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The Key Powers' Construction of the Mediterranean

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Abstract

The geopolitics of the Mediterranean region has been changing rapidly in the twenty-first century, partly as a result of local state dynamics and partly as a product of transformational changes at the international and broader regional levels. The European Union is therefore no longer the dominant or key actor in this region and it now has to balance its policies and interests against the perceptible influence of a range of major and regional powers. The major powers exhibiting clear influence are the United States, China and the Russian Federation, each pursuing its own set of interests in this area. Alongside them are a number of regional powers, several of which are relative newcomers that bring with them very different priorities for and narratives about the Mediterranean region: Iran, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. And then there are the "resident regional powers" of Turkey and Israel which have considerable presence in the Mediterranean and which also have longstanding relations with the European Union. Analysis of how these eight powers perceive the Mediterranean, interact with and within it, and conduct themselves in pursuit of their interests, forms the backbone of this policy report, aimed at shedding new light on the areas of divergence and competition, as well as the basis on which the EU can cooperate with one or more of these influential states.

Introduction: How Non-EU Key Powers Frame the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean waterway has acted as both a bridge and a barrier between continents for millennia. History is riddled with examples of empires and emerging powers testing their influence and strength against each other in and around the Mediterranean, and all have made use of it as a communications and transmission route. The Mediterranean has facilitated access to different continents, and those entities with the means and the will have used it to project power and to secure a comparative advantage against their adversaries. At the height of the Cold War the Mediterranean was a central zone of conflict between the superpowers, and the Sea's riparian states found it difficult to maintain their space between the NATO alliance on the one hand and the Warsaw Pact on the other. Inevitably, some Mediterranean states veered to the West while others stayed close to the Soviet bloc. But, as the example of Egypt demonstrates, these relationships proved to be far too transient to provide either superpower with a firm strategic footing in the Mediterranean. The region thus has its own unique dynamics engendering significant inter-state conflicts which can suck external powers into the theatre, either directly or indirectly. The 1956, 1967 and 1973 wars provide ample evidence of externally-caused conflicts or those resulting from local dynamics. One must also be mindful of the reality

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that much of the political landscape of the Mediterranean – its geopolitical reality – was shaped by European interventions, and in this the "local external" is in fact a dialectical relationship. Indeed, without taking into account the colonial period, one might overlook the fact that historically the Mediterranean has also been imagined as a bridge allowing the projection of European power into Africa and West Asia. Conflicts and securitized tensions of a more "local" nature are also in evidence: the Turkish occupation of Cyprus, Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the simmering tensions between Greece and Turkey are good examples of these, all of which cause fissures between states and communities of this area. The post-Cold War period did provide a glimpse of how major powers can adapt their behaviour in support of creating a more stable and more cooperative set of interactions amongst the Mediterranean states. For a period in the early 1990s a sense of optimism followed the bloody campaign for the liberation of Kuwait, leading to the appearance of "zones of peace" in the area: namely, Palestinian–Israeli mutual recognition and the Jordanian–Israeli peace treaty. But, intra-state conflicts and local tensions did not disappear. Continuing Syrian military presence in Lebanon, Hezbollah–Israeli skirmishes leading to a 34-day war in 2006, the Algerian civil war between the state and Islamists, and Libyan agitation against its neighbours all did much to dampen any sense of a lasting post-Cold War dividend in the Mediterranean. Inevitably, major power interventions and theatre instability from the neighbouring sub-regions – namely the Persian Gulf and sub-Sahara Africa – as well as the ongoing Palestinian–Israeli conflict disrupted efforts to create sustainable cooperative relations amongst the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean countries. In the twenty-first century the Mediterranean has acquired renewed significance as a zone of conflict, political upheavals and external interventions. And it is the nature of these new tensions and upheavals which has driven the research and analysis of experts working on the many important aspects of the changing geopolitics of the Mediterranean. To reach the objectives of this MEDRESET project we have deployed a number of robust theoretical and methodological tools. The primary theoretical approach used in the current Work Package (WP2 on "Geopolitics") has been constructivism, and the key method that of discourse analysis, as elaborated in the WP1 (Cebeci and Schumacher 2016) and WP2 (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2016) concept papers.

The purpose of this policy report is to examine the policies, changing role and influence of different leading stakeholders in the Mediterranean area – as discussed in the WP2 papers on the US (Isaac and Kares 2017a), Russia (de Pedro 2017), China (Quero 2017), Iran (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017a), Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017b), Turkey (Görgülü and Dark 2017), and Israel (ASI-REM 2017) – in order to show how they construct this region in their own narratives and how they interact with it, in order to provide a comparative platform for better understanding of their behaviour and their policy drivers. Following this, our research investigates these actors' policies to ascertain if they are conflicting, competing or converging with the EU's policies. In doing so, we aim to highlight the corresponding policy indications to reconstruct a new role for the EU in the region. In the following we will first briefly explore how non-EU key powers frame the Mediterranean and then proceed to investigate which policies these eight key powers drive in terms of actors, methods and priority policy areas.

1. Diverse Imaginations of the Mediterranean

Applying a critical discourse analysis, the research on China has explored how the mental maps, or cartography, of China's foreign policy are constructed in relation to the Mediterranean. Overall, the term "Mediterranean" and the associations that the West attaches to it are absent from the discourse of Chinese officials and therefore the concept has little application in the Chinese discourse. The research undertaken on China in this WP contends that China uses multiple categorizations to refer to the Mediterranean countries. In other words, there is no single monolithic cartography of the Mediterranean. Instead, the findings of the research here underline four major mental maps or categories used by Chinese officials: "Arab countries/states", the "Middle East", the "Eurasian continent" and "developing countries" (Quero 2017: 3). As the WP paper on China concludes, the mental maps labelled as "Arab countries/states" and the "Eurasian continent" are mainly tied with development, mutual cooperation and the future, whereas the "Middle East" and "developing countries" are generally associated with an emphasis on regional conflicts and have more security connotations. Our findings suggest that at the cognitive level, China's categorization of the space that is called the Mediterranean is not homogeneous; it provides neither a conceptually nor a geographically contiguous geopolitical map of the Mediterranean.

The term "Mediterranean" does not occupy any place in Russia's strategic and conceptual construction of the region. Rather, Russian officials tend to employ the terms "*Blizhnem vostoke i sebernoii Afrike*", literally meaning "Middle East and North Africa" to refer to the region in their official documents (de Pedro 2017: 2). Correspondingly, the MENA region, both now and historically, plays a central role in Moscow's calculus. This is mainly related to Russia's aspiration to enjoy a Great Power status.

Iran's framing of the Mediterranean is perhaps best understood with regard to its dominant political policy of "Axis of Resistance". In other words, the term and concept of the Mediterranean as a region is not present in the discourse and practice of Iran. Instead, Iran emphasizes its conceptual construction of axis of resistance as a security bloc and thus contextualizes its relations in terms of a set of Muslim countries which are part of the Islamic Ummah (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017a: 3).

Similar to the EU, which has priorities descending from the EU countries to its "near abroad" and then the rest of the world, Saudi Arabia and Qatar too have a strong order of priorities in their framing of the world and particularly of the Mediterranean. These countries do not mention the term Mediterranean in their political documents. Instead, they tend to use the terms "Arab" and "Islamic", both of which have deep historical roots. Close examination of the discourse of these countries shows that for Saudi Arabia and Qatar the GCC countries occupy the first step in the ladder of their priorities. Then comes the Arab region followed by the "Muslim world", and finally the rest of the world (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017b: 23).

Similar to the EU's mindmap of the Mediterranean as a securitized region, both the United States and Israel view it as a dangerous theatre. Israel's securitized concept of the Mediterranean functions based on a binary opposition of a secure and more inside versus a dangerous outside. Israel mainly focuses on the Eastern Mediterranean and especially Palestine, Syria and Lebanon (ASI-REM 2017: 6). Consistent with the EU's view of the Mediterranean, the US emphasizes the strategic importance of the region due to its key location, as well as its maritime route for

energy and military access to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The United States' approach towards the region has, until 2017, been based on promoting what is best termed as "selective democratization" in the region (Isaac and Kares 2017a: 14-16), an example of which is their support for the so-called "moderate" Muslim groups in the region. This policy has been similar to the approach adopted by the EU following the post-2010 Arab uprisings which led to the emergence of Islamist parties as power contenders in several Arab Mediterranean countries.

Turkey's foreign policy has arguably gone through a process of change in the post-Cold War period, moving from close cooperation and alignment with its Western allies and the EU in particular towards a more independent and Muslim world-focus foreign policy. The shift is discernible in Turkey's policies vis-à-vis the Mediterranean region. The reorientation is a direct product of the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in 2002 (Görgülü and Dark 2017: 4). Initially the AKP government viewed the EU's regional integration initiatives as a drive towards building a greater economic, political and social community in order to create greater stability in its neighbourhood. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's policy of "zero problems with neighbours", mainly aimed at desecuritizing relations with Turkey's neighbours including Syria, was the key idea in this new approach. However such dramatic events as the Arab Spring, state weakness (in Iraq and Syria) on its doorstep, civil strife in the Middle East and massive migration flows have contributed towards rising tensions between Turkey and its neighbours, and have led to Turkey adopting a security-driven approach to the new environment in the Mediterranean. Finally, issues such as the Turkey's stalled EU membership bid, the Cyprus question and Turkey's projects of dam construction on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers are serious challenges that can affect Turkey's relationships with its neighbours in the Mediterranean and further complicate Ankara's already strained relations with the Union. Although Turkey has participated actively in many initiatives to cooperate with the EU, it does not have a clear, cohesive view on the Mediterranean region. In other words, the region is not taken as a unified space for Turkey.

2. The Eight Key Powers and the Mediterranean in the International System

The geopolitical configuration of the international system is rapidly changing, and regions are responding to these transformational changes in different ways. Regions without institutional or structural order are particularly vulnerable to the process of change and it is in this context that we consider how the emergence of new actors on the international level is affecting the geopolitical conditions of such strategically significant areas as the Mediterranean – the crossroads between Asia, Africa and Europe. As the "systemic shift" takes hold and the post-War Bretton Woods institutional international order gets tested, stretched and strained, we can see the erosion of the global equilibrium in which the West has thus far played a dominant role. The bipolar and then unipolar international system (America's "unipolar moment" following the end of the Cold War) has now passed by and a new multipolar world order is arguably still under development and evolving. Indeed, even the perception of an eroding Bretton Woods order is in itself shaping the behaviour of the major and emerging powers. Uncertainty in turn not only leads to policy confusions but is also fuelling anxiety. Uncertainty, in short, breeds discontent. Against this background of regional multiplicity and international transition, the EU still stands as the world's foremost example of successful supra-national regionalism, with an

ability to create direct and indirect, disruptive and transformative impact on the Mediterranean region. The question remains, to what extent do the EU's policies still match the changing geopolitical configuration of the Mediterranean? Connected with this and equally important is the question regarding the influence and impact on the Mediterranean of the rising powers and stakeholders, in particular regional powers such as Iran, Israel, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and major powers like China, Russia and the United States. It is understood that amongst these last three, the United States remains the most critical actor. It "is first among unequals" as neither China nor Russia has the military, economic and political weight to sustain a global role matching that of the US, and neither can freely exercise influence at the global level to the extent that the United States does.

Confidence, assertiveness and confrontation with the West (containment of Western influence) are the backbone of the Foreign Policy Concept adopted by the Russian government in November 2016. Reflecting on the views and policies of Russia after the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of its military intervention in Syria, this document contends that the "world is currently going through fundamental changes related to the emergence of a multipolar international system", and it assumes that "global power and development potential is becoming decentralized, and is shifting towards the Asia-Pacific Region, eroding the global economic and political dominance of the traditional western powers" (Russia 2016, quoted in de Pedro 2017: 9).

As the research in this WP on Russia demonstrates, plenty of instances point to a strategic distrust, within Russia, of the EU and its regional policies, a situation which got even worse following the Arab uprisings in 2011. Russia's cooperation with the EU over the Libyan crisis ended in the unseating of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the then Libyan president, at the hands of European powers (with strong American support) – an act Russia felt was a betrayal of its cooperative understanding with the EU countries over Libya. Russia put a distance between itself and the EU following the Libyan crisis and proceeded to strengthen its support of the beleaguered Assad, investing militarily and politically in the survival of the Syrian regime. Fear that the EU would attempt to overthrow Assad's regime fuelled Russia's perception of the EU's strategic objectives: through the overthrow of Russia's Syrian ally the EU would weaken Russia's position in the Mediterranean and jeopardize Russia's broader interests and access to the high seas from the Black Sea. Putin's ascendance to power has made Russia more assertive, and its tone and policies have become firmer also towards the countries of the Mediterranean. In this regard, the Arab uprisings have helped Russia review, redefine and sharpen its priorities in the Mediterranean and have encouraged Moscow to follow a much more assertive and independent path in this region. Russia seems convinced that the West's agenda has been to pursue regime changes across the region – and use turmoil in the Mediterranean as a way of meddling in Russia's own internal affairs as well. With the Ukraine crisis as the backdrop, Russia's actions and authority in the region have been "upgraded" dramatically in order to enable it to play a much more central role in the Arab Mediterranean, a crisis-ridden region bereft of regional leadership. In the process Russia is further challenging Western hegemony in an area long dominated by the US–EU axis.

As WP2's discussion of China shows, Chinese self-image is that of a responsible superpower, a constructive and just global actor. Reflecting on the hotspots discursive construction of China ("hotspot" is the label used to characterize international conflictual junctures including Ukraine, Sudan, the South China Sea, Syria, Yemen and Libya, and the nuclear issues of Iran and the

Korean Peninsula) (Quero 2017: 10), the research on China points out a core idea in China's international approach that characterizes its position. The Chinese position is best summed up by President Xi Jinping himself when he states that "the international community wants to hear China's voice and see China's solutions" (quoted in Quero 2017: 11), thus emphasizing that the world needs to collaborate with China in solving regional "hotspot" issues. The documents analysed by this WP's research on China also underline the perception in Beijing that the resolution of such conflicts can "create a more enabling environment for China's development" (quoted in Quero 2017: 11).

China's emphasis on following a foreign policy of non-interference is also manifest in its approach towards the Arab uprisings – a core Mediterranean issue. Its policy of mutual respect and cooperation with all countries is reflected in its approach to Arab countries, and remains consistent with China's view that there must not be any interference in sovereign states' internal affairs. Irrespective of differences in ideologies and outlooks, China aims to respect Arab countries' sovereign independence and territorial integrity. China's position of non-interference vis-à-vis Arab countries is partly an acknowledgement that these countries know the region best and therefore will be able to overcome their internal difficulties without outside interference. Also consistent is China's position on Syria: resisting UN pressures to get involved in Syria's domestic affairs, and continuing to recognize the Assad regime as the legitimate government of Syria.

The term "Mediterranean" and the associations that the West attaches to it are absent from the discourse of Chinese officials and therefore the concept has little application in the Chinese discourse. Quero contends that China uses multiple categorizations to refer to the Mediterranean countries. In other words, there is no single monolithic cartography of the Mediterranean. Instead, the paper underlines four major mental maps or categories used by Chinese officials: "Arab countries/states", the "Middle East", the "Eurasian continent" and "developing countries" (Quero 2017: 4-5). As the paper concludes, the mental maps labelled as "Arab countries/states" and the "Eurasian continent" are mainly tied with development, mutual cooperation and the future, whereas "the Middle East" and "developing countries" are generally associated with an emphasis on regional conflicts and have more of a security connotation. As can be seen, China's categorization of the Mediterranean space is not homogeneous, either conceptually or geographically. As a case in point, the term "hotspot" is used to refer to both Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean countries including Ukraine, Sudan, the South China Sea, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iran (the nuclear issue) and the Korean Peninsula (Quero 2017: 10).

To sum up, it might be reasonable to trace some commonalities between current Chinese comprehension of the Mediterranean space and the European situation in the transitional period between the 1970–1989, 1990–2002 and 2003-2017 phases as described by the MEDRESET project. On the one hand, China's multiple geopolitical cartographies, existing side by side, show that China does not conceive of the region as a coherent unit; thus it shares some commonalities with the European Community's 1970–1989 approach to the region. On the other hand, the increasing popularity of the Middle East mental map, which includes China's self-representation as a responsible global power vis-à-vis this convulsed region, shares some commonalities with the EU's transformation in the 1990s. In addition, political issues, and especially sensitive ones, are generally silenced in China's discourse, which is similar to the EU's depoliticizing and technocratic approach to the Mediterranean in the period 2003–2017. And yet, another conceptualization of the region is evident in China's discourse, according

to which China is distancing itself from its traditional constructions of the Mediterranean and embracing the highly securitized conceptions repeatedly used by the EU and the US. At this point, it is still difficult to ascertain which of the Chinese official mental maps will replace the alternative ones as we go forward.

As the discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran implies, the world is no longer polarized (bipolar or unipolar) and in the new order new powers can rise. As Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has postulated, "today, the power and clout, which the Islamic Republic of Iran has, would not be possible under a bipolar world system and this is due to current fluid conditions in the world" (Zarif 2016, quoted in Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017a: 9). Believing that the world order is undergoing a "transition" period in which the West is no longer the determining global bloc, the Iranian official discourse predicates both a shift of power from the West and the creation of a void which would necessarily have to be filled by new powers (geopolitical actors such as Iran), which in turn means the decentralization and diffusion of power (as opposed to the traditional geopolitical view of the West as the centre). In this scenario, permissive conditions emerge which can facilitate the rise of new actors on the regional and international scene. Thus the new situation paves the way for even smaller powers to play a role through their instruments of soft and hard power, thus fuelling their potential to create their own spheres of influence.

The Islamic Republic of Iran viewed the Arab uprisings as an "Islamic Awakening", to use the term employed by Iran's Supreme Leader (quoted in Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017a: 7). According to Iran's narrative, with Arab regimes losing legitimacy, partly due to their close ties with the United States, Arab populations were now alive to the power of Iran's Islamic Revolution and its message of Muslim solidarity, and used it as their model of resistance. Arab Muslims were following the example of Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979. By extension, Iran's revolution would provide the guide and its leader the guidance for the countries of the Muslim world. Also, the term Islamic Awakening denoted renewal, a sign of Arab Muslims waking up from a period of despair and resignation which had kept them in a position of subjugation. This Islamic Awakening would bring about an alternative world order that would challenge the dominant Western order, and its narrative, in the pro-Western Arab countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. The notion of Islamic Awakening is reinforced by the Islamic Republic in its use of the term "Axis of Resistance", a reference to its anti-Western and anti-Israel/Zionist alliance with Syria, Hezbollah and a myriad of militias now fighting Iran's battles in Syria and Iraq. However, while Iran welcomed the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Yemen as the broadening of the Islamic Awakening, when protests became widespread in Syria in 2012 Iran's leaders viewed the mass opposition against the Assad regime not as a form or extension of Islamic Awakening, but as an attack on its cherished Axis of Resistance. The protests in Syria were quickly diagnosed as terrorism and a *takfiri*-inspired, Western-orchestrated conspiracy designed to weaken Syria's legitimate government and its place in the Axis of Resistance.

With regard to the multi-actor part of the analytical framework, it is noteworthy that Iran has tried to exert its influence in Lebanon and Palestine via such non-state actors as Hamas and Hezbollah rather than through the Lebanese government or the Palestinian national authority.

Due to its proximity to the EU, Turkey has been affected by and involved in several Mediterranean policies of the Union, including the Global Mediterranean Policy (1972), the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995), the Southeast Europe Stability Pact (1999), the EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East (2004) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004).

However, the level of its participation in the abovementioned initiatives has varied from case to case and has not assured a high degree of convergence between Turkey's foreign policy and that of the EU (Görgülü and Dark 2017: 4). Despite a high degree of cooperation with the EU, Turkey has had reservations about the Union's intentions in the Mediterranean, seeing in these political and economic initiatives efforts to build alternative cross-Mediterranean partnerships which could jeopardize Ankara's own plans for full EU membership. These pan-regional initiatives were viewed as efforts to delay Turkey's full integration into Europe, or change the form of its European partnership.

In addition, Turkey's involvement in platforms such as the US-backed Broader Middle East (BMENA) meant that aside from the EU, Turkey's response to the region was also influenced by American policies and actions. Turkey went through four stages in its discourse on the BMENA, as follows: "proactive involvement in securing BMENA as a soft power", "Turkey as 'de-securitizer', and [having] 'zero problems with the neighbors'", "Turkey as a 'regional protector' of BMENA" and "Turkey as [...] an 'integrative power'" (Erşen 2014: 100, Görgülü and Dark 2017: 4-5). Yet at the same time, as this WP's discussion of Turkey demonstrates, Turkey has adopted several "political, diplomatic, and economic means to transform Turkey's relations with the countries in the region and to increase Turkish influence in this major geostrategic area" (Altunışık 2011: 19, Görgülü and Dark 2017: 5).

However, when comparing its approach with that of the EU, Turkey's lack of a comprehensive vision on the Mediterranean region introduces certain challenges, and Ankara's policies can appear piecemeal and unresponsive. Thus, over the Cyprus issue Turkey tends not to yield to a comprehensive approach leading to the unification of the island, and on refugees Ankara has not always coordinated its approach with its EU counterparts. Moreover, the Arab uprisings have posed major challenges to Turkey's position in the region, which indeed has also been shown to be the EU's own experience. Turkey's strategy of peace with its neighbours was severely challenged, for example, by the civil war in Syria. In this respect, one of the most striking examples is the way in which Ankara's relations with Syria changed as the ongoing crisis began to pose a threat to Turkey's internal stability. Although Turkey initially tried to encourage the Syrian government to reform through diplomatic means, President Bashar al-Assad's rejection of Turkey's "advice" and the accompanying refugee influx into Turkey led the government to cut its relations with Syria, denounce the Assad regime, and later back the Syrian opposition against the regime (Görgülü and Dark 2017: 15).

Israel constructs the Mediterranean as an arena where security and trade go hand in hand. Thus, Israel seeks to use commerce to enter security compacts, especially with the European part of the Mediterranean. Moreover, Israel pictures the Mediterranean as a vulnerable space open to political pressure and instability (such as the Arab uprisings). Such conditions increase regime vulnerability and in extreme cases can bring about regime change, allowing the rise to power of political forces more hostile to Israel and more assertive in their support of the Palestinian cause. In addition, Israel's securitized conception of the Mediterranean also extends to Europe. Thus, European policies towards the Levant, such as support for Palestinian agriculture or the EU's differentiation policy on exports from Israeli settlements, are perceived in the context of Israel's broader securitized conception of the Mediterranean and the geopolitical conditions which dominate its strategic objectives.

The discussion in this WP on Israel focuses on the complex issue of identity production in particular. On this basis, Israel views itself as part of Europe and constructs the Mediterranean based on a classification of allies and enemies – "us and them". In other words, countries of the region are either allies or enemies of Israel. Israel has friendly diplomatic ties with the allies, and trades military compacts with more than one of these partners. On the other hand, it adopts a policy of deterrence towards the countries which it regards as enemies, by taking every measure to try and stop them posing a threat to Israel's interests. It also tries to make what it regards as enemy countries weaker whenever possible. In its long-term calculations, the strategy of weakening of its adversaries is regarded as a prelude to their transition from enemy to neutral and possible ally. In this context, Israel views Iran and Syria as the most fundamental challenges to its security, knowing that because of their ideological differences it is very difficult if not impossible to change the attitude of these two countries towards Israel. There now exists a "geopolitical–ideological prism" through which Israel views these countries and their alliance. As a result, Israel constructs these players as enemies that should be deterred at any price. Following the events of the Arab Spring, especially in Syria, Israel also fully understands that overt intervention in Arab conflicts will unify Arabs against it. But Israel is not neutral in the process of change gripping its neighbourhood, and would certainly regard the fall of the Assad regime as a positive development towards meeting its regional interests. Although Assad's fall might put a combination of Islamists in power, it would in practice mean the decline of Hezbollah (an influential non-state actor) and the creation of clear strategic distance between Tehran and Damascus. Israel would not celebrate the rise of radical Sunni Islamists on its borders; yet, it would not consider them worse than the threatening presence of Hezbollah and Iran in Syria (ASI-REM 2017: 10).

Saudi Arabia and Qatar are less certain in formulating a "Mediterranean policy", if such a term could be used. They seem more concerned about their place in the international system and the advantages to be gained from deeper engagement with the changing global order. Uncertainty about global transformations has come at a time of major regional tensions, which in turn has raised the premium on firmer grasp, if not control, of the immediate geopolitical environment. A combination of these changes, and the emergence of new actors in the MENA region, has galvanized Qatar and Saudi Arabia to seek control of the culturally similar and familiar environment around them. In pursuit of this strategy both countries have focused on the Southern Mediterranean, but in different ways, in order to decrease uncertainty about their neighbourhood and contain the threats arising from the Levant and North Africa.

As discussed in Ehteshami and Mohammadi (2017b), Saudi Arabia's approach towards the political instability in the Arab region that started in 2010, a series of events which came to be known as the Arab Spring, reflected an ontological concern. The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) as a legitimately elected government in Egypt was a particular worry. From Saudi Arabia's perspective, the MB's electoral success in 2012 not only gave it a voice in pan-Islamic circles but also legitimacy to address Sunni Muslims, particularly Sunni Arab Muslims, across the region, presumably challenging the narrative of Saudi Arabia and its ulama. In response, we begin to see growing antagonism in the discourse of Saudi clerics towards the group. An important reason for this antagonistic discourse is that once in power the MB came to endorse many of the features of Salafi interpretation of Islam, the very reading of Islam that Saudi Arabia has always propagated, and even worked with Salafis in the newly elected parliament in Cairo, who won 25 percent of the seats in 2011. Therefore, Saudi Arabia's concern was to present itself as the only and true representative of (Sunni) Islam, in contradistinction

to Morsi's Egypt which was now becoming a geopolitical rival – reaching an "understanding" with rival Iran and forming a joint platform with Turkey – as well as being the source of an alternative Islamist narrative. Also, some of the GCC countries' Muslim Brotherhood affiliates were inspired as a result of the success of MB-linked parties in Egypt and Tunisia to engage with local and national politics of their own countries, again potentially challenging the grip and narrative of the ruling elites in these hereditary monarchies. Saudi Arabia interpreted these post-Arab Spring developments as potential sources of threat to the national security of the Kingdom itself, as well as challenges to the stability of some of its other GCC neighbours. The view that local Muslim Brotherhood affiliates could one day oust the monarchies of the GCC had suddenly acquired traction. This perception and sense of vulnerability can contribute to an explanation of Saudi Arabia's support for the new president, General Sisi, after Morsi's government was removed, as well as its support for Salafi groups in Syria (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017b: 10).

In contrast, Qatar's approach was fuelled by activism and was markedly different from Saudi Arabia's largely defensive posture. Doha viewed the situation as an opportunity for extending its influence in the Southern Mediterranean and thus using weakening state structures as an opportunity to create new alliances and to begin playing a more significant role in the region. This strategy was primarily focused on getting closer to the Muslim Brotherhood parties, especially those forming the new governing elites in Egypt and Tunisia. It also endeavoured to use al-Jazeera as a medium through which revolutionary ideas could be circulated from one country and community to another. Post-Arab Spring developments subsequently triggered a competition between Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the Mediterranean. The rivalry was fundamentally over the endorsement and guardianship of various state and non-state actors in the Mediterranean, and Qatar's efforts to create for itself new spheres of influence and partnerships which could help it to withstand Saudi pressure – to shed Saudi Arabia's shadow once and for all. These disputes became broader and more evident following the overthrow of Morsi in Egypt and the deepening of the Syrian crisis, and before too long were extended into the GCC itself. Heightened tensions resulted in a major diplomatic split in 2014 between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and then a much deeper and broader crisis in 2017 between Qatar and several GCC countries (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) as well as Egypt. The 2017 crisis has led to a boycott of Qatar and attempts by the Arab region's "quartet" to isolate Doha and punish it for its regional policies, in the process bringing perilously close the disintegration of the Arab region's only successful regional organization.

Following the Arab Spring the new situation was grasped by Qatar as an opportunity to expand its political influence in the region through making alliances with the new actors, especially the MB-affiliated political parties and their associate civil society organizations in Tunisia and Egypt. Saudi Arabia also did its best to fill the vacuum and extend its influence in the post-Arab Spring MENA region, through building and strengthening relations with the post-uprising governments, utilizing the linkage with non-state actors such as Salafi groups in Egypt, and supporting various Syrian opposition groups (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017b: 10).

The United States has always tended to dovetail its policies in the Mediterranean with its European allies. A prime example of this approach is how the Proliferation Security Initiative and Operation Active Endeavour in 2003 were coordinated with European countries. The creation of the Transatlantic Energy Council in 2009 and the US's crucial contribution to Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011 are further examples of this strategic partnership in action. One can go

further and point to the participation of the US Sixth Fleet in the EU-NAV-FOR Mediterranean in 2015–2016 and the complementary American and European roles in confronting the threat of ISIS as further evidence of this close relationship (Isaac and Kares 2017a: 21). But the partnership also exhibits wider strategic convergence, as in the military counterbalancing of Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean. There exists, in short, a complementarity in US and EU roles in the Mediterranean, especially when the rising material and ideational involvement and influence of other emerging global and regional powers are taken into account.

As the discussion in the WP paper focusing on the United States observes, America has continued its emphasis on the strategic significance of the Mediterranean and its contact with the surrounding areas, in large part because of the importance of the Mediterranean's maritime route for energy, military access to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and for shipping. Moreover, America appreciates the EU's non-military strategies to tackle numerous security issues in the Mediterranean. A similarity between the two is their approaches to democratization in the MENA region. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring events, both America and the EU supported what they saw as "moderate" Muslim groups in the region for the sake of pragmatic pursuit of stabilization.

However, similar to the EU's construction of the Mediterranean, security continues to remain a major American concern in this area, which it demonstrates by its close military partnerships with Egypt, Israel, Morocco and Turkey. Yet, whereas it readily and generally securitizes the issue of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the MENA region, it does not seem to do so in relation to Israel, which can cause confusion in its counter-proliferation strategies and perhaps in its relations with its European partners (Isaac and Kares 2017a: 11).

3. Actors and Policy Instruments

WP2 has investigated which policies these eight key powers drive in terms of actors (EU, Mediterranean states, non-state actors, IOs) and policy instruments (unilateralism, bilateralism, multilateralism) vis-à-vis the Mediterranean.

3.1 Actors

Most of key powers' relations are channelled directly through the Mediterranean states themselves. However, there are a number of other actors besides the states, such as non-state actors, regional organizations and supra-national organizations, that the key actors aspire to utilize in order to implement their policies in the Mediterranean.

The United States appreciates the EU's non-military strategies to tackle numerous security issues in the Mediterranean. A similarity between the two is their approaches to democratization in the MENA region. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring events, both America and the EU supported what they saw as "moderate" Muslim groups in the region for the sake of pragmatic pursuit of stabilization. This US approach was rooted in recommendations made by prominent think-tanks such as the RAND Corporation which urged the Obama administration to work with the successor regimes in the Arab Mediterranean and thus nurture a link with the (now) legitimate Muslim Brotherhood taking control of the levers of power in Egypt and possibly

elsewhere in the Mediterranean. The manifestation of this policy could be found in the US support for the so-called moderate Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia, and also in Libya (Isaac and Kares 2017a: 18).

Another similarity between the EU and the US is the top-down approach to democratization that both actors have embraced. As for civil society support, up until 2011 funding was generally allocated to quasi-governmental civil society organizations (CSOs) or to political parties of a non-Islamist orientation. However, after 2011 both the US and the EU elaborated on initiatives to fund and communicate with a wider range and number of CSOs. Yet it is still noted that the bulk of US CSO funding goes to professional and registered NGOs (Stephan et al. 2015: 5). This is justified in part by the numerous technical and political problems that US agencies, such as USAID, have had to grapple with (Stephan et al. 2015: 7). With all the rhetoric on the need to revisit this top-down approach to democratization, data shows that the bulk of US direct governmental aid allocation in the Mediterranean still goes to governmental institutions (Isaac and Kares 2017a: 17).

Also Turkey has been increasingly involved in activities that promote democracy at both the governmental and the civil society level (Kirişçi 2010: 14), for example through TIKA. (Görgülü and Dark 2017: 7). It has also shown itself supportive of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated parties in the Arab uprisings.

The reaction of GCC countries to the Arab Spring and its aftermath was not unanimous. Saudi Arabia viewed these regimes' removal from power as a political vacuum that would endanger its security. Qatar, however, saw the Arab Spring as an opportunity for further engagement in the Arab region, including the Southern Mediterranean. Forming alliances with new actors and enhancing the existing ones especially with the Muslim Brotherhood in the region are assessed as efforts along this line. In reaction to these developments, and to fill the vacuum created by the absence of strong political systems in the Arab Spring-affected countries, Saudi Arabia has endeavoured to increase its influence in the region by building and enhancing relations with the post-uprising governments. To that end, it also used the linkage with non-state actors such as Salafi groups in Egypt and supported various Syrian opposition groups. (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017b: 10).

Iran has tried to exert its influence in Lebanon and Palestine via such non-state actors as Hamas and Hezbollah rather than through the Lebanese government or the Palestinian national authority, to achieve its goals in line with the Axis of Resistance doctrine. With regard to Syria, before the Arab Spring Iran's main point of reference was President Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian government. Iran did not pay much attention to the non-state organizations in Syria mainly because they were either under the control of the government or too weak to be considered as important actors in the country. Yet, after the civil war in addition to Assad's regime Iran has established relations with some groups that fight alongside Iran and the Syrian army against the armed Syrian opposition groups.

China and Russia have been very clear in their strategies to not undermine state sovereignty, and thus have focused their energies on state-to-state exchanges.

3.2 Policy Instruments

From a layered multi-level perspective, the conduct of Saudi Arabia and Qatar in post-Arab Spring situations in Yemen, Libya and Syria demonstrates that each of these countries would like the GCC to take the lead role in managing and addressing the regional problems in MENA. However, our observations suggest that each of these countries is trying to control its apparatus through patronage and alliance building. With regard to other regional organizations in the Arab and Islamic world (the Arab League, OIC, Organization of Arab Exporting Petroleum Countries-OAPEC and others), Qatar and Saudi Arabia would prefer such multilateral bodies to work closely with the GCC sub-regional organization and thus bring their own influence to bear on these major bodies. They prefer the GCC to complement these entities and influence their workings, thereby avoiding tensions and competitive pressures. The behaviour of the two countries within the framework of the GCC regarding the Arab League, OIC, OPEC and OAPEC provides examples of their attempts to keep the leading role for the GCC (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017b: 23-24).

Looking at the GCC countries' relations with the Mediterranean from the perspective of Europe, it could be argued that most approaches and initiatives by the EU incline towards safeguarding the security and interests of European Union members, as in the case of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, whether on the war against terrorism or immigration waves from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean to Europe, the main goal was to "contribute to regional security and stability" (NATO 2004, Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017b: 20).

Iran's relations with the Mediterranean states remains unilateral-focused – that is to say, its relations have not been moderated through any multilateral bodies. It alone chooses its policy instruments and only collaborates with other powers, like Russia in Syria, in pursuit of its own national interest. It does not have a dialogue mechanism with the EU for exchange of views regarding the Mediterranean.

While due to its proximity to the EU, Turkey has been affected by and involved in several Mediterranean initiatives of the Union, Ankara has had reservations about its involvement in such political partnerships, fearing that these projects could dilute or possibly endanger its full integration into Europe. Moreover, Turkey's less-than-comprehensive vision for the Mediterranean region has created a number of challenges, both for itself and for the EU.

In its discourse Russia seeks to establish the credibility of a multi-polar system of international relations that really reflects the diversity of the modern world with its great variety of interests. Therefore Russia's discourse promotes reaching agreement with other states, based on common interests, via a system of bilateral and multilateral mutually beneficial partnership relationships. Russia intends "to further expand bilateral relations with the states in the Middle East and North Africa, including by relying on the ministerial meeting of the Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum, and continuing strategic dialogue with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf" and "will take advantage of its participation as an observer in the work of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation with a view to further expanding relations with countries of the Islamic world, and promoting partnerships with them in various areas" (quoted in de Pedro 2017: 11).

Associated with the "Belt and Road" Initiative (BRI), China also boosts the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures (CICA) based on a parallel geopolitical category, namely the "Asian countries" – similar to the idea of a "Eurasian continent" category previously discussed in the paper on China. The CICA integrates 26 different countries, including Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Qatar, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. The League of Arab States is involved as an observer (Quero 2017: 15). Much of China's multilateralism in this part of the world seems to stem from its efforts to establish the correct mechanisms for the delivery of the BRI projects, which are in themselves multinational, multifaceted, multi-sectoral and inter-governmental.

The heavy US military presence and political leverage in the region generally compensates for European military deficiencies and lack of strong political leverage. This prevailing complementarity is evident notwithstanding US unilateralism and inclination to use military power or coercive actions, which contrasts with the European inclination to multilateralism and political dialogue with problematic partners in the Mediterranean and beyond. This is not a partnership of equals, as the Palestinian–Israeli-focused Quartet demonstrates. Here we see European inability to influence US initiatives within an international multilateral forum, and it tends to be the US which benefits from the Quartet to promote its unilateral actions (Tocci 2011, quoted in Isaac and Kares 2017a: 12).

Israel has historically constructed its understanding of its security as tightly tied to good relations with the United States and Europe. Yet the Israeli elite firmly rejects "solutionism" or "nowism" in its interactions, whether such demands come from Israeli society itself, the Palestinians, the United States, the EU or elsewhere (ASI-REM 2017: 4).

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Similar to the EU, all key states give ascendency to their strategic interests over any other considerations when dealing with the Mediterranean. Some of these interest conceptions are based on geopolitical considerations, as in the case of China and Russia which see opportunities to be seized in the transitioning international system. Thus, they seek to assume a bigger role in global affairs including the geopolitically significant Mediterranean space. Moreover, although there are some potential complementarities when it comes to security and stability in the Mediterranean, the rift between the European Union and Russia runs deep, and Moscow is positioning itself in the MENA region as a counterbalance to the West.

Other actors, such as Iran, believe that the world order is undergoing a "transition" period that is leading to a less West-centric international system. In this view, regional powers such as Iran and non-state actors such as Hezbollah can play a more significant role in shaping their immediate environments, notably in the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitical configuration. Yet other key states, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are less certain and are more concerned about the future of the international system and the global world order. Nevertheless, they have been proactive in engaging with the post-Arab Spring regional environment, though not in a coordinated or complementary manner.

Israel's securitization of the Mediterranean mirrors the EU's approach. Indeed, out of the eight key powers under discussion, Israel's discursive approach to its surrounding areas (including the Mediterranean) shows the closest convergence with the EU's technocratic, depoliticized and securitized approach towards the Mediterranean. Similar to the EU, Israel's securitized conception of the Mediterranean differentiates between a secure and more "European" inside versus a dangerous outside. Thus relations with the Mediterranean states, especially those regarding economy and energy, are perceived as means to assure Israeli security.

While due to its proximity to the EU, Turkey has been affected by and involved in several Mediterranean initiatives of the Union, Ankara has had reservations about its involvement in such political partnerships, fearing that these projects could dilute, or possibly endanger, its full integration into Europe. Moreover, Turkey's less-than-comprehensive vision for the Mediterranean region has created a number of challenges for the EU. As reflected in its position on the unification of Cyprus, its support for certain groups in the conflicts in the Middle East, its approach to the question of energy security in Europe, and its changing approach to the Mediterranean migration and refugee crisis, Turkey tends to adjust its policies on a case-by-case basis, adding to confusion and uncertainty in Europe and in the region about its long-term objectives. For example, Ankara has had to devote a great deal of diplomatic time, particularly following the shooting down of a Russian fighter over Syria/Turkey, to building new relations with Moscow, and finding a new modus operandi with Tehran. With the gloomy deadlock in Turkey's EU accession discussions, it is conceivable that cooperation between the two, in the context of the Mediterranean, will decrease dramatically. Regional crises that require immediate attention and mutually agreed upon solutions (such as the refugee crisis) would be even more complicated in the absence of a strong Turkey–EU partnership.

We observe that since September 2014 the US focus in its fight against ISIS has been to a great extent shifted to the areas it has traditionally regarded to be of geostrategic importance in the Mediterranean (namely, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Levant and to a lesser extent Libya). In contrast, European attention to counterterrorism efforts has extended to include nearly the entire Southern Mediterranean area and beyond. We have therefore witnessed how conflict in West Africa and the Sahel, and such developments as the emergence of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb group, have required European attention and have developed as crucial concerns for European countries (EEAS 2011, European Commission and High Representative 2015, Lesser 2015: 2). This is not surprising given that the threats of instability and terrorism have been seen as more imminent, and since fighting terrorism and organized crime has increasingly been linked to the problems of uncontrolled influxes of refugees and migrants into Europe. The link between terror networks and uncontrolled migration was further strengthened following a number of terrorist attacks in France and Belgium. These attacks worked to further securitize the phenomena of the so-called jihadi "returnees" and "foreign fighters" to Europe and emerged as the main security challenges facing the Union. The threat perception has arguably been enhanced by the EU's geographical proximity to conflict areas (Council of the European Union 2014 and 2015, Council of the European Union CTC 2014a and 2014b) to the east and south of its territories (Isaac and Kares 2017a: 10).

Our analysis shows that the Mediterranean is a changing geopolitical space and one where the number, type and role of actors are in flux. Due to state weakness and growing social tensions the number of non-state actors has proliferated. Interaction with many of these actors remains difficult and complicated. We have found that major powers' role and presence is also

changing, and the EU and the United States have to contend with the growing presence of both China and Russia in this region. But as these actors behave differently, it is difficult for the EU to develop a single comprehensive approach towards them. Similarly, the EU has to contend with the presence and influence of regional powers. While Israel and Turkey are relatively well known quantities to the EU, Iran, Qatar and Saudi Arabia bring with them new and less clear-cut policies to the Mediterranean, complicating the EU's assessment and calculations regarding the behaviour of these actors. Further, intense competition amongst the Persian Gulf states in the Mediterranean poses the danger of spillover of these countries' own disputes and quarrels to the broader Mediterranean. In light of this assessment, the key policy recommendation WP2 puts forward is to review the nature and type of the EU's interactions with the regional and major powers present in this area. One possible way forward would be to widen the Euro-Med contact group to include the EU and Turkey, as well as non-Mediterranean states which are key powers in the Mediterranean, namely China, US, Russia, Iran and Saudi Arabia, to discuss some initially very limited issues of common concern. Terrorism, migration, water security, environmental protection, energy cooperation, employment enhancement are all areas for further multilateral dialogue.

A change in the security discourses used to define the societies and states in the Mediterranean can help diffuse some of the tensions which now characterize the EU's interactions with the Mediterranean actors. The EU should strive to help create conditions that would increase the political agency of the locals, especially opposition groups, non-co-opted civil society actors and women, in their efforts to change their societies for the better. Such an approach could help nurture the conditions for closer EU cooperation with some of the other actors in the Mediterranean. By desecuritizing its approach the EU will be able to contain the other parties' securitized approach as well, and thus find pathways towards a more cooperative interaction with these emerging actors. As was suggested elsewhere in this project, such an approach does not imply downplaying, or even ignoring, existing security dynamics in the Mediterranean; the idea is instead the adoption of, and adherence to, a more holistic, diversified understanding of the multifaceted developments in a geopolitical space that is ever evolving.

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