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*EU's role in the Middle East and North Africa:  
Pre and post Arab Spring*

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## *Introduction*

The Middle East has always been the part of the world with the most long-term conflicts. It is the anarchy and the insecurity that define the region that make it the centre of the world crisis.<sup>1</sup> The instability that characterizes the area has to do with the fact that the regional system is not consolidated yet as it is still very recent. Therefore the roots of the conflict should be traced in the historical construction of this regional system.<sup>2</sup> It was based on the model of the Westphalian states system, which is one that was imposed on the area and did not give the local people the opportunity to achieve their own solutions.<sup>3</sup> Due to the fact that the region is rich in petroleum, it has always attracted external interest. This led to the imposition of this specific regional system which turned the Middle East into a periphery of the western world system.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there was a misfit between the identity of the people and the sovereignty of the states. With the exception of Turkey, Iran and Israel, the core of the Middle East is composed of Arab countries which share the same identity; however, despite this identity that they have in common, this cultural unity, they are divided into multiple states with their own politics and economy. Therefore, in many cases the

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<sup>1</sup> Hinnebusch Raymond, (2003), *The International Politics of the Middle East*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.3

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.3

nationalist states claimed this sovereignty in order to turn against other states of the region.<sup>5</sup>

North Africa is usually examined along with the Middle East, as the two areas seem to share a lot in common. The term MENA (Middle East- North Africa) is often used and it covers the countries from northwest Africa to southwest Asia, in other words from Morocco to Iran. They share a boundary through the Sahara desert, which is an area of great importance for security interaction, they both have experienced decolonization and in addition to that, after they gained their independence, they were as well both characterized by pan-regional identity movements.<sup>6</sup> Despite these connections between them though, the issues of regional security followed different directions, as in the Middle East, as stated before, the system of the sovereign states was gradually established, characterized by state- interstate security dynamics, whereas the one in North Africa was defined by the interaction of states, regimes and movements.<sup>7</sup>

Till very recently Middle East and North Africa were dominated by authoritarian regimes and not democracies. The picture changed in late 2010 with the developments of what has since been referred to as 'Arab Spring'. It is important though to examine first the democratic deficit of the area, then unfold the events of the Arab Spring and last but not least analyze the part that the EU has played to it along with its policy towards its southern neighbors throughout the years.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.4

<sup>6</sup> Buzan, Barry et Woever Ole, (2003), *Regions and Powers: the structure of international security*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.185

<sup>7</sup> Buzan, Barry et Woever Ole, (2003), *Regions and Powers: the structure of international security*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.186

## *1. Democracy deficit-Authoritarian regimes*

As mentioned before, the regions of the Middle East and North Africa had presented so far reluctance to political reforms, which led to the predominance of authoritarian regimes. There are several factors which contributed to that and need to be assessed, as after 1972 the number of democracies in the rest of the world doubled, whereas in the region there was no improvement.<sup>8</sup>

To begin with, there was a lack of democratic prerequisites in the area. First of all, the region was characterized by large statist economies that did not leave space for private enterprises.<sup>9</sup> As most Middle Eastern and North African states became independent in the second half of the twentieth century, the new governments that were created had to face challenges and compete with the economic system of the world. Therefore this model was chosen and the economy remained mostly in the state's hands along with the major share of employment that could be found mostly in the public sector.<sup>10</sup> Second, the civil society could be characterized as weak and this did not give it the opportunity to pursue a democratic system. The labor units were not powerful and businessmen's associations were not autonomous, which did not allow a civic culture to develop.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the literacy rates are very low and the inequalities are significant. There is poverty in the region and 32% of adults are illiterate.<sup>12</sup> These facts did not allow a reform in the political system; the elites showed fear to promote a democratic reform and the masses did not turn this into their priority either.<sup>13</sup>

Another reason that prevented democratization, was the fact that the area is surrounded by non democratic states. They do not border geographically with states that use the democratic model successfully, thus there could be no demonstration of democracy.<sup>14</sup> What is more, the weak progress of democracy in the area could be attributed to the culture. According to Kedourie, 'the idea of

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<sup>8</sup> Bellin Eva, (2004), "The robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East: exceptionalism in comparative perspective", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 36, no 2, p. 140

<sup>9</sup> Fawcett Luise, (2005), *International Relations of the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.132

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.132

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.139

<sup>12</sup> Bellin Eva, (2004), "The robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East: exceptionalism in comparative perspective", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 36, no 2, p. 141

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 141

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 141

democracy is quite alien to the mind-set of Islam' <sup>15</sup>, which articulates the quite common belief that the Islamic religion is inhospitable to democracy. Some Muslims express hostility to the idea of democracy as they consider that the law is not made by the man but by God.<sup>16</sup> However this argument needs to be rethought as there are examples of Muslim countries that practice democracy, for instance Lebanon.

All the above cases explained why democratization did not occur in the region and instead there was prevalence of authoritarian regimes. However, all this lack of democratic prerequisites is not an adequate argument to clarify the reason why democracy had not been consolidated in the area. What is more important is the fact that there had not been in most Middle Eastern and North African states an initiation of a transition towards the direction of democratization.<sup>17</sup> The governments of the region were not only undemocratic; they were anti-democratic.<sup>18</sup> As stated before, the economy was statist which meant that the public sector was massive and the state was the leading employer.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, despite the fact that these regimes had in cases liberalized their economies, they did not allow autonomous political initiatives to do the same. The state, dominating the economy, was opposed to any democratic reform and any initiatives that were in favor of democracy.<sup>20</sup> However it is significant to mention that, even the public opinion was not entirely in opposition with these regimes. There were complaints about the corruption and the clientelism that characterized the regimes; however, as mentioned earlier, since the state was the leading employer in the region, many citizens had a stake in the state.<sup>21</sup> Therefore they were interested in improving the performance of the current state and did not want to destroy it.

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<sup>15</sup> Kedourie E.,(1992), *Democracy and Arab political culture*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington D.C.

<sup>16</sup> Fawcett Luise, (2005), *International Relations of the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, Oxford,p.134

<sup>17</sup> Bellin Eva, (2004), "The robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East: exceptionalism in comparative perspective", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 36, no 2, p. 142

<sup>18</sup> Fawcett Luise, (2005), *International Relations of the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, Oxford,p.132

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.138

<sup>20</sup> Bellin Eva, (2004), "The robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East: exceptionalism in comparative perspective", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 36, no 2, p. 142

<sup>21</sup> Fawcett Luise, (2005), *International Relations of the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, Oxford,p.138

## 2. Arab Spring-timeline of events

However the picture that we had with regards to the MENA region changed utterly on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2010, when Mohamed Bouzizi, a vegetable vendor, set himself on fire, as a protest against the existing system in Tunisia.<sup>22</sup> His self-immolation was regarded as a symbol of the fight against authoritarian regimes. It resulted in a number of anti-government riots and the subsequent ousting of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, who fled to Saudi Arabia.<sup>23</sup> In October 2011 elections were held and the winner was the moderate Islamic party Ennahda.<sup>24</sup> A spill over effect spread on the rest of the countries of the region. In Egypt, in February 2011, President Mubarak resigned and handed the power to the Armed Forces of Egypt. In late November 2011, democratic elections were held and eventually in June 2012, Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was elected as the new President, whereas Hosni Mubarak was sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>25</sup>

In Libya riots began in February 2011, in Benghazi, after the arrest of Fethi Tarbel, a human rights activist.<sup>26</sup> Three weeks later, on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2011, the Libyan rebels, the National Transitional Council (NTC), declared themselves as the de facto government of Libya.<sup>27</sup> On March 17<sup>th</sup>, the U.N. Security Council authorized a no-fly zone over Libya and air strikes started two days later in order to protect the civilians, who were attacked from Gaddafi's forces.<sup>28</sup> In October 2011 Gaddafi was captured and killed by NTC rebels, who declared the liberation of Libya.<sup>29</sup> In June 2012, Mohammed Magariaf of the liberal National Front Party, was elected as the President of the General National Congress and interim head

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<sup>22</sup> Pillar, P. R. (2011). 'Alienation and Rebellion in the Arab World'. *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 22, no 4, p.p. 8-19, Eltahawy, M. (2011, January 15). Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, *The Washington Post*, retrieved from [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

<sup>23</sup> Myre, G., (2012, January 02). Timeline: The Major Events Of The Arab Spring, *npr*, retrieved from [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)

<sup>24</sup> Masetti, O., Korner K., Forster, M., Friedman J., (2013), 'Two years of Arab Spring. Where are we now? What's next?', *Deutsche Bank DB Research*, p. 5, retrieved from [www.dbresearch.com](http://www.dbresearch.com)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.5

<sup>26</sup> Cutler, D., (2012, January 14), TIMELINE-Arab Spring: a year that shook the Arab world, *Reuters*, retrieved from [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com)

<sup>27</sup> Myre, G., (2012, January 02). Timeline: The Major Events Of The Arab Spring, *npr*, retrieved from [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)

<sup>28</sup> Cutler, D., (2012, January 14), TIMELINE-Arab Spring: a year that shook the Arab world, *Reuters*, retrieved from [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com)

Myre, G., (2012, January 02). Timeline: The Major Events Of The Arab Spring, *npr*, retrieved from [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)

<sup>29</sup> Masetti, O., Korner K., Forster, M., Friedman J., (2013), 'Two years of Arab Spring. Where are we now? What's next?', *Deutsche Bank DB Research*, p. 5, retrieved from [www.dbresearch.com](http://www.dbresearch.com)



of state.<sup>30</sup> In Syria protests began in March but soon escalated only to receive the very harsh response of the government. The clashes between the forces of the government and the demonstrators evolved into a civil war, which is ongoing up to this date.<sup>31</sup> The death toll is estimated to be 70,000, according to Navi Pillay, UN's high commissioner for human rights.<sup>32</sup>

In February 2011 protests took place also in Yemen, which resulted after a year in the resignation from power of the country's President, Ali Abdullah Saleh. Hadi, Saleh, former vice president, took charge as an interim president till the planned elections of 2014.<sup>33</sup> Smaller scale protest movements, which brought about governmental changes, occurred in a number of countries of the MENA region including Morocco, Algeria, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman.<sup>34</sup>

Nobody can predict with certainty the long-term outcome of the Arab Spring. It may take a significant amount of time before truly democratic governments will be established in the area. With regards to the European Union the question arises: should and will the EU be involved in the area's transition to democracy? Will it be a spectator or an actor in these developments that take place in its wider neighbourhood? The EU's stance on the Arab Spring and the criticism that it has received will be further examined. First though a reference should be made to the EU's role in the MENA region the previous years up to the most recent developments of the Arab Spring.

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<sup>30</sup> Masetti, O., Korner K., Forster, M., Friedman J., (2013), 'Two years of Arab Spring. Where are we now? What's next?', *Deutsche Bank DB Research*, p. 5, retrieved from [www.dbresearch.com](http://www.dbresearch.com)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.5

<sup>32</sup> Nichols, M., (2013, February 12). Syria death toll likely 70,000, says U.N. rights chief, *Reuters*, [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com)

<sup>33</sup> Masetti, O., Korner K., Forster, M., Friedman J., (2013), 'Two years of Arab Spring. Where are we now? What's next?', *Deutsche Bank DB Research*, p. 5, retrieved from [www.dbresearch.com](http://www.dbresearch.com)

<sup>34</sup> Koch, C., (2011). The Arab Spring is a real opportunity for Europe, *Europe's world*, retrieved from [www.europesworld.org](http://www.europesworld.org)

### *3. EU's role in MENA – EU Normative Power / CFSP Framework*

The political issues in the wider Mediterranean region have always had a special place in the agenda of external affairs of the European Union.<sup>35</sup> Especially the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East is a major issue that the EU has attempted to play a role in its resolution, as the peace in the area is considered vital for the relations of the European Union with its Mediterranean, non-EU neighbors. The conflict in the region prevents the EU from implementing the larger aims of stability, wealth and good governance that it wishes to provide.<sup>36</sup> The European Union realizes the significance that this issue has in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership that it desires to implement; thus the EU has aspired to become an actor in this conflict in order to achieve its initiative, which is a more active role in its neighborhood.

However the European Union is different from any other political entity there is, which 'predisposes it to act in a normative way'.<sup>37</sup> Its core values include peace, democracy, liberty, human rights, rule of law, equality, solidarity, sustainable development and good governance.<sup>38</sup> As Javier Solana, the High Representative of the EU's Common Foreign Security Policy from 1999 till 2009 has advocated, the European Union, apart from the norms that it desires to promote, acts as a normative power in the practices that it uses as well, in order to promote these norms, which is 'slowly and on a basis of partnership'.<sup>39</sup> It operates collectively and not on a state basis, desiring to reach a contact with its partners outside of its borders through principles that are applied universally.<sup>40</sup> Therefore the EU puts emphasis on this rhetoric that defines its foreign policy. The European Union is not a military power; on the contrary, it functions as a civilian one on the international stage. Since the European Union has promoted democracy in other

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<sup>35</sup> Monar, J., (1998), "Institutional Constraints of the European Union's Mediterranean Policy", *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 3, no 2, p.39

<sup>36</sup> Altunisik, M. B. (2008), "EU Foreign Policy and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: How much of an actor?", *European Security*, vol.17, no 1, p.105

<sup>37</sup> Manners Ian J., (2002), "Normative Power: A contradiction in terms?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol.40, no 2, p.242

<sup>38</sup> Manners Ian, J., (2006), "The constitutive values of images and principles in the European Union", in Lucarelli Sonia and Manners Ian, *Values and principles in European Union Foreign Policy*, Routledge, London.

<sup>39</sup> Manners Ian, J., (2008), "The normative ethics of the European Union", *International Affairs*, vol. 84, no 1, p.55.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.60.

regions of the world, it could not behave otherwise and not have the same policy in the Mediterranean agenda.<sup>41</sup>

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union has been a distinct pillar of the EU since the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992<sup>42</sup> and under the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty<sup>43</sup> the office of the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy was created. CFSP does not necessarily refer to a common policy of the member states; it advocates more the establishment of an institutionalized cooperation among the member states.<sup>44</sup> However under the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, this three pillar system (European Community- CFSP- Police and judicial cooperation) was abolished. In an attempt to achieve higher levels of coordination among the member states, regarding the foreign policy of the EU, Lisbon Treaty introduced the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which combined the posts of the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the one of the European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy.<sup>45</sup> In accordance with the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has limited military capabilities, as the member states hold the responsibility of the defense of their territory.<sup>46</sup> In addition, most member states of the European Union are members of NATO, which is responsible for the defense of Europe. NATO is responsible for peace-making, whereas the EU takes the responsibility for peacekeeping.

As mentioned earlier, with the Lisbon Treaty and the reinforcement of CFSP, the EU is given the chance to play a more effective role on the international scene and have a stronger impact, as the 27 member states speak with one voice. Examples of the EU's common foreign policies towards its southern neighbors are the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Neighborhood Policy.

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<sup>41</sup> Youngs, R., (2002), *The European Union and the promotion of Democracy: Europe's Mediterranean and Asian Policies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.59.

<sup>42</sup> EUR-Lex, *Treaty on the European Union*, retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/11992M/htm/11992M.html#0001000001>

<sup>43</sup> EUR-Lex, *Treaty of Amsterdam Amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and Related Acts*, retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/11997D/htm/11997D.html>

<sup>44</sup> Monar, J., (1998), "Institutional Constraints of the European Union's Mediterranean Policy", *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 3, no 2, p.45

<sup>45</sup> Council of the European Union (2007), *Treaty of Lisbon, Amending the Treaty on European Union and the treaty establishing the European Community*, retrieved from <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/cq00014.en07.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Council of the European Union (2007), *Treaty of Lisbon, Amending the Treaty on European Union and the treaty establishing the European Community*, retrieved from <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/cq00014.en07.pdf>

## 4. EU's Foreign Policies in the wider Mediterranean Region (EMP, ENP, UfM)

### 4.1 Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)

As the EU intended to strengthen its relations with the countries of its southern neighborhood, in November 1995 at the Barcelona Conference it introduced the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) or Barcelona Process.<sup>47</sup> The partnership was between the 15 at the time EU member states and Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Palestinian territories, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Cyprus and Malta, who joined the EU at a later point. The partnership represented the EU's desire to have a more comprehensive policy towards the broader Mediterranean region through multilateral trade and cooperation agreements.<sup>48</sup> It has been characterized as one of the most substantial external actions that have ever been adopted by the European Union.<sup>49</sup>

More precisely, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership refers to a more comprehensive and more institutionalized partnership. It can be divided into three areas of interest, the economic, the political and the social basket.<sup>50</sup> As far as the economic sector is concerned, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is characterized by trade liberalization and association agreements, strengthening of the private sector, removal of non-tariff barriers and sound macro-economic policies.<sup>51</sup> The political basket has to do with cooperation on security issues that would lead to the creation of a 'zone of peace and stability'.<sup>52</sup> The intention of the political part of this process is to promote the strengthening of a bilateral political dialogue.<sup>53</sup> The social part refers to the cooperation on cultural issues, the exchanges between the civil societies, which can be accomplished through education. In addition, the Barcelona Process fights racism and xenophobia and creates strategies that manage demographic change.<sup>54</sup> The goal of the cultural level of the Barcelona Process is to lead to a promotion of a mutual understanding

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<sup>47</sup> Barcelona Declaration, 28 November 1995, [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/bd\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/bd_en.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> Gomez R., (1998), "The Eu's Mediterranean Policy: Common Foreign Policy by the back door?", in Peterson J., and Sjursen H., eds, *A Common Foreign Policy for Europe?*, Routledge, London, p.133

<sup>49</sup> Monar, J., (1998), "Institutional Constraints of the European Union's Mediterranean Policy", *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 3, no 2, p.54

<sup>50</sup> Youngs, R., (2002), *The European Union and the promotion of Democracy: Europe's Mediterranean and Asian Policies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.55.

<sup>51</sup> Barcelona Declaration, 28 November 1995, [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/bd\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/bd_en.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> Youngs, R., (2002), *The European Union and the promotion of Democracy: Europe's Mediterranean and Asian Policies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.55.

<sup>53</sup> Hollis, R.,(1997), "Europe and the Middle East: Power by stealth?", *International Affairs*, vol.73, no 1, p.26

<sup>54</sup> Youngs, R., (2002), *The European Union and the promotion of Democracy: Europe's Mediterranean and Asian Policies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.55.

and knowledge of each other's culture.<sup>55</sup> This will result in a more efficient cooperation on cultural and scientific fields.

It is important to mention that EMP introduced a new agenda in the relations between the European Union and the Middle Eastern countries. The EU, functioning as a normative power, aimed through this process to a cooperation that for the first time would be based on the promotion of democracy and human rights.<sup>56</sup> Going beyond the frameworks that are normally used in an international cooperation, the European Union moved to the creation of a 'geopolitical sub-region' in the international system.<sup>57</sup> It desired to achieve the introduction of the discourse of democracy in the Euro-Mediterranean relations and it was interested in promoting the political pluralism as the norm that should govern the relations of the western Europe with the Arab world.<sup>58</sup>

However the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was a very ambitious initiative that did not manage to live up to the expectations; by 2005 it was considered a failure, as it did not achieve the goals it aimed for.<sup>59</sup> Structure wise, the EMP did not take into consideration the fact that the EU was already a political and economic union, its southern neighbors though were not. Therefore what was intended to be a partnership between two blocs of states, ended up as a partnership between the EU and each Mediterranean Partner Country individually, with the EU leading the way.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, the Mediterranean Partner Countries did not form a common market of their own and were dependent only on the EU market.<sup>61</sup> In general EMP was a partnership that benefitted more the EU than the Mediterranean Partner Countries. On the other hand, a success of the EU regarding EMP should be mentioned: the EU managed to convince Israel and its Arab neighbours to join the same initiative.<sup>62</sup> It is a success for the European

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<sup>55</sup> Hollis, R.,(1997), "Europe and the Middle East: Power by stealth?", *International Affairs*, vol.73, no 1, p.26

<sup>56</sup> Youngs, R., (2002), *The European Union and the promotion of Democracy: Europe's Mediterranean and Asian Policies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.55-56.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.56.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.56.

<sup>59</sup> Del Sarto, R.A. and Schumacher, T. (2005), "From EMP to ENP: 'What's at stake with the European Neighbourhood Policy towards the Southern Mediterranean?", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol.10, p.p 17-38.

<sup>60</sup> Hollis, R.,(2012), "No friend of democratization: Europe's role in the genesis of the Arab Spring", *International Affairs*, vol. 88, no1, p.83.

<sup>61</sup> Hollis, R.,(2012), "No friend of democratization: Europe's role in the genesis of the Arab Spring", *International Affairs*, vol. 88, no1, p.83.

<sup>62</sup> Philippart, E., (2003), "The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: A Critical Evaluation of an Ambitious Scheme", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol. 8, no 2, p.216.

diplomacy that it is the only forum, where Israel and the Arab countries can discuss their problems.<sup>63</sup>

## 4.2 European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

In 2003-2004 the EU decided to enhance the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership through the introduction of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), a foreign relations instrument of the EU to promote security and prosperity.<sup>64</sup> Whereas the goals of ENP are similar to the ones of EMP, what differs is that ENP decreases the multilateral partnership and it gives way to a unilateral, EU- centric policy making.<sup>65</sup> ENP focuses more on the bilateral relations of the EU with each country. Integral part of ENP is the Action Plans; these are association agreements between the EU and each ENP partner that set the framework of the reforms that need to be made in the political and economic sphere.<sup>66</sup> ENP is "built upon a mutual commitment to common values (democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development)" and "it offers political association and deeper economic integration, increased mobility and more people-to-people contacts".<sup>67</sup>

The European Neighbourhood Policy has been criticised for many reasons, mainly though for promoting the European interests instead of the European values, the economic cooperation instead of the support for democracy and human rights and the fact that ENP serves mostly the interests of the EU and not the ones of its partner countries.<sup>68</sup>

## 4.3 Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)

In July 2008 with the initiative of French President Nicholas Sarkozy, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was re-launched under the name Union for the

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<sup>63</sup> Xenakis, D., and Chrysochoou D., (2001), *The emerging Euro-Mediterranean System*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p.74

<sup>64</sup> Commission of the European Communities (2004), *Communication from the Commission: European Neighborhood Policy, Strategy Paper*, retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/strategy/strategy\\_paper\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/strategy/strategy_paper_en.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> Wouters, J., and Duquet, S., (2013), "The Arab uprisings and the European Union: in search of a comprehensive strategy", *Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies*, working paper no.98, p.7

<sup>66</sup> Commission of the European Communities (2004), *Communication from the Commission: European Neighborhood Policy, Strategy Paper*, retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/strategy/strategy\\_paper\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/strategy/strategy_paper_en.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> Commission of the European Communities (2004), *Communication from the Commission: European Neighborhood Policy, Strategy Paper*, retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/strategy/strategy\\_paper\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/strategy/strategy_paper_en.pdf)

<sup>68</sup> Del Sarto, R.A. and Schumacher, T. (2005), "From EMP to ENP: 'What's at stake with the European Neighbourhood Policy towards the Southern Mediterranean?", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol.10, p.p 17-38.

Mediterranean (UfM). UfM is practically the southern regional cooperation branch of ENP and it aims at economic integration and democratic reform of the countries in the southern neighbourhood of the EU, namely the EU's partner countries in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>69</sup> UfM, introduces a number of joint projects in the areas of economy, infrastructure, environment, energy, health, migration and culture in the benefit of the people living in the area.<sup>70</sup> UfM is based on EMP, it introduced through the joint presidency of an EU member state and an Arab state along with the formation of a secretariat in Barcelona<sup>71</sup>, achieving this way an intergovernmental profile, higher than the one EMP had. UfM, the new phase of EMP, even through the introduction of new institutions, in order to achieve greater prosperity and security in the Mediterranean region, did not avoid criticism mainly for its lack of strategic objectives.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> European Union External Action Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED) Retrieved 10-04-2010, from [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index_en.htm)

<sup>70</sup> Hollis, R.,(2012), "No friend of democratization: Europe's role in the genesis of the Arab Spring", *International Affairs*, vol. 88, no1, p.88.

<sup>71</sup> European Union External Action Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED) Retrieved 10-04-2010, from [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index_en.htm)

<sup>72</sup> Henry, J-R., (2012) "Sarkozy, the Mediterranean and the Arab Spring", *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, vol.16, no 3, p.411.

## 5. EU's response to Arab Spring

The EU, watching the transformation of the Arab world, responded to the challenges that the Arab Spring posed by reviewing the already existent ENP. On March 8th 2011, the European Commission together with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, proposed a joint communication named: 'A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean'.<sup>73</sup> This communication was further enhanced on May 25<sup>th</sup> 2011, with 'a new response to a changing Neighbourhood'.<sup>74</sup> The EU through these communications announced its intention of supporting the changes that Arab Spring brought with it, as they are in line with the values and principles that the EU treasures. The EU opted to take an active role despite the implications and difficulties that are involved in the transition from authoritarian regimes to democracy in the Arab World. According to the joint communication, the consequences of the developments in the MENA region will affect the EU as well, who is committed to offer its support to the countries in its southern neighbourhood, depending on the reforms that they are willing to undertake.<sup>75</sup> The EU is based on the values of democracy, human rights, rule of law, good governance, social justice<sup>76</sup> and it has traditionally helped countries move from autocracy to democracy. The EU is ready to offer its assistance and knowledge to the Arab countries now in transition, according to the progress that will be made on the abovementioned areas.

More specifically, according to the joint communication, the "Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity" should be based on three basic elements: "1. democratic transformation and institution-building, with a particular focus on fundamental freedoms, constitutional reforms, reform of the judiciary and the fight against corruption, 2. a stronger partnership with the people, with specific

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<sup>73</sup> European Commission, & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. (2011a). *A partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean*, Joint communication to the European Council, the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, retrieved from [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011\\_200\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> European Commission, & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. (2011b). *A new response to a changing Neighbourhood*, Joint communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com\\_11\\_303\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com_11_303_en.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> European Commission, & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. (2011a). *A partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean*, Joint communication to the European Council, the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, retrieved from [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011\\_200\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf)

<sup>76</sup> Manners Ian, J., (2006), "The constitutive values of images and principles in the European Union", in Lucarelli Sonia and Manners Ian, *Values and principles in European Union Foreign Policy*, Routledge, London.



*emphasis on support to civil society and on enhanced opportunities for exchanges and people-to-people contacts with a particular focus on the young, 3. sustainable and inclusive growth and economic development especially support to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), vocational and educational training, improving health and education systems and development of the poorer regions.*<sup>77</sup>

In order for these goals to be achieved the EU has decided to adjust the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)<sup>78</sup> to the new reality and adopt the “more for more” approach, which involves greater support from the EU for the countries that implement the reforms faster.<sup>79</sup> These countries will be entitled to “advanced status”, which will lead to the increase of political dialogue with the European Institutions. The EU puts as well particular emphasis on the role of the civil society, as non-government organizations (NGO’s) and civil society organizations (CSOs) can contribute to the acceleration of the reforms needed.<sup>80</sup> Mobility partnerships will also be launched in order to secure that the movement of people will be well managed.<sup>81</sup> In order to reenergise the economy and create jobs, the EU is willing to support the small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) through funding coming from the European Investment Bank (EIB) or the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).<sup>82</sup> In addition, trade and investment will be enhanced and the role of education will be emphasized. The EU will also advance its partnership with its southern neighbours in the areas of tourism, transport and electronic communications technologies and most importantly the EU would like to establish an EU-South Mediterranean energy community.<sup>83</sup> Last but not least under the new “Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity”

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<sup>77</sup> European Commission, & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. (2011a). *A partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean*, Joint communication to the European Council, the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, retrieved from [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011\\_200\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> European Commission, & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. (2011b). *A new response to a changing Neighbourhood*, Joint communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com\\_11\\_303\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com_11_303_en.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> European Commission, & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. (2011a). *A partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean*, Joint communication to the European Council, the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, retrieved from [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011\\_200\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> Ibid [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011\\_200\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf)

<sup>81</sup> Ibid [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011\\_200\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> European Commission, & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. (2011b). *A new response to a changing Neighbourhood*, Joint communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com\\_11\\_303\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com_11_303_en.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> European Commission, & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. (2011a). *A partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean*, Joint communication to the European Council, the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, retrieved from [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011\\_200\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf)

the EU is willing to increase the financial assistance it provides to the area; till the end of 2013, EUR 4 billion are expected to be made available to the countries in the Southern Mediterranean region.<sup>84</sup>

In September 2011 the EU adopted the SPRING (Support to Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth) Programme, a complementary programme to the renewed policies introduced by the joint communications of March and May 2011.<sup>85</sup> The goal of this programme was to provide support, according to the needs of each country and assist them on their transition to democracy and the challenges they face on the social and economic sphere.<sup>86</sup> The support offered was subject to the progress of each country, in accordance to the aforementioned “more for more” approach.<sup>87</sup> The programme of total worth of €350 million, applied to all southern neighbourhood partners, the first countries though that benefitted from it were Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan.<sup>88</sup>

As it can be observed, the European Union wishes to play an active role in the transition to democracy of its southern neighbours. It is willing to do so by enhancing the already existing partnerships and suggesting a number of ways to help smooth the reforms needed. It should be mentioned though that the EU does not seek to impose its own opinion through the new partnership that it has suggested; on the contrary, the EU only wishes to express its intention of providing assistance and knowledge. This can be proven by the EU’s “more for more” proposal, which allows the southern Mediterranean countries to decide the degree to which the EU will be involved.

## **5.1 Criticisms of EU’s response to the Arab Spring**

EU’s stance on the developments of the Arab Spring was not received without criticism. Some critics argue that although the EU was offered an opportunity to play a more active role in the greater region, it opted not to take it. According to Schumacher, even though the EU supposedly upgraded its foreign policy system with the implementation of Lisbon Treaty, it did not live up to the expectations

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011\\_200\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> ENPI info centre, EU response to the Arab Spring: new package of support for North Africa and Middle East, 27/09/2011, retrieved from [http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=26482&id\\_type=1&lang\\_id=450](http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=26482&id_type=1&lang_id=450)

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, [http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=26482&id\\_type=1&lang\\_id=450](http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=26482&id_type=1&lang_id=450)

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, [http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=26482&id\\_type=1&lang\\_id=450](http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=26482&id_type=1&lang_id=450)

<sup>88</sup> Ibid [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011\\_200\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf)

and it was characterized by an "incoherent mix of activism and passivism".<sup>89</sup> EU's response to the developments in the Maghreb and Mashreq countries revealed once again the intra - EU divisions and made clear the lack of unity there is among the governments of the different EU member states.<sup>90</sup> It could be argued that although in theory the EU wishes to have a more active role in the area, in practice it was proven that it feels more comfortable with the role of the spectator, as its foreign policy system is quite complicated.

The constraints of the EU's foreign policy system were made clearer through the case of the Libyan crisis. The EU proved to be incoherent in its response and it did not manage to speak with one voice. The reason is that the member states have different geopolitical interests and they remain sovereign in their international relations. Despite the fact that the member states were enthusiastic about the upgrade of the Common Foreign and Security policy that was introduced with the Lisbon Treaty, they were not in practice willing to sacrifice any of their sovereignty in favor of a stronger European Union. In the specific case of Libya, France and the United Kingdom took the initiative for the use of force, as part of a NATO-led intervention against Gaddafi's armed forces, whereas Germany was reluctant to align with its partners. France and the UK, since they have the military means to do so, led the way in order to protect civilians and believed that they acted on behalf of the EU; however the rest of the EU member states did not perceive their action as such, felt sidelined and that the common foreign policy was not promoted.<sup>91</sup> Germany's "wait and see" approach did not help either; Germany decided to abstain at the UN security Council on the issue of the use of force against Libya, which only made matters worse, as the EU was perceived once again as divided and powerless.<sup>92</sup> The statement of French foreign minister, Alain Juppe, "the common security and defence policy of Europe? It is dead", certainly did not help the image of the EU either.<sup>93</sup> As a result of the incoherence among the member states, the idea of an intervention under the framework of

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<sup>89</sup> Schuhmacher, T., (2011), "The EU and the Arab Spring: between Spectatorship and Actorness", *Insight Turkey*, vol. 13, no 3, p.117.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p.117.

<sup>91</sup> Dassu, M., (2011, March 31). Paris and London torpedo EU foreign policy, *La Stampa*, retrieved from [www.lastampa.it](http://www.lastampa.it)

<sup>92</sup> Vernet, D., (2011, March 19). La crise libyenne a detruit la diplomatie europeenne, *Slate*, retrieved from [www.slate.fr](http://www.slate.fr)

<sup>93</sup> Juppe A., (2011, March), [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr)

the Common Foreign Defence Policy was not given a serious thought.<sup>94</sup> The European Union Military Operation in Libya (EUFOR Libya) was never activated.

On the same note, it was argued that the EU presented itself as "divided and unable to take the initiative"<sup>95</sup>, as it waited long enough before it responded to the Arab Spring developments. The EU leaders were described as "amateurs", as they assumed that Gaddafi would be ousted from the government as easily as Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt.<sup>96</sup> British historian Timothy Garton Ash, argues as well that the EU should have a strong presence in the MENA region after the Arab Spring developments, as the latest incidents in the EU's southern neighbourhood can affect the future of Europe as well. He claims that the EU has the capacity to do this due to the instruments it has and the economic and cultural ties that bond it with the countries of the area. He remains sceptic though arguing that the EU "needs speed, flexibility, boldness, imagination – none of them qualities with which this slow-moving multinational club is traditionally associated".<sup>97</sup> Others argue that the EU's economic engagement with the southern Mediterranean could be replaced with some stronger political engagement, as the economic crisis in the EU would require for the European Union to make use of other assets, like political, diplomatic and military assets.<sup>98</sup>

On the other hand others argued in favour of less EU involvement in the area. It was said that the countries of the MENA region fought for their self-determination; therefore the West should have as less as possible to do with it and not intervene.<sup>99</sup> Jenkins compares the current situation with the west's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, where only "insecurity and chaos" were caused; consequently he argues that the EU should stay out of the region as "this is not our continent, these are not our countries and none of this is our business. We should leave them alone."<sup>100</sup> On the same note it could also be argued that the EU could be accused of taking advantage of the current situation and trying to impose its own will in the area and be subsequently accused of attempting a new era of colonialism.

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<sup>94</sup> Menon, A., (2011), "European Defence Policy from Lisbon to Libya", *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, vol. 53, no 3, p.75

<sup>95</sup> Accardo, G.P., (2011, March 14). Coping with Gaddafi's return. *Presseurop*. Retrieved from [www.presseurop.eu](http://www.presseurop.eu)

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Garton Ash, T., (2011, February 2). If this is young Arabs' 1989, Europe must be ready with a bold response. *The Guardian*, retrieved from [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

<sup>98</sup> Witney, N., (2012, September 24). Europe has role to play in Arab Spring, *CNN*, retrieved from [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com)

<sup>99</sup> Jenkins, S., (2011, February 1). The west's itch to meddle is no help. *The Guardian*, retrieved from [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

## 5.2 The case of Syria

As mentioned earlier, the protests in Syria in March 2011 developed into a civil war, which has been ongoing ever since. Faced with the atrocities of the Assad regime, the EU has opted not to intervene militarily, as it did in Libya, but to attempt to provide a political solution.<sup>101</sup> According to the most recent announcement of the EU, a number of restrictive measures have been implemented since May 2011, in order to prevent further repression of anti-government protests and violation of human rights by the Syrian government.<sup>102</sup> More specifically the EU has placed an embargo on arms sales as well as on any equipment that has the potential to be used for internal repression.<sup>103</sup> The EU only provides non-lethal military aid along with occasional technical assistance. It is believed that the United Kingdom and France will provide military consultants, that's not the case though for Germany.<sup>104</sup> The EU has offered EUR 428 million in humanitarian aid to Syria, which makes it the largest donor for the crisis.<sup>105</sup>

The EU has also put a ban on crude oil and petroleum products coming from Syria and will not provide any technological knowledge or equipment to the oil and gas industry. In addition the EU will prohibit investment in oil companies or companies that construct new power plants to provide electricity.<sup>106</sup> The EU has announced as well a travel ban and an asset freeze for those involved or associated with the violent repressions of the civilians.<sup>107</sup> All bilateral co operations and loans have also been suspended.<sup>108</sup>

The EU has been criticised for being silent, when it comes to the Syrian civil war. Some have argued that the EU has demonstrated complete apathy to the fight of the anti-government protesters for democracy, when the EU itself has always advocated the promotion of democracy.<sup>109</sup> For some the EU is to be blamed for

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<sup>101</sup> Council of the European Union (2013a), *Conclusions of the EU Foreign Affairs Council*, retrieved from [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/136004.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/136004.pdf)

<sup>102</sup> Council of the European Union (2013b), *Factsheet-The European Union and Syria*, retrieved from [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf)

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf)

<sup>104</sup> Spiegel, (2013, March 04). Western Aid: EU May Provide Training to Syrian Rebels, retrieved from <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/the-eu-is-set-to-support-syrian-rebels-with-military-training-a-886794.html>

<sup>105</sup> Council of the European Union (2013b), *Factsheet-The European Union and Syria*, retrieved from [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf)

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf)

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf)

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/128379.pdf)

<sup>109</sup> Riccardi, A., (2011, August 02). Your silence is killing us. *Corriere della Sera*, retrieved from <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/827221-your-silence-killing-us>

not having done anything in time in order to prevent the massacre.<sup>110</sup> The EU has been accused of not taking military action, like it did in Libya, and of contributing to the continuation of violence.<sup>111</sup> According to Kedar “the civilized world cannot and should not tolerate such a blood-thirsty dictator, and should do whatever it can in order to get rid of him and free his poor people from his yoke”.<sup>112</sup> However there are various reasons that prevented the EU from responding militarily to the Syrian crisis.

To begin with the EU would not be able to conduct a military intervention in Syria as it lacks the resources for such an operation.<sup>113</sup> Most EU member states do not have the military capacity to be involved in such a task. In addition, for the past few years the EU has been experiencing a deep economic crisis that does not allow it to cut funds from healthcare or education and divert them to defence.<sup>114</sup> Most importantly the EU cannot intervene in Syria, as the risks are too high and many external powers are involved. Russia and Iran support the Arab regime, whereas Saudi Arabia and Qatar are reported to be funding the rebels.<sup>115</sup> The EU has every right to be cautious regarding an intervention in Syria, as the situation might get out of hand and result in massive casualties on the EU’s side. There are many security concerns involved in the Syrian case, as Russia, China, Brazil, India and South Africa are against an intervention, which has played a role in the EU’s resort to solutions other than the military one.<sup>116</sup>

What is more, Syria, unlike Libya has a real army and air force,<sup>117</sup> therefore it is not that simple for the EU to intervene, as the losses may be uncountable. Another factor that should be taken into serious consideration is the lack of cohesion that the Syrian opposition is characterized by. Possibly a reason that the

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<sup>110</sup> Morvay, P., (2011, May 12). Syria-EU: Carte blanche for Assad, *SME*, retrieved from <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/650001-carte-blanche-assad>

<sup>111</sup> Salomons, D., (2012, November 21) in Great Debate: Intervention in Syria, *The Morningside Post*, retrieved from [www.themorningsidepost.com/2012/11/21/great-debate-intervention-in-syria](http://www.themorningsidepost.com/2012/11/21/great-debate-intervention-in-syria)

<sup>112</sup> Kedar, M., (2012, November 21) in Great Debate: Intervention in Syria, *The Morningside Post*, retrieved from [www.themorningsidepost.com/2012/11/21/great-debate-intervention-in-syria](http://www.themorningsidepost.com/2012/11/21/great-debate-intervention-in-syria)

<sup>113</sup> Guetta, B., (2011 June 15). Ce que l’Europe decouvre en Libye, *Liberation*, retrieved from [www.liberation.fr](http://www.liberation.fr)  
Morvay, P., (2011, May 12). Syria-EU: Carte blanche for Assad, *SME*, retrieved from <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/650001-carte-blanche-assad>

<sup>114</sup> Guetta, B., (2011 June 15). Ce que l’Europe decouvre en Libye, *Liberation*, retrieved from [www.liberation.fr](http://www.liberation.fr)  
Doyle, C., (2011, June 14). Why foreign intervention is not welcome in Syria, *The guardian*, retrieved from [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

<sup>115</sup> Garton Ash, T., (2012, June 13). The road to Damascus may well run through Moscow, *The Guardian*, retrieved from [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

<sup>116</sup> Gowan, R., (2012, January 26). The EU and Syria: everything but force? *Institut d’etudes de securite Union Europeenne*, retrieved from <http://www.iss.europa.eu/fr/publications/detail-page/article/the-eu-and-syria-everything-but-force/>

<sup>117</sup> Ottaway, M., (2012, November 21) in Great Debate: Intervention in Syria, *The Morningside Post*, retrieved from [www.themorningsidepost.com/2012/11/21/great-debate-intervention-in-syria](http://www.themorningsidepost.com/2012/11/21/great-debate-intervention-in-syria)

international community did not decide to take military action in Syria is the fact that the opposition cannot provide a valid alternative to the Assad regime, as the opposition is comprised of different groups, which have no unity with each other.<sup>118</sup> Even the geostrategic location of the country could make a possible intervention even more complex and result in incalculable consequences.<sup>119</sup>

For the time being the EU has decided not to lift the embargo and arm the rebels, which according to the statement of Germany's Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle at a briefing in London on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2013, "was wise and right".<sup>120</sup> According to him the support to the opposition should be "in a reasonable way". On the other hand, William Hague, British Foreign secretary did not exclude the possibility of future arming of the anti-government fighters in case a political solution does not go through.<sup>121</sup>

The outcome of the civil war in Syria cannot be predicted. However, what could be argued with some certainty is that most likely the solution to the conflict will come through "political and military dynamics on the ground and not international diplomacy".<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Lund, A., (2012) "Divided they stand: an overview of Syria's political opposition factions", *Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)*.

<sup>119</sup> Morvay, P., (2011, May 12). Syria-EU: Carte blanche for Assad, *SME*, retrieved from <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/650001-carte-blanche-assad>

<sup>120</sup> Abbas, M., (2013, March 07), Germany says EU right not to arm Syria rebels, risks too high. *Reuters*, retrieved from [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com)

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com)

<sup>122</sup> Stepanova, E., (2012), "The Syrian Civil War: Transition without Intervention?", *PONARS Eurasia*, Policy Memo No. 228.

## Conclusion

In late 2010, starting from Tunisia, demands for democratization and political reform spread as a domino effect throughout the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. These demands resulted in the complete transformation of the Arab world and they altered as well its relations with the EU.

The EU's discourse has always included the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights. Therefore on the international scene the EU has been defined as a normative power that seeks to promote its values beyond its own member states. Even before the most recent developments of the Arab Spring, the EU advocated that these values are the drive for its relations with non EU countries.<sup>123</sup>

However one could easily observe that there is a gap between rhetoric and practice. Although in theory the EU supported the democratic reform in the Arab world, in practice it collaborated with the authoritarian regimes till recently in power, as "the need for stability and security overshadowed the principal of democratic reform".<sup>124</sup> Even Stefan Füle, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, confirmed that "*Europe was not vocal enough in defending human rights and local democratic forces in the region. Too many of us fell prey to the assumption that authoritarian regimes were a guarantee of stability in the region. This was not even Realpolitik. It was, at best, short-termism – and the kind of short-termism that makes the long-term ever more difficult to build.*"<sup>125</sup>

Therefore it could be argued that the Arab Spring, among others, revealed the weaknesses of the EU's foreign policy; EU's rhetoric and contradictory actions prevented it from having any role in the shaping of the uprisings in the Arab world;<sup>126</sup> The Arab Spring indicated as well that the EU could not speak with one voice to all these developments in its wider neighbourhood. The EU appeared to be divided on an important issue for its own security, which resulted in the loss of

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<sup>123</sup> Peters J., (2012), *The European Union and the Arab Spring: promoting democracy and human rights in the Middle East*, Lexington Books, Plymouth.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid

<sup>125</sup> Füle Štefan, "Speech on the recent events in North Africa", Speech/11/130, Brussels: 28/02/2011, retrieved from [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-11-130\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-11-130_en.htm)

<sup>126</sup> El Molla N.K. and Dario Cristiani, (2013) 'The Arab Spring and the EU Democracy Promotion Efforts: between intentions and perceptions', *European University Institute*, 14<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Research meeting.



its credibility and proved it not to be ready to play a more effective role in the area.

At the same time though, the Arab Spring has provided the EU with an opportunity to “promote liberal values and maintain regional stability”.<sup>127</sup> The EU has already adopted initiatives in order to support the ongoing reforms as they are in line with EU’s rhetoric. Only time will tell though, whether the EU is serious about taking this chance, provided by the Arab Spring, and prove that it has both the capacity and the will to play a more active role in the MENA region.

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<sup>127</sup> Koch, C., (2011). The Arab Spring is a real opportunity for Europe, *Europe’s world*, retrieved from [www.europesworld.org](http://www.europesworld.org)

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