

## FUTURE OF EUROPEAN SECURITY POLICIES: IS GEOPOLITICAL EUROPE POSSIBLE?

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Research Article

### Abstract

*Since the aftermath of World War II, the pursuit of European autonomy in ensuring its security has been a constant topic on the European agenda, however never fully realized. The Lisbon Treaty facilitated Union representation as a legal entity and introduced Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to deepen defense ties. Geopolitical ambitions increased with von Der Leyen's 2019 call for a Geopolitical Commission, preceding the Russia-Ukraine war. Global geopolitical shifts amplify the need for a robust European role. However, the EU's historical struggle in forging a strong security policy fuels skepticism. This study assesses the EU's foreign policy in the Mediterranean and Black Sea amidst regional turmoil, employing a neo-classical realist lens and a global perspective.*

**Keywords:** *Mediterranean, Black Sea, EU, Neo-classical Realism, Geopolitical.*

### Avrupa Güvenlik Politikalarının Geleceği: Jeopolitik Avrupa Mümkün Mü?

#### Öz

*2. Dünya Savaşı sonrasında Avrupa'nın kendi güvenliğini sağlama çabası, Avrupa'nın hep gündeminde olsa da hiçbir zaman tam olarak hayata geçirilemedi. Lizbon Antlaşması ile AB'nin tüzel bir kimliğe sahip olması sağlandı ve savunma politikalarında işbirliğini geliştirmek amacıyla Yapılandırılmış Daimi İşbirliği (PESCO) hayata geçirildi. Henüz Rusya-Ukrayna savaşı gündemde yokken von Der Leyen'in 2019'da Jeopolitik Komisyon tanımıyla jeostratejik politikalara verilen*

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*önem attı. Küresel jeopolitik değişimler güçlü bir Avrupa rolüne olan ihtiyacı artırmaktadır. Ancak AB'nin güçlü bir güvenlik politikası oluşturma konusundaki tarihsel zorlukları, şüpheciliği beslemektedir. Bu çalışmada AB'nin Akdeniz ve Karadeniz'deki bölgesel çalkantılar ve çatışmalara karşı politikaları neo-klasik realizm perspektifi ve küresel bir bakış açısıyla ele alınmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Akdeniz, Karadeniz, AB, Neo-klasik Realizm, Jeopolitik

### Introduction

Since the 2010s, geopolitics is continuously on the rise in the EU's neighboring regions. Both in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions, the EU initiated its neighborhood policies to create a ring of friends around its borders and increase cooperation not only between the EU and the regional countries but also amongst the regional countries. Almost 3 decades after the initiation of the Barcelona Process and almost 2 decades after the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), this aim is not achieved and yet, one can observe the increasing tensions in both regions.

The focus of this paper is rising tensions in the EU's neighborhood since the 2010s. In the light of these changes the paper assesses the EU's role as an international actor from a neo-classical realist and worldview perspective. When Ursula von Der Leyen made her speech on Geopolitical Commission in 2019, the Russia – Ukraine war was not in the picture. As geopolitics is on the rise all around the globe, the need for a geopolitical Europe is increasing too. Yet, the poor record of the EU in the past in creating a solid security and defence policy increases sceptic voices over the future of the policy.

In the Mediterranean region, in December 2010, the then called “Arab Spring” started when Muhammad Bouazizi set himself on fire in Tunisia. The economic difficulties, political oppression and increasing social unrest led to protests in the region, profoundly affecting politics in Libya, Egypt, and Syria. The increasing number of people fleeing the region and arriving at the EU borders made migration the number one priority of the EU, especially in 2015. The following “deal” with Türkiye and controversial migration policies of the EU and its member states questioned the normative actorness of the Union itself and respect for rule of law and human rights in some of the EU member states.<sup>1</sup> Also, the EU's reaction to the government

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmet K. Han, "An Indecent Proposal? The Issue of Syrian Refugees and EU-Turkey Relations." *ISPI Commentary* November 2, 2015. accessed September

changes and democratic practices in the regional countries damaged the credibility of the Union.

Around the same time, steps were taken by the regional countries for the new hydrocarbon exploration agreements and drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean region. In 2011, the Continental Shelf Delimitation Agreement was signed between Türkiye and TRNC, and in 2013 the EastMed Pipeline was identified as a priority by the European Commission. In 2017, Italy, Greece, Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus, and Israel declared their support for the project and the agreement was signed in 2020 between Greece, Israel and Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus. Türkiye's response to this cooperation mechanism was to sign a deal with Libya creating an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which hindered the planned pipeline. The diplomatic row, followed by increasing Turkish military presence in the region, led to EU sanctions on two persons [Mehmet Ferruh Akalın, head of TPAO's Exploration Department, and Ali Coşkun Namoğlu, Deputy Director of the Exploration Department of the TPAO] "who are responsible for or involved in planning, directing and implementing offshore hydrocarbon exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean which have not been authorized by the Republic of Cyprus."<sup>2</sup>

In the East, the enlargement of NATO to Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) and the EU's intensified relations with the Black Sea countries such as Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova under the Eastern Partnership (EaP) increased the threat perception of Russia since the "near abroad" has been always a key priority area for Russian foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> In 2014, after the Russian army's occupation of Crimea, a referendum on the unification with Russia took place in March and two choices were given to the voters: either "join Russia or return to Crimea's 1992 constitution, which gave the peninsula significant autonomy"<sup>4</sup>. By the end of March 2014, Putin

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27, 2023. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/indecnt-proposal-issue-syrian-refugees-and-eu-turkey-relations-14099>.

<sup>2</sup> "Turkey's Illegal Drilling Activities in the Eastern Mediterranean: EU Puts Two Persons on Sanctions List." Council of the EU, February 27, 2020, accessed September 27, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/02/27/turkey-s-illegal-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-eu-puts-two-persons-on-sanctions-list/>.

<sup>3</sup> Bohuslav Litera, "The Kozyrev Doctrine - a Russian Variation on the Monroe Doctrine." *Perspectives* no. 4 (1994): 45.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Pifer, "Crimea: Six years after illegal annexation." *Brookings*, March 17, 2020, accessed September 27, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/03/17/crimea-six-years-after-illegal-annexation/>.

ratified the Treaty of Accession of the Republic of Crimea to Russia. As a response to this annexation, the US, the EU, and Canada enforced sanctions on Russia. The EU imposed sanctions that included a clause for the “travel restrictions and an asset freeze should be imposed against persons responsible for actions which undermine or threaten the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, including actions on the future status of any part of the territory which are contrary to the Ukrainian Constitution, and persons, entities or bodies associated with them.”<sup>5</sup> The 2022 Russian attack on Ukrainian soil has been an attack on the international order based on the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the states. This time, the EU was faster and more vigorous in reacting compared to the Russian annexation of Crimea and in fact surprised the students of international relations. The sanctions aim to weaken the Russian economy and deprive it of components and critical technologies. They included asset travel bans and freezes against the persons and assets of Vladimir Putin, Sergey Lavrov, Yevgeny Prigozhin, Victor and Oleksandr Yanukovych, Russian State Duma members, National Security Council members, military staff and high-ranking officials, businesspeople, propagandists, and oligarchs. Some economic sanctions in finance consist of "a SWIFT ban, restrictions on Russia’s access to the EU’s capital and financial markets, and a ban on transactions with the Russian Central Bank. In the transportation sector, EU airspace is closed to all Russian owned aircraft, Russian road transport operators are banned, and there is a ban on exports to Russia of goods and technology in the aviation, maritime and space sectors".<sup>6</sup> In addition to these restrictions, EU sanctions in energy and defense sectors as well as on raw materials, services and media are implemented.

The EU’s rapid and firm response to the Russian aggression increased hopes on the possibility of a more assertive Europe in a world order in which geopolitics is on the rise. European desire to become a foreign and security actor is not new. Since Rene Pleven introduced the plan for a European Defense Community in the 1950s, establishment of a mechanism to provide European defense at a supranational level has been discussed. Over the past

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<sup>5</sup> "Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP." Official Journal of the European Union, March 17, 2014, accessed September 27, 2023, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2014:078:0016:0021:EN:PDF>

<sup>6</sup> “Infographic - EU sanctions in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine”, Council of the European Union, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/eu-sanctions-russia-ukraine-invasion/>

seven decades, there have been several steps taken to establish a Common Foreign and Security Policy. Even in the Maastricht Treaty this policy area was identified as a pillar of the EU. However, the EU was not successful in convincing the international actors enough to be perceived as a serious security actor in world affairs. The intergovernmental character of the policy area prevented the Union from increasing its assertiveness. In 2019, Ursula von der Leyen said that she will lead a “geopolitical Commission”<sup>7</sup> and, in 2022, the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence was published, aiming to “make the EU a stronger and more capable security provider”<sup>8</sup> while the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), established in 2017, set the goal of raising cooperation on defence among the participating EU members.

Although there have been various steps in achieving the goal of a more active EU in the security field, uncertainty over the strong actorness of the EU in foreign and security policies continues. This paper analyses the impact of challenges both in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions on the EU since the 2010s and explores the possibility and desirability of a geopolitical Europe and its ramifications. In doing this, the paper uses Neoclassical Realist Theory’s main indicators such as internal dynamics, external systemic pressure, and ideas/perceptions. In the subsequent sections, an in-depth examination of the dynamic developments in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions is undertaken, followed by a comprehensive analysis of the corresponding responses from the EU. These two regions are strategically positioned as pivotal arenas in the realm of geopolitics, thereby warranting meticulous scrutiny.

### **I. Neo-classical Realism: How Does It Relate to the EU?**

Neo-classical realism, “incorporating external and internal variables”<sup>9</sup> suggests that one should analyze systemic pressures and a country’s place in

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<sup>7</sup> Lili Bayer, “Meet von der Leyen’s ‘geopolitical Commission’”, *Politico* December 4, 2019, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/meet-ursula-von-der-leyen-geopolitical-commission/>

<sup>8</sup> “A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence”, European Union External Action Service, March 24, 2022, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en)

<sup>9</sup> Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy”, *World Politics* 51 (October 1998): 146

the international system, capability to reflect power, leader perception, socioeconomic structures, and national character in order to understand a country's foreign policy. As Kitchen argues<sup>10</sup>, identifying interests of a state is “an interpretive process”, in which the leadership, character, perception and consideration of both internal and external politics determine the foreign policy behavior of a state.

In the EU case, one can observe on the one hand increasing nationalist tendencies in the EU member states and on the other hand, an increasing security threat perception from outside which paves the way to strengthen the EU mechanism in foreign and security policies. However, this does not translate into a security union at the EU level. It just demonstrates that the security concerns are on the top of the member states' agenda. Today, although systemic pressure pushes the EU to be more security oriented, the internal politics of the EU member states are not yet suitable for the creation of a geopolitical EU. In the face of crisis situations, in both the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions explained in the following sections, one can observe that the EU member states have been willing to initiate policies to protect themselves without turning the EU into a true supranational actor.

As Dyson argued, “international structure is the key source of change and convergence in the objectives and instruments of the states' defense policy”<sup>11</sup>. During the Cold War, the Soviet threat was the main systemic pressure for increasing cooperation among the member states, and today, once again, the Russian threat brings the member states closer to each other and as the member states “expect to benefit from expanded common funding”<sup>12</sup>, the support for common policies increases. Thus, as Baun and Marek argues, “changes in Europe's geostrategic and security environment”<sup>13</sup> i.e., Russia and migration, push member states to shoulder

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<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Kitchen, “Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: a Neoclassical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation”, *Review of International Studies* 36, No. 1 (January 2010): 128

<sup>11</sup> Tom Dyson, *Neoclassical realism and defence reform in Post-Cold War Europe*, (Basingstoke:Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4

<sup>12</sup> Niklas I.M. Nováky, “Who wants to pay more? The European Union's military operations and the dispute over financial burden sharing”, *European Security* 25, no 2, (2016): 222

<sup>13</sup> Michael Baun and Dan Marek, “Making Europe Defend Again: The Relaunch of European Defense Cooperation from a Neoclassical Realist Perspective”, *Czech Journal of International Relations* vol 54, no 4 (2019): 32.

the burden collectively, within a more integrated and institutional framework, while holding on to the intergovernmental character of the policy field due to the nationalist sentiments at home. This combination of external and internal dynamics shapes the EU's foreign and security policies, preventing the EU from being a credible geopolitical actor.

## II. Internal Dynamics

Especially after the 2008 economic crisis, we have seen an increasing nationalist rhetoric in Europe. Followed by the migration and COVID 19, the nationalist, more protectionist policies and the political rhetoric were widely utilized in the EU member states. The austerity measures in the aftermath of the financial crisis, the north – south divide became more visible and the changes in the attitudes among EU member states were all reflected in the public opinion polls. In 2013, PEW research showed that the percentage of people who were favorable to the EU dropped 15 points from 60 to 45.<sup>14</sup> In France the drop was 19% while in Spain it was 14%. The same research demonstrated that German public opinion differed highly compared to the rest of the EU member states, with 60% in favor of the EU. After the crisis was over, the PEW research also showed that the percentage who say their country's membership in the EU has been a good thing is high in western Europe, especially in Germany, when compared to the Euro crisis. In Germany the percentage went up to 74.<sup>15</sup> Another study focusing on economic nationalism in Europe after the Euro crisis, finds “a remarkable increase in support for the economic nationalist camp in general, and for radical-right parties in particular.”<sup>16</sup>

Following the economic crisis, the so-called “Arab Spring” and the increasing number of migrants from the southern neighborhood put more pressure on the EU and the member states. Since 2015, migration has been

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<sup>14</sup> “The New Sick Man of Europe: the European Union”, Pew Research, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2013/05/13/the-new-sick-man-of-europe-the-european-union/>.

<sup>15</sup> “Western Europeans more content with EU membership now than during euro crisis”, Pew Research, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/14/the-european-union/pg\\_10-15-19-europe-values-04-010/](https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/14/the-european-union/pg_10-15-19-europe-values-04-010/)

<sup>16</sup> Italo Colantone and Piero Stanig, “The Surge of Economic Nationalism in Western Europe”, *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, No. 4 (Fall 2019): 134

one of the top priority issues in the Eurobarometer results. In 2015, migration was one of the most important issues facing the EU, at 55%, and in 2016, it went down to 45%.<sup>17</sup> Immigration is still regarded as an important issue, usually counted in the top 5 issues.<sup>18</sup> The impact of rising immigration has been immense on the EU and the rhetoric in the EU politics, emphasizing externalisation and securitisation of migration policies. In the member states, the prevention of migration has been highlighted in the election campaigns since then. In the Netherlands, the PVV and the founder of the party, Wilders, promises de-Islamization of the country, including zero asylum seekers and no immigrants anymore from Islamic countries.<sup>19</sup> Although Wilders does not command a large political following, his views are accepted by the mainstream parties when it comes to immigration. This can be observed in other EU member states, in which populist parties do not get the majority of the votes, but their rhetoric is highly accepted by the other political actors. For instance, in Denmark, when the anti-immigrant populist Danish People's Party became very vocal, the Social Democratic Party, although left-wing, adopted very harsh restrictive measures against refugees and immigrants. These tendencies are also observed in Central and Eastern European countries, such as Hungary. Orban stated that “in matters of immigration, Hungary's position is clear and has not changed: we do not want to become a country of immigration”<sup>20</sup> and in 2015, closing the Serbia – Hungary border left migrants stranded.

COVID-19 also had an impact on the changing rhetoric in the member states in 2020. In such a health crisis, the citizens turned to their states and demanded more safety. The closing of the borders and increasing national demand for more inclusive health policies but also socio-economic policies, reinforced all the national identities once more. In Europe, the ability of the

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<sup>17</sup> “Standard Eurobarometer 86”, Autumn 2016, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2137>.

<sup>18</sup> “Standard Eurobarometer 99”, Spring 2023, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3052>.

<sup>19</sup> Geert Wilders Weblog, *The Netherlands Ours Again, Preliminary Election Program 2017-2021*, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.geertwilders.nl/index.php/94-english/2007-preliminary-election-program-pvv-2017-2021>

<sup>20</sup> Jean Baptiste Chastand, “Behind hostile immigration propaganda, Hungary welcomes foreign workers”, *Le Monde* May 20, 2023, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/05/20/in-hungary-the-reality-of-immigration-lies-behind-hostile-propaganda\\_6027301\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/05/20/in-hungary-the-reality-of-immigration-lies-behind-hostile-propaganda_6027301_4.html)

northern countries to provide more in both economic and health benefits compared to the southern countries, followed by debate on aid to the southern countries increased questions over solidarity in the EU. The French and German proposals to provide loans for the EU countries in need during COVID-19 were opposed by the Frugal Four states (Austria, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands) on the grounds that the countries receiving the funds should go through structural reforms. In other words, conditionality was proposed for the EU member states to benefit from the EU. The research at the time showed that “both EU leadership endorsement (France and Germany) and elite polarization (opposition from the ‘frugal four’) decreased public support” for the aid to the countries hit by the pandemic - Next Generation EU (NGEU).<sup>21</sup> Eurobarometer results also show that citizens became more critical of the EU institutions due to the handling of the COVID – 19 pandemic and vaccine procurement. In 2021, 48% of the respondents said they were very satisfied (5%) or rather satisfied (43%) with the measures taken by the EU to fight the pandemic.<sup>22</sup>

All these pressures on the EU and its member states created a more introverted Europe and the people demanded more from their national states in the times of crisis, while they are concerned about the developments not only in the South but also in the East. In the latest Eurobarometer survey<sup>23</sup>, the international situation ranked second when asked “what do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment?”.

### III. External Pressures

#### A - The Mediterranean Region since the 2010s: How Did the EU Respond?

At the end of 2010, when Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire after the police confiscated his vegetable cart in Tunisia, a set of protests not only in Tunisia but also in Egypt, Libya, and Syria erupted. Bouazizi had a

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<sup>21</sup> Monika Bauhr and Nicholas Charron, “All hands-on deck’ or separate lifeboats? Public support for European economic solidarity during the Covid-19 pandemic”, *Journal of European Public Policy* 30, No 6, (2023)

<sup>22</sup> “Resilience and Recovery Public opinion one year into the pandemic”, Spring 2021, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer/spring-2021-survey>

<sup>23</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 99, Spring 2023

domino effect on the other countries in the region. In January 2011, Ben Ali, President of Tunisia, fled to Saudi Arabia, bringing an end to his era. Following the Tunisian example, another young man, Mohamed Saeed, became the symbol of protests in Egypt following his death under suspicious circumstances after being arrested in the summer of 2010. Mubarak had to leave his office, too. In Libya, in February 2011, protests against Gaddafi erupted, but he refused to leave, which resulted in a full-scale civil war. Unlike the Tunisian and Egyptian examples, in Libya the UN Security Council stepped in and imposed a no-fly zone and NATO intervened with air forces, and in October 2011, Gaddafi was captured and killed. Since then, the political situation in Libya has not stabilized and two governments, UN-backed Government of National Accord and House of Representatives (HoR) led by Haftar, are struggling to take control of the whole country. Although in Tunisia and Egypt the integrity of the state was protected and new governments were established, albeit with more difficulty in Egypt, in Libya neither stability nor democracy was achieved, and it has been identified as a “failed state” in the literature.<sup>24</sup>

In all these cases, youth unemployment, corruption, unjust political systems, authoritarian rules and lack of human rights and rule of law were some of the commonalities that led mainly the youth to the streets. In Tunisia, the youth unemployment reached 40%<sup>25</sup>, GDP per capita decreased, as a result of the economic crisis in 2008, while the region could not attract enough FDI to create wealth. Rising food prices affected the disadvantaged groups more. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), in 2011, world food prices “surged to a new historic peak in January [2011], while increases in international prices of wheat and maize continued”.<sup>26</sup>

One of the positive impacts of the international aid and cooperation agreements in the region, especially with the EU, has been the increasing level of education in the regional countries. However, since economic development could not reach a level to offer these educated young people

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<sup>24</sup> Alan J. Kuperman, “Obama’s Libya Debacle: How a Well-Meaning Intervention Ended in Failure”, *Foreign Affairs* 94, no 2 (March/April 2015): 67.

<sup>25</sup> Andrea Ansani and Vittorio Daniele, “About a Revolution: The Economic Motivations of the Arab Spring”, *International Journal of Development and Conflict* 2, no 3, (2012): 1250013-1.

<sup>26</sup> “World food prices reach new historic peak”, FAO, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/50519/icode/>.

the jobs corresponding to their education level, social and economic dissatisfaction was inevitable among the youth. The partially liberalized political systems in the regional countries, as Brumberg stated, prevented these young people expressing themselves, which increased the frustration. Brumberg also argued that “in the Arab world, a set of interdependent institutional, economic, ideological, social, and geostrategic factors has created an adaptable ecology of repression, control and partial openness.”<sup>27</sup> and in these regimes “ruling elites could juggle competing ideas to ensure their own continued control as arbiters of such pluralistic political scenes, which they had no intention of ceding through genuine liberalization.”<sup>28</sup> Partial liberalization or liberalized authoritarian systems may be considered worst for the young people, since they cannot expect any change through the quasi-alternative ideas and politicians. Thus, protests on the streets were left as the only option for groups such as *Kefaya*, *National Association for Change*, *9 March Group for the Independence of Egypt’s Universities* and *April 6 Youth Movement* in Egypt.

As a response to all these developments, the EU first perceived these as democratization attempts that should be supported. In Tunisia, after the change of government, the EU gave more funding to the projects working on regional imbalances, prioritized support for elections by providing technical assistance to help the authorities organize elections and “supported civil society organizations (CSOs) in raising public awareness and training domestic election observers.”<sup>29</sup> To support the economic transition the EU provided €3.5 billion for the period 2011-13 and €700 million through the SPRING programme (Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth). The European Commission launched an agriculture and rural development (ENPARD) initiative for the period between 2012 and 2018 and allocated €4 million. Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia benefitted from this initiative. In order to increase people to people contact, dialogues on migration, mobility and security were initiated. The Privileged Partnership was established in 2012 between the EU and Tunisia, followed by the 2013-2017 Action Plan.<sup>30</sup> For the period 2021-

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel Brumberg, “The trap of liberalized autocracy”, *Journal of Democracy* 13, no 4 (October 2002): 57.

<sup>28</sup> Brumberg, “The trap of liberalized autocracy”, 61.

<sup>29</sup> “EU’s response to the “Arab Spring”: The State-of-Play after Two Years”, European Commission, February 8, 2013, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/MEMO\\_13\\_81](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/MEMO_13_81)

<sup>30</sup> “2013 – 2017 Action Plan”, European Commission, 2012, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/plan\\_action\\_tunisie\\_ue\\_2013\\_2017\\_fr\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/plan_action_tunisie_ue_2013_2017_fr_0.pdf)

2024, the EU's bilateral assistance to Tunisia under the Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe initiative reaches €600 million and focuses on “promoting good governance and the rule of law; stimulating a sustainable economic growth generating employment and accompanying the energy transition and reinforcing social cohesion between generations and regions.”<sup>31</sup> In February 2021, the Joint Communication on the renewed partnership with the Southern Neighborhood was adopted and several flagship themes – such as support to the conclusion of a Comprehensive Aviation Agreement with the EU, support to the deployment of social protection systems improving the resilience of vulnerable populations, support to the digitalization of the economy, support to the rollout of the national water strategy, securing availability and access to water – are directly linked to EU-Tunisia relations.<sup>32</sup> In addition to these programmes and initiatives, Tunisia has been a part of EIDHR, Horizon 2020 for Research and Development and cultural programmes such as MEDIA.

In Egypt, the political situation was more complicated than Tunisia and when the Muslim Brotherhood won the elections after Mubarak’s departure, Morsi’s “attempts to impose an Islamic constitution and claim maximal powers to himself alienated secularists as well as pro-democracy groups and also the army”<sup>33</sup>. In January 2013, just before Morsi was toppled, European Council President Herman van Rompuy visited Cairo and in his remarks after meeting with Morsi he said:

“Mr. President, you may rest assured that on this path of enshrining democracy, the European Union will stand by your side as a friend, a neighbor and a partner.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> “European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), Tunisia”, European Commission, accessed August 2, 2023 [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/tunisia\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/tunisia_en)

<sup>32</sup> “Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours”, European Commission, February 9, 2021, accessed August 2, 2023 [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/joint\\_staff\\_working\\_document\\_renewed\\_partnership\\_southern\\_neighbourhood.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/joint_staff_working_document_renewed_partnership_southern_neighbourhood.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> CSR Murthy, “United Nations and the Arab Spring: Role in Libya, Syria, and Yemen”, *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 5 no 2, (2018):121

<sup>34</sup> “Remarks by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy after his meeting with president of Egypt Mohamed Morsi”, European Council, January

After Morsi was overthrown by the military coup led by General Sisi in July 2013, Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and First Vice President of the European Commission at the time, visited him and emphasized the importance of political inclusiveness for democratization in Egypt.<sup>35</sup> By the end of 2013, Morsi was charged with “terrorism and plotting with foreign militants against Egypt” while the Muslim Brotherhood was officially classified as a terrorist group.<sup>36</sup> In May 2014, General Sisi was elected president with 97%<sup>37</sup> of the vote and re-elected in 2018, although there were opposing views and criticism over human rights violations. On June 5, 2014, the EU stated that

“The European Union expresses its willingness to work closely with the new authorities in Egypt in a constructive partnership with a view to strengthening our bilateral relations.”<sup>38</sup>

The criticism over the EU’s statement emphasized lack of democratic practices in the country, since the parliamentary elections were to be held before the presidential elections, but the order was reversed and the president had the right to appoint 5% of the members of the new parliament according to the law passed by the interim president, Mansour.<sup>39</sup> The EU continued relations with Sisi since, and in his latest visit to Brussels in March 2022, protests highlighted human rights violations in Egypt. However, European Commission President von der Leyen emphasized Egypt’s strategic

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13, 2013, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/26169/134655.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> “Ashton Meets With Egypt’s Morsi”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 30, 2013, accessed August 2, 2023 <https://www.rferl.org/a/eu-ashton-morsi-egypt/25060773.html>

<sup>36</sup> Shadia Nasralla, *Egypt designates Muslim Brotherhood as terrorist group*, Reuters, December 25, 2013, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-explosion-brotherhood-idUSBRE9BO08H20131225>

<sup>37</sup> “Egypt President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi: Ruler with an iron grip”, BBC News, December 1, 2020, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19256730>

<sup>38</sup> “Declaration on behalf of the European Union on the presidential elections in Egypt”, European Council, June 5, 2014 accessed August 2, 2023, [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/143096.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/143096.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Gardner, “EU ‘congratulates’ el-Sisi”, *Politico* June 6, 2014, accessed August 2, 2023 <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-congratulates-el-sisi/>.

importance in the “fight against illegal migration, terrorism, and extremism”.<sup>40</sup> In addition to its strategic importance, the economic relations between the EU and Egypt continued to grow, trade between the EU and Egypt reached €24.5 billion in 2020<sup>41</sup>. The biggest FDI inflow to Egypt is from the EU, 1.928.900 (USD mn)<sup>42</sup>, and Egypt’s exports to the EU reached 8 billion EUR<sup>43</sup> in 2022.

In the Berlin International Conference on Libya, 19 January 2020, it was decided on the Berlin Process to assist the UN “in unifying the International Community in their support for a peaceful solution to the Libyan crisis”.<sup>44</sup> In the conclusions of this conference, governance, energy resources, respect for human rights and economic and financial recovery are some of the highlighted subheadings, which are in line with the EU’s main concerns regarding Libya. In order to assist the humanitarian needs the European Commission allocated €3 Million<sup>45</sup> in 2011, and since 2011 the Union “has allocated €88.8 million in humanitarian aid to Libya, including €4 million in 2022”<sup>46</sup>, imposed sanctions (28 February 2011) prohibiting the

<sup>40</sup> “EU welcomes Egypt’s President al-Sisi: when human rights do not matter”, Euromed Rights, March 3, 2022, accessed August 2, 2023 <https://euomedrights.org/publication/eu-welcomes-egypts-president-al-sisi-when-human-rights-do-not-matter/>.

<sup>41</sup> “The European Union and Egypt”, Delegation of the European Union to Egypt, July 28, 2021, accessed August 2, 2023 [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/egypt/european-union-and-egypt\\_en?s=95](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/egypt/european-union-and-egypt_en?s=95).

<sup>42</sup> “Egypt Foreign Direct Investment: Inflow: European Union (EU) 2021- 2022”, CEIC Data, accessed August 2, 2023 <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/egypt/foreign-direct-investment-by-country/foreign-direct-investment-inflow-european-union-eu>.

<sup>43</sup> Ahmed Kotb, “Egypt’s exports to European Union doubled in 2022, says head of EU Delegation”, *AhramOnline* December 15, 2022, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/482653.aspx>

<sup>44</sup> “Berlin International Conference on Libya”, United Nations Support Mission in Libya, January 19, 2020, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/berlin-international-conference-libya-19-january-2020>

<sup>45</sup> “Crisis in Libya: European Commission Allocates €3 Million to Address Humanitarian Needs”, European Union Press Release, Brussels, February 25, 2011, accessed August 2, 2023, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/11/228>

<sup>46</sup> “European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, Libya Fact sheet”, European Commission, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/libya\\_en#how-are-we-helping](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/libya_en#how-are-we-helping)

“direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of arms,” travel restrictions, and freezing of assets related to the Qaddafi government.<sup>47</sup> In April 2011, the EU adopted a decision on EUFOR Libya, stating that if requested by the OCHA<sup>48</sup>, it would provide support for humanitarian assistance in the region.”<sup>49</sup> The EU has also been funding projects on civil society, governance, health, economy, youth and education, and support to the political process, security and mediation activities via the European Neighborhood Instrument and the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace.<sup>50</sup>

Syrians were suffering from high unemployment, corruption and lack of political and social freedoms and demanded political-economic changes similar to the other Arab countries. In March 2011, protests erupted in Syria and as the unrest spread, foreign power involvement – financially and militarily – made things more complicated in the region, and by March 2023 more than 500,000 people had died, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The Syrian War intoxicated the whole region and became too intricate. The opposition was fragmented and as the extremist jihadist organizations became involved, the violence escalated. In 2012, a group called Jabhat al Nusra announced itself as Al-Qaeda’s Syrian franchise, and in 2013 remnants of Al Qaeda in Iraq calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq “exceeded al-Nusra’s brutality.”<sup>51</sup> In order to broker a ceasefire and peace

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<sup>47</sup> “Council Decision 2011/137/CFSP concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Libya”, 40. The Council of the European Union, Brussels, February 28, 2011, accessed August 2, 2023, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:058:0053:0062:EN:PDF>.

<sup>48</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

<sup>49</sup> “Council Decision 2011/210/CFSP of 1 April 2011 on a European Union military operation in support of humanitarian assistance operations in response to the crisis situation in Libya (EUFOR Libya)”, 41. The Council of the European Union, April 1, 2011, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32011D0210>

<sup>50</sup> Mohamed Eljarh, “Is Europe Exporting Instability to the Southern Mediterranean? Libya as a Case Study”, *EuroMed Survey Changing Euro-Mediterranean Lenses, IEMed*, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.iemed.org/publication/is-europe-exporting-instability-to-the-southern-mediterranean-libya-as-a-case-study/>

<sup>51</sup> Zachary Laub, “Syria’s Civil War: The Descent into Horror”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 14, 2023, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war>

talks, several multilateral steps were taken. One of the first examples of these multilateral efforts was creation of the Friends of Syria group, but then the Geneva Process under the aegis of the UN became the main platform for the peace talks. The Geneva Communique called for a political process beginning with the establishment of a transitional governing body formed on the basis of mutual consent.<sup>52</sup> After 9 rounds of talks, there was no substantial progress in the Geneva process. In 2017, Türkiye, Iran and Russia started the Astana Talks, but failed to make any progress.

From the start of the violence, the EU, the US, and the Arab League put sanctions on Syria. The Arab League cut off the transactions with the Syrian central bank, stopped funding projects in Syria, and put a travel ban on senior Syrian officials, and in 2019, the USA's Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act established additional sanctions and financial restrictions on institutions and individuals related to the conflict in Syria.<sup>53</sup> The EU sanctions were introduced in 2011 and extended until June 2023.<sup>54</sup> The EU's 6 key areas in relation to its strategic objectives in Syria mainly focus on inclusive political transition in line with the UNSCR 2254, promotion of democracy, human rights and freedom of speech while strengthening civil society, national reconciliation process and transitional justice, resilience of the Syrian population and society.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "Final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria", United Nations Office at Geneva, June 30, 2012, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://web.archive.org/web/20140129025023/http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B9C2E/%28httpNewsByYear\\_en%29/18F70DBC923963B1C1257A2D0060696B?OpenDocument](https://web.archive.org/web/20140129025023/http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B9C2E/%28httpNewsByYear_en%29/18F70DBC923963B1C1257A2D0060696B?OpenDocument)

<sup>53</sup> "H.R.31 - Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019", US Congress, 116th Congress 2019 – 2020, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/116/congress-house/31>

<sup>54</sup> The EU's list of sanctioned people and entities includes 289 persons targeted by both assets freeze and a travel ban, and 70 entities subject to an assets freeze. Other measures include a ban on the import of oil, restrictions on certain investments, a freeze of the assets of the Syrian Central Bank held in the EU, and export restrictions on equipment and technology that might be used for internal repression, as well as on equipment and technology for the monitoring or interception of internet or telephone communications. "Syria: Council extends sanctions against the regime for another year", Council of the European Union, May 31, 2022 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/05/31/syria-council-extends-sanctions-against-the-regime-for-another-year/>

<sup>55</sup> "EU Response to the Syrian Crisis", European Commission, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/factsheet\\_syria\\_digital-final.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/factsheet_syria_digital-final.pdf)

The EU's main contribution was in the field of humanitarian aid since the start of the civil war in Syria. ECHO<sup>56</sup> sets its mission as "to preserve lives, prevent and alleviate human suffering and safeguard populations affected by natural disasters and man-made crises."<sup>57</sup> Also, FPI<sup>58</sup> was responsible for the ICSP<sup>59</sup> and since 2011 it has funded projects supporting UN peace efforts, civil society dialogue initiatives, transitional justice and countering violent extremism.<sup>60</sup> From mid-2021 onwards, FPI managed funds under the crisis response pillar of the new NDICI<sup>61,62</sup>. In addition to these initiatives, the Brussels Conference has been a platform for raising funds to support the CSOs and people in Syria. Josep Borrell<sup>63</sup>, stated that the EU has delivered "€25 billion since the start of the crisis." In the Brussels Conference in March 2021, additional "€5.3 billion of new pledges" was generated.<sup>64</sup> EU Regional Trust Fund, Maddad was also used to merge various EU financial instruments and contributions from Member States into one single mechanism for fast disbursement.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

<sup>57</sup> "About", European Commission, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/departments-and-executive-agencies/european-civil-protection-and-humanitarian-aid-operations\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/departments-and-executive-agencies/european-civil-protection-and-humanitarian-aid-operations_en)

<sup>58</sup> European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments

<sup>59</sup> Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace

<sup>60</sup> "Foreign Policy Instruments", European Commission, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/departments-and-executive-agencies/foreign-policy-instruments\\_en#:~:text=The%20Service%20for%20Foreign%20Policy%20Instruments%20is%20reporting%20directly%20to,the%20most%20coherent%20and%20effective.](https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/departments-and-executive-agencies/foreign-policy-instruments_en#:~:text=The%20Service%20for%20Foreign%20Policy%20Instruments%20is%20reporting%20directly%20to,the%20most%20coherent%20and%20effective.)

<sup>61</sup> Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument

<sup>62</sup> "Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI – Global Europe)", European Commission, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument-global-europe-ndici-global-europe\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument-global-europe-ndici-global-europe_en)

<sup>63</sup> High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission

<sup>64</sup> "Syria: ten years on we still need a political solution that addresses the root causes of the conflict", Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Kazakhstan, March 31, 2021, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/syria-ten-years-we-still-need-political-solution-addresses-root-causes-conflict\\_en?s=222](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/syria-ten-years-we-still-need-political-solution-addresses-root-causes-conflict_en?s=222)

<sup>65</sup> "EU Response to the Syrian Crisis", European Commission.

When one looks at the policies that the EU initiated and adopted in all these cases, it is clearly seen that the EU has been rather active regarding the aid towards humanitarian causes rather than political and/or military response. The 2015 Strategy the EU adopted included the fight against IS and utilized the Counter Terrorism Agenda to disrupt IS's financial resources.<sup>66</sup> However, in 2017 the EU could not respond, neither to the Russian military intervention in Syria nor the ongoing battle between the regime and opposing forces. As the conflict continues, the positions of the Member States have started to differ from the EU itself; some proposed accepting the victory of Assad and starting the dialogue with him, i.e., Greece, Italy, and Poland.<sup>67</sup> There has been criticism over the sanctions, arguing that the sanctions increased the poverty while the war economy became “a barrier in the way for peace”.<sup>68</sup> Pierini<sup>69</sup> argues that the institutional structure of the EU foreign policy prevents the EU to be effective in Syria, while the inability of the big member states – Germany, Britain and France – to have a unanimous position towards the war decreased the EU's possible positive impact. Another common criticism was the inability of the EU to be a credible actor due to its dependence on the US, which limited implementation of its policies.<sup>70</sup> As Bouris and Nacrou argue, the EU “reduced its margin for maneuver as a funding partner and technical assistance provider to the United Nations (UN) mediation initiatives.”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> “Financing of the Terrorist Organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)”, Financial Action Task Force (FATF), February 2015, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/dam/fatf-gafi/reports/Financing-of-the-terrorist-organisation-ISIL.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> Charles Lister, “Is the EU Starting to Wobble on Freezing Out Assad?”, *Foreign Policy* October 27, 2022, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/27/eu-syria-policy-assad-migration/>

<sup>68</sup> Rim Turkmani and Mustafa Haid, “The role of the EU in the Syrian conflict”, *SiT*, (February 2016):16, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://brussels.fes.de/fileadmin/public/editorfiles/events/Maerz\\_2016/FES\\_LSE\\_Syria\\_Turkmani\\_Haid\\_2016\\_02\\_23.pdf](https://brussels.fes.de/fileadmin/public/editorfiles/events/Maerz_2016/FES_LSE_Syria_Turkmani_Haid_2016_02_23.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> Marc Pierini, “In Search of an EU Role in the Syrian War”, *Carnegie Europe*, (August 2016): 22 accessed August 2, 2023, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP\\_284\\_Pierini\\_Syria\\_Final.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_284_Pierini_Syria_Final.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> Ayşe Üstünel Yırcalı, “Europe and the Syrian Conflict: Policies and Perceptions”, *PODEM*, (September 2017): 9, accessed August 2, 2023, <http://podem.org.tr/en/researches/europe-and-the-syrian-conflict-policies-and-perceptions/>

<sup>71</sup> Dimitris Bouris and Anis Nacrou, “The Ins and Outs of the EU's Shortcomings in Syria”, *EuroMed Survey Changing Euro- Mediterranean Lenses*, *IEMed*,

It was clear from the beginning of all these crises that the EU was more interested and invested in preventing migration rather than political and/or military response. As the flux of migrants increased by 2015, the prevention of migrants entering the EU became a priority, thus EU relations with its immediate neighborhood evolving around this theme was observed. In March 2016, the EU-Türkiye Statement was announced to end the irregular migration from Türkiye to the Union. As part of this statement, a.k.a the Migrant Deal, Türkiye accepted to “take any necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for illegal migration”. In return the EU “will further speed up the disbursement of the initially allocated 3 billion euros under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey and ensure funding of further projects for persons under temporary protection identified with swift input from Turkey”<sup>72</sup>. In 2017, a Joint Statement on the Migration Situation in Libya was published, stressing “the imperative need to improve the conditions of migrants and refugees in Libya and to undertake all necessary action to provide them with the appropriate assistance and to facilitate their voluntary repatriation to their countries of origin as well as durable solutions for refugees.”<sup>73</sup> In 2018, just a year after these statements, another framework - regional disembarkation platforms - was proposed to prevent migrants reaching EU soil. When the original idea, Regional Protection Areas near refugee origin countries to contain them<sup>74</sup> was leaked in 2013, the proposal was not welcomed. Only after 5 years did the European Council conclusions call for “the Council and the Commission to swiftly explore the concept of regional disembarkation platforms, in close cooperation with relevant third countries, as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-ins-and-outs-of-the-eus-shortcomings-in-syria/>

<sup>72</sup> “EU-Turkey Statement”, Council of the European Union, March 18, 2016, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

<sup>73</sup> “African Union-European Union summit - Joint statement on the migrant situation in Libya”, Council of the European Union, December 1, 2017, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/12/01/au-eu-summit-joint-statement-on-the-migrant-situation-in-libya/>

<sup>74</sup> Alan Travis, “Shifting a problem back to its source”, *The Guardian*, February 5, 2003, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/feb/05/immigration.immigrationandpublicservices>

(UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)”<sup>75</sup> Since then, controlling migration took the relations between the EU and the regional countries hostage, decreasing the normative role and actorness of the EU as well as its image as a credible benign actor in its neighborhood.

### **B - The Black Sea Region since the 2010s: How Did the EU Respond?**

Russian aggression in its “near abroad” has been escalating since the 5-day war in 2008 in Georgia. In 2014, invasion and then annexation of Crimea and in 2022, war in Ukraine changed the whole Black Sea geopolitics. Through all these aggressions Russia’s main aim has been increasing its influence not only over the Black Sea and the Caucasus but also the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In the war in Georgia and in Crimea, the EU’s response when compared with the war in Ukraine in February 2022, was less forceful. In 2022, the EU’s sanction plans have been tougher, and the EU has been able to act in a more united manner, rapidly.

One of the reasons for Russian aggression in the region is NATO’s enlargement towards the east and the increased Russian perception of threat. After the end of the Cold War, Czechia, Hungary and Poland became members of NATO in 1999. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined the Alliance in 2004; Albania and Croatia in April 2009; Montenegro in June 2017; and the Republic of North Macedonia in March 2020.<sup>76</sup> Besides, the EU became a more active and welcomed actor in the region through its Neighborhood Policy, especially after the introduction of the Eastern Partnership. With the countries in the Eastern Partnership – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine – the EU aimed to intensify its relations through Association Agreements, which include not only economic and trade relations but also cultural, political and social policies. In 2013, Yanukovich withdrew from signing the Association Agreement and the “Euromaidan” Protests started in Kiev. At the end of February 2014, Yanukovich fled the country and temporary president Turchynov was in power until Poroshenko was elected as the President of Ukraine in May 2014. The division of the

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<sup>75</sup> “European Council Conclusions”, Council of the European Union, June 28, 2018, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/06/29/20180628-euco-conclusions-final/>

<sup>76</sup> “Enlargement and Article 10”, NATO, July 25, 2023, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49212.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49212.htm)

country between Russian speaking Eastern Ukrainians and Ukrainian speaking Western Ukrainians continued shaping the regional developments yet again.

After Russia invaded and annexed Crimea in March 2014, in his address Putin stated:

“Do not believe those who want you to fear Russia, shouting that other regions will follow Crimea. We do not want to divide Ukraine; we do not need that. As for Crimea, it was and remains a Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean-Tatar land.”<sup>77</sup>

The EU’s response to annexation was quick. Just after the annexation referendum, the EU issued sanctions including travel restrictions and asset freezes, bilateral talks between the EU and Russia were suspended, and Russia was expelled from the G8. An arms embargo and restrictions on technological investments followed.

Russian attack on Ukraine, in February 2022, called a special military operation by Putin, initially launched on different fronts – Belarus, Kharkiv, Luhansk and Donetsk. The EU’s response was fast again, and the level of solidarity demonstrated was even surprising, considering the criticisms over the EU’s actorness in its foreign and security policies. It was argued that the consensus reached in the EU was as a result of “the distrust towards Russia mobilizing the Member States with one voice” and “shifts in trusting relationships inside the EU”.<sup>78</sup>

Since the annexation of Crimea, the EU has sanctioned 1473 individuals and 207 entities, including Vladimir Putin, Sergey Lavrov, Viktor Yanukovich, the Wagner Group and news agency RIA FAN.<sup>79</sup> As part of the sanctions, the list of sanctioned products includes a vast variety of products such as software, quantum computers, products related to oil refining and the energy industry, dual use goods that can be used both for

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<sup>77</sup> “Address by President of the Russian Federation”, President of Russia, March 18, 2014, accessed August 2, 2023, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>

<sup>78</sup> Michal Natorski and Karolina Pomorska, “Trust and Decision-making in Times of Crisis: The EU’s Response to the Events in Ukraine”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 55 no 1, (2017): 59

<sup>79</sup> “EU sanctions against Russia explained.” Council of the European Union, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/sanctions-against-russia-explained/#sanctions>

civilian and military purposes, luxury goods, crude oil, gold, cements and so on. In addition to the sanction on Russia, economic and military support mechanisms for Ukraine were initiated by the EU since the annexation of Crimea. These support mechanisms cover capacities such as temporary protection mechanisms, the European Peace Facility, the EU Military Assistance Mission for Ukraine, macro-financial assistance, budget support, emergency assistance, crisis response and humanitarian aid.

Another impact of the Russian war in Ukraine has been on the defense budgets of the EU member states. Since the 2014 Annexation of Crimea, defense spending has been on the agenda and the need for increased spending on battle tanks, unmanned aerial systems, defense-space capabilities, and military mobility was highlighted.<sup>80</sup> The Strategic Compass published in March 2022, one month after Russia invaded Ukraine, aims to

“make the EU a stronger and more capable security provider, by establishing a strong EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of up to 5000 troops, deploying 200 fully equipped CSDP mission experts, enhancing military mobility, making full use of the European Peace Facility [EPF] to support partners and conducting regular live exercises on land and at sea”.<sup>81</sup>

Ukraine has been one of the partners benefitting from the EPF and “€5.6 billion have been mobilized to support the delivery of military equipment to the Ukrainian Armed Forces”<sup>82</sup> Also, the EU member states decided to create the European Defense Investment Programme.

It was argued that the EU was not an effective actor in foreign and security policies all these years because there was no existential threat<sup>83</sup> and now, the war in Ukraine presented such threat. However, the studies so far have not demonstrated increased supranationalism or centralized decision-

<sup>80</sup> Daniel Fiott, “The Fog of War: Russia's War on Ukraine, European Defence Spending and Military Capabilities”, *Intereconomics*, 57, no 3, (2022): 154

<sup>81</sup> “A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence”, European Union External Action, March 24, 2022, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://www.eas.europa.eu/eas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1\\_en](https://www.eas.europa.eu/eas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en)

<sup>82</sup> “EU Solidarity with Ukraine”, European Commission, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/eu-assistance-ukraine\\_en#support-for-military-equipment-and-training](https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/eu-assistance-ukraine_en#support-for-military-equipment-and-training)

<sup>83</sup> Philipp Genschel, “Bellicist integration? The war in Ukraine, the European Union and core state Powers”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 29, no 12 (2022):1885

making mechanisms in the EU in this particular field. Although the importance of the security policy climbed to the top of the agenda of the EU, the intergovernmental character of the policy is still protected so far. The impact of the sanctions was contested, and it was argued that neither the sanctions imposed just after the annexation of Crimea nor invasion of Ukraine in 2022 changed the Russian behavior.<sup>84</sup> One significant change on the Western security structure has been the Finnish and Swedish applications to NATO membership. So, it would not be fair to say that Russian aggression in Ukraine had no impact on the European security system. However, the biggest impact which united European countries has been on NATO rather than the EU. In the Vilnius Summit of NATO, emphasis was on a collective defense based on a 360-degree approach in which Ukrainian President Zelenskyy participated. The decision to establish “the NATO-Ukraine Council, a new joint body where Allies and Ukraine sit as equal members to advance political dialogue, engagement, cooperation, and Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO”<sup>85</sup> demonstrate the importance given to Ukraine and its territorial integrity by the Euro-Atlantic alliance.

### Conclusion

When the common foreign and security policies became the 2<sup>nd</sup> pillar of the Union in the 1990s, the international environment dictated more liberal and cooperative relations among the states. However, by the 2000s, security concerns of the states and the people changed while increasing threat perception, the need for more security and defense shaped the international system. In the EU case, at the internal milieu, the 2008 economic crisis, followed by the 2015 migrant crisis and the 2020 pandemic, put tremendous pressure on the EU and its member states. At the external front not only the southern neighborhood but also the eastern neighborhood suffers from ongoing conflicts. The civil war in Syria, Arab uprisings, economic and social devastation in the south, and Russian aggression towards especially Georgia and Ukraine increase the concerns over border security and energy security.

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<sup>84</sup> For further analysis see Stephen B. Nix, “Responding to the Russian invasion of Crimea: policy recommendations for US and European leaders”, *European View*, 13, (2014): 143–152; Kiegan Barron, “The Annexation of Crimea and EU Sanctions: An Ineffective Response”, *The Arbutus Review*, 13, No. 1, (2022)

<sup>85</sup> “Vilnius Summit Communiqué”, NATO, July 11, 2023, accessed August 2, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_217320.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm)

The paper demonstrated that in the Mediterranean region, the EU focused more on humanitarian aid and prevention of migration. In the East, facing the Russian aggression, the EU was fast in responding through sanctions and later through military equipment aid to Ukraine. Also, NATO's significance for the European security structure was proved once more. The desires of Sweden and Finland to join NATO, along with Ukraine expressing interest in becoming a member of the organization, underscore the inclusive security umbrella that NATO provides for the Euro-Atlantic region. In the Vilnius Summit, the emphasis on peace and stability, coupled with the commitment to increase military spending beyond 2% of GDP, reflected the collective effort to enhance security in the Euro-Atlantic area, with the EU playing a pivotal role as a partner.

Given the increasing security concerns, the EU faces external pressures to boost joint efforts in security and defense. On the one hand, the EU finds it necessary to robust its efforts in this field, on the other hand internal dynamics among member states hinder effective power-sharing. There is a shared commitment to prioritize security and defense policies, however it has not been translated into a unified, EU-level action yet.

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