The EU's Middle East Policy and Its Implications to the Region

Kenan Dagci*

Introduction

In the last four years, one of the striking features of commentaries on the Middle East was the growing number of the references -both in the media and academic texts- to the European Union (EU)'s incoherent policies in the Middle East. In many of these references, it has been argued that the EU has no clear cut policy towards Iraq or Iran and this is directly related to the different political preferences of its members. In the recent Iraq war, while some EU members, most notably Britain, joined the coalition forces led by the United States (US), other EU members such as Germany and France preferred not to involve in the war.

In the Cold War era, the military guarantee of the U.S. created an atmosphere which was conducive to European cooperation and encouraged the initial drive for European integration. For some authors like Brian White[1], while Europe and the U.S. had been strategic partners in the NATO alliance throughout the cold war era, the removal of the Soviet threat in 1991 focused the attention less upon partnership and more upon the competitive aspects of their economic relationship.

As Robert Schuman put it in his famous declaration of 9 May 1950 "*World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it...*"[2] Since Europe witnessed the devastating effects of the two world wars, European political elites decided to unite Europe to eliminate the threat of future conflicts. For bringing this decision into life, it was necessary to create an area of security and prosperity in Europe. Therefore, communities such as European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC; 1951), European Community (EC; 1957) and European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom; 1957), which led to the creation of what is now the European Union, were established on the basis of economic and security reasons. These two goals are interrelated and indispensable factors for continuity of the European Union.

During to the Cold War era, EU deepened its economic integration between its members by establishing those communities mentioned above, and guaranteed its security under the NATO umbrella[3]. But in the post-Soviet era, it is possible to see that states or regional integrations began to pursue different and independent policies related to their different interests. This development opened a new phase in international politics. This new phase profoundly changed the mindset of the national decision makers in Europe. Of course, this new phase also resulted in some new developments at the European Union level. The most important one of these developments, Maastricht Treaty (1992), established the European Union on the three pillars (European Communities, Common Foreign and Security Policy, and Police and Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters.) By establishing the EU, EU accelerated its deepening and enlargement process.

At the present, EU with its 27 members relatively managed to create both security and prosperity areas. For instance, since establishing of ECSC (1951) there has not been any war witnessed among the members of the EU. But continuity of presence of these areas depends on existence of some conditions. First, there should be stability in the immediate neighboring countries of the EU. After all, instability in those countries has profoundly affected the security area of the EU. Second, economic and other social conditions should be satisfactory in the neighboring countries. EU has faced some threats like immigration and terror attacks arisen from the Middle East countries in which economic and social conditions are weak. Third, political structures or governance of these countries should comply with the EU.

In this article, I will argue that the Middle East is the most important geography which can directly affect the EU's well-being in economic and security aspects. Therefore, the EU ought to redefine and reorganize itself in order to pursue a common policy towards the Middle East for its future. To address this point, this article explains (1) why and how Middle East has occupied an important place in the EU's policies; (2) instruments which the EU have been using in relations with the Middle Eastern countries; (3) relations between the EU and other countries except Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, such as Iran, Iraq and the Gulf States.

Changing Nature of the Security

Security is a concept that has many domestic societal and economic facets and therefore cannot be reduced to basic external and military issues[4]. Particularly after the Cold War, scholars began to emphasize the changing nature of security in its all dimensions. Accordingly, security is defined as "to secure the state against those objective threats that could undermine its stability and threaten its survival."[5] In the Cold War era, security merely

referred to the relationship between states and its main focus was on issues such as sovereignty, alliances, inter-state negotiations, strategic deterrence and nuclear-related issues.[6] Domestic stability, legitimacy of political institutions, law enforcement and economic welfare, were of secondary importance to security[7]. But in the post Cold War era, as a consequence of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the concept of security has gained a multidimensional character. Domestic stability, social and economic issues have become the first importance to survival of the states. For the survival of the EU, the concerns over economic and military security of the EU have gained primary importance and these have affected the EU's policies toward the Middle East. As it will be argued below; Economic security is one of the important facets of the security for the EU since sustainable development, new and permanent markets and securing energy supplies are essential factors for economic security.

At the present, Europe is the largest importer of oil and gas. Imports account for about 50% of energy consumption and this rate will rise to 70% in 2030. Most energy imports come from the Gulf, Russia and North Africa[8]. Therefore, these regions have an important place in terms of the EU's economic security.

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Economic Security

Sustainable Development ⟷ Security of Energy Supply

New and permanent markets

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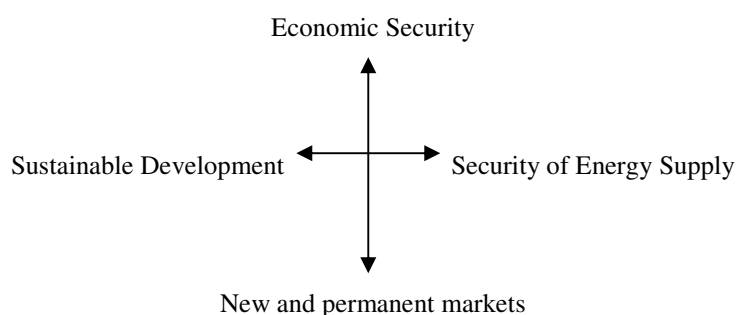
Other facet of the security is the military security. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, characteristics of the military security issues have become very complicated and multidimensional phenomena. In last two decades -particularly the threats shown below[9]- have begun to be seen as key threats that can be overcome with cooperation between states and governmental or non governmental organizations.

Military Security
• Proliferation of the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)
• Global Terror
• Regional Conflicts

- State Failure
- Organized Crimes (Immigration, drug trafficking, human trafficking etc.)

Today, these threats can be relatively accepted as military security issues. Also, these have common attributes which can have indirect or indirect effects on the security of states. Therefore, the Middle East is a vital region which should be considered from different aspects for the EU.

Meaning of the Middle East for the EU

The definition of the Middle East has a geo-cultural dimension rather than merely a geographic one[10]. According to some narrow definitions; Middle East lies from Egypt to Iran and includes River Nile and Mesopotamia. Due to its geo-cultural characteristic, the Middle East includes countries from both North Africa (these countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea have been also defined as Mediterranean countries) and Asia. In this context, we can assert that Middle East is a cultural area more than is an area which has just physical borders.

Since the Middle East is adjacent to Europe geographically, it has been traditionally viewed as the "back yard" of Europe separated by the sea. Due to this physical closeness, Europe is naturally affected by local developments in the Middle East. The Mediterranean is Europe's "backyard," and anything that happens in that "backyard" can have more direct consequences for the Europeans[11].

Geographical proximity and historical ties are longstanding realities underpinning the growing interdependence between the EU and the Middle East. These two factors have been influencing EU's stance toward the region. Current EU members France, the UK, Italy and Spain had colonies in the Middle East in the past. At the present, this colonial past of the some EU's member states has turned back as immigration to these countries.[12] As Solana pointed out in a conference, deteriorating social conditions, and growing racism and xenophobia contribute to the North's anxiety about political instability and illegal immigration coming from the South.[13] Therefore, political, economic and social conditions in the Middle East have a potential to affect the EU in terms of its both economic and security interests.[14] Because of this potential, the EU has developed some instruments to deal with the challenges posed by the situation in the Middle East to its security and prosperity. These are:

- Enlargement (to the European countries)
- Establishing associations/ or cooperation with the third countries that EU does not consider enlarging to, such as Middle Eastern countries. (For example, the

European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership are the instruments of the relations between the EU and third countries.

Because of this article does not take *"enlargement"* as its main focus, *"establishing associations or cooperation with third countries"* will be discussed.

Establishing Associations or Cooperation with the Middle Eastern Countries and Their Implications

Middle East constitutes a cultural geography in which nations from various ethnic, religious backgrounds have been living together. At the same time, these nations have different social, economic and political conditions. Due to these different conditions, the EU has been implementing its policies by three instruments: (1) Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) (2) Cooperation with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) (3) Cooperation with Iraq, Iran and Yemen.

When looking at the creation of the EC, it can be seen that relations between the EC and the Middle East began with a Declaration of Intend which was annexed to the Rome Treaty. This declaration promised a special treatment for Morocco, Tunisia and Libya, but it was not until 1969 that limited association agreements were concluded with Tunisia and Morocco. Moreover, EC had already concluded association agreements with Greece (1961) and Turkey (1963). After these developments, more limited association agreements were subsequently concluded with Malta (1970) and Cyprus (1972). Alongside these association agreements, EC also concluded a series of bilateral, and somewhat differentiated, trade agreements with Israel (1964), Lebanon (1965), and Egypt (1972).[15] Thus, by 1972, it is possible to see that EC had used "association agreements" and "trade/cooperation agreements" as forms of establishing relations with the third countries as well as Mediterranean countries.

Relations between the EC and the Mediterranean Non-member Countries (MNC) possessed a disorderly character in 1971, in order to solve this problem the European Parliament called for the formulation of a systematic policy towards the Mediterranean region. In 1972, at the October Paris summit, a Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) was announced[16]. As a matter of fact, GMP was a beginning of the bilateral agreements made with the MNCs. However, as some points out, bilateral agreements between the EC and its southern neighbours did not contribute much to goals of the EC[17].

In December 1973, a delegation of foreign ministers from Arab League offered a Community summit to propose cooperation. They were responding to a November 1973

European Political Cooperation (EPC) declaration which referred to the legitimate rights of Palestinians. The EC agreed to discuss economic issues with the Arab League, but avoided discussion of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Euro-Arab dialogue fizzled out after Egypt was expelled from the Arab Leauge in 1979 (for agreeing the Camp David accords with Israel) and never really recovered[18].

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership : Collapse of the Soviet Union produced power vacuums in the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Central Asia, Middle and Eastern Europe, and made international relations and security issues more dynamic. Clearly, the end of the Cold War necessitated a major reconsideration, by the EC, of its relations with the neighboring regions.[19] In the 1990s, the number of economic migrants from North Africa to the EU increased dramatically due to a number of civil wars and strife in their home countries. Receiving destinations of these migrants, particularly the southern member countries of the EU, prompted the EU to consider renewing and strengthening the EU's relationship with southern Mediterranean[20]. On the other hand, concerns over energy supplies led the EU to develop closer relationships with Eastern Mediterranean, Iraq, Iran and the GCC. Consequently, the EU has begun to recognize that stability in the Mediterranean is very important to the Union's well-being, and has shifted a major part of its attention to its broad southern flank[21] in particularly southern-tier countries—notably; France, Spain, and Italy— and these countries took the lead in initiating greater engagement with the Mediterranean[22]. In November 1995, the EU-Mediterranean Partnership was formally launched at Barcelona Euro- Mediterranean Ministerial Conference, which brought together the EU and twelve non-EU partners: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

The EMP provides a framework for cooperation between EU members and their twelve Mediterranean partners (Libya is not as yet a partner, although discussions for bringing Libya into the EMP are under way). The partnership consists of a series of bilateral association agreements as well as the Barcelona Declaration, which provides for broad multilateral cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, energy, tourism, and youth. To date, all of the Mediterranean partners except Syria have signed association agreements[23].

Mediterranean association agreements are the main contractual agreements between the European Community and its partners in the Mediterranean. They replace cooperation agreements concluded in the 1970s. The agreements cover the three main areas[24]: (1) political dialogue; (2) economic relations; (3) cooperation in social and cultural affairs.

The political area aims to establish a Euro-Mediterranean area of peace and stability based on common respect for human rights and democracy. The creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area by 2010 has constituted the principal goal of the economic area, while intercultural dialogue and understanding are the hallmarks of the third area. Consequently, all agreements contain a clause defining respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights as 'an essential element' of the agreement. They all contain clauses dealing with political dialogue; the free movement of goods, services and capital; economic cooperation; social and cultural cooperation; financial cooperation; and institutional arrangements.

European Neighborhood Policy: The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) which was developed in 2004 is a part of the EU's most recent foreign policy efforts aimed at strengthening its security with respect to the new neighbouring countries resulting from enlargement[25].

As Aliboni put it, no country at the flank of the EU territory can be regarded as a military threat today. However, there are domestic and inter-state conflicts in the adjacent region that could spill over into the Union. Furthermore, neighboring countries have potential to cause problems of 'soft' security: illegal trafficking of various kinds, organized crime, terrorism, abuse of the environment etc. Hence it is in the EU's interest that they are well governed and included in a solid international cooperative framework[26].

The ENP also addresses the strategic objectives set out in December 2003 'European Security Strategy'. It was pointed out in the European Security Strategy that:

" Even in an era of globalisation, geography is still important. It is in the European interest that countries on our borders are well-governed. Neighbours who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organized crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe…"[27]

The ENP applies to the EU's immediate neighbours that have land or sea borders with the EU– Algeria, Belarus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine. Because of Turkey's candidacy for full membership, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were also included into the ENP. Although Russia is a neighbour of the EU, relations between the EU and Russia are developed through a Strategic Partnership instead of the ENP.[28]

Cooperation with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC): The EU relations with GCC countries- Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, are channeled through a Co-operation Agreement signed in 1989

between the European Community and the GCC. The objective of this Agreement is to contribute to strengthening stability in a region of strategic importance and to facilitate political and economic relations. Working groups have been established in the fields of energy and the economy.

Relations with Iran, Iraq and Yemen: In December 2002, the EU and Iran began to negotiations on a Trade and Cooperation Agreement for progress on political issues in four key areas: human rights, WMD, terrorism, and the Middle East peace process. Due to tensions between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency over nuclear proliferation, Trade and Cooperation Agreement negotiations were ceased[29]. On the other hand, Yemen and EU signed a cooperation agreement in 1997 to facilitate cooperation in the areas of trade and development. When looking at the EU-Iraq relations, it can be put forward that there is no political or contractual relations.

Conclusion

This article elaborated on the EU's policies towards the Middle East and its implications to the region. First, I discussed what the Middle East meant for the EU. In international Relations discipline, the Middle East is almost defined as region which has geographic borders but contrary to conventional view, the Middle East has a geo-cultural character. From this perspective, it could be asserted that the EU or any power willing to make their interests real should perceive the region as a multi-cultural geography. Therefore, the EU and its members should pursue a common policy towards the Middle East.

Second, up to here, the EU has used three instruments-EMP, Cooperation with the GCC and Cooperation with Iran, Iraq and Yemen-having diverse dimensions in the region. Due to the fact that the EU perceives the Middle East consisting physical borders, the policies which it implements may result in failure. In the case that the EU takes the Middle East as a unique region, and develop common policies towards the region, it may attain success.

Third, the EU has used several instruments such as association agreement and cooperation, as mentioned above, for promotion democracy, human rights, women rights, press freedom, good governess, and has supported them by MEDA funds so far, but, has not gained significant success yet. This lack of achievement is not surprising. Since the EU has generally favored conducting most of its democratic reform activities on a government to government basis. MEDA funding is used primarily for government programming. Instability in the whole Middle East concerns the EU directly, and threatens it due to illegal migration, terror etc. Also the EU is independent on imports from the Middle East for half of its energy

suppliers. For all these factors, the EU should focus on the common policies that can overcome the threats.

* Assistant Prof. of International Relations, Kocaeli University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of International Relations, Kocaeli-Turkey.

NOTES

[1] Brain White, *Understanding European Foreign Policy*, New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 1-4.

[2] See, Declaration of 9 May 1950, http://europa.eu/abc/symbols/9-may/decl_en.htm, accessed in 3 December 2006.

[3] See, *European Security Strategy*, France: The European Union Institute for Security Studies, December 2003, p.3. http://www.iss-eu.org/solana/solanae.pdf, accessed 3 January 2007.

[4] Jan Zielonka, "Europe's security: A great confusion", *International Affairs*, vol. 67, no. 1, January, p. 128.

[5] Susanne Lindström, "The changing nature of security: The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and non-military security," presented at the workshop on The Status of International Mediterranean Studies, 6 October 2005, European Research Institute, University of Birmingham.

[6] Ibid.

[7] İbid.

[8] See, *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, France: The European Union Institute for Security Studies, December 2003, p.6. http://www.iss-eu.org/solana/solanae.pdf, accessed 3 January 2007.

[9] These threats are defined in detail in the "*A Secure Europe in a better world: European Security Strategy*," France: The European Union Institute for Security Studies, December 2003, p.6-9; see, http://www.iss-eu.org/solana/solanae.pdf, accessed 3 January 2007. Also see Mona Yacoubian, *Promoting Middle East Democracy European Initiatives*, the United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 127 October 2004, p. 3.

[10] Ahmet Davutoglu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, Istanbul, Kure Yayinlari, 2001, p.

[11] See, summary of the proceedings presented in a conference titled "The American Component in Europe's Middle East Policy", held in Center for Strategic Studies of the University of Jordan, November 21-22, 2000, Amman, Jordan. www.css-jordan.org/activities/conferences/americancomp/report.htm , accessed in 15 March 2007.

[12] For more information in detail see Christina Boswell, "The external dimension of EU immigration and asylum policy," *International Affairs, (79) 3, 2003, pp. 619-638.*

[13] The Philip Morris Institute for Public Policy Research (PMI), *Mediterranean Partnerships*, Conference Procedings, Real Academia de Bellas Artes, Madrid, October 5-6, 1995, p. 9.

[14] Kenan Dagci, "AB ve ABD'nin Ortadoğu Stratejileri ve Büyük Orta Doğu Projesi," in: *Büyük Orta Doğu Projesi: yeni oluşumlar ve değişen dengeler*, Kenan Dagci (ed.), İstanbul: TASAM Yayınları, 2006, p.176.

[15] Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, pp. 152-153.

[16] For more information in detail see Jean Siotis, "The European Economic Community and its emerging Mediterranean policy," in F.A.M. Alting von Geusau (ed.) *The External Relations of the European Community: Perspectives, Policies and Responses,* Westmead, Saxon House, 1974, p. 77-78.

[17] Karen Smith, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, 2nd edition, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 75.

[18] Smith, p.76.

[19] Bretherton and Vogler, p. 155.

[20] Bessma Momani, "The EU the Middle East, and Regional Integration," World Economics • Vol. 8 • No. 1, January–March 2007, p. 5.

[21] PMI, ibid, p.3.

[22] Yacoubian, p. 3.

[23] Yacoubian, p.4.

[24] European Commission, *Europe and the Mediterranean: towards a closer partnership*, Belgium: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2003,p. 9.

[25] Communication from the Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper,* Brussels, 12 May 2004, COM (2004) 373 final

[26] Roberto Aliboni, "The Geopolitical Implications of the European Neighbourhood Policy," European Foreign Affairs Review 10, 2005, p. 1.

[27] *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, France: The European Union Institute for Security Studies, December 2003, p.6. http://www.iss-eu.org/solana/solanae.pdf, accessed 3 January 2007.

[28] For more see http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/policy_en.htm, accessed in 12 December 2006.

[29] Yacoubian, p. 6; also for more information about relations between Iran and the EU see Ziba Moshaver, "Revolution, Theocratic Leadership and Iran's Foreign Policy: Implications for Iran–EU Relations," *The Review of International Affairs*, 3 (2), Winter 2003.

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