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# The EU and the Middle East: From the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to the Union for the Mediterranean

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Europe has a complex history with its Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) neighbors. From colonial histories to a unified policy agenda, Europe has long sought to expand its sphere of influence to the Middle East and North Africa. European history, and certainly the history of the European Union as a political project, is inextricable from its policies towards its immediate neighbors around the Mediterranean. While Europe's historical relationship with its MENA neighbors is largely built on colonialism, it was not until fairly recently that the EU created a formal, unified policy towards its MENA neighbors. The development of European policy during the Cold War marked a shift towards addressing "Mediterranean security in a regional and multilateral framework" (Del Sarto 2006, 10). It wasn't until the 1990s that the MENA region took a sharper focus in EU foreign policy concerns. Attached to this focus was a prolific language of security and stability in the region (Kienle 1998; Romeo 1998). As the Soviet Union collapsed, the geopolitics of the region shifted focus and Europe began to expand its influence in its Mediterranean neighborhood. Increasingly, issues such as immigration, terrorism, trafficking, and energy needs shifted European attention to the southern and eastern parts of the Mediterranean.

Since 1995, the region has taken on further importance for the EU, both within the foreign policy and domestic arenas. The EU states that its MENA neighbors represent the intersection of "strategic" or "practical" concerns for the EU and speak to its significant contribution throughout history to "the mutual enrichment of cultures and civilizations" (Commission of the European Communities 2003a, 13). By the mid-2000s, the existing Euro-Mediterranean relationships became defined institutionally through two pillars: the European Neighborhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean (including its predecessors). By engaging in the maintenance of economic, political, and humanitarian security in the region, the EU's proactive foreign policy towards its Middle Eastern and North African neighbors has two main objectives: to encourage political and economic reform in MENA countries and to ensure regional cooperation between the EU and its neighbors. Broadly speaking, the EU's current policy towards the MENA region focuses on three strategies. First, the EU seeks to encourage and facilitate political, social, humanitarian, and economic reform in its MENA neighbors. Second, the EU seeks to deepen relationships, both bilaterally and regionally, between the EU and its non-European partners as well as between MENA states themselves. Third, a significant amount of the EU's attention towards the region has focused on Israeli-Palestinian relations.

The goal of this chapter is to trace the origin and trajectory of the Union for the Mediterranean, including its antecedents, namely the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process).

## **The Barcelona Process: Towards a More Formalized Relationship with the South**

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The Barcelona Process, which came to include the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), was created under the auspices of trying to ameliorate relations and mitigate inequality between the EU and its southern and southeastern neighbors. The Barcelona Declaration was signed in 1995 and institutionalized the partnership between the EU and its southern Mediterranean neighbors. The Barcelona process led to the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), demonstrating the attempts on the part of the EU to create a unified and defined foreign policy towards the region. It was seen as a way to augment the strategic relationships between the EU and the southern states in the European Neighbourhood Policy. The European Union outlines the institutional importance of the MENA region, noting that the Barcelona Process improves the relationship between the EU and MENA by:

1. Upgrading the political level of the EU's relationship with its Mediterranean partners;
2. Providing for further co-ownership to our multilateral relations; and;
3. Making these relations more concrete and visible through additional regional and sub- regional projects, relevant for the citizens of the region (Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean 2008a, 13).

The formation of an institutionalized relationship between the EU and the MENA states was influenced by discourses of pragmatism and strategy – that the Mediterranean region was strategically a good place for Europe to invest its economic and political resources. Similarly, the Paris Summit, which reemphasized the importance of a European policy towards the MENA states, underlined the strategic importance of the region for the EU, stating:

The Barcelona Process has been the central instrument for Euro-Mediterranean relations. Representing a partnership of 39 governments and over 700 million people, it has provided a framework for continued engagement and development. The Barcelona Process is the only forum within which all Euro-Mediterranean partners exchange views and engage in constructive dialogue. It represents a strong commitment to peace, democracy, regional stability and security through regional cooperation and integration (Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean 2008a, 8).

The Paris Summit emphasized the goals of the EU's policy in the region towards pursuing a “mutually and effectively verifiable Middle East Zone free of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical and biological, and their delivery systems” (Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean 2008a, 10). The Barcelona Process and the Paris Summit paved the way for decades of policy making towards the MENA region.

At the time of the initial 1995 meeting, 14 non-EU member states were included in the conference. At its conception, the EMP included the fifteen EU member states, which expanded to include all 27 member-states, as well as the Mediterranean partners including Algeria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and the Palestinian territories. Libya was added as an observer, given the EU's belief that Libya's role in the Mediterranean region could “positively contribute to the strengthening of the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation (*sic*)” (Commission of the European Communities 2003a, 4).

The Barcelona Declaration was designed with the expressed intent of uniting the two shores of the Mediterranean, creating an “area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity” (European Commission 2000a, 2). There is a direct recognition that an important aspect of this partnership is “an attempt to extend southwards the zone of peace and prosperity achieved within the EU, through a process of North-South integration” (European Commission 2005b, 4). In its five-year assessment, the European Commission noted that the Barcelona Declaration had paved the way for a partnership that intended to demonstrate an increased commitment towards equality with the southern neighbors, and that therefore the Barcelona Process should be considered “a proximity policy” (European Commission 2000). Despite making noted achievements the Commission also recognized that “the Middle East peace process [had] run into difficulties and affected the general Barcelona Process; progress with the association agreements [had] been slower than expected [and] trade among the partners themselves [was] very low” (European Commission 2000, 2).

## The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was originally organized into three categories, or pillars, focusing on political

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stability, economic prosperity, and social cooperation for the states on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean. In 2005, a fourth focus area – migration – was also added. The fourth basket was meant to address concerns on the part of some EU member that immigration originating from the MENA region is threatening the security of EU member states.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has the stated long-term goal, which in many ways has been achieved, of “turning [the] Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity” (Council of the European Union 1995).

## *Political and Security Basket*

The first pillar of the Barcelona Process, “Political & security partnership: Establishing a common area of peace and stability,” focuses on the development of political stability and security with an emphasis on ‘good governance’ practices, the development of democratic regimes, and the protection of human rights (Council of the European Union 1995). Specifically, the EMP focuses the first basket on three complementary parts. There is a desire to:

1. Increase political dialogue on both bilateral and regional level[s];
2. Ensure partnership-building measures;
3. Develop the Charter for Peace and Stability, which was meant to help identify areas of friction and disagreement in the Mediterranean (European Commission 2000).

These parts constitute the largest of the objectives of the EMP. Political integration of states to the south of the EU works to increase interdependence and reduce the inequalities expressed across the Mediterranean, while stopping short of political integration into the EU. While the political basket focuses on securitizing the MENA region, it highlights the ambiguity of the EU’s relationship with its southern border. The political and security basket provides a logic to monitor and manage political developments in the southern Mediterranean states, and sets up a “code of conduct” for the area (Council of the European Union 1995).

Despite the attention and resources dedicated to developing democratic institutions and political reform in southern and eastern Mediterranean states, it has been argued that “in practice Mediterranean governments were hostile to funding encroaching upon the political sphere” (Youngs 2001, 86). The structure of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership specifically nested discussions of political reform and the promotion of democratic governance with issues of economic development, thus speaking to the role of discourses of democratization in the EU’s foreign policy creation. As Youngs notes, during the 1990s the European Union launched a set of narratives which linked democratization, economic development, and strategic interests in external states (Youngs 2001, 13). The political basket of the EMP, moreover, has perhaps been the least “successful” in terms of achieving stated goals, and has resulted in tensions over the goals of democratization on the part of the EU in the Mediterranean.

## *Economic and Financial Basket*

The second pillar, “Economic & financial partnership: Creating an area of shared prosperity,” emphasizes the purported importance of “sustainable and balanced economic development of the countries of the Mediterranean region” (Council of the European Union 1995). Within the second chapter, the EMP notes three interconnected objectives:

The establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area, EU support for economic transition and to help the partners meet the challenges posed by economic liberalization, and the increase of investment flows to the Mediterranean partners which will result from a free trade and economic liberalization (European Commission 2000, 10).

This pillar expresses a primary interest in mitigating poverty and lower life expectancy in non-European Mediterranean states, such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt, through an emphasis on development and the creation of a Mediterranean free trade zone (Council of the European Union 1995; Philippart 2003, 210). With the

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adoption of the EMP, a large number of free trade agreements were signed bilaterally between states, although the project of a “region-wide” free-trade area has largely failed (Handoussa and Reiffers 2001). Accordingly, the fight against poverty is a stated goal of the EMP, particularly as the per capita income in the EU is about ten times higher than in the Mediterranean partners (Noi 2011, 39).

Another dimension of the economic basket is the development of free trade areas. The establishment of the free trade area in the Mediterranean, despite a significant amount of emphasis placed on economic integration by the EMP, is largely seen as a failure. In 2000, however, intraregional trade only accounted for “5% of the 12 Mediterranean partners’ trade volume” while only “a mere 2% of European FDI flow[s] into the Mediterranean region” (European Commission 2000, 13). As the EU notes, even after its inception, the Free Trade Area did not guarantee greater access to the internal markets of the EU to the Mediterranean partners, but rather focused on the creation of “horizontal exchange of goods, capital and human resources [with the intent of] creat[ing] markets large enough to attract significant foreign direct investment, which in turn are indispensable for sustainable economic growth” (European Commission 2000, 11). The financial basket of the EMP emphasizes the economic interconnectedness of the EU and its Mediterranean neighbors. More importantly, it positions “free trade [not as] an end in itself, but rather a means to a much bigger goal: the creation of a stable, peaceful and prosperous Mediterranean” (European Commission 2000, 12).

The principal financial instrument for implementing the economic efforts of the EMP is the *Mesure d’Accompagnement* (MEDA) program and was adopted by the Council in July of 1996. The MEDA program provides a structure through which economic and financial initiatives can be carried out, increasing the interdependence between the EU and its southern Mediterranean partners (Philippart 2001). However, in 2007 MEDA was replaced with a financial instrument of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). Between 2007 and 2013, the program has an estimated 12-billion-euro budget for assistance given to the southern and eastern Mediterranean states (Commission of the European Communities 2008; Noi 2011). It remains to be seen whether or not initiatives undertaken through this pillar are beneficial to the citizens of the non-European Mediterranean states. After five years of the implementation of the EMP, the “per capita income in the EU [was still] approximately 10 times higher than that of the Mediterranean partners” (European Commission 2000, 13), while the:

Combined gross domestic product of the Maghreb States (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia; population: 66 million) is less than that of Portugal (population: 10 million), while the GDP of the Mashreq States (Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria; population: 86 million) roughly equals that of Greece or Finland (population: 10 and 5 million respectively) (European Commission 2000, 13).

## *Social, Cultural, and Human Basket*

The third pillar outlines the goals for the EMP with regards to the social and culture objectives. The main objective of this basket is to promote intercultural dialogue, particularly through an emphasis on shared culture between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. The Barcelona Declaration specifically states that the partnership seeks to increase the role of mass media; develop training programs for young people in the area of human resources; improve health and well-being among populations; to establish closer cooperation between states with regards to the problem of irregular migration; and to fight against drug and human trafficking, to name a few (Council of the European Union 1995). It is acknowledged in this portion of the Barcelona Declaration that the area of human resources and intercultural awareness cannot be divorced from the aims of economic development, and thus the “human” aspect of the Barcelona Declaration becomes important.

This pillar has arguably been the most successful in achieving its goals. The EMP noted during its five and ten-year reviews that the three main projects undertaken by the cultural and social basket have had the most profound impact. These objectives are the development of three particular programs:

1. Euromed Heritage: for the preservation and development of Euro-Mediterranean cultural heritage. The success of this initiative has encouraged the EU to launch a second phase in 2000.

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2. Euromed Audiovisual: supporting Euro-Mediterranean audiovisual cooperation projects in the field of radio, television and cinema.
3. Euromed Youth: in the field of youth exchange aiming at facilitating the integration of young people into social and professional life and stimulating the democratization of the civil society of the Mediterranean partners in that it improves mutual comprehension and cohesion between young people across the Mediterranean basin (European Commission 2000, 15).

After September 11, 2001, the states' aims of the cultural basket became more emphasized, especially as the cultural aspects of the partnership were brought to the fore in discussions of the "incompatibility" of predominantly Muslim cultures in Europe (M. Pace 2006, 117). The EU notes that "one of the main obstacles to the further development of the Barcelona Process has been the inability, on both shores of the Mediterranean, to deal with the growing political significance of Islamist forces in Southern countries" (European Union Institute for Security Studies 2008, 16). While programs launched under this basket include a Euro-Mediterranean University and other youth programs designed to increase intercultural dialogue and understanding and to overcome the challenges of xenophobia, the language used in the articulation of this basket and its objectives is dubious.

## *New Objectives: The Fourth Basket*

In 2005, a fourth pillar was added to the EMP, with a specific focus on immigration (Portugal Presidency of the European Union 2007; Council of the European Union 2005). Although immigration is mentioned as an area for attention in all three of the other pillars, it became a large enough concern to warrant more concentration and is perhaps one of the most resonant of the EU's security concerns (Youngs 2001, 57). For example, in the original Barcelona Declaration, the third pillar placed emphasis on the fact that the partners recognize the "importance of the role played by migration in their relationships" (Council of the European Union 1995, 6).

Specifically, this new pillar places a large emphasis on ways to create legal pathways to migration between the EU and other Mediterranean countries, finding ways to avoid brain drain, and promoting "sustainable return of migrants to their countries of origin" (Noi 2011, 44; Portugal Presidency of the European Union 2007, 2). Within the EMP framework, two major migration-based initiatives have been undertaken, with a combined budget of 7 million Euros (Noi 2011, 45). These two programs, entitled Euro-Med Migration I and II, work to create focus groups between the EU and non-member Mediterranean states to tackle the proposed need for legislative convergence and reform of migration laws in Partnership states.

The projected scope of the EMP involved a dense network of institutions and programs between the EU and its southern neighbors, the partnership aspect of the Barcelona Process is in effect one of the weakest elements (R. Joffé 1996; Del Sarto 2006). On one hand, in 1999 the Commission noted "three and half years after the inaugural conference in Barcelona, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has developed and strengthened considerably and has given clear proof of its viability in sometimes delicate and difficult circumstances" (Commission of the European Communities 1999). Yet by 2003, almost ten years after the launching of the project, political reform in southern Partner states did not meet the EU's expectations and the European Commission noted that "political reform in the majority of the countries of the Mediterranean has not progressed as quickly as desired" (Commission of the European Communities 2003b, 7). Furthermore, despite these mixed reviews on the part of the EU itself, the proposed Free Trade Area was not established by 2010, and there has arguably been "a worsening state of human development" in the region (Wolff 2012, 5). As Benita Ferrero-Waldner notes in the Barcelona process's ten-year review, the EMP had until 2005 functioned more as an inter-governmental process and acknowledged that the organization needed to better address "questions that are of the interest of the citizens and should be at the center of [the] concerns in the partnership" (European Commission 2005, 1).

Among the southern partners, a lack of cooperation and development on the political front, particularly amongst Israel and the Arab states of Jordan, Syria, and Egypt has contributed to the failures in the economic front. Thus, many of the attempts to create multilateral talks stalled, which left the European Union created bilateral agreements with individual countries in the south (Vasconcelos and Joffé 2004, 4). The view of the project as mainly an economic one has highlighted the lack of political dialogue between southern partners themselves, as well as within north-south

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discussions, leading some to conclude that the political basket has perhaps been the largest shortcoming (M. Pace 2006; Commission of the European Communities 2003a; Vasconcelos and Joffé 2004). The EU acknowledged that “a reinvigorated cooperation within the region and with Mediterranean partners should be sought” (Commission of the European Communities 2003), again emphasizing the political and strategic importance of the region for the EU.

Returning to Barcelona in November of 2005 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Declaration, the Euro-Mediterranean Heads of State and Government met for the first time in a decade. While a five-year work program was released that reiterated many of the same commitments that the Barcelona Declaration had a decade earlier, the Summit brought attention to the dysfunction of the Partnership, as Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan were the only representatives of the non-European Mediterranean countries that were in attendance (Council of the European Union 2005; Youngs and Kausch 2009).

The boycott of the Arab states at the 2005 Euro-Mediterranean Summit, along with the disappointing progress towards political and economic reforms and dialogue in the region led some to write the Partnership off, or at the very least allowed many academics and analysts to largely ignore any evaluation or explanation of the EU policies in the region (S. Wolff 2012, 5). However, despite its lack of success in terms of its stated goals, the EMP is largely important and significant for developing an understanding of the EU's persistence towards trying to establish a meaning of the Mediterranean, in order to articulate a coherent policy towards the region. As Wolff notes, much of the literature on the EMP has focused on the political failures and has lacked any in depth discussion of the symbolic importance of the Partnership, failing to question “the dynamics at hand behind the EU's governance in the Mediterranean” (S. Wolff 2012, 5). Others have argued that at the end of the day, the Barcelona Process and the EMP remains a neo-colonial mechanism which reinforces “a Eurocentric and dichotomist framework where true dialogue cannot flourish” (M. Pace and Schumacher 2004, 124). Clearly, there remains a large disparity between the southern and northern Mediterranean.

## **The Union for the Mediterranean**

In light of the dubious acceptance of the EMP, in 2008 it was relaunched and shifted to form the Union of the Mediterranean (UfM). The UfM was inspired not solely through the revamping of the EMP, but was also influenced by a proposal on the part of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who envisioned a more institutionally integrated, formal union for the northern and southern Mediterranean countries. Sarkozy made his vision for an integrated Mediterranean Union clear during his acceptance speech after winning the 2007 presidential election:

I want to issue a call to all the people of the Mediterranean to tell them that it is in the Mediterranean that everything is going to be played out, that we have to overcome all kinds of hatred to pave the way for a great dream of peace and a great dream of civilization. I want to tell them that the time has come to build together a Mediterranean union that will form a link between Europe and Africa (“Nicolas Sarkozy: Victory Speech Excerpts” 2007).

The Union for the Mediterranean launched in 2008 and Sarkozy added “we had dreamt of it. The Union for the Mediterranean is now a reality” (Vucheva 2008).

Although initially facing skepticism from European leaders, namely German Chancellor Angela Merkel who warned of the development of “a Europe of private functions” (EurActiv 2012), the Union for the Mediterranean was created by the 42 Euro-Mediterranean Partners' Heads of State and Government on July 13, 2008 at a summit in Paris. The headquarters remained in Barcelona, as the UfM was meant to build upon the statutes and goals of the Barcelona Process and the EMP. According to the UfM, the representatives at the Paris Summit demonstrated the shared:

Conviction that this initiative can play an important role in addressing common challenges facing the Euro-Mediterranean region, such as economic and social development; world food security crisis; degradation of the environment, including climate change and desertification, with the view of promoting sustainable development; energy; migration; terrorism and extremism; as well as promoting dialogue between cultures (Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean 2008, 8).

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In March of 2008, the European Council approved the idea of a Union for the Mediterranean, agreeing to call it “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean” (Commission of the European Communities 2008). The UfM is seen as a way for the urgency of the common challenges that Europe and the Mediterranean face to be revisited and given greater political importance (Commission of the European Communities 2008).

The UfM expanded the states included in the Barcelona Process, and now includes 43 members, including all EU member states, as well as Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Israel, Mauritania, Albania, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, and the Palestinian territories. The UfM also added Monaco, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro to the partnership, noting that these states “have accepted the *acquis* of the Barcelona Process” (Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean 2008a, 8).

Rather than replacing the structure of the EMP, the UfM was meant to build upon the EMP, filling in any areas of weakness and leading to a further regimentation of the Mediterranean area (Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean 2008a). The introduction to the statutes clearly display this:

The participants at the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean on 13 July 2008 agreed that the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) will build on the Barcelona Declaration of 28 November 1995, promote its goals...and further reinforce the *acquis* of the Barcelona Process by upgrading their relations, incorporating more co-ownership in their multilateral cooperation framework, strengthening equal footing governance and translate it into concrete projects, thus delivering concrete benefits for the citizens of the region (Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean 2008b, 1).

The statutes also outlined the need to:

establish new institutional structures to contribute to achieving the political goals of the initiative *inter alia* through the setting up of a Secretariat with a key role within the institutional architecture of the UfM (Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean 2008b, 1).

The Secretariat allowed for a more formalized relationship between the EU and its Mediterranean partners by introducing a secretary general and deputy secretary general and focusing on increasing monitoring of projects funded and conducted by the UfM. Furthermore, the UfM came with a stated interest in “increasing regional integration and cohesion” (Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean 2008a, 8).

A decision was taken to establish bi-annual summits to “enhance the visibility of the Barcelona Process” (Gillespie 2008, 281). The new forum differed from the EMP, which used conferences of foreign ministers of each state to come to decisions regarding the partnership (Commission of the European Communities 2008; Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean 2008b). Thus, as the EU notes, this change was meant to provide more co-ownership to the multilateral relationships formed through the Barcelona Process (Commission of the European Communities 2008; Balfour 2009, 102). This shift is significant given the criticism that the EMP received for lacking a substantial movement towards political “partnership” between the EU and its southern neighbors.

## The Arab Spring and the Future of the EU–Mediterranean Relations

The wave of uprisings and revolutions across the Arab world post 2010 (popularly known as the Arab Spring) should not have caught anyone by surprise. The rampant inequality and political oppression in many countries across the MENA region, exacerbated by the demographic reality of populations whose citizens were largely both unemployed and under the age of 25, created a political and social tinderbox. Yet in the wake of the Arab Spring, we should ask what role the EU played in exacerbating, or at the very least failing to mitigate, the circumstances that created the momentum for the Arab Spring. Is it an indication that the Barcelona Process’s focus on creating incentives for economic, social, and political reform failed? Or does it constitute a missed opportunity for the EU in the region? Understandably, the EU’s involvement in formal partnerships in the region, and the expressed focus on political reform, human rights, and democracy for its MENA neighbors was misaligned with the reality of political oppression, “rigged” elections, and declining living standards across the region.

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One reality of the EU's relationship with its MENA neighbors is that the focus on economic issues has largely been on a state-to-state level. As a result, there is the fair perception that many of the EU's initiatives are Janus faced. In addition to the perceived failure to foresee the Arab Spring, there is also a question of how genuine and effective the EU's response to the Arab Spring was, or whether it was too little, too late (Etzioni 2011). In the years since the Arab Spring uprisings, many Arab populations across the region are still under dire political and economic constraints. There is an opportunity for a renewed cooperation and a recommitment to democracy and economic development in the region.

## Conclusion

What does the future hold for these strategic partnerships between the EU and the MENA region? In a region that is marred by political instability, it is hard to see where European policies towards MENA states go from here. The complications, both from within the EU and from the MENA states, make it difficult to see how these political, institutional instruments for encouraging stability can accomplish their stated goals.

In November of 2015, while marking the 20th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration, several foreign ministers from UfM countries renewed their commitment to the UfM and regional cooperation among the EU and MENA states. Yet while the members of the UfM are assuring their support of the EU's efforts in the region and the goal of coordinated cooperation, there are some concerning developments both within the EU and outside that will challenge the viability of the EU's policy and tools in the region.

Within the EU, the shockwave of the Brexit vote, as well as other waves of populist sentiment in France, Hungary, and beyond, cast doubt upon the ability of the EU to maintain a cohesive policy towards the region. While the sentiments that led to the Brexit vote went largely underestimated, they are not divorced from the external factors from the MENA region.

The regional instability created by the civil war in Syria and the refugees that the conflict has produced have created political questions within Europe about the EU's policies toward the MENA region. The refugees of the Syrian war put a massive burden on other countries in the region, like Jordan, and further disrupt European attempts to consolidation cooperation in the region. Similarly, recent developments in Turkey, including the contested results of the plebiscite that have allowed Turkish President Erdogan to consolidate his power, make it hard to imagine that just a few years ago Turkey was in active negotiations pursuing EU membership.

Despite numerous challenges and difficulties in the region, the EU remains committed to asserting its influence on the MENA region. Increasingly though, the EU's own security depends on what happens in its "sphere of influence." Nevertheless, many European member states have long and complex histories with MENA states. The success or failure of European policy in the area might depend on contemporary factors, but one thing remains clear: it is in the EU's best interest to have a safe and secure MENA region.

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