

# “THE EUROPEAN UNION’S BALANCING ACT BETWEEN NORMS AND INTERESTS IN ITS SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD”

- An analysis of explanatory factors behind inconsistent human rights and democratisation policies of the EU in Northern Africa



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*The EU's High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Lady Ashton, hugging a unidentified child in a refugee camp. The image is official and thus chosen to represent the foreign policy of the EU on the actual front page of the European External Action Service (EEAS)-website.*

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## **Abstract**

The events of the ‘Arab Spring’ and especially the initial uprisings in Northern Africa have uncovered the EU’s policies towards the region and the often inconsistent balancing of the EU’s treaty-based norms of human rights and democratisation versus the interest of the EU and its member states.

This thesis aims at filling the research gap in the field of International Relations exposed by recent events: through a comprehensive assessment of the explanations behind the criticised conduct of the EU in the years leading up to the ‘Arab Spring’ via process-tracing of the possible causal explanations of the dependent variable: The EU policy in the five Northern African countries.

The concluding hypothesis indicates that the variables explaining the inconsistent EU policies in Northern Africa are: 1) the security concerns of immigration, terrorism and energy security and 2) the economic liberalisation agenda, while the variables of the US relations and the conflict issues in Western Sahara and in the Middle East are surprisingly indicated as having a weaker impact.

The larger implications of the findings are discussed in a broader context of the way forward for the EU’s foreign policy-making. An actual ‘New foreign policy-paradigm’ is proposed in which transparency and a ‘re-politicisation’ of the EU’s foreign policy is argued as crucial for the positioning of the EU in a ‘Post-Western’ world order – as well as internally towards its own citizens.

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# The European Unions balancing act between norms and interests in its Southern neighbourhood : an analysis of explanatory factors behind inconsistent human rights and democratisation policies of the EU in Northern Africa

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