changing region. As summarised by Erzsébet Rózsa, "the Arab Spring has proven that the indigenous dynamics of the region have become much more independent from superpower – US and EU – influence, as regional states have increasingly pursued their own perceived interests and do not necessarily act according to superpower wishes."⁴

3. For the calculation of the distribution of answers, only those expressing a particular assessment or opinion (i.e. excluding "Don't know" answers) have been taken into consideration so as to show the distribution of respondents giving a substantial answer. The % of "Don't know" answers are calculated on the basis of the total number of received answers.

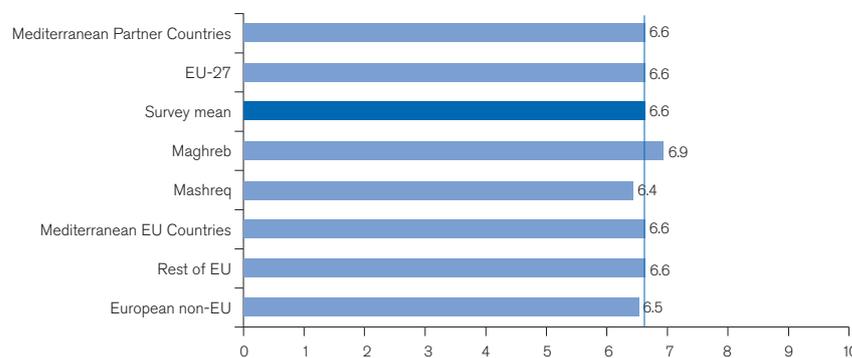
4. E. Rózsa, "Geo-Strategic Consequences of the Arab Spring", EuroMeSCo Paper 19, 2013, <http://www.euromesco.net/images/papers/papersiemed19.pdf>

The European Union: an Economic Giant with Global Competition...

Nevertheless, the consolidation of a multipolar Mediterranean must not involve the disappearance of Europe as one of the centres of influence in the region. If we analyse the respondents' perception in terms of EU influence in the Mediterranean, we see that most of them view the Union as a preferential trading and economic partner for the Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs). This is especially true for Maghreb countries such as Tunisia and Morocco, whose exports depend on the EU market with quotas up to 70% for Tunisia and 59% for Morocco.⁵ If we group together the responses from the Maghreb, we see how the perception of the EU as a preferential trading partner is above the Survey average, at 6.9 on a scale from 0 to 10, reflecting the close trade relations between the two regions.

Graph 2: EU's influence regarding the following aspect: The EU as a major trading and economic partner for MPCs

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for progressively less significant and 10 for increasingly more significant)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 4th Euromed Survey

The picture is less optimistic when the delivery of EU promises in terms of support for the democratic transition in the southern Mediterranean is taken into consideration. Through mainly socio-economic instruments, the EU has used the rubric of the 3Ms to provide support to the democratic transition processes in the southern Mediterranean. Despite the unfavourable context of economic crisis, the EU has managed to mobilise substantial amounts of the first M, "money", through joint actions between the European Commission, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank and bilateral aid programmes, among other mechanisms.

Fewer advances have taken place in the two remaining "Ms": market access and mobility. On the one hand, the Member States continue to be reluctant to open their markets to imports of certain manufactured and agricultural products from the southern Mediterranean, thereby creating a strong asymmetry in the economic and trade relations between the two shores and hindering the achievement of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs).

On the other hand, the mobility partnerships are conditioned on adherence to the European security instruments (readmission agreements, cooperation with Frontex, joint water vigilance operations...) and result in forms of highly selective, temporary and restrictive migration.⁶ In this respect, most progress has been made in Morocco with the signing of a mobility partnership

5. The figures reflect data from 2012 in the case of Tunisia and 2010 for Morocco. K. Kausch, "The End of the (Southern) Neighbourhood", EuroMeSCo Paper 18, 2013, <http://www.euromesco.net/images/papers/papersiemed18.pdf>

6. S. Carrera, J. Parkin, L. Den Hertog, "EU Migration Policy after the Arab Spring: the Pitfalls of Home Affairs Diplomacy", CEPS, Policy Paper 74, 26th February 2013.

on 7 June 2013, but its appeal is limited for countries such as Egypt, which has refused to start negotiations to this end.

Faced with this reality, if we broaden the analysis of MPC economic and trade relations with other powers, we see how a multipolar scenario is being consolidated in the Mediterranean, in keeping with the above.

Trade relations between Turkey and Arab countries, for instance, have multiplied by seven in just eight years. Ankara already has five Free Trade Agreements in the Mediterranean (Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, along with Syria, which is currently suspended) and is negotiating the signing of similar agreements with Libya and Algeria,⁷ while the agreement with Lebanon will come into force after the internal ratification by this country.⁸ The EU, in contrast, has barely started dialogue with Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan to establish DFCTAs.

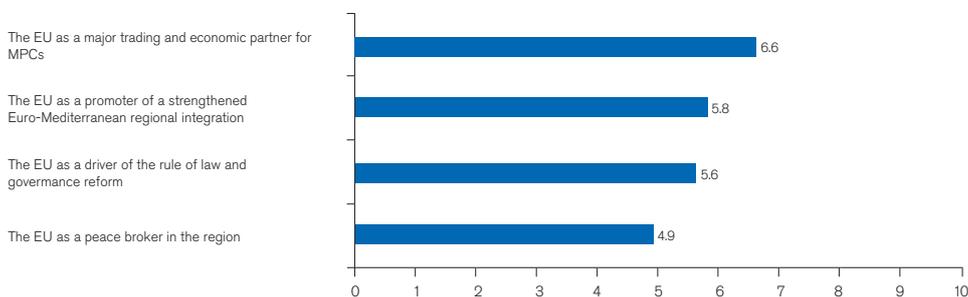
On the other hand, trade between the southern Mediterranean countries and the emerging powers has continued to grow in recent decades. While total trade with Asia has doubled from 6% to 12% in the last ten years, the BRICs as a whole are becoming outstanding partners in the North Africa and Middle East economies. Between 2001 and 2011, trade between the BRICs and the region evolved from a little over 6% to 14%.⁹ The case of China demands a special mention, where bilateral trade with Arab countries has grown an average of 22.1% per year since 2011.¹⁰

...But Still a Political Dwarf in the Mediterranean

Faced with EU economic potential in the southern Mediterranean – albeit disputed with other powers – we should ask how far this results in political and diplomatic influence. The Survey reveals that aspects such as the promotion of Euro-Mediterranean regional integration, the reforms of the rule of law and governance or active EU mediation in regional conflicts are only graded between 4.9 and 5.8 on a scale from 0 to 10. Only in those countries in which trade relations with the EU are denser (such as Morocco or Tunisia), do respondents call for greater EU involvement in the management of political dossiers, extending their power beyond the merely economic field.

Graph 3: EU's influence regarding the following aspects:

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for progressively less significant and 10 for increasingly more significant)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 4th Euromed Survey

7. A. Balcer, "The EU and Turkey in the Southern Neighbourhood: a new opening?", Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, Policy Paper 72, 19th February 2013.

8. Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Turkey, <http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=tradeagreements&bolum=fta®ion=0>

9. O. Masetti, K. Kömer, M. Forster and J. Friedman, "Two years of Arab spring: Where are we now? What's next?", Deutsche Bank Research, 25th January 2013.

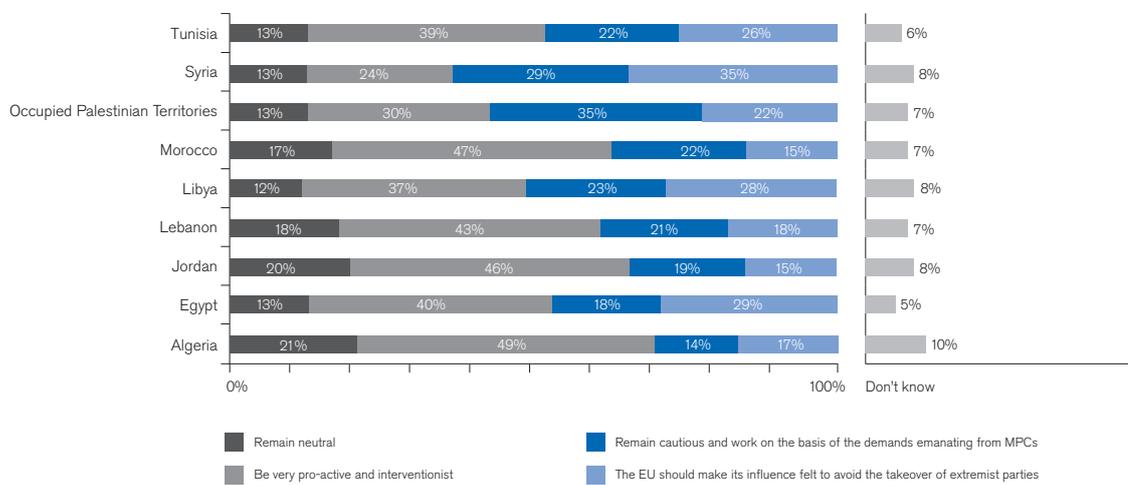
10. "China, Arab countries see booming trade despite political unrest", 16th August 2012,

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/16/c_131790200.htm

It is worth noting that most respondents are negative about the EU as an interventionist political actor in the affairs of the region. The Survey expresses a clear preference for the EU to remain neutral or to act upon demands expressed by the MPCs. Among all the countries in the region, only in Palestine and Syria do a majority of respondents demand an active role for the EU in the management of domestic conflicts.

In the remaining countries, the percentage of respondents who prefer a neutral role or action limited to the demands of the MPCs ranges from 52% for Tunisia to 70% for Algeria. This coincides with the statements of European political leaders who, since the outset of the Arab Spring, have expressed their will to act on demands issued from the countries in the region, thereby decreasing the possible accusations of external interference.

Graph 4: Assessment of the EU's role with regard to domestic developments in the Mediterranean Partner Countries¹¹



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 4th Euromed Survey

The scenario of self-imposed or desired caution also responds to the limitations of EU external policy in the Arab Spring. These notably include a lack of strategic vision for the region, an economic and institutional crisis that limits the Union’s external action, the re-nationalisation of the external policies of its Member States or the flagrant division between the “big three” (France, United Kingdom and Germany)¹² in priority issues such as the military intervention in Libya or the recognition of Palestine as an observer state in the United Nations. All of them are elements that have acted to the detriment of a decisive and coherent external policy faced with the tectonic changes of the Arab Spring.

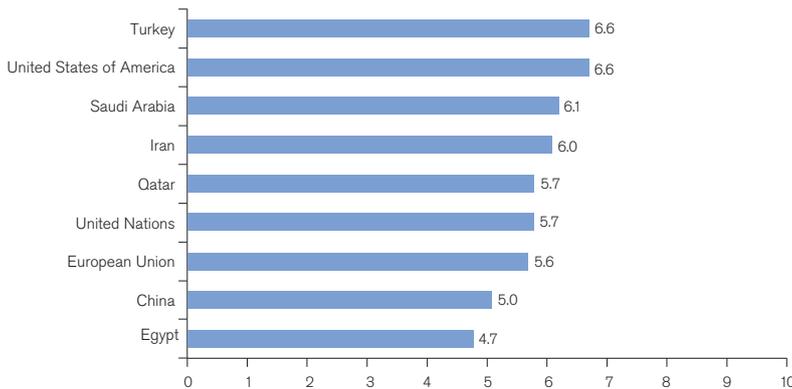
The case of Syria is paradigmatic of the EU’s difficulty in establishing itself as a major international political actor. A broad majority of respondents (64%) expresses the will that the EU will “be very pro-activist and interventionist” or “avoid the takeover by extremist parties.” Moreover, the EU is also given a grade of only 5.6 out of 10 in terms of the probability that it will be a key actor in the resolution of the Syrian conflict, and is surpassed by almost all the main international actors with influence in the conflict (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United States, Iran and even the United Nations).

11. For the calculation of the distribution of answers, only those expressing a particular assessment or opinion (i.e. excluding “Don’t know” answers) have been taken into consideration so as to show the distribution of respondents giving a substantial answer. The % of “Don’t know” answers are calculated on the basis of the total number of received answers.

12. S. Lehne, “The Big Three in EU Foreign Policy”, Carnegie Europe, 2012, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/eu_big_three1.pdf

Graph 5: Probability attributed to the following regional and international actors to progressively become a key actor for a final resolution to the Syrian conflict

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for no probability and 10 for very high probability)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 4th Euromed Survey

The Syrian case recalls the prevalence of theories on the capability-expectations gap in European external policy,¹³ according to which the EU is expected to be greatly involved given the pressing challenges for peace and international security while its internal divisions prevent it from establishing itself as a significant actor.

The rise of the weapons embargo in Syria is a good example of this. The United Kingdom and France, in keeping with the central role played in Libya, led the diplomatic manoeuvres for the EU to lift the weapons embargo on the Syrian rebels. London and Paris argued that such a measure would bring about a rebalance of forces on the ground and impel negotiations at the Geneva Conference with al-Assad's regime and its possible disappearance.

In contrast, the Scandinavian countries, Poland, the Czech Republic and Austria, among others, championed the opposition to the lifting of the embargo, arguing that there were few guarantees that weapons would not end up in the hands of Islamist militias or contribute to a military escalation with harmful consequences for civilians. Germany, distrustful of the manoeuvres of the United Kingdom and France, sought to find middle ground and Spain, at first sceptical about the lifting of the weapons embargo, finally joined the faction led by London and Paris.

The lifting of the weapons embargo was finally agreed at the Foreign Affairs Council in May 2013, although this did not placate doubts about its capacity to alter the balance of forces on the ground and even less to put an end to two years of bloody civil war.¹⁴ In any case, months of internal debate reinforced the perception of a separate Europe faced with the international community and incapable of becoming a key geopolitical actor in its immediate neighbourhood.

The conflict in Syria merely strengthens the visions reflected in the Euromed Survey 2012, which see the emergence of a multipolar Mediterranean, in which the alliances between international actors are weaving an increasingly complex and denser diplomatic network. However much the Survey indicates a clear will for the EU to consolidate itself as one of the poles of this network, its influence will be limited as long as the division between Member States over external policy persists. Despite its projection as an economic giant (albeit with important limitations on its delivery capability), Europe continues to find it very difficult to turn such economic power in the Mediterranean into political influence.

13. The formulation refers to the gap that exists between what the European Community was able to deliver in terms of agreements, instruments and resources and what was expected from it in terms of external policy. The debate begins with the article by C. Hill, "The capability-expectations gap or conceptualising Europe's international role", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 31 (3), 1993, pp. 305-328.

14. J. Barnes-Dacey and D. Levy, "Syria: The imperative of de-escalation", European Council on Foreign Relations, 2013, http://ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR80_SYRIA_BRIEF_AW.pdf