

“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.

TABLE OF CONTENT

Abstract.....	1
Foreword.....	5
1. Introduction.....	6
1.1 Research question	8
1.2 Elaborating questions	9
1.3 Demarcation and conceptual clarification	9
1.4 Outline of the research structure	12
1.5 Overview: Background information	13
1.5.1 How does the EU support the Northern African countries?.....	13
1.5.2 Country assessments	15
1.6 Defining the context: The critique of the EU’s inconsistency.....	17
1.6.1 Mapping the inconsistencies.....	17
1.6.2 Building the hypothesis on the EU’s balancing of interests and norms.....	20
2. Theory.....	22
2.1 Two combating theories – and the third way?.....	22
2.2 Establishing the theoretical triangle.....	26
3. Methodology	27
3.1 Theory of science	27
3.2 Choice of methodology	28
3.2.1 Process-tracing.....	29
3.2.2 Case and data selection.....	30
3.2.3 Specific considerations when using Wikileaks in academic research	30
3.3 Assessment of the variables.....	32
3.3.1 The dependent variable: The EU policy in Northern Africa	32
3.3.2 The independent variables: External factors	33
3.3.3 The intervening variables: The excluded internal factors	33
3.4 Establishment of hypothetical causal chains	33
4. Analysis	35
4.1 Sifting the rhetorics: The three-folded security questions of the EU.....	35
4.1.1 Stemming immigration.....	37
4.1.2 Islamism and counterterrorism – a constructed threat?.....	42
4.1.3 The black gold and gas rush: Energy security	45
4.2 US relations – power balancing or just keeping up the good relations?	51
4.3 Conflict issues: The passive EU-approach	55
4.3.1 Western Sahara	56
4.3.2 The Middle East Peace Process	60
4.4 Economic liberalisation: “It’s all about the money” – and clashing norms	65
4.5 Summary of the analysis	71
5. Discussion: Time for a “New EU foreign policy-paradigm”	77
5.1 Diagnosis: Lack of EU coherence is low competitiveness in the new world order.....	77
5.2 Proposing a paradigm-shift: New transparent foreign policy.....	82
5.3 Proposed remedies: Three EU policy changes	88
6. Conclusion	90
Bibliography	92
Annex 1	107

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Country assessments.....	16
Figure 2: The central assessment of the EU's balancing of interests and norms	21
Figure 3: Template for assessing the reasoning behind the independent variable.....	26
Figure 4: The simplified hypothesis of the explanations behind EU relations in Northern Africa	34
Figure 5: Final assessment of the explanations behind the theoretical positioning of the EU	72
Figure 6: Final detailed hypothesis of the explanations behind the EU policies in Northern Africa	74