The EU's Promotion of Gender Equality in Egypt: Towards a New Strategy?

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

'Equality between men and women is now indisputably recognized as a basic principle of democracy and respect for humankind' (EC, 1996, p. 2). These are the opening words of the European Commission's (EC) Communication 'Incorporating Equal Opportunities for Women and Men into all Community Policies and Activities'. Since 1995, the EU has considered gender 'a social, economic and cultural dimension which cuts across all areas and sectors of development, and has crucial implications for the achievement of all development objectives' (EC, 1995, p. 4). However, policy after policy, commentators have *disputably* recognized gender equality as a key principle of EU democracy promotion and doubted it had *crucial* implications for all its development activities (e.g. Allwood, 2013; Balfour, 2008; David and Guerrina, 2013; Rees, 2005). The EU has been blamed for swimming against the tide, since its rhetoric has not matched its practice (Bretherton, 2001). In the following pages, I draw from these critiques in order to analyze the EU's women's rights promotion efforts.

Egypt will serve as a case study to investigate whether the Arab Spring has had any impact on the EU's gender-related initiatives. The Arab Spring represented a pivotal moment for the EU's promotion of women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), especially in Egypt. In fact, since the uprisings, not only has the EU recognized its failure to support gender equality and civil society development in Egypt, but women in the country have witnessed a deterioration of their rights. Both the Gender Inequality Index (UNDP, 2013) and the Thomson Reuter's Foundation (2013) identified post-revolutionary Egypt as the worst place for women in the MENA. These rankings may have pushed the EU towards urgent improvement of its women empowerment policies in Egypt.

To further develop this hypothesis, chapter 2 reviews the literature on gender mainstreaming, the principle adopted by the EU to promote women's rights. Since its definition is unclear, experts have interpreted the principle in different ways—as an outcome, a process, or a strategy—and its implementation has varied accordingly (Allwood, 2013). Gender mainstreaming has had irregular results not only because of the ambiguity of its definition. Challenges have also arisen because, when intersecting with the EU development agenda, gender mainstreaming has been affected by various features of the implementing institutions, the political context and the recipients. In section 2.3, through a critical review of gender mainstreaming, I attempt to gather and organize a list of the main factors affecting gender mainstreaming. They can be summarized as the:

1. clarity and transparency of the implementing institution's rhetoric;
2. adequacy of the institution's political and financial resources;
3. number of crosscutting issues within the institution;
4. number of issues being mainstreamed simultaneously;
5. degree of involvement of the recipient country's social movements; and
6. degree of internalization of beliefs inimical to gender mainstreaming by the recipient population.

These six factors underlie the analytical framework employed in chapter 4 to answer the following research question. To what extent has the Arab Spring impacted the development of these factors and, consequently, the EU's

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promotion of gender equality in Egypt?

In section 4.1, I analyze how each factor affected the EU's promotion of women's rights in Egypt before January 25, 2011, when the uprisings began. A parallel study is conducted in section 4.2, taking into consideration the period going from the beginning of the revolution to now. A comparison between the two periods helps shed light on the ways the EU has interpreted gender mainstreaming through time, and it identifies which factors have become more problematic for the EU since Egypt's democratic uprising. The Arab Spring ultimately proves to have had a slightly positive effect on EU policies, but its commitments have not fully been realized due to the complexity of the challenges posed by the factors considered.

Two distinct reasons make this research scientifically relevant. First, while previous research about European promotion of women's rights abroad either compared two case studies (e.g. Balfour, 2005), concentrated on a geographical region (e.g. Novikova, and Van der Molen, 2005; Robinson, 2013) or focused on a peculiarity of EU gender policies (e.g. Allwood, 2013; McGauran, 2009; Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000), I take a less common perspective: I focus on a single case study. Instead of comparing Egypt to another country, I examine how gender equality promotion in a given place can be affected by an unexpected historical event, such as the Arab Spring. Second, the research is based on an original theoretical framework. It does not merely draw on a conceptual analysis of the possible interpretations of gender mainstreaming but, through a meticulous literature review, it distills the main factors affecting gender mainstreaming at all levels of the policy-making process. Such a comprehensive framework provides a broad perspective on the issue while also facilitating an in-depth investigation of the Egyptian example.

CHAPTER 2: Gender Mainstreaming: Origins, Interpretations, Challenges

2.1 From Beijing to the EU

The EU started including the concept of gender mainstreaming in its external policy following the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, held in September 1995. After years of debate on how to promote equal opportunities between women and men, the UN agreed in Beijing on the adoption of a gender perspective in all its institutions (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000, p. 435). A few days after the conference, the EC (1995), which had been an active participant in the talks, published the 'Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Integrating Gender Issues in Development Cooperation'. On behalf of the EU, the EC endorsed the principle of gender mainstreaming, which had first timidly been evoked in 1991 in the Third Action Programme on Equal Opportunities (Pollack, 1999). It stated that 'gender analysis should be an integral part of the process for elaborating global country strategies for development cooperation' and that 'gender issues should be mainstreamed into all development interventions' (EC, 1995, p. 6). It was the strongest commitment made by the EU until then, and outlined new strategies to promote gender equality, including but not limited to: access to gender expertise and training of development projects' staff about such issues; inclusion of women as both participants and beneficiaries of projects; and assessment of development activities based on the impact they have both on women and men (EC, 1995).

A year later, gender mainstreaming was explained in an EC communication as the promotion of 'equality between women and men in all activities and policies at all levels' (EC, 1996, p. 2). All the European Communities' policies had to include gender equality as a substantial objective. They stressed their commitment to design projects not addressed specifically to women, but to the whole system, in an attempt to bridge the gender gap. With the Treaty of Amsterdam (European Communities, 1997), the EU and its member states further emphasized the promotion of gender equality as one of their main tasks. Consequently, the European External Action Service (EEAS) (n.d.) affirmed its 'political will to protect and promote women's rights', with a reference to the 'Guidelines on Violence against Women and Girls and Combating all Forms of Discrimination against Them'.

Various conferences and statements have resulted in the rhetorical reinforcement of the EU and its institutions as endorsers of the principle of gender mainstreaming. However, it has been argued that in the past two decades the

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EU has struggled to put the principle in practice, especially in its external relations (Allwood, 2013; David and Guerrina, 2013; Rees, 2005). Critics point to the Barcelona Declaration (EMP's Member States, 1995), the founding act of the most important security and development partnership between the EU and twelve Southern Mediterranean countries. Even though it was stipulated when the European excitement about gender mainstreaming was at its highest, it lacked of any significant female participation from the Southern Mediterranean shore, and it referred to women's rights only once, in basket II (Naciri and Nusair, 2003, p. 45). It is a significant example of the inconsistency of EU's gender policy.

EU efforts to further gender equality through its relations with its Southern Mediterranean neighbors are analyzed and assessed in chapter 4, taking Egypt as a case study. However, in order to present a coherent and efficient analysis of the outcomes of EU's policies, the upcoming paragraphs comprise a literature review of gender mainstreaming. First, I examine the main debates regarding the nature of the term. Is gender mainstreaming an outcome, a strategy or a process? Depending on how the principle is interpreted, different kinds of actions and tools are employed by actors to implement it. Second, drawing from an essay by Gill Allwood (2013), in which she lists and assesses the possible unintended consequences of gender mainstreaming, I identify the challenges to this approach. What prevents policy makers from mainstreaming gender equality? The main challenges found are divided into thematic areas, and are employed in chapter 4 to examine whether the EU has been able to overcome them, or not.

2.2 Outcome, Strategy or Process?

Teresa Rees (2005, p. 560), an expert on mainstreaming gender in EU development policies, defines gender mainstreaming as 'the promotion of gender equality through its systematic integration into all systems and structures, into all policies, processes and procedures, into the organization and its culture, into ways of seeing and doing'. Even though one of the most wide-spread and accepted definitions, Rees' description still proves how 'vague and elusive' (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012, p. 529) gender mainstreaming is as a norm. The tools for integrating gender equality systematically could be numerous and indefinite, and it would be hard to agree on a method to measure its integration 'into ways of seeing and doing', for example. Sylvia Walby (2005) also considers the principle unclear, because it includes at least two distinct frames of reference, often in opposition: the mainstream and gender equality. Therefore, to couch both terms into the same policy, the interpretation of the concept has often changed, and its implementation too, according to the varying actors, contexts and recipients.

The main ground for discussion regarding gender mainstreaming is about its application. Some consider it an outcome, some a strategy, others a process (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012). Each view can itself comprise various and diverse means of implementation. For example, those who consider it an *outcome* could embrace different opinions on how to achieve it: either through transformation, agenda-setting, or integration. Transformation means a change in culture and power structures, a manifestation of the actions of outsiders not involved in policy-making; these actions can transform the mainstream through practices figuratively melding men and women (Walby, 2005, p. 323). Transformation is seen as a widespread acceptance of gender equality, but because of its endogenous origin and its detachment from policy-makers, it can be seen as utopian and as leaving little space for actual achievements. Integration is the second approach, which does not contest present policy paradigms, but adds a gender perspective into existing policies (Jahan, 1995). It introduces gender mainstreaming as a tool into norms and processes, without threatening nor disrupting the *status quo*, but adding value to existing organizations or laws (Allwood, 2013). However, the integrationist method has been denigrated as a mere 'box-ticking exercise, devoid of any substantive content' (Allwood, 2013, p. 43), since it does not rethink the role of any organization but simply imports prefabricated, one-size-fits-all, norms. The agenda-setting approach seems to be the most concrete. It results in actual social changes, driven by ideals based on a gender perspective. An example of agenda-setting as an outcome would be the participation of women in the preparation or course of peacekeeping operations (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012, p. 537). Unlike the integrationist approach, agenda-setting has outcomes visible in the world, not only in legislation.

However, since the transformation, integration and agenda-setting perspectives focus only on gender mainstreaming as an outcome, it is also useful to examine how other kinds of action can result from an interpretation of gender mainstreaming as a *strategy*. Booth and Bennett (2002) identify three approaches deriving from this interpretation: equal treatment, women's perspective, and gender perspective. The equal treatment approach regards actions that

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assure women the same opportunities and rights as men, mainly through mandatory and statutory legal instruments, and the de-institutionalization of discriminatory practices (ibid). A weakness of equal treatment is its exclusive attention on formal rights (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000, p. 433). The women's perspective promotes initiatives based on the perception that women are a disadvantaged group that deserves particular treatment. This approach is often criticized because it is based on heterosexist norms, viewing the gender equality issue merely as a female one (Caglar, 2013). To cite Simone de Beauvoir (1949), it could be said that 'men are the norm and women are the other' in regards to the women's perspective approach. The gender perspective is the most developed and recent of the three. Its first appearance as a concept dates back to the beginning of the 1990s, and it seeks to promote a more just distribution of human responsibilities (Booth and Bennett, 2002, p. 434). Moreover, it does not just acknowledge man and women as two different groups, but it also recognizes the difference embedded within these groups, since the identities of individuals are shaped by class, race, religion, and other factors (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012, p. 537). The gender perspective is based on the premise that both men and women can either be deliberate oppressors or socially disempowered individuals. Because of its complexity and the great variety of factors that this approach has to take into consideration, the gender perspective strategy could be the hardest of the three to implement. However, Booth and Bennet (2002) describe these three approaches as being part of a 'three-legged stool', and so as being dependent on each other in order to shape a well-rounded gender mainstreaming strategy. Walby (2005, p. 328) confirms this assumption: from an examination of the EC's documents about gender equality, it can be asserted that the EC recommends the simultaneous use of all three strategies, too.

Another group of scholars considers gender mainstreaming to be a *process*. Gillian Youngs (2008, p. 694) specifies that it is 'a process rather than an end in itself'. Gender mainstreaming as a process could have different manifestations: it may require the use of experts, provided with specific training and agreeing on pre-established procedures, or it may involve the participation of civil society members and NGO representatives (Beveridge *et al*, 2000). Depending on which path it takes, gender mainstreaming could either follow an expert-bureaucratic model or a participatory-democratic model (ibid). The former involves the implementation of technical processes, the latter of political ones (Rees, 2005, p. 563). According to the expert-bureaucratic model, gender mainstreaming is the implementation of expertise and efficiency by the usual policy makers with specially developed toolkits (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012, p. 538). However, this approach falters because 'when policies are worked out *for* rather than *with* a politically excluded constituency' (Phillips, 1995, p. 13; italics in original), they are unlikely to engage with all the important concerns of the excluded constituency. That it is why it would be ideal to adopt more participatory-democratic models. Sylvia Walby (2005, p. 332) would define them as processes 'by which various actors, previously outside the privileged policy arenas, get to have voice within them'. Women and men from different classes and with diverse backgrounds would participate in policy-making debates, if the participatory-democratic model is preferred. Nonetheless, the distinction between the two models is argued to be artificial, since in reality gender mainstreaming processes often involve a mixture of the two models (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012).

After an analysis of the interpretations of gender mainstreaming (summarized in Figure 1), it is evident that different understandings of the principle can result in different ways of implementing it. Various ways of interpreting it and, consequently, putting it into practice have been identified by the academic community since the term was formalized a couple decades ago. However, as it is shown in chapter 4, the same institution could adopt several of the approaches described above, if not all. The EU is an example of this tendency, its relations with Egypt demonstrate how malleable gender mainstreaming is as a concept. Since a strict and universal formula to apply gender mainstreaming has yet to be found, attempts to implement it have often faced various challenges. In the next section, the challenges that gender mainstreaming has had to confront are explored and analyzed.

2.3 Why does it fail?

In this section I provide an outline of the main factors affecting gender mainstreaming in relation to development. My analysis draws from Gill Allwood's (2013) study of the unintended consequences of gender mainstreaming and of its failures once it intersects with development policies. First, I try to understand the causes and origins of some of its failures. In order to do so, my analysis focuses on three levels of the process of gender mainstreaming: the institution that aims to implement and enforce it; the wider internal and external political context in which the institution operates; and the society or group that is the recipient of gender mainstreaming policies. Once the most significant challenges

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to mainstreaming gender equality are identified, I design a framework of analysis useful to test the overall effectiveness of mainstreaming initiatives, which is applied in chapter 4 to examine EU gender policies.

2.3.1 The institution

The institution or organization attempting to integrate gender mainstreaming approaches into its policies may itself generate various challenges to the implementation of such a principle. Different modes of implementation result in more or less successful gender policies. At the level of the institution, there are two main factors that can affect the success of gender mainstreaming: the clarity and transparence of the institution's rhetoric and the adequacy of its political and financial resources (Allwood, 2013, p. 44).

The clarity of an institution's communications is an important factor, especially when gender mainstreaming is implemented using a top-down approach. 'Clear policy objectives, clear lines of authority [and] good communication between various groups' (McGauran, 2009) can make a top-down model effective. Instead, when political actors fail to outline lucidly the goals of gender policies, they leave room for interpretations, which consequently result in divergent practices of gender mainstreaming (Caglar, 2008, p. 337). Therefore, when analyzing the effectiveness of an institution's policy, it is necessary to examine how its rhetorical objectives have translated into practice. Sometimes, the gap between rhetoric and practice does not simply result from unclear objectives, but from a lack of transparent goals. The EU's security-democracy dilemma exemplifies the hazards of insufficiently transparent objectives: it has been argued that the EU's promotion of women's rights in its Southern neighborhood has not aimed to spread democracy but to assure regional security (Isaac, 2013). When gender mainstreaming is used for ulterior motives, it is unlikely to effect a genuine improvement in women's rights.

Another factor affecting a gender policy's success is the adequacy of an institution's financial and political resources. In terms of financial means, different features of an institution can prevent a policy from being delivered effectively. These could be: a tendency to focus on policy inputs (e.g. staff, funds) instead of maximizing outputs and outcomes; or the development of 'budget management frameworks that are inadequate for the reprioritisation and reallocation of funding' (McGauran, 2009, p. 218). A weak or inconsistent allocation of funding could result in the failure of projects not only related to gender mainstreaming, but to all development issues. Stronger monitoring activities should be promoted, making sure that funds are allocated using gender disparities as a key indicator of policy performance (Naciri and Nusair, 2003, p. 10). Fragile political resources can also hinder gender mainstreaming projects. In fact, weak political means can easily be challenged by the interaction with the vertical processes and controls of different bureaucracies, often serving as barriers rather than support (McGauran, 2009). To overcome this challenge, it could be useful to include different voices in the political debates and processes taking place within an organization. Pollack and Hafner-Burton (2002) confirm the positive impact that an increased openness to civil society and NGOs has had on the application of gender mainstreaming.

2.3.2 The context

The second level of gender mainstreaming regards the wider context within which the institution operates. In fact, it has been stressed that the implementation of new models in policy making is constrained by the institutional and external context in which policy makers act (McGauran, 2009). In the next paragraphs, I first look at the challenges posed to gender mainstreaming by different factors coexisting within the same institution, then I analyze how dynamics deriving from the external context can hinder gender equality policies, too.

In big institutions having to do with issues ranging from national security, to development cooperation or environmental issues, the difficulty of dealing consistently with a plethora of matters is understandable. In order to recognize whether gender mainstreaming is challenged by the numerous practices and policies belonging to the same institution that implements it, it is useful to introduce the principle of Policy Coherence for Development (PCD). With PCD I refer to the instrument adopted by the EU as an attempt to assure that policies in a determined area are not hindered by policies in another (Allwood, 2013). Even though PCD was created to maximize the effect of all development activities, this concept has proven to be fragile. In fact, especially in regards to EU politics, Gillen Allwood (2003) has noticed 'the way in which gender slips off the agenda once other policies intersect with

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development'. While PCD should monitor the effective implementation of women's rights promotion, gender mainstreaming is often discarded as a priority because of a context characterized by the competition between an inflating number of crosscutting issues.

At the external level, a similar issue is emerging, regarding the abundance of issues that are progressively being mainstreamed. In fact, 'mainstreaming is an attractive strategy for all areas of social policy' (Albertson *et al.*, 2002, p. 80). Anti-poverty, pro-environment or youth groups, among others, could all call for their cause to be mainstreamed. In the midst of this 'mainstreaming competition' it is difficult for one of these groups to catch enough attention of institutions like the EU (ibid). The struggle between groups to monopolize the focus and resources of a big institution risks turning into a zero-sum game. Moreover, if several principles are actually being mainstreamed, the implementing institution could find itself overwhelmed by a 'mainstreaming overload', with many strategies to be mainstreamed but not enough resources nor funds to do so (Allwood, 2013, p. 50). It is indeed necessary to take into consideration the presence of other processes being mainstreamed by the same institution in order to assess the success of gender policies.

2.3.3 The recipient

The third level of analysis regards the group or society recipient of gender mainstreaming policies. It is important to keep considering it as a vital part of gender mainstreaming, in order not to reduce the whole policy-making system into a bureaucratic issue of a few experts only. However, there are two key aspects of the recipient group that, if underestimated by a policy, could undermine the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming efforts: the involvement of the social movements belonging to the recipient group and the level of internalization of cultural beliefs inimical to gender mainstreaming.

Gulay Caglar (2008, p. 337) has identified a paradox embedded in gender mainstreaming: its rapid international diffusion as a key strategy for promoting gender parity and its simultaneous failure to significantly transform structures of inequality. This weakness of gender mainstreaming could be caused by the low engagement with movements and organizations at the grassroots level. In fact, it is argued that, from a feminist perspective, gender mainstreaming will succeed only if the movement keeps being involved in the process (Allwood, 2013, p. 44). Therefore, it is important to keep the link between activists outside the institution, and experts within the institution, intact. Only a genuinely connected system, with experts and activists sharing ideas and best practices, can hold institutions accountable.

Another issue described by Ines Smyth (2007) regards the incompatibility between gender mainstreaming and some beliefs entrenched in the culture of the society in which gender equality policies are applied. She trusts that gender discrimination has its roots in deeply internalized beliefs and firmly embedded structures, and that gender mainstreaming cannot simply dissolve them. Analyzing the power relations and structures reproducing gender inequality in a given society, the reasons preventing gender from being easily mainstreamed can be identified (Allwood, 2013). Recipient groups or societies might not consider gender mainstreaming to be applicable to their case, since it might clash with long-lasting, deeply rooted cultural and political beliefs. This aspect must be considered when mainstreaming gender in a targeted society. The more the implementing institution internalizes the beliefs held by the recipient, the more it can grasp the cultural peculiarities inimical to gender mainstreaming.

2.3.4 The Six Factors

After a review of gender mainstreaming literature, a scheme of the issues affecting the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies can be drawn. The review has mostly focused on texts studying the reasons for the failure of gender policies after their ratification, once they interact with the three levels of policy implementation: the donor, the context and the recipient. At each of the three levels of the gender mainstreaming process it has been possible to identify two main factors affecting the outcomes of gender policies. The resulting six factors that will guide my ensuing analysis can be summarized as the:

    1. clarity and transparency of the implementing institution's rhetoric;

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2. adequacy of the institution's political and financial resources;
3. number of crosscutting issues within the institution;
4. number of issues being mainstreamed simultaneously;
5. degree of involvement of the recipient country's social movements; and,
6. degree of internalization of beliefs inimical to gender mainstreaming by the recipient population.

These six factors are used as a framework for analyzing the EU's promotion of women's rights in Egypt. They also facilitate an examination of the possible difficulties faced by the EU as it implements gender equality policies. In section 4.1, I focus on the period preceding the Arab Spring: was the EU able to overcome the challenges posed by the six factors identified? In section 4.2, I ask the same question, focusing on the post-Arab Spring period.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Outline, Case Study Selection, Data Collection, and Limitations

The literature review of gender mainstreaming presented in the previous chapter constitutes the basis of the theoretical framework employed throughout this study. The questions that direct my research are the following: how has the evolution of the six factors considered the most relevant for the development and application of gender mainstreaming affected the EU's promotion of women's rights in Egypt? How has the Arab Spring had an impact on the development of these six elements? Through this research focus I aim to study how these factors are directly related to the challenges that the EU has had to confront while attempting to implement gender mainstreaming polices. The six factors affecting the success of gender mainstreaming identified in the previous section are analyzed first in relation to the pre-, then to the post-Arab Spring period to assess if the EU has improved its promotion of women's rights in Egypt, and how. The interpretations of gender mainstreaming identified in section 2.2 are used too, to identify how the EU has understood and implemented the term at any given time.

The research is qualitative and based on empirical analysis. It provides repeated observations of the same dependent variable over an extended period of time. The dependent variable of this research is the EU's promotion of women's rights in Egypt. The independent variables are the six factors identified in section 2.3, unceasingly affecting the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies. The timeframe encompasses the period from 1995, with the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the EU's adoption of the principle of gender mainstreaming, to today. The EU's promotion of women's rights in Egypt between 1995 and 2011, and between 2011 and 2015, are compared in order to assess the impact that the Arab Spring events had on EU's gender policies.

The case study was selected for several reasons. First, the EU is one of the main international promoters of women's rights. Since the Treaty of Rome of 1957, the EU has signed several treaties having the promotion of gender equality as an important pillar (EC, 2015b). The Euro-Mediterranean area is also a region of great interests for gender and development researchers. In fact, it is characterized by high inequality: according to the Gender Inequality Index (GII), only European countries appear in the top 10 of most equal countries, while the first country from the Southern neighborhood appearing in the chart, which is also a member of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), is Tunisia, at position 48 (UNDP, 2013). The gender gap between Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries is evident. This research aims to add knowledge to the ongoing analysis of gender issues in an area growing each day more interconnected.

On the other hand, Egypt was picked for three reasons. First, for the poor conditions of Egyptian women. In fact, according to the 2013 GII, Egypt appears at position 130 out of 151 countries, scoring worse than Iraq, at position 120, and the Arab Republic of Syria, at position 125 (UNDP, 2013). The Thomson Reuter's Foundation (2013) confirmed this data through a poll, stating that Egypt is the worst state for women in the Arab world. Second, Egypt is one of the countries possibly experiencing the effects of the Arab Spring the most, having changed three presidents (counting Adly Mansour, acting president) and two constitutions, since the overthrown of Mubarak's regime. Third, Egypt is a key partner of the EU, both for trade and security reasons. Its situation cannot be ignored by EU member countries, which have tried to maintain for decades a strong relation with Egypt, a crucial leader in the Southern

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Mediterranean region. These three reasons make it necessary to observe the EU's policy's transformation as Egypt undergoes profound changes domestically, and witnesses a deterioration of women's rights.

The data used in this research was obtained through unobtrusive methods. In addition to secondary academic sources reviewing the process of gender mainstreaming, I employ primary sources, too. These are communications, declarations and contributions of the EU and its relevant instruments or partnerships, such as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the EMP, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the EU Delegation to Egypt, and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), among others. These data are mostly accessible to the public through the official website of the relevant institution.

The research is limited in its resources. No interviews to EU's professionals and Egypt's aid recipient groups or experts were conducted. These could have added deeper insights about the EU policy making process or the perception of the EU by selected Egyptian citizens. Moreover, the case of Egypt is not compared to the case of another country from the Southern neighborhood. In future studies it could be useful to compare the EU's promotion of women's rights in Egypt to other countries, using the same theoretical framework, to see if its policies have followed the same pattern elsewhere.

CHAPTER 4: EU's Promotion of Women's Rights in Egypt

4.1 Before the Arab Spring

In this section I analyze the promotion of women's rights by the EU in Egypt, focusing on the period going from 1995 to January 25, 2011. 1995 represents a fundamental date for the EU's promotion of gender equality towards Egypt: The Beijing Conference spread the principle of gender mainstreaming while the Barcelona Declaration set the beginning of the EMP and the consequent actions for development and dialogue between the EU and its Southern Neighbors. The 25th of January 2011 represents the outburst of the Arab Spring in Egypt. During the whole period, Egypt was under Hosni Mubarak's presidency. One by one, the six factors affecting gender mainstreaming are examined within this time frame, to evaluate if, and how, they had an impact on the EU's promotion of women's rights in Egypt.

4.1.1 Clarity and transparency of the EU's rhetoric

Regardless of the several EU declarations in favor of women's rights (e.g. EC, 1995; EC, 1996; EC., 2010; EEAS, n.d.a) promulgated in the years immediately following the Beijing Conference, the clarity and transparence of the EU's rhetoric has been contested. The EU lacked clarity, for example, with its Association Agreement with Egypt. In fact, the Association Agreement, the most important bilateral trade agreement between the EU and Egypt, had a clause stating the importance of the respect of human rights, but did not mention women (Naciri and Nusair, 2003, p. 46). Because of its ambiguity, the clause did not clearly invoke the principle of gender mainstreaming, so loudly praised by the EU, and allowed the institution to keep dealing with Egypt regardless of its women's rights abuses. The EMP also lacked precise objectives since it was created following a 'holistic multilateralism' (Bilgic, 2011, p. 148). Its one-size-fits-all model had de-emphasized the prominence of gender in EU's external policies with Egypt, shaping an approach that treated Southern Mediterranean countries as if they were all the same, and therefore not considering the particular needs of a country like Egypt. The UfM, created in 2008 as a multilateral partnership to replace the old EMP, seemed to have clearer objectives, thanks to its project-based approach. Its main aim was to design *ad hoc* projects to tackle precise issues (UfM, n.d.a). However, the UfM had two main faults. First, Hosni Mubarak, who had never distinguished himself for its commitment to human rights in Egypt, was co-president of the UfM (Khadera, 2013). Second, gender equality promotion did not appear in the UfM's priority areas, making any observer wonder whether the EU had actually implemented gender mainstreaming or had just adopted an integrationist model, without disrupting the *status quo.*

Moreover, the lack of complete transparence about the EU's commitment to mainstreaming gender seems to confirm the idea that its promotion of women's rights in Egypt was partly a *façade.* As E. H. Carr (1981, p. 80) warned, morality is nothing but 'a disguise for selfish vested interests'. The post-9/11 agenda especially allowed the EU to use

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human rights rhetoric to conceal unrelated interests, such as regional security (Balfour, 2008, p. 40). This strategy worked in Egypt because its relations with the EU were based on two easily compatible features: 'the Egyptian government's need for unconditional financial assistance, and the EU's security concerns' (Abdel-Latif, 2010, p. 3). Thus, the Egyptian regime played on such concerns, inflating the danger of security threats in order to get higher aid and less pressure on issues regarding democratization or human rights abuses (ibid). For instance, €1 billion in aid was allocated by the EU to Egypt, mostly to its Treasury, from 2007 to 2013 (EC, 2013). This was done regardless of the growing governmental corruption and the worsening situation of female laborers, who manifested their disappointment during those years, through national protests and strikes, a prelude of the 2011 revolution (Beinin and Duboc, 2010). This is one of many examples (e.g. Isaac, 2013; Youngs, 2003) showing that the EU has prioritized women's rights rhetorically, but in practiced favored its relation with Mubarak's regime as a security ally.

4.1.2 Adequacy of the EU's financial and political resources

The adequacy of the EU's financial and political resources employed to promote gender equality in Egypt can be assessed analyzing the functioning of the MEDA Programme and the ENP. The MEDA was the main financial instrument of the EMP, operative from 1996 until 2006 (Eur-Lex n.d.). However, its commitment to women's rights promotion was not the strongest. Its annual reports did not integrate any evaluation of women's rights, 'due both to the lack of statistics about women (gender indicators), as well as to the lack of procedures for gender analysis' (Naciri and Nusair, 2003, p. 50). This prevented clear understandings of its effectiveness. Moreover, although the MEDA had allocated some funds for gender equality in Egypt, they had mostly been used for projects aiding women in the economic sphere (ibid). For instance, aid for small-and-medium-sized enterprises run by women was often not available to the whole female population, but just to the portion of women with enough financial resources to own their businesses. The MEDA proved an inadequate instrument to help empower women in Egypt.

The ENP was the successor of the EMP and the MEDA. It was created in 2004 not only as one of the main instruments to conduct foreign relations with Southern Mediterranean countries, but also as 'the major policy in which conditionality [could] be detected' (Robinson, 2013, p. 8). The 2004 ENP contained the much-discussed 'more for more' principle, usually perceived as an example of positive conditionality, since incentives are offered in exchange for democratic reform and the protection of human rights. However, not only did women's rights not appear as one of the ENP's conditions, but the 'more for more' principle was criticized for not including the 'less for less' norm (ibid). The 'less for less' principle is a form of negative conditionality that would translate into the withdrawal of aid if any conditions are disregarded, and is seen as a way for the EU to perpetuate its commitments to the protection of women's rights. Two conclusions can be drawn from the EU's decision to add neither women's rights as a condition nor the 'less for less' principle to the ENP: first, that its funding was allocated regardless of women's rights; second, that the EU was far from being an agenda-setting actor in terms of gender mainstreaming. Commitment to that principle was still relegated to some far-away rooms in Brussels.

4.1.3 Number of crosscutting issues within the EU

The relation with Egypt had been key for the EU for decades. Since the first Cooperation Agreement signed in 1977, the EU led a consistent commercial relation with Egypt (MEDEA Institute, n.d.). To maximize its relation with Egypt, the EC participated in the development of its economic infrastructure and production. Notably, this comprehended the 'industrialization and the modernization of its agriculture, as well as cooperation in the fields of science, technology, the protection of environment, the fisheries sector and the encouragement of private investments that are in the mutual interest of both parties' (ibid). It was difficult to mainstream gender in a development agenda that prioritized not only the strengthening of the economic, but also of the security sector (Abdel-Latif, 2010). The European Consensus on Development (EC, 2005) was the first strong attempt to improve the harmonization and coordination of an increasing number of crosscutting issues in development cooperation. Women empowerment explicitly had to be a goal of any development activity and PCD had always to be taken into consideration to make sure that a project would not hinder gender equality.

Nonetheless, the promises expressed in the Consensus did not immediately materialize. The first EU report on PCD (EC, 2007) had no sign of gender equality in the list of crosscutting issues that it evaluated, while the second report

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(EC, 2009) barely spoke about gender in the section regarding the social dimension of globalization, proving that it was still not considered a crosscutting matter. The EU-Egypt 2007 Action Plan (ENPI, 2007), out of the several key areas of action that it covered, did not include women's empowerment, which was relegated to being a small sub-category of the 'Enhanced Political Dialogue and Reform' section. While the EU aimed 'to enter into intensified political, security, economic, trade, investment, scientific, technological and cultural relations' (ENPI, 2007, p. 1) with Egypt, it diverted its attention from setting a valuable gender agenda for its neighbor.

4.1.4 Number of issues being mainstreamed simultaneously

Mainstreaming was a novelty at the beginning of the 1990s, but after the EU's commitment to mainstream gender equality in 1995, other activists called for their cause to be mainstreamed too (Woodward, 2008, p. 18). From climate change to health to good governance, different sectors aimed to add their topic of concern as a crosscutting issue to all EU development activities. The European Consensus on Development (EC, 2005), was the sign of how mainstreaming had become popular. The Community decided to strengthen mainstreaming in relation to issues such as 'democracy, good governance, human rights, the rights of children and indigenous peoples, gender equality, environmental sustainability and the fight against HIV/AIDS' (EC, 2005, p. 2).

This tendency was soon adopted by different EU instruments. The first PCD report (EC, 2007), emphasized its effort to mainstream environment, conflict prevention, security policies, employment and energy; only at page 170, there was a short reference to gender equality. The same year, the ENPI for the South, following the 2006 Cairo Environment Ministerial Conference, drafted a new environment plan which called for the mainstream of environment (ENPI South, 2007). It stated that in the specific case of the project 'gender [was] not, in principle, a crosscutting issue to be addressed' (ibid, p. 28). As Woodward affirmed (2008, p. 295), the novelty of gender mainstreaming wore off and 'issues such as gender equality [disappeared] from agendas to be replaced by others'. Due to the high number of issues to be mainstreamed, some experts detected 'an integrationist version of gender mainstreaming, an expert-bureaucratic mode of implementation, a technocratic, tick-box attitude on the part of some of those responsible for carrying out gender mainstreaming practices' (Allwood, 2013, p. 50).

4.1.5 Degree of involvement of Egypt's social movements

Under Mubarak's regime Egypt's women in civil society had more restrictions than freedoms. The constitution gave the government unlimited power over the administration of NGOs, which needed its authorization to plan any activity (Benin and Duboc, 2010; Khodary and Sika, 2012). The country was for decades under the Emergency Law, a governmental instrument that, in case of national security threats, interrupted the protection of freedom of assembly and free speech (FIDH, 2010). Personal Status Law further reduced women's freedoms by giving men authority to discipline them (EMHRN, 2014). Women were subordinate to the power of the government as well as to that of men. Lack of education also hindered their position: under Mubarak, the female literacy rate went from 44% in 1996 to 64% in 2010 (World Bank, n.d.). Despite the improvement, a huge portion of Egypt's female population could not access information and news, due to their illiteracy. They could not follow the press, access applications for EU's initiatives, nor communicate with EU's representatives: public awareness of EU's programs was confined to the political elite and the academic world (Bayoumi, 2010). The shortage of polls surveying the female population's opinion of the EU relation with Egypt also shows how the female activists and the EU were barely involved in each other's businesses (ibid).

Because of the strict governmental control over NGOs and the low level of education of many women, the EU struggled to interact with grassroots feminist movements in Egypt. Instead, it managed to cooperate with organizations formed by educated, upper class women. The NCW was a key EU's partner, especially for strategies run by the ENP (ENPI, 2007). As the main instrument for gender equality promotion, it was run by Suzanne Mubarak, Egypt's first lady, who could elect all secretaries and committees, and had absolute power over the council (Dawoud, 2012). The NCW knew little about the problems oppressing women from the rural sector or female laborers, and the EU proved to be too distant from such issues to intervene. Most of its project had female entrepreneurs as beneficiaries, who were not necessarily the neediest women at the time (Naciri and Nusair, 2003, p. 48). Even though these projects embraced a women's perspective approach, they lacked of participatory-democratic

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processes of implementation that prevented gender mainstreaming from turning into a reality.

4.1.6 Degree of internalization of beliefs inimical to gender mainstreaming by Egypt

An animated debate following the adoption of gender mainstreaming was about whether gender equality was going to be compatible with Islam. In Egypt, a tension between *Sharia* and international law had shaped an Islamic/feminist binary that opposed Islamic local beliefs to universal human rights (Muhanna-Matar, 2014, p. 4). Women's rights promotion was regarded as a 'secular enterprise' by some women's groups and activists based in Egypt, who viewed it as a way to perpetuate Western power in the country (Kirmani and Phillips, 2011). The so-called Islamic feminism that rose in the 1990s and early 2000s in Egypt was partly a protest against Western hegemony and the materialism of Mubarak's era (Aoude, n.d.). Most feminist civil society organizations were connected to the Muslim Brotherhood, main dissenter of the economic liberalization and privatization led by Mubarak. These Islamic feminist groups did not only oppose Mubarak's economic reforms, but also did not welcome international definitions of equality, like the one in the CEDAW, believing that they did not acknowledge the differences between men and women and their inherently complementary nature (Naciri and Nusair, 2003). Such groups opposed women employing international legal arguments and universal human rights in their work, preferring definitions dictated by *Sharia* law. It was indeed difficult for the EU to engage with women who were inimical to the idea of gender mainstreaming because they identified it as both a way to promote Western hegemony and a concept incompatible with Islam.

However, different researches affirmed that the clash between Islamic and secular feminists was not so radical and that Muslim societies were in fact characterized by great cultural and political variety (Spierings, Smits and Verloo, 2008). Consequently, the unwillingness to engage in dialogue could be found not only within Egypt's society, which was actually not so radically and unilaterally opposed to secularism, but at the EU level as well. In fact, after 9/11, a debate about the threat of political Islam had filled policy makers with new concerns about the reliability of institutions founded on Islamic beliefs (Tibi, 2002). The EU had been equally reluctant to reach out to the whole spectrum of the Egyptian civil society and concentrated most of its attention on a few organizations that 'meshed with its normative predispositions' (Behr and Siitonen, 2013, p. 21). In the mid-2000s, one of the main EU attempts to broaden its engagement with Islamist NGOs was abandoned, due to the opposition of some member states (ibid). The unwillingness of Islamic feminists and the EU to cooperate was reciprocal, but the EU could have soothed the hostility of such groups, if it had been less selective on the civil society organizations deserving its funds.

4.2 After the Arab Spring

Despite all the talks, activities and money spent by the EU to promote development in its Southern neighboring countries, and especially in Egypt, the Arab people had grown hungry and resentful, while the EU was unaware of it. Western think tanks and governments had been unable to estimate the strength of the frustration against Mubarak's 30-year-long dictatorship and had undervalued the potential of Egyptian civil society (Selim, 2012). Social injustice, inequality, oppression and the risk of hereditary succession in the government fed the anger of Egyptians from different classes, backgrounds, and religions. Nonetheless, the EU was struggling to recognize the calls of the Egyptians that took over the streets of Cairo in January 2011: as of February 2nd, Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi still considered Mubarak 'the wisest of men', trusting that he could lead a transition towards democracy (Anon., 2011). Those proved to be fragile hopes, as nine days later Mubarak's government was overthrown by the majority of the population.

While women were pivotal during the uprisings, a pattern of marginalization emerged from the practical and legislative developments that followed (Robinson, 2013, p. 4). Women's harassment and discrimination grew after 2011 (Amnesty International, 2015), while both Morsi's and Al-Sisi's constitutions failed to include hoped-for reforms to protect half of Egypt's population (Amnesty International, 2012; Mahmoud, 2013). The revolution, carried out by women and men alike, arguably had no benefits for Egypt's women. The EU's reaction to the Arab Spring was seen by many as a litmus test for the EU's commitment to women's rights promotion in the country (Robinson, 2013). As a consequence, the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, made the promotion of gender equality in third countries a priority (EC, 2011f). Different commitments and new actions were designed to make up for the policies that had failed to prevent the 2011 uprisings. They are analyzed and explored,

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from a gender mainstreaming perspective, in the following sub-sections.

4.2.1 Clarity and transparency of the EU's rhetoric

The ambiguity of the EU's rhetoric was most evident throughout the 18 days of revolution in Egypt. The EU's hesitancy to take sides was a result of decades of cooperation with Arab dictatorships. Even though women and men had occupied factories, flooded streets and planned strikes for years, calling for the removal of Mubarak, the EU had kept its relations with his regime intact. In January 2011, the EU initially followed its previous strategy: it did not demand Mubarak's resignation, but rather called on the regime to stop violence against protesters and undertake some reforms (Isaac, 2013). The EU was not ready to give up its relations with Arab dictators: as much as Italy showed its support for Mubarak, Sarkozy praised Ben Ali of Tunisia (Selim, 2012). However, the following events proved that the EU might have been siding with the losers. After U.S. President Barack Obama finally declared that the transition must begin and that Mubarak should leave office, the EU switched sides and rhetoric (ibid). This change can be explained by the dilemma that had hindered its political coherence for decades: should the EU promote human rights or cooperate with undemocratic regimes?

The EU was not able to answer effectively that question and perpetuated an unclear gender policy during the years following the revolution. While Catherine Ashton stressed the EU's commitment to gender equality promotion (EC, 2011f), the EC (2011c) published its first response to the uprisings, 'A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean', which comprised only one reference to women, and almost no commitment to gender equality promotion as a priority. This inconsistent response was enacted while international news agencies denounced the increasing discrimination and sexual violence against women witnessed in Tahrir Square (e.g. El-Sabbahi, 2012; Younis, 2011). Oxfam (2011) criticized the EU's early response to the Arab Spring too, stating that it had failed to address women's rights.

During the governmental change from Morsi to Al-Sisi, the EU once again proved to have adopted an unclear line of action towards its neighbor. Despite Al-Sisi's controversial overthrown of Morsi's democratically elected government, and the reports of gender violence committed by the military under Al-Sisi control, the EU was satisfied with the change (Amnesty International, 2015, p. 12). It tacitly approved the *coup d'état* while remaining 'unequivocally committed to supporting the Egyptian people in their aspirations to democracy and inclusive governance' (Rettman, 2013). However, during the following months, its unequivocal commitment seemed shaky. On one hand, the EU Delegation to Egypt wrote a controversial report denouncing women's discrimination and abuses during the 2014 presidential elections, which caused its expulsion from an NCW's seminar (EU Election Observation Mission, 2014). On the other, German Chancellor Angela Merkel praised Egypt's peace efforts (Brenner, 2015), while Italy's Prime Minister Renzi considered Al-Sisi a 'great leader' (Serra, 2015). From 2011 until today there has been little clarity about the EU's standpoint in regard to women's rights issues in Egypt. The incoherence of some of its policies proves that its objectives are still not completely transparent. However, the growing international pressure and the good results of institutions such as the EU Delegation to Egypt suggest that things are changing and that the EU might be moving closer to a clearer commitment to gender equality.

4.2.2 Adequacy of the EU's political and financial resources

The revolution triggered a re-thinking of political and financial resources that the EU devoted to the Arab world. After its first major communication in March 2011 (EC, 2011c), the EU published in May 'A New Response to a Changing Neighborhood' (EC, 2011b), a review of the ENP that set the rules to be followed by the EU in relation to its Southern neighbors. Even though the EU's first efforts to promote human rights and democracy were strong and swift, it could be argued that they were also uncoordinated and ineffective (Duquet and Wouters, 2013). While the new ENP strategy promoted the involvement of the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the UfM (EC, 2011b), other instruments were created such as the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) (EC, 2012) and the Support for Partnership, Reforms and Inclusive Growth (SPRING) Program (EC, 2011a). Although all these instruments had a small reference to women's rights, none of them was fully committed to the issue. Moreover, the creation of so many new tools was seen as redundant and unnecessary. The EU should have focused on existing instruments instead of generating parallel processes and

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structures, fragmenting its projects and increasing management costs (Duquet and Wouters, 2013)

Nonetheless, both praise and criticism resulted from the reforms and new initiatives launched by the EU. The ENP was improved, enhancing its commitment to human rights and democracy, and strengthening its emphasis on women (EC, 2011b). Moreover, it differentiated its levels of aid, depending on the progress made in consolidating human rights, and it introduced a 'less for less' conditionality, enabling the EU to reduce support if expectations are not met (Duquet and Wouters, 2013). The EU Delegation to Egypt progressed as well, demonstrating to be an excellent instrument by 'allowing the EU to already have a foot on the ground' (Duquet and Wouters, 2013, p. 259). It proved to have mainstreamed gender into its mission: during the 2014 elections, it fearlessly denounced the women's rights abuses it witnessed (EU Election Observation Mission, 2014). The UfM reported some progress as well. Although gender equality was missing from its priority list, its projects, which became active in 2011, strongly addressed women (UfM, n.d.b). The UfM was willing to take a women's perspective strategy, and its project-based approach could have in the long run a positive impact on targeted groups of women.

The EIB, the EBRD, the EED and the SPRING Program raised more concern. The EIB and the EBRD were appointed in the March 2011 Communication as leaders of inclusive growth in the region. However, the former was criticized by civil society since it had 'too few results and lacked effective accountability' while the latter had 'no projects running or any experience in the MENA region' (Duquet and Wouters, 2013, p. 245). The EED, seeking to enhance democratization in third countries, proved to be a redundant, supplementary instrument that could have been just as well incorporated by the EIDHR (ibid). The SPRING Program was criticized too: it supported Egypt with €449 million but barely committed itself to gender equality promotion, which appeared just as a crosscutting issue (Balfour, 2012, p. 21). Overall, the positive changes implemented by the EU after 2011 were limited. Gender mainstreaming was slowly becoming a priority for some EU's instruments, but it was still far from being seriously embraced by others. The fragmentation of EU's funds and projects could also hinder their effectiveness. Instead of launching new instruments to promote human rights, the EU should have reinforced the already existing ones.

4.2.3 Number of crosscutting issues within the EU

The EU began reshaping its relations with Egypt slowly: the number and kind of cross-cutting issues within its policy towards Cairo did not change suddenly. The EU-Egypt ENP Action Plan ratified in 2007 and meant to end in 2013, was extended until 2015 (EEAS, 2014, p. 3). This was done regardless of the changes occurring in Egypt, which would have requested a reprioritization of the several crosscutting issues in the Action Plan. The Association Agreement has not been modified since 2004 either, and still refers to human rights as a condition for the partnership, but not specifically to women's rights, which have deeply deteriorated since 2011 (EEAS, n.d.b). An attempt to redesign the EU's development efforts was the 2011 Agenda for Change (EC, 2011e). In the new agenda, the EC stated that 'gender equality and the empowerment of women as development actors and peace-builders will be mainstreamed in all EU development policies and programmes' (EC, 2011e, p. 6). However, this declaration did not differ from the ones made two decades before, when gender mainstreaming was a novelty to be assimilated. The EU was still following an integrationist approach, merely stressing the importance of gender mainstreaming but doing little to create a viable process to implement it.

Good advancements can be found elsewhere. The EEAS (2014) published a new document regarding its relations with Egypt which had as priority issues 'Poverty Alleviation, Local Socio-Economic Development and Social Protection'. It reported many cases of gender discrimination in Egypt and stressed its commitment to stop them. The PCD also improved from 2011 until 2015. On one hand, the 2011 Report (EC, 2011d) had little reference to women's rights, while it emphasized the importance of mainstreaming issues such as climate change and migration. On the other, in 2015, the PCD Report (EC, 2015a) finally introduced gender equality as a main crosscutting issue: under the category of 'security', the EU aimed to address women's rights issues in times of crisis and develop toolkits supporting its actions. As of today, women's rights seem to cover a more crucial role in Euro-Mediterranean development activities.

4.2.4 Number of issues being mainstreamed simultaneously

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Some scholars suggest that mainstreaming as a policy strategy may have had its day (Allwood, 2013). The excitement for its novelty might have faded and policy makers might have forgotten about the commitments they made in the 90s. However, I argue that mainstreaming is still an active EU policy instrument, but that the number of issues being mainstreamed has decreased. While failing short of listing any explicit commitments, the EU included in its 2011 Agenda for Change (EC, 2011e) the necessity of mainstreaming gender (and nothing else) within its development objectives. Compared to the 2005 Consensus on Development (EC, 2005), the issues to be mainstreamed have decreased in the 2011 Agenda: in 2005 the list was so long that it would have been difficult to mainstream all the policy issues named.

Nonetheless, gender equality is still a persistent concern for the EU. The 2015 PCD Report (EC, 2015a) is an evidence of the EU's recent tendency of preferring quality over quantity in terms of mainstreaming. In fact, it has stressed the importance of mainstreaming issues belonging to three thematic areas: environment and climate, immigration, and gender. Analyzing the report, the EU's emphasis on environmental and immigration issues is evident. However, the recent international developments regarding women's rights, and the growing consensus on the importance of empowering women, may have supported the presence of gender equality promotion in the EU's development agenda. While women's rights have recently worsened in the MENA, and especially in Egypt, the international community, led by the UN, has emphasized the necessity of empowering women in order to achieve genuine economic development and social justice (UN, 2011).

4.2.5 Degree of involvement of Egypt's social movements

The unexpectedness of the 2011 uprisings was a sign that the EU had not effectively engaged and dialogued with the Egyptian civil society, repressed by three decades of Mubarak's dictatorship. However, the resistance to cooperate was not one-sided: the women's movements that surged in 2011 were unwilling to affiliate with the EU or other political actors. The female protesters were young 'ordinary' women, with disparate social backgrounds and levels of education, who defined themselves 'neither as Islamist nor secularist and feminist, but as activists' (Muhanna-Matar, 2014, p. 7). They had grown enthusiastic about the practice and meaning of citizenship and democracy, becoming involved in *super partes* civil society organizations, which went beyond gender issues, but instead called 'for equal rights, human dignity and justice for both men and women' (Muhanna-Matar, 2014, p. 6). For example, Asmaa Mahfouz, a key figure in the April 6th Youth Movement, was also one of the founders of the 'Egypt's Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution', one of many anti-nepotism and pro-freedom of speech organizations led by Egyptian women (ibid). Other women joined forces with men, creating groups such as '*Shoft Taharosh'* ('I Saw Harassment'), an NGO to prevent women's rights abuses in Tahrir Square (ibid). Even though the EU was a mere spectator of the rise of the political consciousness of the Egyptian women, it could not deny that its consideration of these movements must have changed. 2011 represented the 'birth of new Egyptians' (Selim, 2012, p. 1), and perhaps the rise of new hopes for change in terms of the EU's involvement with grassroots social movements.

Despite their high participation in the 2011 social movements, Egyptian women were not able to translate their contribution during the uprisings into involvement in public life after the revolution. The EU Election Observation Mission (2014, p. 6) reported that a 'severe underrepresentation of women in public life' and an 'absence of political will to promote women' resulted into women holding only 1.8% of seats in parliament and only 1% of them pursuing a career as judges. This situation was unhelpful, since the EU was used to dealing with members of the Egyptian government, which maintained an overtly patriarchal structure even after 2011 (ECWR, 2012). Even though the new EEAS (2014) program has strongly aimed to strengthen civil society and reach out to support NGOs, the EU has struggled to design a strategy to achieve this objective. The NCW is still the main EU's partner for women's rights promotion, even though it showed its unwillingness to prioritize the respect of gender equality over the reputation of the Egyptian government, when it expelled the EU Delegation from one of its seminars because it had denounced abuses and discrimination against women (Middle East Monitor, 2014). The EED (n.d.), created to be a main tool for civil society support, has implemented just four activities in Egypt, of which only one specifically targets women. Overall, the EU still has work to do in order to fully engage with women's rights movements and civil society groups in Egypt. However, a step forward has been taken recognizing the pivotal role that female activists can potentially play, and the importance of their participation to achieve a genuine democratic transition.

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4.2.6 Degree of internalization of beliefs inimical to gender mainstreaming by Egypt

After 2011, women's rights had not been on the agenda of either the Islamists under Morsi, or the Armed Forces under Al-Sisi: the low percentage of women's representation in both the government and the parliament is a clear indicator of this patriarchal tendency (Khodary and Sika, 2012). The former were opposed to mainstreaming gender for religious reasons. In fact, they supported 'Muslim Sisterhood' activists in Parliament to mobilize against the CEDAW, seen as a 'manifestation of atheism that should be abolished from the Egyptian legislation' (ibid, p. 98). Morsi also ratified a constitution blamed to 'limit fundamental freedoms and ignoring the rights of women' (Amnesty International, 2012). The latter have sacrificed gender equality promotion in order to re-assert Egypt's patriarchal and dictatorial structure as if 'to restore stability Egypt [needed] a dose of repression' (HRW, 2015). Al-Sisi's bad reputation in terms of women's rights started in Tahrir Square, with the infamous virginity tests carried out by the army, and is now blamed by activists believing that the 'rape of [a] woman echoes Sisi's rape of Egypt as a whole' (Amnesty International, 2015, p. 43). As much as the Muslim Brotherhood's beliefs were incompatible with the pillars of gender mainstreaming, the new government's iron-fisted policies have done little to safeguard women's rights.

While beliefs within the government have remained hostile to gender mainstreaming, at the grassroots level the tendency has reversed. During the uprisings, the newly formed women's rights movements had challenged the elitist character of pre-2011 Arab movements and the Islamic/feminist binary that had characterized previous activists (Muhanna-Matar, 2014). The Tahrir Square female protesters were not only members of the NCW, run by Egypt's upper class women, nor they all shaped their demands according to Islamic pillars (Singerman, 2011, p. 18). Instead of embracing an Islamic or secular feminist perspective, they went 'beyond the standardized criterion of feminism' (Muhanna-Matar, 2014, p. 16). They preferred an approach following a gender perspective strategy, considering both men and women, from different classes, ethnicities or religions, as oppressed. Mozn Hassan, activist and director of the Nasra Feminist Studies Centre in Cairo, succinctly explained the tendency that had inspired the 2011 protests: 'No one sees you as a woman here; no one sees you as a man. We are all united in our desire for democracy and freedom' (Khodary and Sika, 2012). Egyptian women have definitely been shaping their political efforts around a new set of beliefs, challenging old Islamic/secular dichotomies, and the discrepancies between feminism and patriarchy. The EU should take into consideration the advanced perspective on equality that these movements have embraced, as it could be a valuable first step toward greater women's rights in the country.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusions

The six factors analyzed have undoubtedly affected the EU's support of gender equality in Egypt, damaging the coherence of its strategy. The incorporation of women's rights promotion in all EU's development activities in Egypt has been influenced by these factors, making the EU's interpretation and implementation of gender mainstreaming susceptible to their oscillations. The Arab Spring definitely had an impact on the development of these six elements and, consequently, on the gender-related strategies promoted by the EU in Egypt. However, changes have been insufficient to state that the EU has overall embraced gender perspective strategies or participatory-democratic processes. In fact, it still tends to interpret gender mainstreaming as an outcome, rather than as a strategy or process. This can be proved confronting the findings identified within the donor, the political context and the recipient, presented in section 4.1 and 4.2 (see Figure 2).

Examining the first two factors, it results that the EU's gender-related initiatives in Egypt have been characterized by both continuity and change. In terms of clarity of its rhetoric, no improvement has been registered. Before the Arab Spring, despite all the EC's communications on the importance of gender equality promotion, the main instruments regulating EU-Egypt relations lacked explicit effective commitments to women's rights. After 2011, the tendency did not change: the EU still hesitates to denounce Al-Sisi's women's rights abuses, even though Catherine Ashton pushed for a stronger gender equality promotion in the country. The EU is still constrained by the old security/democracy dilemma, which obfuscates its own rhetoric, still based on an integrationist interpretation of gender mainstreaming, devoid of substantive contents and rarely employing statuary statements. On the other hand, the EU's political and financial resources have moved forward from adopting a mere integrationist model. The ENP, the UfM and the EU Delegation to Egypt now promote strategies based on a women's perspective. Even though they still rely on expert-bureaucratic processes, and struggle to involve all levels of Egypt's society into their policies,

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these instruments now promote projects explicitly and concretely empowering targeted groups of women.

At the context's level, improvements have been recorded as well. Before 2011, both within the EU and internationally, the principle of mainstreaming had been embraced with enthusiasm. The EU attempted to include as many crosscutting issues to its policies, while an increasing number of experts also demanded their issues of interest to be mainstreamed. A rise of issues calling to be mainstreamed both internally and externally reduced many of the EU's mainstreaming policies to mere integrationist, box-ticking exercises, rarely translating into concrete actions. In the post-Arab Spring period, a new trend could be detected. Recognizing that mainstreaming too many issues could be deleterious, the enthusiasm for the policy tool cooled down. Thus, less issues were selected for mainstreaming. While the 2015 PCD included only climate change, immigration and gender as its crosscutting issues, the EEAS wrote a report mostly denouncing women's rights deterioration in Egypt, calling for gender equality to be a key EU priority in the country. Through a limitation of its crosscutting issues, it could be asserted that the EU is pushing for the improvement of a few issues, including gender equality. It is interpreting gender mainstreaming as an equal treatment strategy, employing instruments like the PCD to assure that women's rights are legally respected and promoted in all development activities.

Within Egypt, the political transition sparked by the Arab Spring has had various effects on women's rights. At the governmental level, the degree of involvement with gender equality promotion initiatives has not increased. While under Mubarak's regime the Emergency Law restricted the freedom of assembly, press and speech, and women's rights abuses were left unpunished under the Personal Status Law, the two following governments have not done better. Morsi wrote a constitution limiting women's rights, while his party rejected the CEDAW's definition of gender equality. Al-Sisi has kept an iron-fisted policy, considered by members of the international community deleterious in terms of women's rights. Overall, the three government's ideologies have not been on the same page as the EU in terms of gender mainstreaming. On the other hand, Egypt's activist class has redesigned its system of beliefs. Not only members of Islamic movements or elitist groups, like the NCW, advocate for women's rights. Streets have filled with people with no political nor religious affiliations, campaigning for genuine development and human rights in a manner that goes beyond partisan divisions. This new tendency could be beneficial for the EU, which had previously been reticent to collaborate with Islamic groups and struggled to engage with grassroots movements. Even though this new class of activists still refuses to affiliate with political institutions, their demands seem to be based on a gender perspective. The EU should engage in dialogue with them. This would allow the EU to employ more participatory-democratic processes of gender mainstreaming.

Overall, after the Arab Spring improvements have been made in terms of the EU's promotion of gender equality in Egypt. Instead of interpreting gender mainstreaming from a mere integrationist point of view, the EU has opted for the implementation of equal treatment and women's perspective strategies as well. Even though most of its projects are still based on expert-bureaucratic processes, participatory-democratic actions could be promoted in the future, since the degree of internalization of beliefs inimical to gender equality seems to be decreasing within Egypt's population. Through recently formed instruments, like the EED, the UfM and the SPRING program, the EU should collaborate with Egypt's new generation of activists, to share knowledge and ideas for initiatives.

Having passed only four years since the 2011 uprisings, it is hard to tell whether the EU's advancement in terms of women's rights promotion is going to be long-term, or if it will have any positive impact on the country, currently the worst for women in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Future research should periodically assess EU gender-related activities in Egypt, to study if its efforts are actually translating into improvements. In fact, the rights of half of Egypt's population cannot be underestimated by EU development experts and strategists, if they wish to bring progress and stability to one of their key neighbors. The EU cannot let women see their rights deteriorate, nor it can think of them as mere disadvantaged, passive recipients of its aid. The women of Egypt have to contribute to their country's development, to be active agenda setters, to decide for themselves. The empowerment of women means the empowerment of Egypt.

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