

Conflicting Role Conceptions: In Search of the European Union's Added Value for its Southern Neighbors

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Joint working paper series of the *EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies* Department at the College of Europe and the *United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies* (UNU-CRIS), Bruges

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Abstract

Many scholars have analyzed the role of the European Union (EU) in its southern neighborhood by looking at the EU's policy documents and strategies. As such, it is often argued that the EU is at best a useful partner in democratic reform and at worst an unsuccessful 'normative power'. However, very few studies have analyzed the EU's role from the recipients' point of view: the southern neighboring countries themselves. This paper adopts an 'outside-in approach' and explores what the southern neighborhood countries believe the EU should be or do. On the basis of a set of 15 interviews with diplomats from the region and an analysis of 50 newspaper articles from the region on the EU's relations with its southern neighborhood, this paper seeks to reveal the EU's real 'added value' for its southern Mediterranean partners. To what extent does the EU's own perceived role in its southern neighborhood match the role conception of those countries? Based on the three case studies of Algeria, Jordan and Egypt, the paper finds that there is a clear divergence in role conceptions between the EU and its southern partners. While the EU sees itself as a 'force for good' and promoter of norms and democracy in the southern Mediterranean region, the three countries primarily believe that the EU perceives itself foremost as a provider of security and stability in the region, while they primarily expect it to act as a reliable partner for economic cooperation.

Introduction

"The EU is not an island; it's a part of a global community. For large parts of the world, the word Europe itself has become associated with a philosophy of humanity, solidarity and integration. Therefore the EU has to play a bigger role to work for the 'global common good'", former EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, once said.¹ Over time, the EU increasingly built up aspirations to play a leading role in global politics, thereby engaging in a large number of negotiations, cooperation schemes and conflict resolution processes with an increasing number of other states and actors.² Due to its unique nature, the EU is often said to be a different great power and a growing part of academic research focuses on this subject.³ Among the questions that scholars try to answer in this regard are the influence of the EU in world politics (is the EU a new superpower?), its degree of coherence (does the Union speak with one voice?) and the qualities that characterize its behavior (is the EU a leader in international negotiations?).⁴ Most analyses of EU 'actorness' and EU foreign policy remain detached scholarly assessments of EU behavior over time.⁵ This paper takes a different approach by using role theory for the analysis of the positions and actions of the EU in global politics. Focusing on which 'roles' the EU is allocated when dealing with specific foreign policy issues can deepen and enrich our understanding of agency and action in European foreign policy.⁶

In the case of the EU's foreign policy towards its southern neighborhood, a lot has been written already on its possible role as a 'norm promoter', 'provider of peace

¹ Solana, Javier, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, "Shaping an Effective EU Foreign Policy", speech at Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Brussels, 24 January 2005.

² Comelli, Michele, Eralp, Atila & Ustün, Cigdem (eds.), *The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Southern Mediterranean*, Ankara, Middle East Technical University Press, 2009, p. 10.

³ See Boening, Astrid, Kremer, Jan-Frederik & Van Loon, Aukje (eds.), *Global Power Europe-Vol. 1: Theoretical and Institutional Approaches to the EU's External Relations*, London, Springer, 2013.

⁴ McCormick, John, *The European Superpower*, London, Palgrave, 2006.

⁵ Elgström, Ole, *Leader or Foot-Dragger?*, Stockholm, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2006, p. 9.

⁶ Roles refer to patterns of expected, appropriate behavior. With role conceptions, we mean both an actor's own considerations of its place, position and appropriate behavior vis-a-vis others in a given social environment and the expectations, or role prescriptions of other actors, as signaled through language and action. Bengtsson, Rikard & Elgström, Ole, "Reconsidering the European Union's roles in international relations: self-conceptions, expectations, and performance", in Harnisch, Sebastian, Frank, Cornelia & Maull, Hans (eds.), *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, London, Routledge, 2012, pp. 93-94; and Holsti, Kalevi, "National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy", *International Studies Quarterly*, 14(3), 1970, pp. 238-239.

and stability', etc.⁷ However, very few studies have analyzed this policy area from the recipients' point of view: the southern neighboring countries themselves. This paper provides a different perspective by adopting an 'outside-in approach' and by analyzing what these third countries believe the EU should be or do instead of what the EU itself believes that it should be or do. As such, it tries to shed a different light on the EU's 'actorness' and performance in its southern neighborhood and looks for the EU's real 'value added' for its southern Mediterranean partners.

Why study roles and the outsiders' perceptions?

The literature on EU foreign policy has often stressed the importance of studying other actors' perceptions and expectations of EU policy.⁸ Bretherton and Vogler stated, for example, that "the relationship between internal coherence/consistency [...] and perceptions of the European Commission's presence is of central importance", while Laffan *et al.* believe that "the Union forms a highly significant presence in the perceptions and actions both of its members and of outsiders".⁹ Yet, despite the fact that many observers have underlined the necessity of probing what expectations and images actors outside the EU have of its foreign policy, very little empirical research has been carried out in this area.¹⁰ This study is an attempt to help fill this void by providing three case studies on one of the most important EU foreign policy areas: the Union's relations with its southern neighborhood. Studying the external perceptions of EU actions and policies is also of great importance for three other reasons. First of all, they are a source of knowledge of EU foreign policy as they are "important indicators of how well intentions have been translated into observable actions", thereby "providing insights into how the EU is actually judged as an international actor".¹¹ Secondly, as foreign policy roles are created through a continuous interaction between own role conceptions and structurally based expectations, studying the outsiders' perceptions helps understand the EU's foreign

⁷ See for example Comelli, Michele, "The impact of the changes in the Arab world on the Southern dimension of the ENP", *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, XX(2), 2011, pp. 54-70; Bengtsson, Rikard, "Constructing Interfaces: The Neighbourhood Discourse in EU External Policy", *Journal of European Integration*, 30(5), 2008, pp. 597-616; Hollis, Rosemary, "No friend of democratization: Europe's role in the genesis of the 'Arab Spring'", *International Affairs*, 88(1), 2012, pp. 81-94.

⁸ Elgström, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁹ Bretherton, Charlotte & Vogler, John, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 45; Laffan, Brigid, Smith, Michael & O'Donnell, Rory, *Europe's Experimental Union: Rethinking Integration*, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 171.

¹⁰ Elgström, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹¹ Rhodes, Carolyn, "Introduction: The identity of the European Union in International Affairs", in Rhodes, Carolyn (ed.), *The European Union in the World Community*, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, p. 6.

policy identity.¹² Thirdly, the outsiders' expectations and perceptions equally influence the impact of EU foreign policy role performance.¹³ Whether policy initiatives taken by the EU reach their goals, are seen to be legitimate, effective and consistent, is at least partly determined by the images and expectations that the recipients of that particular policy action have. Thus, studying how the EU is viewed abroad helps us to better understand its role and effectiveness as a foreign policy actor.

Research design

By utilizing role theory as well as the 'outside-in approach',¹⁴ the following three interrelated issues are investigated and critically assessed: (1) the constitutive elements of the EU's own role conception, (2) the role conception of the EU's southern neighbors on what the EU does or should do in the region, and (3) the possible mismatch of roles that might occur when comparing the different perspectives on the EU's role in its southern neighborhood. The paper addresses the following research question: To what extent does the EU's own perceived role in its southern neighborhood match the role conception that those Mediterranean countries have for the EU?

After first readings and introductory interviews with relevant EU policy makers and academics, it became clear that the EU's own perceived role in its southern neighborhood is one of a 'norms promoter' rather than anything else. This is very much in line with Ian Manners' 'Normative Power Europe' argument and different from the roles that other international actors pursue in Northern Africa and the Middle East.¹⁵ However, although the EU stresses the normative role in policy documents and official statements, its southern partners who are the recipients of this policy may perceive the EU's role quite differently.

Since it is not feasible for the purpose of this paper to study in depth the role conception of the EU and its ten southern partners, three case studies are selected:

¹² Elgström, Ole & Smith, Michael, *The European Union's Roles in International Politics. Concepts and analysis*, London, Routledge, 2006; and Aggestam, Lisbeth, "Role theory and European foreign policy", in Elgström, Ole & Smith, Michael (eds.), *The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis*, London, Routledge, 2006, pp. 11-29.

¹³ Role performance is the actual policy behavior of the actor in this social context (cf. Bengtsson & Elgström, *op. cit.*, p. 94) and will be operationalized by looking at the coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy of the EU's actions in the southern neighborhood.

¹⁴ This in line with Keukeleire's 'outside-in approach': Keukeleire, Stephan, "Lessons for EU Diplomacy from an Outside-in Perspective", in Sieglinde Gstöhl & Erwan Lannon (eds.), *The Neighbours of the EU's Neighbours: Diplomatic and Geopolitical Dimensions beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy*, Farnham, Ashgate, (forthcoming).

¹⁵ Manners, Ian, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40(2), 2002, pp. 235-258.

Algeria, Egypt and Jordan. First of all, by selecting these countries, both the Mashreq (Jordan) as well as the Maghreb (Algeria) countries are covered.¹⁶ Secondly, Jordan is a country which is very optimistic and cooperative about EU foreign policy – most notably the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) –, while Algeria is (a lot) less. Thirdly, Egypt is a country which is currently undergoing a drastic domestic transformation as a direct consequence of the Arab Spring.

In order to provide an answer to the research question, the following methodological approach was applied: First, 15 expert interviews with relevant policy makers from the EU (4 interviews), as well as diplomats from the southern neighborhood countries based in Brussels (4 interviews) or in their country of origin (7 interviews) were conducted. These interviews were semi-structured, lasted on average one hour and provided valuable insights on how exactly both sides see the role of the EU in its southern neighborhood.¹⁷ The total number of interviewees was obviously limited, but the validity of the results are strengthened by the fact that the diplomats/experts from the same countries/organization, had more or less the same perceptions on the EU's role(s) and stressed similar strengths and weaknesses. Secondly, a brief review of the current press coverage on EU-southern neighborhood relations and the related role conception was conducted by collecting, analyzing and comparing 50 media articles written by southern Mediterranean news agencies. For that, 17 Egyptian, 17 Algerian and 16 Jordanian newspaper articles were randomly selected, and this from at least three different independent (online) news agencies for each country in the period of 2011-2014. This data was then inserted into an online qualitative data analysis tool called 'Dedoose' which allows comparing the different points of views.¹⁸

In what follows we first describe the EU external policy towards these countries and the EU's own perceived role. This is then contrasted with the outsiders' point of view.

The EU's interaction with its southern neighborhood

This section seeks to provide an overview of the evolution and current framework of EU-southern neighborhood interactions. Consequently, a general role conception of the EU for its southern neighborhood is then deduced and tested in three case studies.

¹⁶The Palestinian Authority and Israel are special cases given their unique relationships with the EU. Lebanon, Libya and Syria should also be dealt with separately, as they were recently (or still are) involved in an armed conflict/civil war which requires the EU to adopt a considerably different approach than it does towards the other Arab countries.

¹⁷ This means that they were centered on a limited number of basic questions but left some room for the respondents to elaborate and choose direction themselves.

¹⁸ www.dedoose.com.

EU-southern neighborhood relations: evolution and current framework

The EU's approach towards its southern neighborhood is characterized by a plethora of initiatives, institutional set-ups and programs, as proximity is one of the cornerstones of the EU's relations with the region.¹⁹ At the nearest point, only 14 kilometers separate the EU from the Arab world (between Spain and Morocco), making the region a 'first frontier' to Europe. But Europe's colonial past in the region and its economic interdependence also considerably influence the relationship. Whereas the EU is a major trading partner for its southern neighbors (almost 50% of total Arab trade and 65% of total Maghreb trade), the EU especially relies on the region's energy supply.²⁰ As such, 20.4% of the EU's oil imports and between 22-25% of its total gas imports originate from the Arab world, which is set to increase even further in light of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the crisis in eastern Ukraine.²¹

Next to their geographic, historical and economic ties, both regions are also intertwined politically and geo-strategically. One of the main goals of the EU in its direct southern neighborhood is to achieve peace and stability, or to create a "stable and prosperous neighborhood".²² The EU does as much as possible to stop the "export of instability" and the influx of illegal migrants, much to the frustration of (some of) its southern partners.²³

This leads to what is arguably the most important driving force or rationale of the EU's programs and projects towards its southern neighborhood: the promotion of democratic reforms and human rights since the EU believes that this will help decrease the instability and 'under-development' of the region.²⁴ As such, it is often

¹⁹ These are the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995), the European Neighborhood Policy (2004) and the Union for the Mediterranean (2008). However, there are other relevant initiatives and frameworks such as the Global Mediterranean Policy (1972-1992), the renewed Mediterranean policy (1992-1995), the '5+5' initiative (1990) or the Franco-Egyptian initiative called Forum of the Mediterranean (1992). See Khader, Bichara, "The European Union and the Arab World: from the Rome Treaty to the Arab Spring", *PAPERSIEMed*, 17, 2013.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3. The non-oil producing Arab countries export mainly agricultural products, basic industrial products, raw materials etc.

²¹ For a full account of possible implications that the turmoil in Ukraine in 2014 might have, see Ratner, Michael *et al.*, "Europe's Energy Security: Options and Challenges to Natural Gas Supply Diversification", *Congressional Research Service*, US Congress, Washington D.C., 2013.

²² European Union, "Regulation (EC) NO 1638/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument", *Official Journal of the European Union*, L310, 9 November 2006, pp. 1-14.

²³ Boulding, Kenneth, "Moving from Unstable to Stable Peace", retrieved 19 March 2014, <http://www-ee.stanford.edu/~hellman/Breakthrough/book/pdfs/boulding.pdf>.

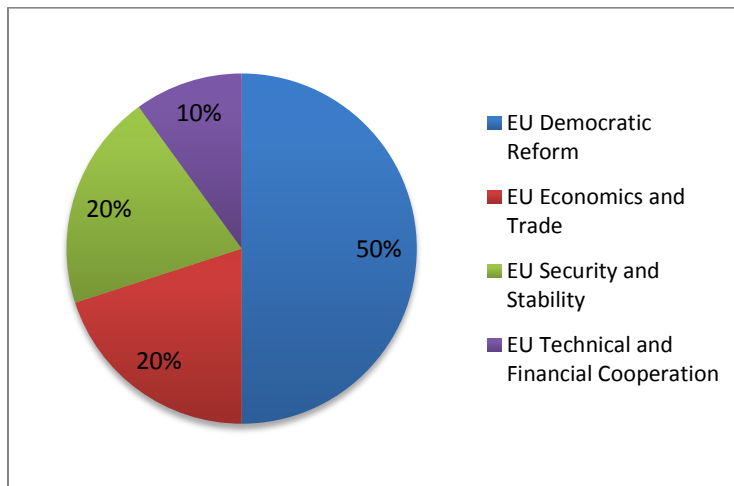
²⁴ Boubakri, Amor & Lindahl, Susanne, "The European Union and challenges to democracy building in the Arab world", in Helgesen, Vidar (ed.), *Democracy in Development: Global consultations on the EU's role in democracy building*, Stockholm, International IDEA, 2009, p. 66.

stated that whereas “the Arab world is perceived in Europe as the nearest difference, Europe sees itself as the nearest reference”, leading the EU to adopt an approach similar to a “mission civilisatrice”.²⁵

The EU's role conception in its southern neighborhood

This section investigates how the EU sees itself in the region.²⁶ Based on interviews with EU officials, it is argued that the EU sees itself as a promoter/supporter of structural, democratic and economic reform in its southern neighborhood.²⁷

Figure 1: The EU's own role conception in its southern neighborhood



Source: author's own compilation.

Figure 1 reveals that, above all, the EU sees itself in the role of pushing for democratic reforms in its southern neighborhood. It shows which four roles were generally attributed to the EU: The bigger their share of the pie, the more often they were referred to by the interviewees. Three main arguments were put forward:²⁸ First, the emphasis on structural political and economic reforms clearly frames the EU's role across the Mediterranean basin. The EU even makes (further) financial and technical cooperation conditional on the reforms that its partner countries undergo, which illustrates its intended role as a 'norm promoter/supporter'. Second, through the expectations of the partner countries that see the EU as an 'anchor of stability and modernization', the EU is equally set to lead those countries through the necessary

²⁵ Paris, Roland, "International peacebuilding and the 'mission civilisatrice'", *Review of International Studies*, 28(4), 2002, pp. 637-656.

²⁶ See Panebianco, Stefania, "The constraints on EU action as a 'norm exporter' in the Mediterranean", in Elgström, Ole & Smith, Michael (eds.), *The European Union's Roles in International Politics, Concepts and Analysis*, New York, Routledge, pp. 136-354.

²⁷ Four officials from the European External Action Service were interviewed; see the list in the bibliography.

²⁸ See also Elgström, Ole & Smith, Michael (eds.), *The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis*, London, Routledge, 2006.

reforms in order to achieve stability and prosperity.²⁹ The EU is even seen as “the greatest contribution to sustainable stability and security on the European continent”³⁰ and serves as a “pole of attraction for our region—countries along our borders who actively seek closer relations with us”.³¹ Third, when looking closely at the EU’s intentions towards the Mediterranean region, one can find arguments as well for the so called ‘civilizing’ element of the ‘normative great power’ role.³² As such, the EU seeks “to export its ideals and practices to outside parties against the background of the perceived success of the EU, the need in the neighborhood for further security and welfare, and the moral obligation of the EU to help out”.³³

From the analysis above one can thus conclude that the overarching aim of the EU’s interaction with its direct southern neighbors is to ensure peace and stability. It is believed that by promoting a specific set of norms and values and supporting the North African and Middle Eastern countries to adapt their political and economic systems accordingly, sustainable peace and security will be achieved. The next section looks at how the EU’s southern neighbors perceive the EU’s role, and contrasts the outcome with the findings of this section.

Different role conceptions? Bringing the outsiders’ perspective in

As there is only very limited academic literature available on the perceptions the partner countries have of the role of the EU, this section is mostly based on empirical research. More than ten expert interviews with diplomats originating from Jordan, Egypt and Algeria were conducted, and 10 articles from Algerian, Egyptian and Jordanian newspapers were studied with the aim of tracing these countries’ perceptions on what the EU’s role in its southern neighborhood is or should be.³⁴

The EU in the eyes of Jordan: a provider of financial and technical support rather than a normative great power

Jordan officially entertains relations with the EU since 1977 and is included in most of the EU cooperation frameworks with the region.³⁵ Jordan always sought close

²⁹ Ferrero-Waldner, Benita, “The EU in the World”, *European Policy Centre*, Brussels, 2006.

³⁰ Prodi, Romano, President of the European Commission, “A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the key to stability”, Speech/02/619, Brussels, 6 December 2002.

³¹ Landaburu, Eneko, “From Neighbourhood to Integration Policy: are there concrete alternatives to enlargement?”, speech, CEPS Conference “Revitalising Europe”, Brussels, 23 January 2006, p. 5.

³² Bicchieri, Federica, “Our size fits all: normative power Europe and the Mediterranean”, *Journal of European public policy*, 13(2), 2006, pp. 286-303.

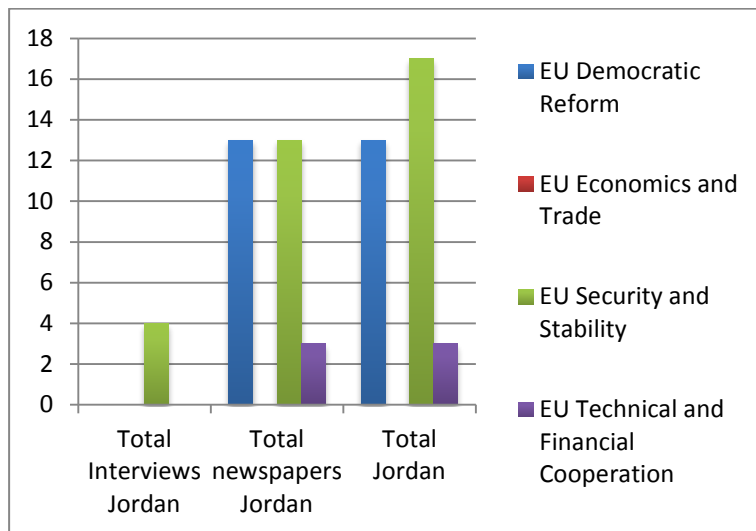
³³ Bengtsson, Rikard & Elgström, Ole, “Conflicting Role Conceptions? The European Union in Global Politics”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 8(1), 2012, p. 96.

³⁴ See the list in the bibliography.

³⁵ More specifically, it is part of the EMP, ENP and UfM.

relations with the EU and currently holds an 'advanced status' within the ENP framework, a level of cooperation that only few southern ENP countries enjoy. The launch of negotiations for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) in 2012 also points in the direction of a true dedication on the Jordanian side to an increasing interaction and interdependence with the EU.³⁶ But do the Jordanians share the EU's own role conception for the region? Figure 2 shows how, according to the Jordanian interviewees and written press, the EU sees itself.

Figure 2: The EU's role conception from a Jordanian point of view³⁷



Source: author's own compilation.

Figure 2 shows that the Jordanians think quite similarly about the EU's own role conception, namely that it sees itself as a supporter/promoter for reform and the preservation of peace and stability in the country. However, they feel that the EU is pushing (slightly) more for guaranteeing peace and security in the region than it is promoting all kinds of reforms (be it economic or democratic). This is due to two reasons: Jordan is first of all seen as a strategic partner in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) and a strong supporter of a comprehensive two-state solution as, next to Egypt, it is the only Arab country that signed a peace treaty with Israel.³⁸ Therefore, Jordan is of strategic importance for the EU's efforts to come to a solution in the MEPP and the EU will do what it can (from political support to financial and technical assistance) in order to keep the Jordanian approach in line with its own

³⁶ Also, in November 2008 Jordan submitted a paper on "Upgrading of Jordan-EU relations" to the EU- Jordan Association Council. In that paper it expressed the desire to come to a qualitative and quantitative intensification of its relations with the EU. For more, see Pirolli, Milena, *EU and Jordan: Beyond the ENP Action Plan*, Amman, Center for Strategic Studies of the University of Jordan.

³⁷ By "Total Jordan" we mean the sum of the results of the analysed interviews as well as the press articles.

³⁸ Stewart, Dona, *Good neighbourly relations: Jordan, Israel and the 1994-2004 peace process*, London, IB Tauris & Company, 2007.

strategy.³⁹ Secondly, the Jordanians also assume that the EU wants Jordan to stay “the Ark of Noah in the High Seas of the Middle East”.⁴⁰ For that, it is reported that the EU has its programs and funds oriented around security-related themes, and more specifically around the issue of refugees originating from unstable neighbors such as Lebanon (especially with the outbreak of the war in 2006) and Syria (which is in civil war since 2011).⁴¹ In order not to derail the whole region because of spill-over effects of violent conflicts in Jordan’s neighboring countries, it is argued that the EU sees itself as a great supporter of Jordan’s hosting of large numbers of refugees.⁴² Indeed, the EU has already dedicated more than €2 billion to the Syrian crisis, thereby making “the Union the world’s largest donor in this regard” vis-à-vis Jordan.⁴³

But the Jordanians equally underline the EU’s own perceived normative role. It is argued that the EU is ready to support Jordan on its path to reform because “a strong, democratic Jordan is not only an asset for its people, but also to its European neighbors and friends and to the world”.⁴⁴ Especially in the written press, many references are made to various statements by EU officials on how and why Jordan should reform. Next to this, detailed overviews of the EU’s financial envelopes are also reported as to make a stronger case for the EU’s own perceived role as a ‘force of good’ or reform promoter/supporter to Jordan by showing that a substantial amount of money goes to this kind of projects.

Now, is this what the Jordanians truly *want* from the EU? Do they share this role conception or do they have other expectations from the EU? Figure 3 visualizes how the Jordanian diplomats as well as the written press feel about EU-Jordan relations and how they should, in their view, be.

³⁹ With the Mubarak regime no longer in power, Jordan is becoming more and more a strategic partner for the EU (and the US). Also see Jonasson, Ann-Kristin, *Common Values? Perspectives on the Jordan-EU Political Dialogue*, PhD dissertation, University of Gothenburg, 2013.

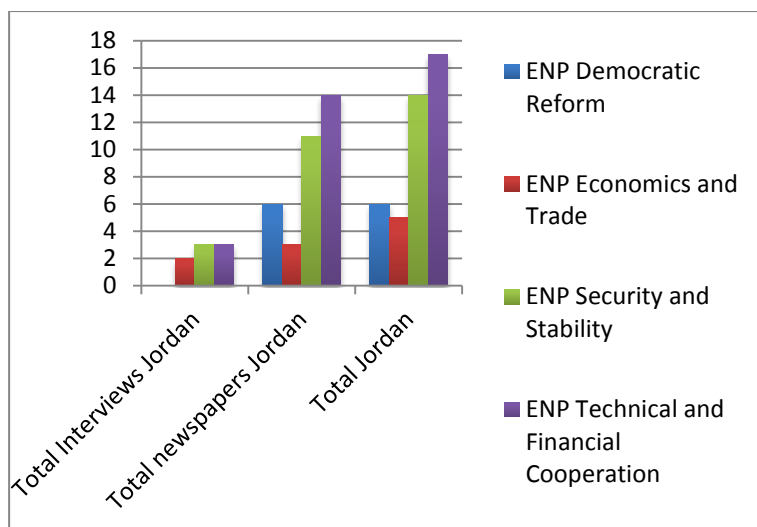
⁴⁰ Interview with Akram Ali Hayajneh, Second Secretary, Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Brussels, 10 April 2014.

⁴¹ Think in this regard also about the influx of Iraqi and Palestinian refugees. For more see Refugees International, “Jordan”, retrieved on 21 March 2014, <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/where-we-work/middle-east/jordan>.

⁴² European External Action Service, “EU/Jordan Action plan”, Brussels, 2013.

⁴³ Omari, Raed, “EU allocates 180m euros to assist Jordan”, *Jordan Times*, 26 November 2013.

⁴⁴ Thereby quoting the EU’s ambassador to Jordan, see Delegation of the European Union to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, “EU bolsters its support to reformers in its Southern and Eastern neighbourhoods”, press conference, 15 May 2012, Amman.

Figure 3: Jordanian role expectations regarding the EU

Source: author's own compilation.

Figure 3 shows that the EU's self-proclaimed role for Jordan is not fully shared by the Jordanians. As a matter of fact, Jordan sees the EU as a provider of technical and financial support rather than anything else. The EU's role of providing support to Jordan's quest for peace and stability, both domestically and regionally, is only of secondary importance. It was also stated that Jordan seeks the support or political recognition of the EU in its foreign policy, most notably in the MEPP but also as 'a partner in ensuring domestic security and stability', especially in light of the large influx of Syrian refugees. It is calculated that in March 2014 almost 10% of the total Jordanian population were Syrian refugees, which put serious pressure on the country's healthcare, education and water management systems.⁴⁵ The refugee camps in Jordan are currently among the world's largest refugee facilities. Therefore, Jordan strongly hopes that the EU continues (and increases) its support, both financially as well as technically in order to be able to provide a decent shelter to the almost one million refugees.⁴⁶

But it is not only in the area of security that Jordan seeks political support and financial and technical assistance from the EU. As Jordan is a small and resource-poor country, it imports almost 96% of its energy supply from abroad.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the Kingdom suffers from great water scarcity as its available resources are

⁴⁵ Syrian refugees, "Jordan", retrieved on 24 March 2014, <http://syrianrefugees.eu>.

⁴⁶ This number is contested though; some argue it is 'only' 600'000. The Zatari camp is the biggest refugee camp with 120'000 people. *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Khammash, Tanya, "the Jordanian Energy Sector", retrieved on 14 April 2014, <http://jordinvest.com.jo/uploads/documents/energy-sector-report-12-12-2012.pdf>.

diminishing at a very fast pace.⁴⁸ In order to tackle these challenges, Jordan wants to transform its economy into a sustainable and resource-efficient model economy and seeks to invest heavily in renewable energies.⁴⁹ But Jordan lacks sufficient funding and the technological expertise to achieve this goal. Therefore, the Jordanian government asks the EU for support in this area by means of an increase in the macro-financial assistance and accompanying national indicative program packages, as well as the number of twinning projects similar to the two recently launched projects on the improvement of (economic) statistical data and the competitiveness of the telecommunications sector.⁵⁰

It can thus be concluded that Jordan acknowledges the EU's self-proclaimed role as a partner for democratic reform, but it does not necessarily share this conception. What the Jordanians truly expect from the EU is technical and financial support to make the economy grow and to ensure stability in the neighborhood rather than anything else. Is this also the case for EU- Egypt relations?

The EU's role in Egypt according to the Egyptians: a partner for socio-economic growth and welfare

Egypt is the largest country in the region with a population of almost 80 million inhabitants, of which around 8 million live in its capital Cairo, the biggest city in the Arab world. Official relations between the EU and Egypt go back as early as 1966.⁵¹ EU-Egypt relations are mostly conducted within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), as Egypt's participation in the ENP framework has been more ambiguous. The first EU-Egypt ENP Action Plan was only adopted in 2007 after almost four years of cumbersome negotiations. The implementation of this Action Plan, especially in terms of reforms, remains limited, as the Egyptians seem to be more and more opposed to any "interference of Brussels".⁵² How can we explain this ambiguous Egyptian

⁴⁸ Rico, Mariona, "Water in the Middle East: The Need for Cooperation", in *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*, Barcelona, 2010, p. 190.

⁴⁹ See Greenpeace, "Jordan's Future Energy", retrieved on 4 April 2014, http://www.greenpeace.org/arabic/PageFiles/481146/Jordan_Report2013.pdf.

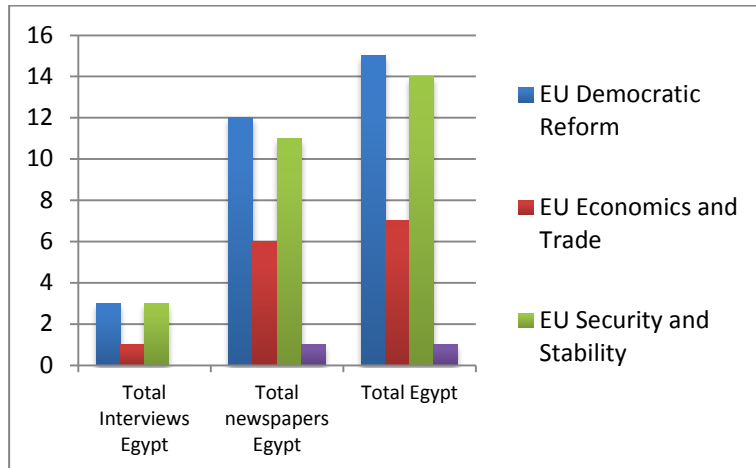
⁵⁰ The EU has allocated a total of €265 million to Jordan for the 2007-2010 NIP, new programs launched in 2011 also included: capacity-building in wind energy and solar power (€10 million); support to the reform on employment, technical and vocational training (€35 million); democratic governance (€10 million); water for low income communities (€10 million); and local economic development (€10 million). For more, see European Commission, "The EU and Jordan: long-standing relationship", MEMO/12/124, Brussels, 2012.

⁵¹ Comelli, Michele, "Dynamics and Evolution of the EU-Egypt Relationship within the ENP Framework", *Instituto Affari Internazionali*, IAI1002, 2010.

⁵² *Ibid.*, see also Zafar, Shaista, "Contemporary EU-Egypt Relations within the Parameters of the EU's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership programme and ENP", *Journal of European Union Studies*, 13(2), 2011, pp. 98-118.

position towards the EU? Studying the different views on the EU's possible role for Egypt helps understanding the issue. As argued above, the EU sees itself first and foremost as a norm promoter and supporter of democratic reform in its southern neighborhood, including for Egypt. But do the Egyptians share this view?

Figure 4: The EU's role conception from an Egyptian point of view



Source: author's own compilation.

Figure 4 shows what the interviewed Egyptian diplomats, as well as the written press, believe how the EU sees itself. Most of them acknowledged that the EU's emphasis has, in general, been on supporting democratic reform in Egypt. As such, various statements delivered by EU officials, including the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, but also EU Foreign Ministers, were often quoted to demonstrate the EU's self-proclaimed role as a norm defender in Egypt.⁵³ Amongst those quotes are general messages such as "the EU reaffirms the importance of its relationship with Egypt and the continued support it gives to the Egyptian people in their desire to establish a democratic and prosperous society".⁵⁴ But also critical views are reported on how the EU sees itself as a 'force of good':

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said: 'What we have seen is a deterioration of the situation in Egypt during the past few months.' He raised concerns regarding the 'deterioration in terms of human rights, deterioration in terms of the political space [...] and the rise of terrorism and violence.' He was also concerned over the 'banning of the Muslim Brotherhood' and the arrests of political activists. Bildt added: 'All of this goes hand in hand and is not a good thing'.⁵⁵

⁵³ High Representative Catherine Ashton highlighted, for example, the need to follow the roadmap "in terms of elections and to try and be as inclusive as possible in terms of bringing all Egyptian people who support democracy and who support the future of Egypt into the political framework", whereas British Foreign Secretary William Hague stated: "In Egypt we want for a democratic transition to succeed, but for a democratic transition to succeed, it's important that the rights of media freedom are upheld." See "EU foreign ministers discuss Egypt", *Al Ahram Weekly*, 13 February 2014.

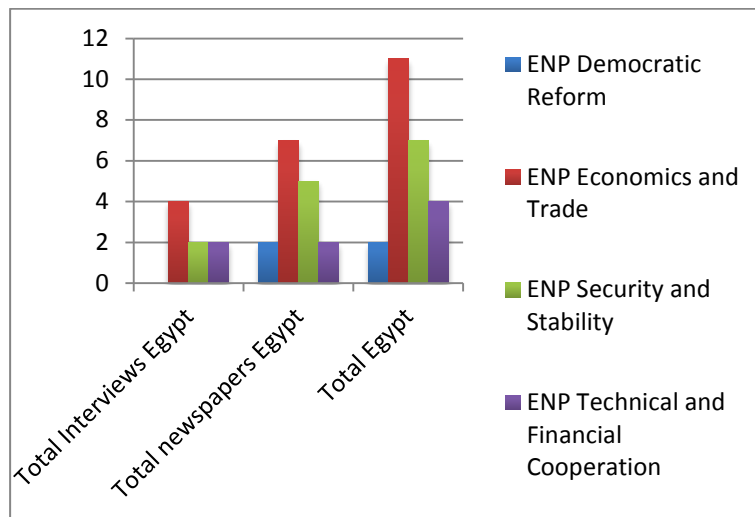
⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Next to reporting on the EU's self-perceived role as a norm promoter in Egypt, the interviewees and newspaper articles also referred to the EU's own role conception of a partner for ensuring stability and security in Egypt. Four items were reported to be in the minds of the Europeans in this case: illegal immigration, countering (the rise of) terrorism, regional conflicts in which Egypt could play a (major) role, the MEPP and the Syrian crisis.⁵⁶ Especially with regard to combatting illegal immigration, the EU sees a major role for itself, with regard to stopping the migrants coming from as well as transiting through Egypt with the destination of Europe.⁵⁷

But what role do the Egyptians themselves attribute to the EU? Figure 5 shows what Egyptians see as the true added value of the EU.

Figure 5: The Egyptian role expectations regarding the EU



Source: author's own compilation.

As Figure 5 clearly indicates, the Egyptians do not see or want the EU as a norm provider and advocate of democratic reform,⁵⁸ Instead, they see the EU as an economic and trade partner and wish to further increase these interactions to make the Egyptian economy grow. By strengthening the economic relations with the EU, a more favorable economic climate would be created by restoring economic stability and thereby providing the necessary confidence for foreigners to invest (again) in Egypt. As the EU is currently the biggest trade partner for Egypt, increasing the trade

⁵⁶ Equally see the EU-Egypt Action Plan, European External Action Service, "EU/Egypt Action Plan", Brussels, 2007.

⁵⁷ This via closer military cooperation, exchange of maritime information, but also through negotiating readmission agreements with Egypt and other countries. For more, see Albrecht, Hans-Jörg, "Fortress Europe? Controlling Illegal Immigration", *European Journal of Crime Criminal Law and Criminal Justice*, 2002, 10(1), pp. 1-22.

⁵⁸ See also Comelli, Michele & Paciello, Maria, "The ENP's potential for reform in the Southern Mediterranean: a Cost/Benefit Analysis", in Comelli, Michele, Eralp, Atila & Ustun, Cigdem (eds.), *The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Southern Mediterranean: Drawing from the Lessons of Enlargement*, Ankara, Middle East Technical University Press, 2009, pp. 53-77.

with the Union would be very beneficial and create more job opportunities for Egyptians.⁵⁹

Although closer economic and trade relations are a priority for Egypt, the Egyptians see the role of the EU in this field rather differently compared to how the EU has behaved so far. According to the interviewees the EU's conditions of liberalization and privatization for more trade and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), has only led to a net loss in growth of the fragile Egyptian economy.⁶⁰ Trade and economic cooperation should instead focus on capacity building, training, energy, transportation, education, proper water management, enhancing competitiveness, etc.⁶¹ Only then the EU could truly fulfill the role that Egypt expects from it: to be a reliable partner for socio-economic growth in Egypt as to increase the welfare and prosperity of all Egyptians.

Like the Jordanians, the Egyptians also have a clear and correct understanding of how the EU sees itself acting in its southern neighborhood. But also similar to the Jordanians, the Egyptians see another role for the EU than the way it is acting right now. For Egypt, closer economic and trade relations with the Union are of top priority to ensure socio-economic growth. The EU should therefore organize its programs and interaction differently so that they all serve this end goal, rather than trying to promote a specific set of norms and values. Is this also the case for Algeria? Do the Algerians agree with the EU's self-proclaimed role for the country?

The EU's prime role for Algeria: being a number one energy market

The EU's only southern neighbor which has formally refused to join the ENP framework is Algeria. Relations between Algeria and the EU officially started in 1976 with the signature of a cooperation agreement but have especially taken shape through the Barcelona Process in the 1990s. By joining the EMP, Algeria wanted to come out of its international political and economic isolation as a consequence of its civil war in the early 1990s.⁶² But even though socio-economic interaction and diplomatic relations between the EU and Algeria expanded gradually through the Barcelona Process, Algeria officially refused to join the ENP in 2004 and was very skeptical when French

⁵⁹ Bayoumi, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-11.

⁶⁰ This is also confirmed by various scholars. See for example Al-Iriani, Mahmoud & Al-Shamsi Fatima, *Foreign Direct Investment and Economic Growth in the GCC Countries: A Causality Investigation Using Heterogeneous Panel Analysis*, paper, Al-Ain, Department of Economics, United Arab Emirates University, p. 5.

⁶¹ Korany, Bahgat & El-Mahdi, Rabab, *The Arab Spring in Egypt: Revolution and Beyond*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁶² Boumghar, Lotfi, "The Algerian Position on the European Neighbourhood Policy", in IEMed, *Mediterranean Yearbook 2013*, Girona, Iemed, 2013, pp. 207-209.

President Sarkozy invited it to join the UfM.⁶³ Four reasons are at the basis of this refusal: First, Algeria heavily criticized the way in which the ENP was created, as there was no prior consultation of, nor proper communication towards the potential partners. Creating a true spirit of partnership between both sides of the Mediterranean therefore becomes impossible for the Algerians. As the ENP framework would be dominated by “European hegemony” it truly was considered unacceptable to Algeria.⁶⁴ Second, the way in which the ENP operates, namely through the ‘more for more’ principle and political conditionality was also not accepted by Algeria because it appeared as “the expression of a hackneyed view of relations between Europe and the South shore of the Mediterranean in which one party assumes the lovely role of sermonizer and distributor of brownie points to unruly pupils who need to be set back on the right track”.⁶⁵ Third, due to historical reasons, Algeria is very sensitive to issues of sovereignty and interference in domestic affairs.⁶⁶ As such, the country does not accept that the EU would be involved in domestic politics and ask for a specific set of reforms. Fourth, Algeria considered the ENP too much of a ‘one-size fits all’ policy framework, taking each country’s specific needs too little into account. Furthermore, by putting all countries under one umbrella, the EU would ignore the regional dynamics at play, most notably between Algeria and Morocco, which equally hinder an effective framework of cooperation.⁶⁷

Which role do the Algerians see for the EU in the region and how do they think that the EU sees itself in the region?

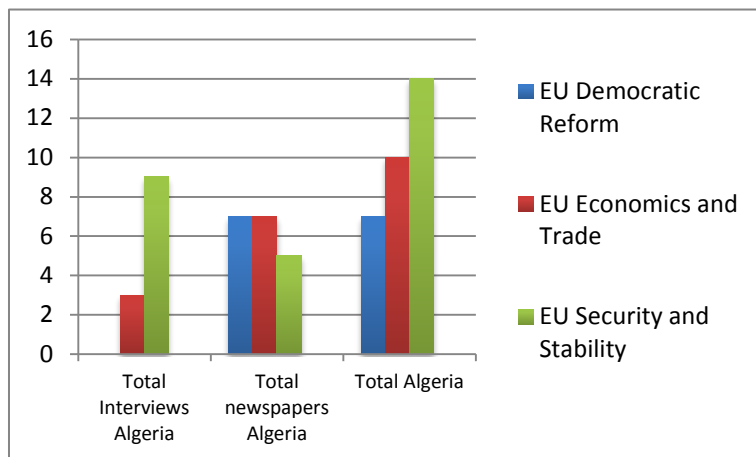
⁶³ Darbouche, Hakim, “Energising EU–Algerian Relations”, *The International Spectator*, 45(3), 2010, pp. 71-83.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74. Moreover, the reservations expressed by Algeria can also be at least partially explained by the fact that it is less financially dependent on the EU than the other southern neighboring countries.

⁶⁵ Darbouche, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁶⁶ See Boubekour, Amel, “Energy supplier or political partner? Algeria’s marginalization and opportunities in EU policies”, in Comeli, Michele, Eralp, Atila & Ustün, Cigdem, *The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Southern Mediterranean*, Ankara, Middle East Technical University Press, 2009, pp. 99-118.

⁶⁷ Morocco-Algeria relations are tense because of the Western Sahara issue, making it difficult to cooperate. See Darbouche, Hakim, “Decoding Algeria’s ENP policy: differentiation by other means?”, *Mediterranean Politics*, 13(3), 2008, pp. 371-389.

Figure 6: The EU's role conception from an Algerian point of view

Source: author's own compilation.

Interestingly, and in contrast to the Egyptians and Jordanians, the Algerians do not think that the EU's main self-proclaimed role for Algeria is one of a partner in democratic reform or a norm promoter. Instead, Figure 6 shows that according to the Algerian diplomats and written press, the EU sees itself first and foremost as a partner in security and stability in Algeria. Two main arguments provide the basis for this role conception according to the Algerians. First of all, as most of the illegal migrants still come from the Maghreb countries, the EU feels that it should step up its efforts to support the Algerians in tackling the issue and removing the related security threats.⁶⁸ Next to that, the Algerians also believe that the EU fears a repetition of the 1990s scenario and all the possible repercussions for Europe related to that.⁶⁹ Therefore, the EU has a strong interest in supporting Algeria in its attempts to counter terrorism and the radicalization of Islamist parties.

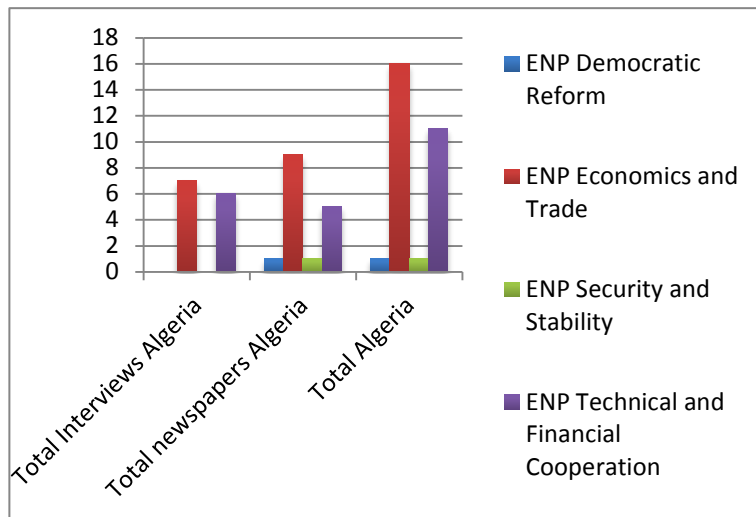
The interviewees also indicated that the EU seeks to collaborate with Algeria in order to ensure security and stability in and with its neighboring countries.⁷⁰ In addition, the role of the EU as the main importer of Algerian oil and gas is, especially in the written press, emphasized on a regular basis. Algeria accounts for 30% of all EU gas imports, a share which is also set to rise in light of the Ukrainian and Russian turmoil.⁷¹ But does this reflection on how the EU sees its own role mirror the Algerian role expectations? What would be the true added value of the EU according to Algerians themselves?

⁶⁸ See Joffe, George, "The European Union, democracy and counter-terrorism in the Maghreb", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 46(1), 2008, pp. 147-171.

⁶⁹ Pierre, Andrew & Quandt, William, *The Algerian crisis: policy options for the West*, Washington D.C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1996.

⁷⁰ See Francis, David, "The regional impact of the armed conflict and French intervention in Mali", *Norwegian Peace building Resource Centre*, Oslo, 2013; and Dennison, Susi, "The EU, Algeria and the northern Mali question", *ECFR policy memo*, 69, 2012.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Figure 7: Algerian role expectations regarding the EU

Source: author's own compilation.

Figure 7 illustrates that Algerians do not see a role for the EU in guiding their country to (democratic) reforms, nor in the provision of peace and stability. Instead, the EU is mostly seen as an important trading partner as well as a provider of technical expertise. As a matter of fact, the EU is Algeria's most important gas and oil consumer. Its revenues account for 97-98% of all export revenues and no less than 75% of the national budget revenues.⁷² For Algeria, the EU is thus of utmost economic importance and it seeks closer energy cooperation. In order to increase its energy supply to Europe, Algeria needs to improve its infrastructures and acquire the right technology. The EU could help in achieving this goal. The European Commission's National Indicative Program for Algeria already includes specific projects to address this 'wish' from Algeria, but the allocated budget and efforts are far from sufficient.⁷³ Finally, Algeria also seeks technical experience and expertise in other sectors (including education, telecommunications, agricultural sector and water management) in which the EU could be of a true added value too.⁷⁴

Whereas both Jordan and Egypt acknowledge the EU's self-proclaimed role of a norm promoter/defender for the region, the Algerian interviewees and written press see it differently. For them, the EU believes first and foremost having a role in to ensuring peace and security in the country. However, Algeria does not support this self-proclaimed role conception and expects the EU to do something different for the country. For Algeria, the EU should make sure that the trade and economic relations between the two partners be assured and increased as much as possible,

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ European Commission, "Instrument Européen de voisinage et de partenariat, Algérie 2011-2013", Brussels, 2011.

⁷⁴ See in this regard also Migdalovitz, Carol, *Algeria: Current Issues*, Washington D.C., DIANE Publishing, 2011.

especially in the field of energy. Thus, also in this third case study, one can speak of a role mismatch between the two partners at both sides of the Mediterranean basin. What are the consequences of this? And why is it important to keep this divergence in role conceptions in mind when analyzing EU-southern neighborhood relations?

Conclusion

This paper sought to answer the question to what extent the EU's own perceived role in its southern neighborhood matches the role conception that those countries have for the EU. The analysis confirms that the EU indeed sees itself as a 'force for good' or norm promoter/defender in the southern Mediterranean region. However, only in Egypt the interviewees as well as the written press acknowledged this self-conception of the EU, whereas in the case of Jordan and Algeria, the general feeling is that the EU sees itself first and foremost as a partner for security and stability in the region. In a second step, the paper also studied the role expectations that the EU's southern neighbours have of the EU. Interestingly, in none of the cases, the EU's self-proclaimed role as a partner in democratic reform figured on their wish lists. Instead, Algeria expects the EU primarily to be a reliable energy partner and a source of technical expertise and knowledge in order to make its economy more competitive. Egypt also looks to the EU in search for economic cooperation and further financial and technical support. Jordan, located in a precarious region with large influxes of refugees, is mainly concerned about its national security. It turns towards the EU in search of a political partner that helps the country to remain stable and safe and a partner who shares the (financial) burden of hosting hundred thousands of Arab refugees.

Based on three case studies, one can thus conclude that there is a clear divergence in role conceptions between the EU and its southern partners. However, there might be some limitations linked to the research design applied. It is possible though that some conclusions on EU-Egypt, EU-Jordan or EU-Algeria relations are too (country) specific to generalize from, or subject to change on a fairly short notice as some of the countries (especially Egypt) might have different political and social outlooks and realities in the near future leading to different views and needs regarding the EU. Also, interviewing only people from within the European External Action Service might not capture the whole self-perception of the EU's role in its southern neighborhood, nor might the views expressed by the various southern Mediterranean diplomats be widely shared by their colleagues. But in order to tackle these possible caveats, the gathered empirical information was cross-checked and complemented by data originating from various primary sources (such as the ENP formal documents) as well

as a limited amount of secondary literature, which tended to reaffirm and strengthen the views and arguments made during the interviews and media articles. For these reasons, the findings of the three case studies might be generalized towards the whole region and be used as a basis for further academic research.

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