

MED RESET

مِد ريسيت

Policy Papers

No. 1, June 2017

THE EU'S CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

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This project is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020
Programme for Research and Innovation under grant agreement no 693055.

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ABSTRACT

Gathering the results of the three reports produced by Work Package 1 (WP1) of the MEDRESET project, which assess the EU's constructions of the Mediterranean in the years 1970–1989, 1990–2002 and 2003–2017 respectively, this report provides a critical analysis of three major discourses that the EU-Europe employs regarding the Mediterranean: “the Mediterranean as a diverse geopolitical space”, “the Mediterranean as a dangerous space” and “the Mediterranean as a space crucial for EU interests”. The major argument of the report is that the EU's approach to this space constructs identities, and, while constructing the Mediterranean, the EU also draws boundaries, reproduces its own self and legitimizes its policies.

INTRODUCTION

This report gathers the results of the three reports produced by Work Package 1 (WP1) of the MEDRESET project, which assess the EU's constructions of the Mediterranean in the years 1970–1989, 1990–2002 and 2003–2017 respectively (Isaac and Kares 2017, Morillas and Soler i Lecha 2017, Cebeci and Schumacher 2017). Analysing three major discourses of the EU regarding the Mediterranean (“the Mediterranean as a diverse geopolitical space”, “the Mediterranean as a dangerous space” and “the Mediterranean as a space crucial for EU interests”), it argues that the EU's approach to this space first and foremost constructs identities, and that while constructing the Mediterranean the EU also draws boundaries, reproduces its own self and legitimizes its policies.

Critical constructivism, with a poststructuralist bend (which underlines the link between foreign policy and identity construction and draws attention to binary oppositions), helps us understand the relationship between the constructions of European and Mediterranean identities and the EU's policies on the Mediterranean, “through all the boundaries that this relationship draws, the exclusions that it entails, [...] the legitimacy that it provides” (Cebeci and Schumacher 2016: 4) to the EU, and the subjects and objects it creates (Cebeci and Schumacher 2016: 3 and 2017: 3-4). The report also proceeds from the critical constructivist argument that identities are based on difference (Neumann and Welsh 1991, Neumann 1998, Campbell 1998, Weldes et al. 1999), and attempts to reveal how the EU reproduces its own difference while constructing its Mediterranean other – especially because it is mainly the EU's “normative”/“postmodern” difference² from its others that legitimizes its acts/interventions³ in world politics.

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2 On the EU's normative difference see Manners (2002). On its postmodern difference see Cooper (1996).

3 Note that the term intervention here is not employed to denote military intervention only (which is the last resort in the EU's case), but mainly covers soft measures such as diplomacy, conditionality, etc.

The report uses a critical discourse analysis approach to further its arguments and scrutinizes the discourses that shape the EU's relations with its Mediterranean partners and that reproduce Mediterranean and European identities. It thus inquires into three major discursive practices employed by the EU to define the Mediterranean, and attempts to demonstrate how the EU-Europe constructs itself whilst defining the Mediterranean: "the Mediterranean as a diverse geopolitical space", "the Mediterranean as a dangerous space", and "the Mediterranean as a space crucial for EU interests". These three discourses are significant because despite several shifts in the EU's other discourses on the Mediterranean, these three have displayed considerable continuity throughout all these periods that we researched. For example, over the years, the EU's mapping of the Mediterranean has changed from a more limited space (which only includes the littoral states as well as Portugal and Jordan) to a more extended one (which includes the Sahel and the Gulf states), and the references to the Mediterranean as a region in the Barcelona Process were gradually replaced by references to the Southern Mediterranean and lately to the surrounding regions. Nevertheless, the three discourses that we put forward in this report have not changed.

The report seeks to answer the following questions⁴ while analysing these three discursive practices: How does the EU discursively construct the Mediterranean as a space? How are the mental maps of the Mediterranean drawn and re-drawn? How are subjects in the region categorized and labelled/predicated ("us", "them", "we-like", "the other", "conflictual", "peaceful", "progressive", "backward", etc.)? Are there any specific characteristics with which these subjects are associated (Wodak 2001: 72)? How are these representations "normalized" or legitimized/justified? What are the exclusions and discriminations that they entail (Wodak 2001: 73)? How are these representations intensified or mitigated, exaggerated/magnified, repeated/emphasized, minimized/omitted (Wodak 2001: 73)? How do those representations help reproduce the EU-Europe's identity and legitimize its policies (conditionality and interventions) in the Mediterranean (cf. Hansen 2006: 23 and Milliken 1999: 229)? How do silences and exclusions in the EU texts feed into such constructions and legitimation? Which groups are silenced or excluded through the EU's policy practices? What "common sense" does the EU convey and endorse in its relations with its Mediterranean partners and what does this make meaningless/impracticable, inadequate or disqualified (Milliken 1999: 229)?

In order to answer these questions, the research done for this report involves an in-depth analysis of all EU official documents on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)/Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and the Arab uprisings (such as declarations, communications, common strategies, Action Plans and Strategy Papers); all the speeches by the President of the European Council, the High Representative, the President of the Commission, the Commissioners (responsible for the ENP/UfM); the European Council Presidency Conclusions; the documents produced by the European Parliament (the resolutions, reports, debates and its President's speeches); and speeches of leaders of "key Member States" on the Mediterranean. It also entailed an extensive literature review of relevant scholarly books and articles in journals/special issues on the Mediterranean, Euro-Mediterranean relations, the ENP, the Arab uprisings and the EU, as well as of the documents that are produced by think tanks such as the EU-ISS, CEPS, EPC, CIDOB, IAI, etc. A total of

4 As set by a conceptual and methodological background paper of the MEDRESET project (Cebeci and Schumacher 2016).

twenty in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected acting and retired EU officials from the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission, acting and retired researchers from the European Parliament, and a Member of the European Parliament, in Warsaw, Brussels and Vienna, in November and December 2016 by the College of Europe-Natolin (12 interviews), as well as former EU officials and politicians from EU Member States in January 2017 by CIDOB in Madrid and Barcelona, London and Brussels (8 interviews; those in London and Brussels by phone), for WP1 of the MEDRESET project. Some of the findings of these interviews are also used in this analysis.

This report first inquires into how the Mediterranean is constructed as a diverse geopolitical space and attempts to demonstrate how this diversity is portrayed as a liability as opposed to the EU's unity in diversity. Second, it analyses the "Mediterranean as a dangerous space" discourse, underlining how it constructs the secure EU-European inside against the insecure Mediterranean outside. Third, it scrutinizes how the Mediterranean is constructed as a space crucial for EU-European interests, with a view to displaying how the discourses of EU responsibility in the stability and security in the Mediterranean are employed and how the EU's interventions are justified and legitimized through such discourse. Finally, the report offers an analysis of the co-constitutive nature of the EU discourses and practices regarding the Mediterranean.

1. THE MEDITERRANEAN AS A DIVERSE GEOPOLITICAL SPACE

"Relations between EU and the countries of the Mediterranean and the Middle East reflect the complexity and diversity of our partners and their situations" (Council of the European Union 2004: 17). This statement is a typical example of how the EU constructs the Mediterranean. Despite the EU's attempts at region-building in this space, especially through the EMP, the discourse that "the Mediterranean is a diverse space" has always been part of the European Community (EC)/EU discourse as well as of the studies on the EMP. The diversity in the Mediterranean is almost always represented by the EU-Europeans as a trait which diminishes the chances of integration/cooperation in the region. For example, High Representative Federica Mogherini, in her subsequent speeches at the opening and closure of a UfM meeting held in 2017, contended that the Mediterranean was "the less integrated" region in the world (EEAS 2017a and 2017b) while one of our interviewees claimed that the "Southern Mediterranean is the least integrated region anywhere in the world" (Interviewee 1, 2016). The following statement is a good example of how the EU-European discourse of diversity in the Mediterranean is used together with the region's depiction as "the least integrated".

There are many things in the region which are not well integrated [other than culturally and linguistically] – absent, Turkey. Let's put Turkey on one side [because it is a candidate country]. For the rest of the region, when you look at the trade between countries, it is only 5 or 6 percent. It is not a very well integrated region economically. It is not well integrated politically, either. You have within it, of course, one country which is completely separate, completely different from others, Israel. You have the Maghreb with its own history and special relationships with certain EU Member States. So, [...] you would not necessarily make that choice [of regarding the Mediterranean as a region]. But when you come from Europe, there are reasons for that. So, it is a

European construct essentially, not a natural construct, in that sense. A more natural construct would be the Arab world.⁵ (Interviewee 2)

The statement above openly refers to the existence of different (and distinct) geopolitical areas in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean: The Maghreb and the Mashreq as constituent parts of the Arab World, and Turkey and Israel as two distinct countries. On the other hand, European representations of the Mediterranean as a geopolitically diverse region are not new. In their MEDRESET working paper, Isaac and Kares (2017) demonstrate how the European Community mapped the Mediterranean as a vastly diverse, divided space with various geopolitical sub-groups such as those which had the prospect of membership (i.e., the European Mediterranean countries which became EU members in the 1980s), non-European Mediterranean countries, and Yugoslavia as well as the subgroups in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean – the Maghreb and the Mashreq (or the Middle East). Paraphrasing Duchêne et al. (1984: 21), Isaac and Kares (2017: 14) contend that the EC/Europeans “were increasingly convinced that the Mediterranean [was] politically, economically and culturally diverse; that it [was] politically unstable and conflict-ridden; and that it could be destabilized by adverse conditions”. This is still the case today, as many EU-European politicians, officials and researchers define the Mediterranean as a diverse space, which is composed of several sub-regions that are not only limited to the coast of the Mediterranean, because such depictions sometimes involve the Sahel as well as the Gulf countries.

On the other hand, the only time when the Mediterranean was conceived as a region was the launching of the EMP in 1995, as Morillas and Soler i Lecha (2017) argue. The Mediterranean region envisaged by the Barcelona Process encompassed not only littoral states but also those countries which do not have a Mediterranean coast (Portugal and Jordan), whereas one littoral state, Libya, was excluded.

The Mediterranean as a region is something which was very central to the conception at the time, for the Barcelona Process. It lives on in bodies like the Union for the Mediterranean, but the conceptual approach in recent years has been much more focused on the notion of neighbourhood. (Interviewee 7)

The definition and centrality of the Mediterranean as a region in the EMP also brought about the discourse that the Mediterranean is “a European construct, not a natural construct” (Interviewee 2). There were several reasons for such construction when the EMP was initiated, as analysed in detail by Morillas and Soler i Lecha (2017). A crucial reason was the EU’s quest for displaying global actorness (Morillas and Soler i Lecha 2017: 5) through the projection of the Union’s own model of regional integration. Jones (2009: 83) contends:

The projection of ‘EU’rope southwards has required the symbolic, territorial and institutional construction of the Mediterranean for region-building initiatives. These constructions facilitate and, crucially, justify the promotion of ‘EU’ropean ‘solutions’ outside of EU territorial space; in effect, the production of the Mediterranean region by

⁵ A similar emphasis on the diversity of the Mediterranean and its Arabian characteristics can also be found in the following statement: “It is a quite diversified region, both in terms of political reality and the economic condition of different countries. Not really integrated; in the sense that we may think of it as an Arab region, but that’s the lowest common denominator, like language or religion, but to a certain extent” (Interviewee 5, 2016).

European elites mobilizes the European project and permits its deployment politically and normatively in this new politico-geographic space. [...] The institutional blueprint from 'EU'rope for Mediterranean regional construction [...] enables the parcelling and representation of Mediterranean geopolitical space on 'EU'ropean terms.

Jones's analysis demonstrates the Euro-centric nature of the EU's attempts at region building in the Mediterranean, and the construction of these efforts in such a way as to serve European interests. However, such construction cannot solely be explained through the EU's intentions to pursue its interests. A deeper dynamic at work concerns the EU's quest for reproducing itself vis-à-vis its Mediterranean other, through projecting its own model of integration.

The diversity in the Mediterranean is associated with the political, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the societies in the region. The cultural characteristics are especially important in this regard as this diversity is not only underlined with regard to Muslim sectarian differences (the Sunnis versus the Shiites) but also with reference to a lack of a culture of cooperation – both political and economic. Some of the officials interviewed stated that although trade cooperation with each other would be very beneficial for certain countries, they were rather reluctant to do so (e.g., Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2). The discourse on political, economic, social and cultural diversities of the Mediterranean is usually used to justify the discursive shift in the definition of the Mediterranean space by the EU, "wherein the term 'Mediterranean' [...] has increasingly been replaced with the term 'Southern Neighbourhood'", starting with the ENP review of 2015, "and later, in the Global Strategy, with the term 'surrounding regions to the east and *south*'" (Cebeci and Schumacher, 2017: 5). The latest discourse on the Mediterranean (both within the framework of the ENP Review of 2015 and the EU's Global Strategy) repeatedly refers to a recognition – even "lessons learnt" (Interviewee 2) – on the EU's part that the countries of the Mediterranean space are too different from each other to form a coherent region.⁶ This discursive shift is also used to justify the EU's more differentiated approach⁷ towards its neighbours – tailored "according to the specific needs [and] the level of ambition of each partner" (European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy⁸ 2011a).

The construction of the Mediterranean space as the most diverse and the least integrated one in the world, when juxtaposed with the slogan "united in diversity" used to create/maintain a EU-European identity (first used in 2000 within the context of the envisaged "big bang" EU

6 Note that this rhetoric was also used when the ENP was first introduced. Pace (2007: 662) argues: "The shift from regionalism to bilateralism, from the EMP to the ENP, can be understood as a move from the dynamics of integration *per se* to a new type of (EU) international regime that recognizes the inherent diversity within southern Mediterranean partner countries and therefore the need to differentiate between neighbours to the south". On the other hand, it should be noted at this point that despite the EU's recent rhetoric of the Southern neighbourhood or the surrounding regions, there are still areas where the Mediterranean is treated as a single region, besides the UfM. These are the most technocratic areas such as fisheries, the environment and research. "Some of them are very obvious, like fisheries; it is a good example, because you cannot do any work to protect fishery stocks in the Mediterranean unless all of these countries that have Mediterranean coast and are fishing in these waters participate. But it is not only fisheries. Environment is very important. Research is very important. So there are number of very concrete policy areas in which we approach the Mediterranean as a single region" (Interviewee 7).

7 Note that this differentiated approach – although first envisaged by the ENP in 2004 and underlined in the 2011 ENP revision – could only start to be effectively employed after the adoption of the ENP review in 2015 and the Global Strategy in 2016.

8 Hereinafter, "European Commission and High Representative".

enlargement of 2004), reveals how the latter is constructed against its others.⁹ The European discourse of diversity/lack of integration in the Mediterranean can thus be associated with the EU's construction of itself as a well-integrated entity despite the diversity of its Member States. Bhambra (2009: 76) argues:

The focus on what unites Europe, or what Europe shares in common, often exists alongside calls for recognizing Europe's diversity, where cultural multiplicity is taken 'as the key feature of Europe'. [...] In this way, Europe is no longer to be seen simply as a culture, but rather, a 'community of values', where the values believed to be quintessentially European include the concept of human rights, and the sense of history itself.

This surely refers to a representation of the EU as an "ideal power" (Cebeci 2012) which has achieved peaceful regional integration and which promotes norms and values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It is also possible to find "ideal" depictions of Europe in various Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP), EMP, ENP and UfM texts as well as major European foreign policy texts such as the European Security Strategy (ESS) and the Global Strategy.¹⁰

The document entitled "A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean", issued in 2011 by the EU in the wake of the Arab uprisings, stipulates: "The European Union in its dual dimension of a community of democratic member states and a union of peoples has had to overcome historical hurdles. This success story was possible when hope triumphed over fear and freedom triumphed over repression" (European Commission and High Representative 2011b). This rendering refers to European integration as a success story because the European peoples were able to overcome historical hurdles. This statement is especially meaningful as it is used in a document about the Arab uprisings, specifically targeting the societies in the Southern Mediterranean. Thus, the EU's framing of the Mediterranean as a diverse space, the least united in the world, is another way of constructing the "ideal" European identity vis-à-vis the imperfect/backwards/uncivilized Mediterranean other. The diverse nature of the Mediterranean as predicated by the EU is especially significant because it leads to and justifies the argument that non-European Mediterranean countries are conflictual. This brings us to another discursive practice that the EU-Europeans use to define the Mediterranean: "the Mediterranean as a dangerous space".

2. THE MEDITERRANEAN AS A DANGEROUS SPACE

The Mediterranean "is the most conflictual region of the world and it is also the less integrated one" (EEAS 2017b). This statement is taken from a speech that the High Representative Federica Mogherini gave at a press conference held after the ministerial meeting of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). It is significant as it constitutes a typical example of how the

⁹ Kinnvall (2016: 155) refers to the "idea of Europe in which unity in diversity prevails [as] an idea that in many respects is focused on what keeps Europe together in the face of non-European values, cultures and citizens".

¹⁰ For example, the Global Strategy refers to European diversity as "a tremendous asset provided [the EU-Europeans] stand united and work in a coordinated way" (EEAS 2016: 46-47).

Mediterranean is constructed as a dangerous space by the EU-Europeans. Such depiction inevitably and inherently creates the binary between a peaceful, secure and stable Europe versus an unstable, conflictual Southern Mediterranean where the threats of radical religiously motivated terrorism, illegal immigration, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and energy crises flourish.

The representation of the Mediterranean as conflictual is also evoked by the representation of the EU-Europe as postmodern and the states/societies of the Middle East as modern. Ortega (2003: 162) contends:

[T]he EU and its member states are living in a post-modern world, where borders between states have lost their traditional relevance. In contrast, the Middle East is still a typically modern world, in the sense that open conflicts hamper international cooperation and war is a foreign policy option. [...] Having replaced bloody territorial disputes by political integration, from a European standpoint, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for instance, has a nonsensical aspect. Europeans believe that apparently unsolvable frontier disputes can indeed be resolved and interstate cooperation can be established instead. Conversely, from an Israeli (or Palestinian or Arab) point of view, borders are of the essence, as was the case in Europe in previous centuries. [...] [T]he current European mindset is not well suited to understanding primitive conflicts.

These remarks clearly reflect the European conceptions and perceptions of the Mediterranean and also how European and Southern Mediterranean/Middle Eastern identities are produced and reproduced by the European discourse, as Ortega explicitly uses significant markers of difference. He not only refers to a peaceful Europe versus its conflictual Middle Eastern other, but he also claims that there is a temporal difference between the two. In other words, he depicts the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean as backward. On the other hand, he represents the EU-Europe as "ideal", claiming that it can no longer even grasp the logic of conflict.

Official EU texts also use the same binary. The European Security Strategy (ESS) for example starts with a depiction of the EU as peaceful, free, secure and stable (Council of the European Union 2003: 1) whereas it refers to the Mediterranean as suffering from "serious problems of economic stagnation, social unrest and unresolved conflicts" (Council of the European Union 2003: 8). The framing of the Mediterranean as a dangerous space feeds into the representation of the region as unstable not only in political and economic terms but also in terms of conflicts in the region. The 2011 "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A Review of European Neighbourhood Policy" document states: "The persistence of protracted conflicts affecting a number of partner countries is a serious security challenge to the whole region. EU geopolitical, economic and security interests are directly affected by continuing instability". (European Commission and High Representative 2011a) One of our interviewees, referring to the definition of the Mediterranean as a region, asserted: "When we use the established terminology, like the Middle East, [it] is somehow tainted. It makes you think of the conflict and it impacts on everything else" (Interviewee 5, 2016). This can also be seen in the "New Response" document of 2011, which stipulates: "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other conflicts in the Middle East, [...] and Western Sahara continue to affect sizeable populations, feed radicalisation, drain considerable local and international resources, and act as powerful impediments to reform". (European Commission and High Representative 2011a)

It is crucial, at this point, to state that silences in the texts are as important as what is written, and sometimes even have a more critical function. What is silenced in the representations of the EU/Europe as peaceful and a model is that these accounts are mostly Euro-centric and almost always ignore that during and right after the establishment of the European Communities, there was an ongoing war of decolonization between Algeria and France (1954–1962).¹¹ Hansen (2002: 487) thus contends:

Indeed, without such Eurocentrist and pro-integration approaches, it becomes difficult to comprehend how, to date, none of the wars fought in colonial possessions by member states, as well as subsequent campaigns, have been able to, at least, complicate the much repeated argument that European integration, since the outset, has worked as an advocate of peace. [...] Moreover, even if one were to abide by prevailing standards and discount the effects of such wars outside of the present-day EU, hence taking the peace argument solely to denote 'peace in Western Europe', there is still no way around the fact that several member states have been regularly engaged in armed conflicts, and that European integration apparently has been equipped with no structural component able to prevent this from happening.¹²

Such omissions/silences in EU-European texts (both scholarly and official) help create a positive image of the EU, whilst the dominant knowledge conveyed by Europeans (on the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean as conflictual) misses all the structural factors – the role of international actors such as the EU and its Member States and the neoliberal model imposed by them, especially in terms of trade liberalization – behind the lack of regional integration, and conflictuality.¹³ This reflects a Euro-centric approach which assumes that the causes of conflict and lack of integration in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean lie solely within that space itself.¹⁴ In many EU documents, on the other hand, when the Southern Mediterranean is represented as conflictual and the EU is depicted as the one which is perceiving threats from it, this automatically puts the EU in a position to (legitimately) intervene in the region.

Jones (2009: 83) contends: "Symbolically, the Mediterranean is constructed by 'EU'rope as the 'near abroad', a volatile quarter on the mutable map of the EU's Neighbourhood depicted as posing new threats to Europe's economies, security and liberal-democratic structures of government". A related discourse in this regard is the discourse of "radical changes" used to predicate the Mediterranean especially after the Arab uprisings. The document "A Partnership

11 The war over the Falkland Islands was also another instance which occurred after the UK became an EEC member. It was depicted by Robert Cooper (1996: 28), who is regarded as one of the pioneers of the "postmodern Europe" discourse, as follows: "Although these post-modern characteristics apply among the states of the EU they do not necessarily apply between them and other states: if Argentina chooses to operate according to the rules of Clausewitz rather than those of Kant, Britain may have to respond on the same level. Similarly, in the days of the Cold War, all the European states had to operate on the old logic vis-à-vis the Warsaw Pact although among themselves the post-modern logic increasingly applied". Cooper's text not only serves to preserve the "peaceful" identity of the EU-Europe whatever the circumstances may be (representing what happened as an exception to the rule), it also justifies conflictual behaviour against third countries (because in his definition, only the European states could achieve this postmodern condition). Using the binary of Clausewitz and Kant also marks the difference between peaceful Europeans and their conflictual others. There are numerous instances where this difference is reiterated by EU-Europeans.

12 Also see Bhambra (2009) for a similar argument.

13 The author is thankful to Maria Cristina Paciello for her valuable remarks on this point.

14 Here also, the author is thankful to Maria Cristina Paciello for her valuable remarks.

for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean" issued as the EU's response to the Arab uprisings read as follows: "A radically changing political landscape in the Southern Mediterranean requires a change in the EU's approach to the region" (European Commission and High Representative 2011b). The "New Response" document of 2011 states: "The ENP must provide an ambitious response to the momentous changes currently ongoing in the Southern Mediterranean region" (European Commission and High Representative 2011a). Such changes are usually portrayed as security challenges. The ENP Review of 2015 refers to such radical changes in terms of positive developments such as the local actors' quest for political reforms, but then lists the challenges linked to these changes as follows:

[C]onflict, rising extremism and terrorism, human rights violations and other challenges to international law, and economic upheaval have resulted in major refugee flows. These have left their marks across North Africa and the Middle East, with the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings and the rise of ISIL/Da'esh. (European Commission and High Representative 2015: 2)

In other words, the representation of change as something dangerous inevitably brings about the idea of tackling it through the use of security measures, again legitimizing the EU's continuous engagement in the region. The discourse of "the Mediterranean as a dangerous space" thus "imposes on the EU the obligation to engage with the narrated security challenges in order to uphold the EU's self-presented identity as a space that has succeeded in sustainably domesticating relations between its member states" (Schumacher 2015: 385) whilst continuously reproducing its ideal self vis-à-vis its Mediterranean other.

3. THE MEDITERRANEAN AS A SPACE CRUCIAL FOR EU INTERESTS

An important argument used to justify continuous EU engagement in the Mediterranean is the EU's interests. In almost every EU official text, the major interest of the EU-Europeans in the Mediterranean space is named as "the interest in stability in the region". In this regard Morillas and Soler i Lecha (2017: 5) cite the European Commission (1994: 5), which stipulated: "all Member States would benefit from greater stability and prosperity in the region. This would multiply trade and investment opportunities and reinforce the base for cooperation in political and economic fields".

The depiction of the Mediterranean as a problematic area legitimizes the EU's continued engagement in the region. The following statement in the ESS is thus significant:

The Mediterranean area generally continues to undergo serious problems of economic stagnation, social unrest and unresolved conflicts. The European Union's interests require a continued engagement with Mediterranean partners, through more effective economic, security and cultural cooperation in the framework of the Barcelona Process. A broader engagement with the Arab World should also be considered. (Council of the European Union 2003: 8)

This statement openly shows how the discourse of a problematic Mediterranean is linked with the discourse of European interests and how EU engagement in the region is justified. The

rhetoric of resilience employed both in the ENP Review of 2015 and the EU's Global Strategy can also be read through such lines. The Global Strategy uses the discourse of "helping" the "fragile" countries in the EU's "surrounding regions to the east and *south*" (EEAS 2016: 28, emphasis added) and depicts the "Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa" as "in turmoil, the outcome of which will likely only become clear decades from now" (EEAS 2016: 34). It further stipulates:

It is in the interests of our citizens to invest in the resilience of states and societies to the east stretching into Central Asia, and south down to Central Africa. Fragility beyond our borders threatens all our vital interests. By contrast, resilience – the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises – benefits us and countries in our surrounding regions, sowing the seeds for sustainable growth and vibrant societies. Together with its partners, the EU will therefore promote resilience in its surrounding regions. (EEAS 2016: 23)

This statement is significant in the sense that European interests are defined with reference to resilience of the states beyond the EU's borders, which are depicted as "fragile". This is openly a boundary-drawing exercise where the secure EU-European inside is constructed against the fragile and thus dangerous outside (in this case, the Mediterranean outside) through the discourse of threats to European interests. Employment of the term "resilience" also indicates a recognition on the EU's part that (contrary to what is stated in the Lisbon Treaty about the foreign policy aims of the Union) the primary aim is no longer democracy promotion.

On the other hand, a significant discourse on European interests in the Mediterranean space which was intensively used but which has recently been toned down by the EU is the discourse of "geographical proximity" (cf. Schumacher and Bouris 2017: 10-11). Before the New Response document and the recent emphasis on the surrounding regions, the discourse of geographical proximity was almost always used together with the discourse of European interests. Isaac and Kares (2017: 4) contend that the EC's "overall" policy towards the Mediterranean countries as reflected in the Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) was based on "geographical proximity", portraying the non-EC Mediterranean countries as "neighbours linked by a complex network of relations".¹⁵ Aliboni (2002: 104) states that after 11 September and with increasing migration, "Europe's proximity to North Africa and the Middle East, previously neutral in its effects, now has an impact on Western security and requires policies suited to manage such proximity". Citing this, Morillas and Soler i Lecha (2017: 19) also argue that because of the Mediterranean's "geographical proximity", the region was regarded as "a threat", hence the prevalence of the "need for engagement" narrative and that of the Mediterranean as "Europe's responsibility" (Morillas and Soler i Lecha 2017: 21, 2, 4, 5).

The "Wider Europe" document of 2003 also underlines geographical proximity, stipulating that it "increases the importance of a set of issues revolving around, but not limited to, the management of the new external border and trans-boundary flows. The EU and the neighbours have a mutual interest in cooperating, both bilaterally and regionally" (Commission of the European Communities 2003: 6). This document is significant not only because it demonstrates the link between geographical proximity and European interests, but also in that it has a

¹⁵ The citation in Isaac and Kares (2017: 4) is from Commission of the European Communities (1972).

boundary-drawing function, emphasizing the EU's new external border and trans-boundary flows.

The discourses of geographical proximity or surrounding regions almost always go hand in hand with the discourse of interdependence between the EU and its Southern Mediterranean partners, to mark the EU interests in the region. Morillas and Soler i Lecha (2017: 4-5) assert that "the magic word was 'interdependence'" and "[t]he European Commission (1994: 2), for instance, listed environment, energy, migration, trade and investment as 'areas of Euro-Mediterranean interdependence' and considered that Europeans had 'a vital interest in helping Mediterranean countries meet the challenges they face'". In their view, it was thus "inevitable and even natural to intensify cooperation between the EU and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries" (Morillas and Soler i Lecha 2017: 4). The Strategic Partnership document (cited by Morillas and Soler i Lecha 2017: 4) also read as follows: "Europe and the Mediterranean and Middle East are joined together both by geography and shared history. [...] Our geographical proximity is a longstanding reality underpinning our growing interdependence; our policies in future years must reflect these realities" (Council of the European Union 2004: 2). Here, geography and interdependence are represented as the major reasons for continued EU engagement in the region.

4. EU DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES ON THE MEDITERRANEAN: BOUNDARY-DRAWING, IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION, LEGITIMATION AND BEYOND

The MEDRESET project is based on the theoretical premise that discourse and practice are in a co-constitutive relationship. Discourse itself is also practice because it is mainly about framing things in specific ways. Thus discourse has performative function as it draws boundaries, creates identities, feeds into and legitimizes policies, etc. EU discourses on the Mediterranean also have the same function. This section displays how the three discursive practices analysed above first and foremost help the EU draw its own boundaries as well as the boundaries of the Mediterranean and how they feed into and reproduce (and also get produced by) the EU's technocratic, depoliticizing and securitizing approach towards the Mediterranean.

All the three discourses discussed above help the EU construct the secure, stable and peaceful European inside vis-à-vis a dangerous, unstable and conflictual outside. This pertains to drawing boundaries and accentuating them (Cebeci 2012: 565). Boundary drawing is particularly important in the EU's case because its borders have always been uncertain (cf. Tonra 2010, Del Sarto and Steindler 2015, Schumacher 2015, Del Sarto 2016). Such ambiguity comes not only from the prospect of enlargement, but it is also very much related to the contested and dynamic nature of identity construction on the part of the EU. The Mediterranean other is its "constitutive other", through which Europeanness is defined. This has several dimensions: geographic, political and socio-economic, as well as cultural. The rejection of Morocco's application to become a member of the EC on the grounds that it was not a European country is an important example in this regard which can be analysed with reference to all these

dimensions, the geographical one being particularly underlined.¹⁶

Silences in the texts are crucial for boundary drawing in the Mediterranean, because in almost all European texts (official, non-official, academic or policy-oriented) on the region, the EU's southern borders are depicted as the northern shores of the Mediterranean. Such mapping silences, however, the fact that Morocco actually has land borders with the EU because Ceuta and Melilla are formally Spanish territory. Thus EU-European representations of Morocco as non-European on geographical terms are subject to contestation.¹⁷ This not only reveals the importance of the silences in the texts, it also shows why the EU needs to continuously differentiate itself from others by drawing mental maps. The EU's bordering practices in Ceuta and Melilla are also worthy of attention in this regard, because the two spaces "serve as important hubs in Spain's and the EU's escalating struggle against the perceived malignancy of 'illegal immigration' from Africa and elsewhere" and their borders are protected by a radar system and walls strengthened with barbed wire as well as sensors and cameras (Hansen 2004: 55). EU practice in this regard is not only about boundary-drawing, it is also about technocracy and securitization.

On the other hand, the discourse on the Mediterranean as a space crucial for European interests, especially in terms of economic/trade interdependence, inevitably feed into and constitute technocratic policies, not only because the European Commission¹⁸ (regarded as the most technocratic body of the EU) is the major actor that has competence over these issues but also because of the depoliticized approach of European External Action Service (EEAS) officials. Although the EEAS is supposed to be providing (geo)political input to the EU's policies on the region, so far it has had a technocratic and depoliticized approach.¹⁹ The Global Mediterranean Policy, the EMP/UfM and the ENP can all be viewed as technocratic policies. The Global Mediterranean Policy was highly technocratic as it prioritized trade liberalization and cooperation in development which were pursued mainly through regulatory and technical arrangements (Isaac and Kares 2017: 8). With regard to the EMP, Morillas and Soler i Lecha (2017: 21) argue that "[w]hat was initially incepted as a political project was nevertheless implemented in a rather depoliticized and technocratic way" and mainly offered "a comprehensive cooperation framework based on the link between trade liberalization and political transformations, reinforcing a technocratic approach to regional challenges". The ENP Action Plans, the benchmarks set for this relationship and the annual progress reporting system (which has recently been abandoned) are all technocratic practices (Cebeci and Schumacher

16 For example, see Simão (2013). The Council decision for the rejection is classified. For more on the EC's rejection of Morocco's application, see Isaac and Kares (2017).

17 For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Hansen (2002, 2004) and Bhambra (2009). Note that these analysts also draw attention to the fact that Algeria was part of the EEC initially, because it was still regarded as French territory. This shows how the EU's borders are fluid, contested and ambiguous and can easily be deconstructed/displaced (in Derridean terms).

18 For the EU practice in this regard in the period 1990–2002, Morillas and Soler i Lecha (2017: 5) contend: "The Commission but also European Affairs departments in some Member States were qualified by one of the officials interviewed as pushing for technocratic responses to political challenges (Interviewee 1). That is, they were acting as depoliticizing agents".

19 A former high-ranking EU official (our Interviewee 6) argues: "In fact, the EEAS is trying in a way to duplicate way too often what the Commission is doing, because a large majority of the officials at the EEAS come from the Commission and want to keep on doing what they were doing before. In order to find their way they are more or less trying to do the same work as the Commission without proper experts for this, because as they have left the Commission now for a few years, they do not have all the knowledge anymore".

2017).

The depoliticizing and technocratic policies of the EU in the Mediterranean also accompany its securitized approach to the region. Securitization pertains to extreme politicization, and the discourse on the Mediterranean as a dangerous space itself refers to the speech act through which the region is securitized. Although a highly politicizing discourse is used in securitizing the Mediterranean – particularly when referring to the threats of radical religiously motivated terrorism and illegal immigration (especially with the recent mass flow of refugees from or through the region) – the means that the EU uses to tackle these threats are also technocratic (especially with regard to border-management practices) and depoliticizing. For example, the EU asks its Mediterranean partners to sign readmission agreements, not only without a domestic political discussion on content but also depriving the refugees of their basic human rights in many cases.²⁰

Securitization is also seen as the reason why the EU has supported authoritarian regimes in the Arab world for years. Morillas and Soler i Lecha (2017: 13) assert:

The securitization of the Euro-Mediterranean agenda became clear when observers of the Barcelona Process started to witness a tendency to promote “order” and “stability” instead of democratic reform.²¹ One of the officials interviewed went so far as to say that the Barcelona Process “was about the security of Europe, not an altruistic gesture”.

Securitization is a crucial and effective way of othering. First and foremost it marks the difference between a secure inside and a dangerous outside. The representation of the Mediterranean as a dangerous place, where conflicts, threats of radical religiously motivated terrorism and illegal immigration flourish, together with other security challenges such as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and energy crises, thus has an identity aspect as it feeds into the dichotomy of a peaceful and secure Europe versus its conflictual, unstable and dangerous other. Revealing the relationship also with boundary-drawing, Schumacher (2015: 385) contends that the EU’s threat/risk narrative regarding its southern borderlands

divides the world into spaces of security and insecurity and it leaves no doubt where the EU situates itself: it puts itself at the centre of such spaces of security and stability, and in doing so it feeds into notions of the self and delineates the borders that separate the self from the other(s).

A similar identity aspect can also be seen in the EU’s securitized approach towards women in the Mediterranean. Cebeci and Schumacher (2017: 12) cite Federica Mogherini depicting the women of the Southern Mediterranean as both victims and potential terrorists, when she states:

[W]e all know the stories of women who join terrorist groups and commit terrorist attacks. But many many more are those who cannot find the job they deserve, get the education they aspire to – women who want to start a business but have to engage in

20 See for example, Amnesty International (2014, 2015).

21 Morillas and Soler i Lecha refer to Khader (2015: 48) here.

a daily fight against bullies and sceptics who tell them they will never make it. (Union for the Mediterranean 2016)

Mogherini's remarks are significant because they convey a certain idea about everyday life in the Southern Mediterranean where women are not treated equally and become either victims or terrorists. This is represented in contrast with Europe, where women enjoy rights which are not given to their Mediterranean others and which is placed in a "patriarchal" position to help/protect these women vis-à-vis their own societies (Cebeci and Schumacher 2017: 21). This again refers to an ideal representation of the EU-Europe versus its Mediterranean other.²²

European attempts at region-building in the Mediterranean through the Barcelona Process can also be read through the lines of identity construction mainly because the EU attempts to reproduce itself through the practice of projecting its own model of "peaceful regional integration".²³ The EU also aims to construct a Mediterranean identity in this regard and Del Sarto (2006: 300) refers to this as "identity manipulation", contending:

A significant component of the EU's region-building endeavour in the Euro-Mediterranean is the attempt to forge a shared Mediterranean identity for the southern EMP participants. But 'being a Mediterranean country' and belonging to a Euro-Mediterranean region are not only a matter of culture and geography. This scenario also stipulates a particular regional order in political terms. With it, the EU's promotion of the Mediterranean theme entails an attempt to interfere with how the southern EMP states define themselves and their regional surrounding. (Del Sarto 2006: 296)

Such attempts at region-building in the Mediterranean, which has been constructed by the EU itself as a highly diverse/heterogeneous region, might seem paradoxical. However, this paradox actually fits well with the argument of this report. If the EU had successfully projected its model and the Mediterranean space had become a well-integrated region, replicating the EU-Europe, the Union would have lost its reason to intervene in this area of the world. It would also have lost its constitutive other (cf. Stern 2011: 48). Thus, knowing that the region is so diverse to the point that it will never become a united whole – i.e., a coherent region – gives the EU the chance to reproduce its "ideal" integrated self on the one hand, whilst giving it the legitimacy to intervene in the affairs of that space on the other. Thus, when we talk about the EU's region-building in the Mediterranean, we actually refer to a project/process that is always in the making but will never be completed. This gives the EU the convenient ambiguity through which it furthers its own and its Member States' interests, and which also helps it maintain its ideal identity vis-à-vis its Mediterranean other.²⁴

22 Surely, such representations ignore the experiences of women in Europe who still have to fight for their rights on a daily basis – which applies even more so to those who are marginalized, notably immigrants, refugees, etc. The author thanks Daniela Huber for her valuable remarks in this regard.

23 Del Sarto (2016: 222) refers to the EU's "export of its practices to the periphery" as a way of ensuring "the continuity of the imperial order".

24 Pace (2006: 92) argues that "the ongoing practices of constituting the Mediterranean as less than European" help construct "what Europe is not (what the Mediterranean is)".

CONCLUSION

Attempting to deconstruct the EU's constructions of the Mediterranean, this report has looked into three discursive practices that the EU-Europeans have continuously used in this regard: "the Mediterranean as a diverse geopolitical space", "the Mediterranean as a dangerous space" and "the Mediterranean as a space crucial for EU interests". It has argued that these three discourses help the EU not only to construct the Mediterranean but also to reproduce its own identity. The report has also claimed that these constructions legitimize the EU's policies and they also pertain to boundary-drawing.

The depiction of the Mediterranean as a diverse geopolitical space inevitably brings about the binary of a Europe united in diversity versus a problematic and economically and politically less integrated Mediterranean. This certainly feeds into the representation of an ideal European identity versus its imperfect Mediterranean other. The construction of the Mediterranean as a dangerous space also creates the binary of a secure, stable and peaceful EU-Europe versus a conflictual Mediterranean, which is also represented as a place that breeds the threats of radical religiously motivated terrorism, illegal immigration, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and energy crises. This binary of a secure European inside versus a dangerous Mediterranean outside legitimizes continuous EU engagement in the region through securitizing and depoliticizing practices. The representation of the Mediterranean as a space crucial for EU-European interests especially in terms of stability, trade and energy is almost always coupled with the depiction of this space as problematic, unstable and composed of authoritarian and weak states, repeating the binaries mentioned above. The rhetoric of the resilience of the surrounding regions employed in the 2015 ENP Review as well as the Union's Global Strategy also builds on these representations. Therefore, the EU's engagement is justified through the discourse of helping those societies which are incapable of political change²⁵ and integration by themselves.

These discourses also legitimize the EU's technocratic, depoliticizing and securitizing approach to the Mediterranean. Securitization inevitably leads to depoliticization because the decisions are taken at the level of the political elites and leave little room for political discussion at the local level in the target societies. On the other hand, the depoliticizing and technocratic approach of the EU towards the region (particularly, the rhetoric of standards, benchmarks, as well as the technocratic reporting system) is usually justified through references to the EU's interest in the stability of the Mediterranean, as well as to its economic/trade interests.

The EU's constructions of the Mediterranean have so far limited its capability to fully grasp the deeper dynamics of this space and, in many cases, have left it prone to criticism for paternalism and self-declared superiority. Thus, the EU's policy problems (such as ineffectiveness, lack of visibility, and distrust of the Union on the part of the partners) are not mainly about the instruments at its disposal (to the contrary, it has a wide range of instruments). Instead, the preconceived and securitized understanding of the EU regarding the Mediterranean space (even, sometimes, with regard to the Mediterranean members of the EU²⁶) coupled with its

25 For the EU-European representations of Turkey as incapable of political change, see Aydın-Düzgüt (2012).

26 For the negative depictions of the EU's southern Member States by the other EU Member States, see Eder (2006). For recent examples of othering discourse used against the southern members of the EU, especially

technocratic and, in many cases, depoliticizing approach²⁷ decreases the effectiveness of its instruments.

Effective foreign policy-making is very much related with how the actor in question constructs its target region (or country), but it also has a lot to do with the other stakeholders (other regional and external players, local elites and civil society actors) and their positions. The MEDRESET project is especially important for its attempt to inquire into how those stakeholders “perceive and practice ‘their’ Mediterranean into being on the geopolitical level and in respect to four geopolitically relevant and contentious policy areas: political ideas, agriculture and water, industry and energy, and migration and mobility” (Huber and Paciello 2016: 3). By analysing how key regional players (such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar) and external/global actors (the US, Russia and China) construct the Mediterranean and pursue their policies in the region, the other Work Packages will show us whether those actors also construct the Mediterranean space in ways that produce and reproduce dichotomies/binary oppositions; whether the relations that they pursue pertain to a more equal, balanced or symmetrical relationship; whether they construct themselves as superior in these relationships; and whether there are any similarities and differences in their definition of, and practices on, the Mediterranean when compared to those of the EU. On the other hand, it is crucial to reveal how the stakeholders within the region (local elites and civil society) perceive the EU and its acts regarding the Mediterranean space, to reset the EU's conception of this space and redesign its policies on it.

To conclude, this report proposes that the EU should change the othering (and also security) discourses used to define the societies and states in the Mediterranean. It should considerably diminish (if not totally abandon) its technocratic and depoliticizing approach towards target societies by facilitating opportunities for increased political agency of locals, especially opposition groups, non-co-opted civil society actors and women. In other words, if the EU aims to make a difference in the Mediterranean, it should first start with desecuritizing its approach, just as its members did among themselves through the European integration process.

regarding the Euro-crisis, see Maselli (2015), Khan and McClean (2017).

²⁷ This approach hinders a deeper geopolitical analysis of the dynamics of target societies.

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This project is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020
Programme for Research and Innovation under grant agreement no 693055