



**Values Promotion and Security Management
in Euro-Mediterranean Relations:
'Making Democracy Work' or 'Good-Enough
Governance'?**

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ABSTRACT

EU policy towards the southern Mediterranean remains painfully fragmented across different lines: member state initiatives vs. EU initiatives; bilateral EU policies vs. multilateral frameworks. Underpinning these tensions is an ongoing ‘securitization’ of the Mediterranean debate which centres on threats emanating from the South, including Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and immigration – or on challenges such as energy. On the other hand, the stated European goal in the region remains the advancement of EU norms and values – to be attained primarily through governance reforms aimed at improving the rule of law. This article will exemplify these discourses by focusing on the case of Italy’s Mediterranean policy. In conclusion it sets out two competing scenarios for the future development of Euro-Mediterranean discourse: one based in normative logic termed ‘making democracy work’; the other rooted in security logic and termed ‘good enough governance’.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE INVOLUTION OF THE EU'S MEDITERRANEAN POLICY

Ever since the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) was launched, the policy of the European Union (EU) towards the Mediterranean region has been fraught with political and conceptual contradictions, inconsistencies and ambiguities. At the time of its inception in 1995 the 'Barcelona process' (as the EMP is also known) was construed as a clear, ambitious strategy. The initiative was regarded as key to the EU's ambition to encourage economic and social development and promote universal human rights. The main lesson learned by the EU from its own past – that of reconciliation on the basis of economic and political integration – was introduced as a liberal-democratic peace experience that could serve as an example for the relationship between the EU and countries in its periphery. For the first time democracy promotion was mentioned as a priority in relation to the Mediterranean. The EMP was presented by policy makers and analysts alike as a tool for constructing a comprehensive Mediterranean region of stability, prosperity and peace.

The near unanimous consensus today is that the EMP has not lived up to these original expectations. External events are often adduced as the main reasons why the implementation of the Partnership has failed: the gradual demise of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, as well as the challenges presented by the EU's eastern enlargement feature top of the list when explaining the underperformance of the Barcelona process (Del Sarto and Schumacher, 2005). At the same time scholarly and political attention has been directed towards the resilience of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes

in North Africa; towards their suspicion of the motives behind EU demands as well as the not-too-remote past of European colonization and exploitation as important factors hindering the construction of a cooperative environment between the two sides of the Mediterranean.

The EU and its southern member states in particular have, especially since the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, been concerned by the rise of terrorism and Islamist extremism (Gillespie and Youngs, 2002). Illegal immigration – always a thorn in the side of the Euro-Mediterranean relations – has gradually become tied more directly to an overall perception of threat stemming from the southern Mediterranean. The EU has downgraded its democracy promotion rhetoric and has instead supported some of the regimes in North Africa and the Middle East as the best alternative to a takeover of these countries by Islamic fundamentalists.

The launching of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 was initially heralded as an important contribution to address these deficiencies. It embodied the ambition, clearly stated in the 2003 European Security Strategy, to “promote a ring of well-governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations”. The ENP aims at offering enhanced forms of cooperation between the EU and its neighbours, based on a demonstrated willingness by partner countries to enact reforms based on the *acquis communautaire*, the EU's accumulated body of rules, in exchange for substantial economic and political incentives short of EU membership. As German analyst Barbara Lippert puts it, the ENP reflected “an ordering principle for structuring the neighbourhood in accordance with the principles, values and procedures on which

the EU is based and for which it enters into international relations” (Lippert, 2008: 6).

However, and in the Mediterranean in particular, the implementation of the ENP has become clear evidence of a profound shift which the EU approach to the Mediterranean has undergone. The ENP has replaced the “idea of an encompassing Euro-Mediterranean region” (Del Sarto and Schumacher, 2005: 22) with the logic of differentiated bilateralism. In so doing, according to Federica Bicchì, “the daily practices of promotion of democracy have been more modest than EU discourse on the export of democracy” (Bicchì, 2009: 75). Esther Barbé and Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués, for their part, argue that the EU has effectively resigned itself to being “a modest ‘force of good’ ” (Barbé and Johansson-Nogués, 2008) in the region. The move from the ambitious rhetoric of the Barcelona process to the patchy implementation of the ENP has also been indirectly underlined by the launching of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008. In the words of Kristina Kausch and Richard Youngs, all these developments bear witness to ‘the end of the Euro-Mediterranean vision’ (Kausch and Youngs, 2009).

According to several scholars (Jünemann, 2004; Youngs, 2004; Holm, 2004; Hyde-Price, 2004; Haddadi, 2004; Cavatorta and Durac, 2010: 7), at the heart of this disappointing record is an enduring, and in some respects irresolvable, conceptual tension. This tension pits a value-driven EU approach at the heart of which lies the promotion of liberal democracy against a security-driven policy on illegal immigration, organized crime and militant Islamism. This tension is rooted in two mutually exclusive logics. On the one hand is the self-representation of the EU as a normative and even ‘ethical’ power in world affairs (Aggestam, 2008), where the spreading of

norms is not regarded as concerning a quest for power in the traditional sense of the word (Manners, 2002). On the other hand there is a conceptualization of security relationships whereby security becomes characterized by power relations between the EU and ‘the outsiders’ (Smith, 2005). As a result, “the EU is engaged in a paradoxical practice, where it simultaneously (re-)produces two conflicting security discourses: a *liberal discourse* and a *cooperative security* discourse” (Malmvig, 2007: 86; see also Holm, 2004). As Bilgin summarizes: “the literature on the EU’s Mediterranean policy concurs on one thing: the centrality of the tension between security and democracy to the EMP and ENP” (Bilgin, 2009: 2).

This article sets out to unfold this tension between the competing value-driven and security-driven logics of EU discourse. In doing so it places a particular emphasis on the interplay between the EU’s multilateral frameworks and bilateral relations between EU and the southern Mediterranean, and presents the case of Italy’s Mediterranean policy to corroborate this argument. The article concludes with a short discussion on the future of Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. In accordance with the two logics outlined in the analysis, it sketches out two competing scenarios for Euro-Mediterranean discourse. One, following the normative logic, is termed ‘making democracy work’; the other, following the security logic, is termed ‘good enough governance’.

2. THE CONCEPTUAL BACKDROP: TWO EUROPEAN DISCOURSES ON THE MEDITERRANEAN

In this section, we will approach the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue as a discursive practice in the Foucauldian sense. A central fea-

ture of discursive practice is not to make a division between discourse and speech on the one hand and perceptions and thought on the other: Discourse analysis addresses discourse in the above sense and does not take a cognitive approach.

Discourse analysis consists of the study of statements which exist as events, constantly enunciating conceptual relations and strategies: “these relations consist of an ensemble of differential positions ... which constitute a configuration ... a differential and structural system of positions” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 106, 108). While thus being regarded as a structural unit, discourse is never totally closed because its elements are not fixed in stable relations. Discourse analysis is therefore a political analysis of how contingent relations become fixed in one specific way out of various possibilities.

In this sense, discourses are ‘producers of meaning’ because they possess a ‘deep structure’ which is difficult to change (Foucault, 1972). They tell stories about who we are, where we are heading, or – in our case – who our neighbours are and how we ought to conduct policies. New stories can be told, but if they question existing constructions of meaning, they will encounter difficulty in getting public support. In the Mediterranean context, for example, it is hard to imagine a dominating EU discourse that negates the EU as an exporter of political and economic liberalism; or another that all of a sudden enunciates that it is absolutely necessary to create as many barriers as possible between the EU and its southern neighbours. Openness to ‘others’ and the existence of fuzzy borders have become inherent parts of the European understanding of the liberal democratic peace project.

One consequence of these initial assumptions is that a liberal democratic political space

cannot be ruled by a hegemonic discourse. Hegemony, in this understanding, “involves more than a passive consensus and more than legitimate actions. It involves the expansion of a particular discourse of norms, values, views and perceptions through persuasive redescrptions of the world” (Torfing, 1999: 302). Rather than one hegemonic discourse, liberal democracies will more likely have a dominant discourse which defines the frames of what can be said and what can be done. In the political space different competing discourses all have to refer to this dominant discourse in order to be legitimized. Yet they will, time and again, challenge the dominant discourse: by destabilizing elements of the existing dominant discourse they will attempt to constitute another one.

The ambiguity characterizing EU policy towards the Mediterranean is due to the existence of two simultaneous discourses. The Mediterranean is on the one hand defined as a sphere of shared values; as a shared cultural cradle of great civilizations that fertilize each other and need each other because of their shared history and geography: what we might term a ‘Mediterranean-as-civilization’ discourse. Alternatively, and in competition with the above, the region is construed as a conflict-ridden zone, ravaged by war and inevitable societal clashes (Lia, 1999; 22, 39; Holm, 2004, 2005): let us call this ‘Mediterranean-as-conflict.’ These conceptualizations are mirrored in the discourses on EU policy. One discourse is that of the EU as an exporter of political and economic liberalism to its neighbours. The other is focused on the need to export security to the southern Mediterranean, and even on about what kind of security it is that the EU seeks to promote – a discourse shaped by phenomena such as organized crime, Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and illegal immigration (Holm, 2004, 2008).

The EU's self-representation as a 'normative' foreign policy actor, seeking to export its values to the 'outside' constitutes the 'deep structure'. It is a deep-rooted producer of meaning which tells a story about what Europe is (or is supposed to be) and where it is heading (or is supposed to head). Indeed, it says a great deal about our neighbours too, and about how we ought to conduct policies towards them. Certain European political actors have repeatedly and forcefully sought to change the meaning of this discourse: enunciating a variety of threats and challenges arising from the Mediterranean. At face value this is the sort of discourse that may not immediately receive public support because it challenges a dominant construction of meaning centred on Europe, and 'the West', as normative exporters of democracy and human rights. Nevertheless, the more conflictual discourse has now established itself as a competing discourse which is increasingly challenging the dominant one. This discourse is reinforced by powerful arguments such as the rise of militant Islamism in the Maghreb area and inside in some EU countries, as well as by relentless news broadcasts of boat people stranded on the shores of, in particular, Spain and Italy. On the political level this discourse has resulted in a posture that some scholars have characterized as 'a barricaded border EU' (Andreas, 2001: 3) or 'a gated community' (Van Houtum and Pijpers, 2007), both images evoking quite explicitly the popularized 'Fortress Europe' metaphor whereby the EU effectively draws up the bridge across the Mediterranean (Holm, 2005).

Wæver, and regards 'security' as a speech act. "In naming a certain development a security problem" Wæver has argued, "the state can claim a special right. It is thus only from the moment when somebody – mostly the political elite – claims that something is

threatened, that an issue becomes a question of security concern" (Wæver, 1995, 54). In the event of 'securitization' some valued object is presented as existentially threatened, which calls for measures that bypass the 'normal' rules of the political game. But 'securitization' is not fulfilled by breaking rules alone, nor solely by existential threats but rather by cases of existential threats that legitimize breaking rules.

As to how the 'competition' between the two discourses actually functions in practice, terrorism is probably the one issue in European discourse where the juxtaposition of an existential threat to the dominant, normative foundations of Europe emerges in the most explicit way. The European discourse in the wake of the terror attacks in Madrid of March 2004 carried out by North African extremists is illustrative. As Bertie Ahern, then Irish Prime Minister and president of the European Council put it in 2004: "terrorism is not just undemocratic. It is anti-democratic. It is not just inhuman. It is an affront to humanity. It runs counter to all the values on which the European Union is founded" (quoted in Gheciu, 2008: 44). Terrorism is thus seen as something exceptional because it threatens our way of life. In the documents laying out the EU's Hague programme in the areas of freedom, security and justice, it is stated that "the security of the European Union and of its member states has acquired a new urgency, especially in the light of the 9/11 of the Madrid attacks on 11 March 2004" (Hague Programme, 2005). Discursive constructions correlating existential threats to European values can be found in other key documents, including the 2003 *European Security Strategy* and the 2008 'Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy.'

While an analysis of European discourses on terrorism is beyond the scope of this pa-

per, the logic behind these documents is a useful litmus test when transposed to the EU context. A ‘Mediterranean-as-conflict’ discourse has been on the rise in the EU. The ‘Mediterranean-as-civilization’ discourse is rooted in historical and social narratives and remains the dominant discourse, holding the other one ‘in check.’ Yet it is the competition between these two discourses that increasingly shapes EU policy and deserves to be observed in closer detail.

3. THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN DISCOURSE: WHAT KIND OF NEIGHBOURS?

Successive EU Mediterranean policies, both in their multilateral or bilateral incarnations and in their more inclusive or exclusive inspirations, all reflect the competition between these discourses. Consider, for instance, the high-level advisory group on the Mediterranean set up by the European Commission in 2003. In their final report the group proclaimed that there is “certainty that the principal complementarities of the two halves of the Euro-Mediterranean area will, in the next half-century, have been integrated into their day-to-day life.” (High-level Advisory Group, 2003: 4). This assessment comes quite some time after the inception of the Barcelona process, and just before the introduction of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The references to ‘complementarities’, ‘integration’ and even ‘day-to-day life’ echo the ‘Mediterranean-as-civilization’ discourse. The fact that the advisory group itself included a number of prominent European intellectuals reflects the profound cultural underpinnings of this discourse. Even so, and arguably mirroring the already visible implementation shortcomings of the EMP, the timeline of

this prospective regional integration is vaguely pushed far into the future, while – in an implicit reference to the other, more divisive Mediterranean discourse – the advisory group refers to ‘two halves’ of the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Since the inception of the ENP the distinction between the two logics has become more neatly distinguishable. The policy underwent a rather significant semantic readjustment immediately after its introduction. From the initial denomination ‘Wider Europe – Neighbourhood’ (Communication from the Commission, 2003), the Commission swiftly shifted the terminology to ‘European Neighbourhood Policy’ (ENP) (Communication from the Commission, 2004). This change cannot be underestimated: the first document indicates inclusion of new countries into a broader European community. This reflected the aspirations enunciated by Commission President Romano Prodi a year earlier of a policy initiative that would provide countries with ‘more than partnership and less than membership’ without precluding the latter (Prodi, 2002). The 2004 Commission document, which outlined the policy in greater detail, is more exclusive in both tone and substance. The earlier references to expanding the ‘four freedoms’ (of goods, capital, services, and people) as well as to EU neighbours sharing with the EU ‘everything but institutions’ (Prodi, 2002) are fudged in a much more cautious language. While references to ‘joint ownership’ remain present in the ENP documents to this day, the 2004 piece is primarily the product of the Commission, rather than of a partnership of equals between the EU and neighbouring partners. Perhaps testifying most explicitly to this changed mindset, this is also the phase when the ENP dossier within the Commission moved from the desks of the Directorate General for Enlargement – a

team that had steered the largest expansion of the EU towards the East – to that of the Directorate General for External Relations.

Testifying to the nuances of this change the Commission's 2004 Strategy Paper on the ENP declared that: "the objective of the ENP is to share the benefits of the EU's 2004 enlargement with neighbouring countries. [It] is designed ... to offer them the chance to participate in various EU activities. The privileged relationship will build on mutual commitment to common values principally within the fields of the rule of laws, good governance, their respect for human rights, the principle of market economy and sustainable development" (Communication from the Commission, 2004). The language here hints at a sharing of values between the EU and its neighbours more than that it refers to 'common values.' However, as became apparent in the implementation phase, both the EU and its neighbours are aware of the controversy surrounding this reference. After all, Russia was invited by the EU to join the ENP as a partner country and refused the invitation, also on the grounds that this alleged 'mutual commitment to common values', as the Commission defines it elsewhere, in effect implies an imposition of EU values in exchange for greater economic assistance. Rather than equal partnership such a mechanism effectively profiles the role of the EU as that of a benefactor and that of the neighbour as a grateful beneficiary.

The European Commission has often countered this kind of criticism with the fact that, in the ENP, implementation of these commitments is fostered through 'positive conditionality.' Partly reflecting the lack of strategic *finalité* in the policy – e.g. the prospect of EU membership – positive conditionality is represented as the principal means designed to promote and reward concrete

progress in the partner countries. Rather than penalizing countries straying away from their commitment, positive conditionality offers more to the partner countries the more they are willing to implement political, economic and institutional reforms. Bilateral detailed Action Plans are mutually negotiated, resulting in country-specific programmes that outline and benchmark specific medium to long term agendas of political and economic reforms.

Upon closer scrutiny, however, the Action Plans also cannot escape the competing rationales driving the ENP. The issue of combating migration, organized crime and drug trafficking by way of judicial and police cooperation is illustrative here. "Efficient and secure border management", writes the European Commission, "will be essential both to protect the shared borders and to facilitate legitimate trade and passage, while securing European borders against smuggling, trafficking, organized crime (including terrorist threats) and illegal immigration will be of crucial importance" (Communication from the Commission, 2003). The ENP effectively places the prevention of these phenomena side by side with the opportunities that may arise through greater movement of people and goods. Yet, in its implementation phase, it is underlined that "the Union cannot fully deliver on many aspects of the ENP if the ability to undertake legitimate short term travel is as constrained as it is currently. Yet our existing visa policies and practices often impose real difficulties and obstacles to legitimate travel" (Commission Communication 2006, quoted in Balzacq, 2008).

One outcome of these conflicting priorities is that the ENP ends up creating different levels of relations between the EU and the neighbouring states in question. Rather than creating a homogenous 'ring of friends' the

ENP fosters differentiation. In the best case scenario differentiation allows more reform minded, or just friendly, regimes to benefit from closer relations with the EU. In October 2008, for example, Morocco was among the first ENP partners to be granted an ‘advanced status’ in the framework of the so-called ‘Governance Facility’ (Communication from the Commission, 2006) whose aim is to further encourage neighbouring countries in their reform processes. This has been the result of a deliberate strategy on the part of the regime in Rabat. Morocco has embarked on top-down, and rather selective liberalization and has been able to present itself as a vanguard of Arab reform. More important for EU governments, it has been willing to embark on reforms and on co-operation with regard to illegal immigration, drugs, crime and terrorism. In the worst case scenario differentiation implies the EU leaving lukewarm reformers behind as it deprives itself of an effective tool to deal with rough regimes which, instead of being attracted to the EU, are effectively drawn to seek allies and support elsewhere. Algeria for one has been described as a ‘reluctant neighbour’ (Emerson et al., 2005) for its unapologetic lack of interest in EU norms. And, in the light of its hydrocarbon riches, ENP incentives have not constituted any economic added value for Algiers.

In this way differentiation has impinged on the ability of the EU to promote political values. EU initiatives aimed at promoting democracy have been concentrated on technical support (for example the purchase of electronic equipment for surveillance of elections), rather than focusing more profoundly on the values and institutions that are supposed to underpin a functioning liberal democratic process.

This selective partnership has benefited the stability of some autocratic regimes; a defi-

ciency indirectly acknowledged in the Communication on ‘Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy’ where the Commission argues that ‘the shared political commitment must be translated into more attractive and palpable incentives for the partners, notably in the area of democracy, governance and the rule of law’ (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

Most significantly for our purposes the competing logics of the ENP, its patchy implementation and the selective differentiation have dealt a blow to the multilateral rationale of EU policies, in this case the EMP. The EU has shied away from presenting itself as an imperial power in its neighbourhood. The European Commission repeatedly states that “reforms...cannot be imposed from outside. They must be generated from within” (Communication from the Commission, 2004). The Southern European countries’ colonial past in the Mediterranean delimits what the EU as an actor can say and do in respect to the southern Mediterranean. At the same time, by placing a greater emphasis on bilateral arrangements, the ENP contradicts the earlier non-imperial discourse of the ‘Mediterranean-as-civilisation’, effectively reviving the focus on the ‘Mediterranean-as-conflict’ discourse. These discourses have been simultaneously at work, and this has prevented the EU from coming up with a coherent Mediterranean policy and strategy.

3.1 The Union for the Mediterranean: Silencing of the EU Discourses?

The latest development in the EU Mediterranean discourse is constituted by the Union for the Mediterranean (UpM, in its French acronym) launched in 2008. Nicolas Sarkozy, the President of France, championed this plan in Europe even before his election as

president. This was a bold idea, rooted and inspired in the ‘Mediterranean-as-civilization’ discourse which he aimed to institutionalize and even politicize. Sarkozy envisioned something that would do for the Mediterranean region what Jean Monnet had done for Europe in the 1950s: a bold regional integration initiative of which “our children will be proud” (Sarkozy, 2007). However, European capitals either timidly endorsed or politely declined the scheme on several grounds. It was feared that the UpM (at the time still called, more ambitiously, ‘Mediterranean Union’), and the unilateral way in which it was being promoted by France would disrupt the already limited EU consensus on foreign policy. Another concern was that it would be perceived in Turkey as a substitute for its already problematic EU membership application. Some even saw it as potentially competing with the European Union itself. The UpM was eventually launched in Paris in July 2008 in the presence of 43 heads of state and government from the whole EU and the southern and eastern Mediterranean (only Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi declined to attend) and also the Western Balkan countries.

The outcome of the initiative has been considerably diluted. The UpM has been endowed with a secretariat in the region headed by two rotating presidents (one from Europe and another from a North African country). While the initiative is open to all EU member states, policy making is focused on the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. The UpM boils down to a number of technical projects in fields such as energy, infrastructure, environment and civil protection. Reflecting the desire to maintain some continuity with the previous EU policy, but also the diminished ambition, the official name of the initiative has become: ‘Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean.’ Contrary to the

initial, ambitious plans the UpM has turned into an “overtly pragmatic and depoliticized” initiative (Kausch and Youngs, 2009: 264).

From an EU perspective pragmatism has the advantage of underlining the concrete results of the considerable resources, energy and talent being devoted to the relationship between the two shores. At the same time, and more striking with regard to what has been argued thus far, is the ‘depoliticization’ of the UpM. The new initiative does not concern itself with the transformation of the domestic political situation in the southern Mediterranean countries. As for its content, it does not aim to provide any conceptual added value to either the EMP or the ENP. Considering the way in which the UpM has turned out, it looks as if EU discourses on the Mediterranean – both the civilisational and the conflictual ones – have now been silenced, possibly making room for new discourses to emerge.

4. THE ITALIAN DISCOURSE ON THE EU’S MEDITERRANEAN POLICY

As a southern founding member of the EU, Italy has naturally placed itself at the forefront of the Euro-Mediterranean debate. A consensus among scholars and policy makers has consistently placed the Southern periphery as one of the traditional vectors of Italian foreign policy (Frattini, 2009; Sardo 2007). The Mediterranean constitutes the principal geo-political expression of Italy’s long-standing support for global multilateralism (i.e. the UN system), the transatlantic alliance (the United States and NATO) and European integration. Thanks to historical and social ties as much as to economic and political interests, Rome has been able to reclaim in the Mediterranean a kind of Great Power ‘actorhood’

that, as a mid-sized European power, it has been unable to muster in global, transatlantic and European contexts.

When seen in a diachronic perspective the perception of this southern projection has changed over time. During the Cold War, the Mediterranean as a region constituted a somewhat neglected theatre of East-West competition. Italy scrambled to reinforce the primacy of the Western Alliance in this area. In the 1980s in particular, as the broader Middle East emerged as a breeding ground for international terrorism, Rome often found itself quite literally in the line of fire: from the hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise ship, to the December 1985 massacre in Rome airport, to Colonel Gaddafi's launching of Scud missiles at the island of Lampedusa in 1986 (see Pace, 2007). Then as now, Rome's priority has been that of fostering trade links across the sea, including in the energy field. Only when the Iron Curtain lifted from Europe did Italy's room for political and economic manoeuvring in the Mediterranean broaden.

In accordance with the overall rationale of this article the following subsections will detail first the normative dynamics and then the security discourses in Italy's post-Cold War perceptions of Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

4.1 Normative Dynamics

Quite ironically for a political and academic discourse that has been characterized as a no-man's-land of constructivism (Lucarelli and Menotti, 2000), Italy's post-Cold War Mediterranean narrative has convincingly embraced the 'new regionalism' rhetoric. In this vein region building is defined as a bottom-up, largely endogenous process. Its multiple identities draw on past experiences mutually recognized by the regional actors or on my-

thologies manufactured by some of them. New regionalism seeks to fudge borders and build integration through people-to-people contacts (Neumann, 1994).

Such multiple regional identities are a feature of the Italian heritage in the region and have naturally fed into Rome's discourse and contribution to EU Mediterranean policy. The reference to Fernand Braudel's seminal work on the Mediterranean and to his depiction of the region as a land where 'to live is to exchange' (Braudel, 1966: 761) features regularly in the discourse of the political establishment. In this context Italy sees itself as one of the indispensable actors upholding this heritage. More than that, Italy is construed as an actor dedicated to defending that heritage in an increasingly diverse EU. As a recent government pamphlet on this issue argues:

We believe Italy will contribute to create the new political and cultural shape of southern Mediterranean citizenship. More than that, Italy will define, together with the other EU countries, a truly new European identity, built on the conjunction of Northern and Western Europe with its forgotten cultural, economic and even philosophical roots in the Mediterranean. (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 2006: 31)

Such formulations have the merit of encompassing many of the facets of the normative based arguments with which Italy seeks to influence European discourse on the Mediterranean. For one, and in accordance with the vulgate of 'new regionalism', the Italian discourse pays close attention to identity building in the Mediterranean and to the multicultural and religiously diverse origins of that identity. Secondly, there is a near-ubiquitous reference to ancient history. This is perhaps more con-

troversial since the *Mare Nostrum* rhetoric is largely absent in North African perceptions of the region (where if it is considered at all it is perceived as a neo-colonial anathema). Even so, the Italian discourse borrows frequently from these historical references to fortify and justify its present Mediterranean strategy.

The economic dimension is possibly the richest one in terms of normative substance. For pundits and policy makers alike, Italy's most substantial contribution here is in its resilient and highly adaptive model of economic development. As is the case in other southern European countries, this model contains an element of state-sponsored capitalism as seen in strategically key sectors such as energy, or in the substantial financial investments by some North African sovereign wealth funds in the Italian economy. More significant for the normative narrative if not for its overall economic turnover is the role played by trade. This is championed by Italy's political actors when discussing the level and depth of transactions with several countries in the region. Italian small and medium enterprises are promoted as the forerunners of a viable social and economic development model for North Africa. (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 2010a).

This reference to development is of fundamental importance here. The development model being promoted by western aid agencies in the Southern Mediterranean is largely based on what is often demonized as the 'Washington Consensus'. Such a model presupposes that economic liberalization determines the conditions for growth and wealth creation, which in turn define the path to political liberalization and, ultimately, mature liberal democracy. With consistent bipartisan support from Italy's fractious political scene, Rome has oftentimes criticized this model. Underpinning support for the Italian model

is a discourse placing 'respect' (Doni, 2007; Frattini, 2009) for different social traditions and political cultures as the paramount guideline of the Italian approach to the region. Far from rejecting the benefits of freer markets and open political competition Italian foreign policy officials are frequently heard to decry the imposition of western rules and standards on North African countries as ideological if not moral arrogance. As Foreign Minister Franco Frattini has put it:

We deeply love the ... European democratic models, but it never crossed our minds to put them on the table and say: "Dear Mediterranean friends, this is our recipe, we believe that you should imitate it because it is the best we have" ... We, in Italy, know how to respect and understand, also when we are not in agreement with our interlocutors. We will continue to work towards a development agreed upon by everyone. (Frattini, 2009).

This linkage between economic and political liberalization is a suitable angle from which to interpret the evolution of Rome's attitude towards the EU's Mediterranean policy. Since the early 1990s Italy's support for a bolder Euro-Mediterranean policy largely followed the logic of other Southern European EU member states. The southern periphery was never quite 'new' to the EU in the sense that the Union, and the EEC before it, had been in the Mediterranean ever since its foundation (Algeria being a French colony until 1962). Yet, at a time in which so much political capital and economic assistance were being invested in post-communist Central Europe, the southern periphery was perceived as being neglected. As the EU slowly began to shape its foreign policy identity, it was rather self-evident to devote attention to the Mediterranean.

The initial Italian support for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership should be seen in this light. The EMP enjoyed broad support across the board, including from the media, trade unions, business sector, NGOs and the political establishment (Aliboni and Ronzitti, 2009: 114). Plainly much of this support was directly related to the fact that, notwithstanding the support of individual governments, the 'Mediterranean' is largely an EU discursive construction and the Barcelona process was inscribed in EU institutional structures. In Italy this fortified the impression that the EU was setting out to play a more significant political role in the region (*ibid.*).

For the pro-EU, centre-left coalition governments that ruled Italy during the second half of the 1990s, this mattered. Interestingly, Romano Prodi – who led the Italian government before heading for the European Commission from 1999–2004 – found himself at the centre of this and following moves. The above-mentioned tensions between the Eastern and Southern vectors in the EU's neighbourhood policy became only stronger in the run-up to the 2004 Eastern enlargement. Coupled with the increasingly disappointing implementation of the EMP, it was in effect the Prodi Commission that pushed most vehemently for a new EU impetus in the Mediterranean. In the first years of the past decade the Commission expanded on some Polish, Swedish and British proposals for an Eastern dimension encompassing Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, and pushed for the broader 'Wider Europe' concept in order to encompass the South Mediterranean and Caucasus countries. In a landmark 2002 speech Romano Prodi thus introduced the 'ring of friends' idea, which was later to turn into the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The following centre-right government in Italy turned more pragmatic in its rela-

tions with the EU, and the implementation shortcomings of both the EMP and the ENP seemed to confirm the hollowness of the EU's normative agenda in the Mediterranean. Policy makers increasingly described the EU performance as disappointing and its mechanisms as overbureaucratized. As a junior minister in the current Berlusconi government has written: "Barcelona's plan in 1995 was that of turning the Mediterranean into a sea of exchanges and development: [however] the plan has been severely hampered by Brussels bureaucracy, still occupied by a myopic northern vision of Europe" (Craxi, 2010).

The latest, and somewhat inevitable turn in Italy's normative discourse on the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue is that while the narrative remains 'European' in tone, its substance and implementation have turned increasingly intergovernmental, even though policy making is channelled through EU structures. The prominence given to the French–Spanish–Italian mediation of the Lebanon stand-off ever since the summer 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel is a notable example of this shift (D'Alema, Kouchner and Morantinos, 2007). Similarly, during the Gaza war of January 2009 the Berlusconi government squarely placed the blame for the hostilities on Hamas, the Palestinian group, whereas the rotating EU presidency struggled to present the EU with a united position.

More directly related to multilateral formats, and telling of this intergovernmental shift, has been Italy's role in relation to the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean. In December 2007 Prime Minister Prodi hosted a meeting with his Spanish and French counterparts which produced the 'Appel de Rome', essentially a pledge of Italian and Spanish support for Sarkozy's embryonic initiative on the condition that this would

be framed in an EU context.¹ A somewhat technical but illustrative detail in this respect concerned the role to be played by the foreseen UpM Secretariat. While the French government proposed that it should become the political core of the initiative, Italy pushed for it to constitute a mere implementation agency for already agreed upon projects. The UpM has thus become a rather bland compromise among governments (one in which Germany, rather than Italy or Spain, ended up playing the bigger role), and it operates as a meeting place for governments agreeing to implement projects.

This intergovernmental logic on the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue has not only further blurred the picture of EU actorhood in the region; it has also fragmented it. As Euro-Mediterranean multilateralism shifts away from Brussels, the implementation of Europe's normative appeal is left to member state capitals, which inevitably translate it in different ways. Italy has not operated differently when compared to other southern EU countries. Likewise as in the case of other member states, the flipside of the normative, multilateral narrative is in how it actually translates into bilateral policies.

4.2 Security Moves

In order to approach the empirical analysis of Italian security discourses a short methodological caveat is in order. Rather than attempting a systematic analysis of all issues and actors of Italian securitization of the Mediterranean, we will propose here an (inevitably selective) analysis of a few key discursive nodal points. This delimitation serves

¹ As Aliboni and Ronzitti (2009) note, it was on this occasion that, precisely to mark this attempt to retain an EU logic, the name of the initiative changed from Union Mediterranee to Union for the Mediterranean.

to allow us to shed more light on some of the themes already introduced in our analysis so far – especially in relation to the promotion of political and economic reforms in the Southern Mediterranean.

Italy's relations with Libya and Algeria are in different ways illustrative of this move. The history of Italy's diplomatic relations with Tripoli is long and chequered. For the purpose of our argument here the developments of the past half decade are, however, a useful example of how this security move has unfolded. As Jentleson and Whytock (2005) have comprehensively argued, Libya's process of 'normalization' since Gaddafi renounced his country's program on weapons of mass destruction has been the product of continued engagement by Western actors as much as of tough conditionality. While less significant in overall strategic terms, Italy's rapprochement has been very pronounced and culminated with the 2008 signing of the bilateral treaty on 'Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya'. The treaty has ignited a rather fierce discussion in the Italian political and media arenas (Pelosi, 2009; Marroni, 2009; Gazzini, 2009). As a broad and ambitious document meant to close a painful chapter of colonial rule, to define the framework of economic and cultural cooperation as well as to specify the scope of cooperation in the field of border control, the security rationale of the deal was indeed apparent. As Prime Minister Berlusconi declared in the immediate aftermath of the signing, the treaty was about "less immigrants and more oil" (quoted in Gazzini, 2009).

Several analysts have since spelled out the significant implications that the treaty will have in those sectors: from investments of Tripoli's sovereign wealth funds in the Italian market, to the privileged access that Italian business – including energy companies

– will be granted in Libya, Italy’s principal oil provider. The most controversial chapter concerns the issue of immigration control and the protection of human rights therein. Some scholars have noted the strikingly vague reference to ‘international legality’ when delimiting the scope of immigration cooperation between the two countries. Frequent cases of ‘forced repatriations’ from Italy to Libya – the latter is not a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention² – have raised concerns and prompted the European Commission to ask for clarification from the Italian government.

When it comes to Algeria the bedrock of Italy’s relations is also energy, with natural gas constituting the near totality (98 per cent) of Algerian exports to Italy, meeting over one third (35 per cent) of Italy’s overall gas needs. Italian energy behemoths ENI and ENEL have long been investing in the Algerian energy market and infrastructure, both upstream and midstream. A new gas pipeline, GASLI, will directly connect Algeria with Sardinia and Tuscany by 2014. (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 2010d). Inevitably this ever tighter connection and economic dependence has coloured Italy’s political relations with Algiers. Ever since the 2003 signing of a bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations, Italy and Algeria have committed to closer and more regular contacts at the highest levels of government. The first summit in this framework took place in 2007 with the presence of President Bouteflika and Prime Minister Prodi; the second is planned for the second half of 2010. In a recent official outline of Italy’s relations with Algiers, Rome stated that “Italy continues to

sustain the process of consolidation of Algeria’s democratic institutions” (Ministero degli Affari Esteri 2010d.)

The ways in which these relations have affected EU policy are not hard to imagine. By most standards, democracy is far from consolidating in Algeria. In April 2009 Abdelaziz Bouteflika won his third presidential mandate with 90 per cent of the vote. He is criticised for enshrining his autocratic rule in the constitution by closing in on free media and arrogating parliamentary power to the presidency (Mundy, 2009). EU policy is not blameless: Brussels’ response to the latest elections has been soft at best. In fact the EU has appeared increasingly powerless: with Algiers refusing to negotiate a bilateral Action Plan, the Commission is effectively checkmated when trying to encourage domestic reforms in the country. The Italian government has framed the difficulties of EU-Algerian relations in a broader criticism of economic and political liberalization. At times, when pointing out the imbalances contained within this paradigm, Rome appears to side with Algeria rather than Brussels. As the Foreign Ministry states on its website: “Italy represents a privileged partner with Algiers in the EU context [...] EU-Algerian relations are not devoid of difficulties, especially when considering [...] gradual liberalization and opening of markets. The economic and social impact of these measures is feared by the Algerian authorities.” (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 2010b)

While the cases of Libya and Algeria stand out because of their strategic relevance, this line of argument applies to other cases in the region as well. While independent analysts deem Tunisia to be “the region’s most overlooked dictatorship” (Kautsch and Youngs, 2009: 973), the Italian government praises its ‘ideal features’ including ‘political and social stability’ (Ministero degli Affari Esteri (2010).

² According to Art. 33 of the Geneva Convention contracting states cannot expel or return refugees or asylum seekers to states where their lives or freedom might be threatened.

In recent years, NGO activists and international observers have repeatedly decried the record on human rights and civil liberties of Mubarak's thirty year regime in Egypt. The Italian government has undergone a gradual rapprochement with the regime, culminating in the signing of fourteen bilateral accords and the invitation of Mubarak to the G8 summit in L'Aquila in July 2009. (Talbot et al., 2010: 139)

The cases of Libya and Algeria (and, for that matter, Tunisia or Egypt) confirm that Italy, as much other southern EU member states, is more concerned by regime stability in the South than with the promotion of civil liberties and human rights. An obvious example here is the very limited Western appetite for the inclusion of moderate Islamist movements in North African electoral processes. Increasing international attention has been turning to the role that the more moderate and socially rooted of these movements can play as a counterweight to the autocracies in the region (Boubekeur Amghar, 2006). While this subject is beyond the scope of the present paper, it is fair to claim that when presented with the option of promoting an opening up of the North African political systems to Islamist outfits the Italian government has been rather concerned about the aftershock that such liberalization could produce in relation to the rise of terrorism in and further immigration from the partner countries in the Southern Mediterranean.

What emerges from these short illustrations is a rather neat demarcation between multilateral policies which tend to be based upon a normative discourse and bilateral relations which are driven by strategic considerations or perceptions of threat. It is worth spelling out that this distinction is an expedient that helps us present analytically the conceptual characterization proposed in this article. However, it

does not necessarily reflect the way in which social reality unfolds in the Mediterranean. The Italian discourse on a heavily securitized item such as immigration is, for one, eminently 'regional', as it encompasses denominations such as 'North African', 'Arab', or 'African' as sources of immigration from the Southern Mediterranean into Europe. More concretely, and especially during 1990s, Italy strongly supported NATO's partnerships in the region, hence underlining the significance of military security for the regional stability of the Mediterranean. Lastly, the Italian government supported the three-basket structure of the Barcelona process modelled upon the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe – to date the most accomplished institutional architecture for comprehensive security in Europe – and commissioned academic studies to assess its feasibility (Pace, 2007). In other works, 'security speak' can also be multilateral. This notwithstanding, when security speak translates into its more exclusive policies or into government positions on the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, it, more often than not, does refer to specific issue areas in relation to target countries.

5. CONCLUSIONS: 'MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK' OR 'GOOD ENOUGH GOVERNANCE'?

This article has sought to frame the interplay between values and interests in foreign policy in a discursive framework emphasizing, on the one hand, the EU's normative agenda and, on the other, the 'securitization' of its policies in the Mediterranean. The case of Italy was proposed to illustrate how these discourses compete and interplay. A number of concluding considerations emerge out of this analysis.

For one it can be argued that notwithstanding the criticism of which it is increasingly the target in the media and among independent analysts, the ‘Mediterranean’ does continue to constitute an important discourse across the region. The notion of regarding the sea as a regional unit, tied together by historical links, customs and traditions and, not least, climate and ecology is profoundly ingrained in the mindset of Italian policy makers, as of those from other southern European countries. The ‘Mediterranean’ rhetoric, far from being misleading, is seen as a distinct added value of the Italian contribution to the EU normative agenda and to its embryonic foreign policy.

Interestingly, when reading the Italian discourse, the idea that there is something ‘normative’ in European policy applies to notions such as ‘respect’ and ‘tolerance’ between Europe and the southern Mediterranean. This is not the same thing as the value charged, even ‘ethical’ connotations that the term ‘normative’ has acquired in the growing scholarship on EU foreign policy. Especially in the most recent Italian discourses, a polity such as the EU is regarded as playing a limited role with respect to the latter understanding i.e. in promoting political norms and standards. Where it attempts to do this, the EU is at times portrayed as rather ‘dogmatic’, i.e. effectively pushing for pre-packaged paradigms of democratization that do not fit with the political environments in which they operate.

Put another way, a normative perception of the Mediterranean exists in Italy, yet it is increasingly not same normative vision as that emanating from Brussels. The Italian vision is based on a specific ‘Italian’ experience in which private enterprise, local government and civil society interplay to create sustainable conditions for democratization and good governance. Simplifying mightily, this is akin

to the ‘civic community’ model described in much detail by American scholar Robert Putnam in his seminal *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Putnam, 1993). Interestingly, Putnam’s analysis of government unaccountability, bad governance and endemic corruption in Italy’s own southern regions would seem to present problems that are not dissimilar to the ones afflicting several parts of the European periphery. Yet, judging by the discourses of Italian policy makers, there seems to be a rather specific Italian model to promote democratization and development in North Africa based on entrepreneurship, investment, respect for local customs and social trust, which Italian policy makers argue that they are supporting.

The other side of this coin is that in order to tackle security issues of strategic relevance such as energy security and immigration, the Italian discourse effectively *de*-securitizes these issues in the bilateral relations with selected North African regimes. In the domestic discourse multiculturalism or, less often, energy security are increasingly ‘securitized’. In relation to Italy’s Mediterranean partners and to the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, this domestic securitization translates into desecuritization of selected bilateral relations. This goes in the direction of defusing potential or existing threats in order to ensure better conditions for collaboration of the partner countries. Here, desecuritization is not a mere semantic move; from a discursive perspective it confirms that security speak and perceptions of threat are still preponderant when compared to normative arguments. In this respect, it could be argued that in the geopolitical and institutional environment of the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, EU member states – Italy included – have used the loopholes created by the competing EU discourses to create for themselves a sort discursive ‘way out’ of poor

policy implementation. Italian policy makers can be heard to criticize EU policies as being something of a corollary of U.S. sponsored democracy promotion, and counter this paradigm with notions such as respect and tolerance. Instead of paving the way for a different model of development and value promotion to that described above, however, this discourse enables Italian policy makers to retain a rather pragmatic profile in the region, and close relations with the autocratic regimes in North Africa, while contenting themselves with 'good enough' governance (Kautsch and Youngs, 2009; Grindle, 2005) when it comes to encouraging domestic reforms on the part of the partner countries.

Aliboni and Ronzitti (2009) have suggested that this growing gap between failing multilateral initiatives and burgeoning bilateral ties means that the Euro-Mediterranean identity is weakening and Italy itself is shifting the southern focus towards the wider Middle East and possibly the Persian Gulf. The analysis of the interplay between competing discourses proposed in this article provides an additional interpretation of the disconnection between the EU's Mediterranean agenda and that of selected member states: to say that the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue is in a bind is an understatement. EU policy makers have openly and repeatedly acknowledged the disappointment with the progress of the Barcelona process and of the ENP. The way in which the UpM has come about, and the manner of its evolving, confirms the serious reservations that scholars have expressed about the scope and potential of EU foreign policy. At the same time Italian relations with the southern Mediterranean are thriving and Italian policy makers continue to subscribe to a Euro-Mediterranean dialogue but have different proposals as to how this dialogue is to move forward. Bi-

lateral relations between EU member states and their North African counterparts may be simply shifting the Euro-Mediterranean discourse away from the EU.

NOTE

The authors are responsible for all English translations from the Italian originals.

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