

BOOK REVIEWS

Costanza Musu, *European Union Policy towards the Arab-Israeli Peace Process: The Quicksands of Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), ISBN 978-0230-55312-5 (hbk), GBP 57.50 (hbk), xiii+224 pp.

In 1974, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger famously quipped that the ‘Europeans will be unable to achieve anything in the Middle East in a million years’. Reading Costanza Musu’s excellent book suggests that Kissinger, alas, was brutally right, at least with respect to the forty years covered in these illuminating pages.

Without question, it is the friction over the Arab-Israeli conflict that has most soured Middle Eastern-European relations for the past four decades. European Union (EU) Member States have been angered by their marginalization over the years in the efforts to resolve the conflict and believe Europe should be afforded a role in the Arab-Israeli peace process commensurate with the Union’s global standing. Arab and Israeli policies towards the conflict and European responses to those policies have had a critical impact on the development of Middle Eastern-European relations and the ways that Middle Eastern and European societies have viewed each other.

The desire of EU Member States to carve out a distinct and common stance towards the Middle East, independent of the superpowers, and to promote a collective role in bringing about a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict can be traced back to the early 1970s. Efforts to draw up a common set of principles to guide their policies towards the conflict were a central feature of the initial years of European Political Cooperation (EPC). Given Europe’s historical legacy, its geographical proximity to the region and its extensive network of political, economic and cultural ties, Union Member States saw the Middle East as a region ripe for EU policy coordination.

The first European official declaration on the Arab-Israeli conflict within the framework of the EPC was issued in November 1973 in the aftermath of the October/Yom Kippur War. The European declaration spoke of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territories by force and called on Israel to end its occupation of Arab land. It also determined that in order to secure a just and lasting peace to the conflict the legitimate rights of the Palestinians needed to be taken into account. The European declaration also made reference to two other sensitive issues: that Arab-Israeli negotiations should take place within the framework of the UN (United Nations) and that any peace agreement should be secured by ‘international guarantees’. Musu’s study shows that the European position articulated in the early 1970s remains to a great extent valid to this day.

Notwithstanding the importance and relevance of the Union’s role in the Arab-Israeli peace process, the subject has received relatively little attention in the fields of European foreign policy studies. A review of the literature reveals a limited number of studies on European policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict and peace process. Musu’s book aims to fill this gap. It conducts an analysis of European policy towards the peace process, aimed not so much at measuring the Union’s success or failure in relation to the breadth of its economic involvement but rather at identifying the factors and the interests underlying the formulation of the EU’s policy.

It is important to emphasize that the study of European policy towards the Middle East and, in particular, towards the Arab-Israeli conflict is useful not only to the extent that it explores the unusual relationships between Europe and its Middle Eastern neighbours, but also insofar as it offers insights into how the EU is actually judged by Arabs and Israelis and illuminates how well European intentions have been translated into observable actions in the Middle East.

Since the study of European policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict casts important light on the European process of setting up its foreign policy instruments, Musu’s book offers both an analysis of

European policy towards the Middle East peace process and fresh perspective on the Union's emerging role as an international actor, especially in the Middle East. It does so by taking simultaneously into consideration the dilemma of harmonization of the different EU Member States' policies and interests; the problem of the self-contained structure of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), its mechanisms and its institutional and political limitations, and finally the Union's diverse interests in the Middle East and the dynamics of burden sharing between the United States and the EU in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Overall, the six chapters of the book, as well as the introductory and the concluding chapters, provide the most updated historical background and an original, stimulating and valuable analysis of the EU's policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict available today. This makes the book an obligatory reading for academics, graduates and policy makers researching and dealing with the Union's foreign policy, in general, and Euro-Middle Eastern relations, in particular.

Sharon Pardo
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev