

A more integrated West-Mediterranean as a possible implication of a weaker EU

by Mohsen Hrizi

Abstract

The growing anti-EU sentiments in Southern Europe, juxtaposed with the increasing importance of North Africa in the foreign policies of Spain and Italy under the influence of the immigration and energy crises, attested to by Giorgia Meloni's Mattei Plan and the Morocco-Spain summit raises the prospects of more integration between the two banks of the West-Mediterranean. But the countries constituting each bank are politically and economically bound by agreements and treaties to other regional blocks and transnational organizations besides their cultural, ideological, and structural incoherence. In this paper, I dwell on the outlook of a more integrated West Mediterranean region, within the context of a weaker EU which is more and more invested in the Mediterranean Sea, and the implications of this integration for the other regional commitments of some West-Mediterranean states. In this endeavour, I draw on an interdisciplinary approach that maps into Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Critical Layered Analysis (CLA), and political theory.

Key Words: Mediterranean, EU, Integration

Introduction

The actual state of cohesion between the European Union (EU) member states is compelling enough for many European elites to maintain their faith in the union and for some Eurosceptic leaders to hesitate to bluntly voice their desire for breaking away from it in the short run. The EU Coronavirus Recovery Fund is needed by most EU member states and the levels of satisfaction with the union in some countries match those of the pre-Eurozone crisis (Busse et al., 2020; Bergmann et al., 2023). Yet, some events that have taken place in the aftermath of this crisis have shown that European cohesion is not immune from setbacks in the long run.

In this paper, motivated by the rise of Eurosceptic discourse in Europe and other challenges to EU cohesion, I explore the scenario of a weaker Europe and its implications for the West-Mediterranean region. In this endeavour, I start from the assumption inherent to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that every activity has material and non-material dimensions (Van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1989). Integration processes need to materialize into supranational institutions that coordinate the policies of member states and oversee their compliance with the founding charters and agreements of these very institutions. The EU as an institution has exercised power using material means (financial, legal, and military) besides the ideological tools of coercion embodied in Neoliberalism (Tereszkiewicz, 2021). In the first part of this analysis, I raise the question if the recent challenges to EU cohesion stand as signs and factors of weakening in the structure of the union. In the second part, I study the prospects of a more integrated West Mediterranean region within the context of a weaker EU.

Methodology

Rather than apply one methodology, in this paper, I intend to apply a multidisciplinary approach that maps into different disciplines and draws on political and linguistic theory. I draw on Critical Layered Analysis (CLA) suggested by Sohail Inayatullah in my study of the aspects of weakening European relations and their political and social context. In this approach, “there are four overlapping levels of reality—the day to day visible and objective presentation of data, or litany; the systemic or interrelated parts that comprise the issue; the worldview or interests and perspectives of stakeholders and finally the underlying, often unconscious, myths and metaphors that support and provide meaning to the entire framework. Myths and worldviews shape the data and thus the systemic solutions” (Inayatullah, 2010). In my analysis of the ideological layer of this process, I draw on CDA in order to reconstruct worldviews underlying certain practices. In my analysis of the prospects of West Mediterranean integration, I invite the Social Field and Communications theories of politics.

The weaker EU scenario

In this part, I draw on CLA, a method suggested by Sohail Inayatullah (Inayatullah, 2010), in order to raise the question if recent challenges faced by the EU stand as “visible” and “objective” aspects of and factors for weakening in the structural and ideological fabric binding the EU nations together. I first discuss the events that have constituted separate challenges to the EU project. Secondly, I study some of the factors behind this visible “litany.” Meanwhile, I dwell on the interaction between these signs, on the one hand, and ideology and discourse, on the other. In this, I study the resilience of the pro-EU discourse in the face of future discursive challenges.

During the last 15 years the EU has faced interrelated foreign and domestic challenges. These crises have threatened the state of cohesion between the EU member states and put the exit of some Southern European member states on the table. My discussion of some recent challenges to the cohesion of the EU addresses the internal difficulties first and proceeds to the ones generated outside of Europe later.

The Eurozone crisis, caused by the Great Recession (2008) in the United States (U.S.) (Rohac & Christensen, 2017), led to many internal challenges to the EU as it contributed to the intensification of Euroscepticism, the genesis of Brexit, the polarization of domestic politics, and the widening of the gap between Northern and Southern Europe (Rohac & Christensen, 2017). The Russia-Ukraine War and the 2015 migration and the 2020 Covid19 crises have all triggered internal crises within the EU whose roots lie outside of the continent.

Euroscepticism, as a sceptical attitude towards the EU that was intensified by the Eurozone crisis (Rohac & Christensen 2017), not only casts doubts on the efficiency of the EU’s material practices but also on its ideological premises rooted in Neoliberalism, free trade, and globalization (Tereszkiewicz, 2021). Right-wing Euroscepticism acts as a weakening force for the EU at the level of discourse while the left-wing detractors of the EU tend to provide material and ideological criticism of the project. Tereszkievicz defines a “radical-left Euroskeptic (RLE)” group as one “based on economic and territorial nationalism; favors a workers’ democracy; supports

a mixed market economy (and an active role of the state in controlling the economy); opposes trade liberalization, marketization, and privatization; and is pessimistic about the EU's current direction”.

Just as it threatened European homogeneity, the Eurozone crisis has led to the polarization of domestic politics in some EU member states, between the radical left and right. Spanish politics has been divided sharply due to a division of public opinion led by right-wing party Vox and far-left Podemos, respectively founded in 2013 and 2014 (Pinto, 2002) in the aftermath of austerity protests (Carvalho, 2022). Polarization between the two extremes of a political scene minimizes the chances of reaching a consensus on national policies, which weakens the state's capacity for taking part in integration processes with other states.

Brexit, which put at stake the very existence of the EU, was partially caused by the Eurozone crisis and its consequent Euroscepticism (Malik, 2018). The vote in the UK to withdraw from the EU on June 23, 2016 points towards another more implicit crisis of trust in the material and mythical usefulness of this union. Brexit was caused by structural problems within the EU (Rohac & Christensen, 2017; Malik, 2018) and encouraged by an anti-immigrant discourse (Khosravinik, 2017) questioning the narrative about a liberal world order where free trade promotes democracy and wards off war.

The Russia-Ukraine war has constituted a test for the EU's capacity for holding together in an age where Globalization is facing several setbacks. Bergmann et al. (2023) argue the EU has shown, despite dependence on Russian oil and gas, “a high degree of political unity” in their stance on the war in Ukraine. This unity did not, however, prevent some divisions among and within EU member states to surface. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has often called into question the EU sanctions on Russia as more harmful to Europe than to Russia (Tidey, 2023), a view shared by Silvio Berlusconi, leader of Forza Italia, and Matteo Salvini, leader of Lega, both part of Italy's ruling coalition (Stancati, 2023). The Eurozone crisis was followed by an ongoing immigration crisis that peaked in 2015 with the entry of 1 million Syrian refugees into Europe (World Politics Review, 2023). This situation has strengthened “anti-immigration movements,” which “has brought the organisation to the brink of disintegration” (Malik, 2018).

When the Coronavirus pandemic broke out in Italy, the lack of a joint policy risked causing a great schism between Italy and its European neighbours. As the country was taken by surprise and the rest of Europe by fear, each country rushed to strengthening its borders to reduce the transmission of the virus and securing for itself the needed equipment for a medical response. With skyrocketing numbers of casualties and limited resources, the spirit of competition rather than the spirit of cooperation shaped the policies of each European state. A discourse capitalized on by the right wing in Italy that the country was forsaken by its neighbours started to circulate (*Ue: Conte, l'Italia è stata lasciata "da sola,"* 2020).

Systemic and ideological analysis: Crises of Globalization

By tracing the Eurozone crisis to the contradiction between the monetary union of the EU which sets fixed interest rates, on the one hand, and the different fiscal policies of the EU member states, on the other, Godby and Anderson (2016), Rohac and Christensen (2017), and Malik (2018) seem to subscribe to a reductionist tradition of emphasizing the role of sub-systemic- domestic- policy flaws in market disruptions and overlooking systemic reasons pertaining to free trade, deregulation and Globalization (Drezner & McNamara, 2013). Because the factors behind the Great Recession and Eurozone crisis are structural and stretch beyond the geographic scope of the EU, they are likely to cause some of the studied challenges to recur in the future regardless of the EU's policies.

In a world that opens economic borders to foreign capital and thus to financial contagion, deregulation encourages risk taking by banks, which puts the global financial system at stake. The Eurozone crisis originated in the U.S. (Rohac and Christensen, 2017), where lack of regulation encouraged predatory lending by financial institutions, thus fuelling a housing bubble that led, like other bubbles, to a global financial crisis (Inyatullah 2010; Drezner and McNamara, 2013). Varoufakis (2023) goes beyond the usual blame put on regulators for not anticipating crises and alleges that prior to the 2023 Banking Crisis, which itself is a sign of this recurrence,

regulators were aware that “the combination of significant increases in long-term interest rates” and a bank-run would lead to crisis.

This passivity before crises is rooted in an ideological commitment to deregulation by European policymakers which limits their ability to avert crises and raises the risk of their recurrence. Drezner and McNamara (2013) relate this possibility of recurrence to a cycle where global financial orders tend to drift “towards credit overexpansion, speculative financial bubbles, amassing of public debt, and eventual collapse.” However, they argue, “political scientists have not done as much to fill in the gaps of why and how policymakers, investors, and citizens keep believing that, in Reinhart and Rogoff’s words, ‘this time is different’”. The 2008 Great Recession was not therefore prevented, though it went through the recurrent life-cycle of a global financial order, due to the accepted wisdom rooted in the Washington Consensus that international deregulation is the engine of growth and that the market will regulate itself before any collapse.

Ideological and material gaps and contradictions of Globalization underlie the crisis of immigration. The free circulation of people plays a role in the Globalization project similar to the one played by capital. If the latter abolishes financial borders, the former acts so as to abolish the physical ones. Yet like many Globalist narratives, immigration remains an incomplete one, caught in a dilemma between those who call for implementing the Globalist promise of no borders and those who advocate erecting more walls before immigrants. Free circulation within the EU is a fact but the movement of people across the borders of the Southern bank of the Mediterranean and from the latter into the EU is controlled and limited (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2021). Irregular immigration has been the alternative for many citizens in EU neighbouring states, mainly in Africa, who do not meet EU visa requirements.

The opposition between the two sides of the immigration dilemma points to the role of Globalization in the immigration crisis and in the intensification of Euroscepticism which in turn has further polarized European politics. The no-border movement in Europe converges with the Globalist, liberal and Marxist outlook on equality between people as transcending nationality, race, and ethnicity (Bauder, 2014). Aware of the convergences

between the Globalist ideology and the call for no-borders, some European politicians, who tend to stand on the Eurosceptic side of the dilemma, have blamed Globalization for the immigration crisis and have called for tighter border measures.

The immigration crisis also attests to the failure of Globalization to deliver the global sustainable development it promises. The gap between the developed North and the developing South is the main incentive for young people in the southern bank of the Mediterranean who do not meet EU visa requirements to try to reach the other bank on board of unsafe boats and ships. Globalization has weakened political borders, and consequently, the principle of non-intervention. This exacerbated the Syrian and Libyan conflicts where foreign military interventions, whether direct or indirect, increased the different parties' capacity for inflicting enough violence to force millions to flee abroad.

Systemic and ideological analysis: A less cohesive Neoliberal West

The less cohesive EU is a metonymy of a less cohesive Neoliberal West striving to maintain its influence, interests, and worldviews against a growing internal protectionist opposition embodied, for example, by President Trump's affirmation of the nation state (Vera, 2022); and within a changing world where new powers are emerging to use their influence to counter Western worldviews and hegemony.

If the ideological foundations of the EU inhere in Neoliberalism with its promise of a prosperous globalized world that demolishes physical, cultural, and economic borders, the Western conservative worldview capitalizes on the setbacks of Globalization to declare itself a rebuilders of these demolished borders through the metaphor of the "natural." Nature stands, in this discourse, as a standard for society to imitate while physical and cultural borders are painted as a lesson we should derive from it. In a speech before an electoral rally of Vox party supporters in Marbella, Spain, Giorgia Meloni, Italy's current Prime Minister, argues that the "ideology of the politically correct" does not content itself with the destruction of national, cultural,

and economic borders but rather goes as far as launching a war on the individual by demolishing the borders between genders (*Fratelli D'Italia*, 2022).

The so-far containable divisions on the Russia-Ukraine War discussed earlier can slide into schisms as the war lasts longer and if other conflicts break out or financial crises hit the world's economies. This possibility was hinted at by French President Emmanuel Macron when he warned that Europe should not be drawn into a hypothetical U.S.-China conflict on Taiwan (Rankin, 2023). The challenges to the cohesion of the Global North in general, and the EU, in particular, discussed earlier have thus acted as warning signs to the EU member states that they should prepare to act alone, and consequently, as weakening factors for the cohesion of the EU. The logic of the nation-state is seeping into the discourse and policies of mainstream European parties and politicians. The Coronavirus pandemic, in its earlier phase, led most world countries to engage into a prelude to a post-Globalized world as states built walls before the free circulation of goods and people.

The prospects of some Mediterranean scenarios

In the previous part, I argued that recent developments in the EU stand as signs of a weakening in the bond tying together the EU member states and the Neoliberal Western alliance due to structural and ideological inconsistencies inherent in the process of Neoliberal Globalization favouring their recurrence and exacerbation. Thus, they also stand as factors further debilitating this bond because they raise awareness among EU policymakers that the return of the nation-state is a possible scenario that should be prepared for. In this part, I firstly discuss the prospects of a more integrated Mediterranean as a possible result of this weakening in light of the difficulties faced by the previous Euro-Mediterranean integration efforts and the present geopolitical situation. Secondly, I argue that while further material partnership is more possible in the West than the East Mediterranean, bridging the ideological and cultural ties in the Mediterranean region is more challenging.

Factors favouring the Mediterranean implication

Several factors make the possibility of a more integrated Mediterranean a tempting idea for southern Europe, and thus, a possible implication of a less cohesive EU. First the less cohesive West and the Globalization crisis I discuss earlier can affect the communication flows between Southern and Northern Europe, on the one hand, and between Europe and North America, on the other, in case the situation in Taiwan and Ukraine further escalates or takes longer to resolve. The crises of Globalization are likely to induce Southern European policymakers into envisaging more regional cooperation at the expense of transatlantic or Globalist ones. In this scenario, following the logic of the communications theory developed by Karl Deutsch and outlined by Cobb and Elder (1970), the mutual relevance between the southern and northern banks of the Mediterranean is likely to be enhanced. Looking eastward is becoming more and more difficult for Europe as Turkey and Hungary stand for Euroscepticism in Europe's eastern periphery and borders respectively (Basbugoglu and Korkut, 2022).

Secondly, geographic proximity means more effective communication and easier, faster, and less costly exchange of goods and services. Integration also means human mobility, and therefore, the movement of people between the two banks, instead of a problem, can be seen as an integrative factor facilitated by geographic proximity despite its unidirectional course. The 2 million Maghrebis living in France and the 397.889 Moroccans who lived regularly in Italy in 2021 (*Ministero Del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali*, 2023) act as a cultural and social bridge between Southern Europe and the Maghreb.

Another factor that is likely to enhance the mutual relevance of the two banks of the Mediterranean to each other is collaboration on national security issues like energy, terrorism, and immigration. After EU countries cut down their imports of Russian gas in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine War, Algeria (Desorgues 2023; Italy says to boost energy, 2023), Libya, Israel, and Egypt are expected to help reduce European energetic dependence on Russia. Tunisia and Morocco have embarked on renewable energy projects that can place them as possible partners for Southern Europe in their

energy transition, with Morocco on the right path to “to meet a 2030 target of 52%” for renewable power capacity (Christofaro, 2022).

Euro-Mediterranean Difficulties

Efforts at enhancing integration between the two banks of the Mediterranean began under the umbrella of the EU in 1995 with the Barcelona Process and continued with the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008. Yet, success in these efforts has been limited and slow (OECD, 2023; Rizzi and Varvelli 2023) due to gaps at the levels of integration, differences between the two banks of the Mediterranean at the structural and ideational levels, and asymmetrical efforts to establish structural and cultural homogeneity.

While the northern bank is well-connected and integrated, infrastructure connectivity in the southern bank is inadequate or weak and so is the state of South-to-South trade, mobility, and scientific cooperation (Rizzi and Varvelli, 2023, p.8; OECD 2021, p.14). Structural differences have also resulted in discordance between the two sides of the Mediterranean. Some southern Mediterranean states, like Algeria, are dependent on energy exports (OECD 2021), which results in further discordance between their economy and the more diversified economies in the region.

The lack of shared values and homogeneity at the structural and ideological levels impacts communication, and thus, affects the relevance of one party to the other, according to the Social Field Theory (Cobb and Elder, 1970). In the Mediterranean, this lack of shared values is due in part to asymmetrical relations implied in blaming the limited success of the EU-MENA integration by Rizzi and Varvelli (2023) on authoritarianism in the Southern banks of the Mediterranean, which, they argue, hampered the efforts at grounding the relationship between the two banks on common values. This view suggests that the Southern Mediterranean states failed to meet the democratic standards of their northern counterparts.

The one-sidedness of this normative discourse is a trait stemming from a broader Globalist one and it is partly responsible for the ideological set-

backs of the Globalization project in the Global South, of which the Southern Mediterranean is part. The recent rapprochement between the Saudis, the long-term allies of the U.S., on the one hand, and the Russians and Chinese, on the other, is in part due to the moralizing discourse of U.S. President Joe Biden during the electoral campaign. The discourse about Western efforts at making allies that endorse democratic values subscribes to ideal political theory in the sense that it overlooks the power-or-security dilemma (Wright, 1952). The Realist school in international affairs criticizes such normative views for being reductionist and argues that international relations are too sophisticated to be moralized (Owens, 2007).

The outlook of an emerging Euro-Mediterranean realism

A lesson the EU is likely to learn from the UfM's limited success and from the crises of Globalization is that partnership between the two banks should be more pragmatic, that is, less political and ideological, on the one hand, and more oriented towards trade, infrastructure, and scientific and energy cooperation, on the other. Another likely conclusion is that coherence on major values should be the fruit of dialogue between the two banks of the Mediterranean rather than a unilateral decision by the Northern bank. Thus a new vision of the Mediterranean as a pluralistic security community, i.e., a space where different entities merge while retaining their structural specificities (Cobb and Elder, 1970) is emerging as an alternative to the homogeneity perspective.

The avoidance of traditional political conditionality enshrined in the Barcelona Process and the UfM and the insistence on economic cooperation in the European Commission's (2021) New Agenda for the Mediterranean and Economic Investment Plan are signs of this emerging realist trajectory which is likely to be strengthened by upcoming financial crises and energy needs. If it follows a realist line, the EU might act as the umbrella under which Mediterranean integration is consolidated rather than an obstacle. Yet, the reach of these new EU agendas to a vast region that covers most of the MENA and Europe is likely to intersect with regional crises in Eastern

Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Therefore, I argue that West-Mediterranean integration constitutes a more pragmatic alternative.

West-Mediterranean integration as a realist alternative to EU-Mediterranean integration

The West Mediterranean is readier than the East Mediterranean for more integration due in part to its smaller geographical scope which facilitates communication and the unlikelihood of violent conflicts between its states. Karl Deutsch posits the unlikelihood of using violence as a minimal condition for the existence of a political community (as cited in Cobb and Elder, 1970, p.14). The East Mediterranean does not obey this condition for it has been grappling with decades-long civil and interstate conflicts. The Syrian Civil War has been the deadliest in the last decade. The Arab-Israeli conflicts have torn the region apart for decades. There is almost no country in the East Mediterranean that does not have border or land disputes with another.

Divisions in the West Mediterranean are more containable. In Spain, despite the polarization of politics and society and separatist tendencies, the Spanish political institutions continue to offer a unifying umbrella for the different political movements, currents, and parties. Algeria and Morocco have been relatively stable for the last two decades and demand on Algerian gas might offer it enough revenue to achieve political, social, and economic stability. Tunisia has witnessed much political turmoil over the last decade but state institutions have shown much resilience within a tumultuous world. The 2 serious challenges for the region are the disagreement between Algeria and Morocco on the Western Sahara issue and French-Italian competition, which are not likely to result in armed conflict in the short run.

Besides, the Western Mediterranean region is less exposed to non-Mediterranean influences than the East. Syria is caught in a superpower conflict that resulted in the presence of foreign forces on its territories and so is the central Mediterranean crisis in Libya. The political scene in Lebanon is divided along sectarian lines capitalized upon by regional actors. The resil-

ient partnership between the two banks of the West Mediterranean stood non-Mediterranean challenges like the Algerian request to join BRICS besides the warming ties between MENA countries, on the one hand, and Russia and China, on the other. The EU, the African Union, and the Arab League instead of obstacles to further Mediterranean integration could support this effort due to its promise to act as a bridge between them.

Signs of an emerging West-Mediterranean political community

Signs of the growing communication and mutual relevance between the two banks of the West-Mediterranean are transpiring gradually as in the transcontinental bid of Portugal, Spain, and Morocco to host the 2030 FIFA World Cup and the growing influence of Algeria and Morocco in West Mediterranean politics due to the immigration and energy crises discussed earlier. European leaders have visited Algeria since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War in search for energy agreements with the North African nation (Desorgues, 2023). With the shortage of Russian gas, Italy wants to exploit its proximity to North Africa in order to become an energy Hub in Europe (Italy says to boost energy, 2023). In December 2022, the Italian Ministry of Environment and Energy Security began the process of authorizing an undersea electrical interconnection between Tunisia and Italy that promises to turn the latter into a hub for renewable energies (Terna, 2023). Morocco on the other hand used the immigration card to put pressure on Spain over the Western Sahara issue. The rapprochement between Spain and Morocco was attested to in the recent summit between the two kingdoms during which certain agreements were signed to turn Spain into the main commercial partner of Morocco (Las Heras, 2023).

The Italian foreign policy, with its realist avoidance of explicit political interventionism, is one more sign of this trajectory of more West Mediterranean cooperation that derives lessons from the slow process of the UfM due to asymmetrical relations between the two banks of the Mediterranean. Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's discourse on "Mattei Plan" – Italy's new partnership plan with North Africa (Perona Calvete, 2023) – has

avoided normative vocabulary and relied on one that enumerates the material benefits of this partnership for the two banks of the Mediterranean. In a speech she gave in India, Meloni enumerated the energy and economic potentials of Africa, which just as they should benefit Europe, “should first of all benefit to peoples who are the owners of these commodities,” she said, describing her intended collaboration with Africa as one “without coercion, economic or otherwise” (DD India, 2023). Fearing another immigration crisis in case Tunisia and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) do not reach a bailout agreement, Meloni “said the International Monetary Fund should take a ‘pragmatic’ approach to a bailout for Tunisia, in comments to other G7 leaders in Japan” (Italy PM urges pragmatic IMF approach, 2023).

A stronger West-Mediterranean partnership is a transpiring implication of recent geopolitical changes. Yet, psychological, cultural, and social integration is likely to face challenges. People, besides discourse, can learn from experience (Deutsch 1954/1970). The emerging realist approach by the EU discussed earlier might contribute to the genesis of some shared values though much congruence is very unlikely. Eurosceptics posit the Southern Mediterranean as the source of a physical and cultural invasion of Europe, while the European leftist, progressive, and Liberal discourses appeal to a European and global identity centred on the individual rather than the national. In the MENA region, Arab nationalism, Islamist conservatism, and nationalist leftism rarely identify with a Mediterranean identity. The unidirectional course of immigration minimizes the chances of social and cultural interactions between the two banks.

Conclusion

In the previous paragraphs I dwelt on the scenario of weakening cohesion among the EU member states in the long and the short run and some of its implications for Mediterranean integration. I concluded that this emerging scenario can evolve into different directions with different implications for this integration:

In the long run: Europe acting within a reformed Neoliberal World Or-

der: The unpredictability of the neoliberal global financial order, the likely expansion of the BRICS, the unlikelihood of a military and economic containment of emerging superpowers in the short run, and the emerging disagreements among and within the Western sub-blocs make it unlikely for the West to maintain its actual state of cohesiveness and its global hegemony in the long run unless this alliance reforms its material and non-material practices. The EU's traditional normative policies in the Southern Mediterranean – generated within the context of Western Neoliberal hegemony- are likely to depend on whether this hegemony is maintained or not.

In the short and the long run: Europe acting as a geopolitical bloc: Calls for the EU to become a geopolitical actor as part of this reform are becoming louder. In order for it to take this line, the EU needs to turn to its Southern neighbours. There are two possible approaches to this EU-Mediterranean turn. One is maintaining the traditional normative approach to the Southern Mediterranean. The other is a pragmatic approach that breaks away from the traditional one used in the UfM. A lesson learnt is that the traditional approach with its political conditionality risks perpetuating the same difficulties of the UfM initiative in the short and the long run. Because it is more relevant within a context of Neoliberal Western hegemony, the traditional approach would be at odds with the context of a geopolitical Europe and with the emerging multi-polarity that has given some Third World states alternatives to compliance with Western conditionality. An alternative European geopolitical approach would follow a more pragmatic line. This approach is drawn upon by Italian government figures in their discourse on Mattei Plan with its focus on devising new mechanisms and models of economic cooperation with the Southern Mediterranean, its avoidance of political conditionality as a means to set up common values, and its focus on shared history instead. This discourse has the potential to compete more effectively than the traditional EU normative discourse with the Sino-Russian one on non-interference in the domestic affairs of Third World states.

The West-Mediterranean Alternative: Most of these scenarios intersect in Southern Europe and the Maghreb, i.e., in the West Mediterranean. The latter, I argued, better subscribes to the category of a security community (Deutsch 1954/1970) than the East Mediterranean due to the unlikelihood

of using violence to resolve disputes. Whether in a cohesive or in a fragmented EU, the mutual relevance between Southern Europe and the South Mediterranean is likely keep growing, despite the emerging multi-polarity, in the short and the long run, due the energetic, economic, and security, interdependence dictated by geographic proximity.

References

- Basbugoglu T., Korkut U., *Responsibility to Protect European Identity: How Do Orbán and Erdoğan Expand Europe's Boundaries of International Protection?* In J. Foley & U. Korkut (Eds.), *Contesting Cosmopolitan Europe: Euroscepticism, Crisis and Borders*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2022.
- Bauder H., *The Possibilities of Open and No Borders*, «Social Justice», vol. 39, n. 4, 2014, pp. 76-96.
- Bergmann M., Toygür I., & Svendsen O., *A Continent Forged in Crisis: Assessing Europe One Year into the War*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2023: [jstor.org/stable/resrep47348](https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47348).
- Busse C., Loss R., Puglierin J., & Zerka P., *The crisis that made the European Union: European cohesion in the age of Covid*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2020: [jstor.org/stable/resrep27735](https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27735).
- Carvalho T., *Contesting Austerity: Social Movements and the Left in Portugal and Spain (2008-2015)*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022.
- Christofaro B., *Small Morocco punches above its weight on renewables*, «DW», 2022: <https://t.ly/JY-BY>.
- Cobb R.W., Elder C., *International Community: A Regional and Global Study*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, inc, 1970.
- Desorgues P., *Algérie : avec son gaz et son pétrole, le régime est-il un des gagnants de la guerre en Ukraine ?*, «TV5 Monde», 2023: <https://t.ly/oGjBw>.
- Deutsch K.W. (With Snyder, R.C.). *Political Community at the International Level*, Archon Books, (Original Work Published in 1954), 1970.
- DD India, *PM of Italy Giorgia Meloni delivered keynote address at the #RaisinaDialogue 2023* [Video]. «Youtube», 2023: <https://t.ly/pAsco>.
- Drezner D.W., McNamara K.R., *International Political Economy, Global Financial Orders and the 2008 Financial Crisis*, «Perspectives on Politics», vol.11, n.1, 2013, pp.155-166.
- European Commission, *Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood: A new Agenda for the Mediterranean*, 2021: <https://t.ly/B90s0>.
- European Commission, *Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood: Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours*, 2021.
- Fairclough N., *Language and power*, Longman Group, Essex, 1989.
- Fratelli D'Italia, *Una grande Giorgia Meloni interviene a Marbella, in Spagna, insieme ad Abascal e agli amici di Vox* [Video]. «Youtube», 2022: <https://t.ly/o6ArQ>.

- Godby R., Anderson S.B., *Greek Tragedy, European Odyssey: The Politics and Economics of the Eurozone Crisis*, Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2016.
- Inayatullah S., *Emerging World Scenarios Triggered by The Global Financial Crisis*, «World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues», vol. 14, n. 3, 2010, pp. 48-69.
- Italy PM urges pragmatic IMF approach to Tunisia bailout*, «Ahram Online», 2023: <https://t.ly/FpaNZ>.
- Italy says to boost energy ties with gas giant Algeria*, «France 24», 2023: <https://t.ly/rOd0Q>.
- Khosravini M., *Right Wing Populism in the West: Social Media Discourse and Echo Chambers*, «Insight Turkey», vol. 19, n.3, 2017, pp. 53-68.
- Las Heras P., *Cumbre España-Marruecos: Declaración de intenciones, pero pocas acciones*, «Universidad de Navarra», 2023: <https://t.ly/EZQTE>.
- Malik S., *Post-Brexit Scenario: The European Union under Threat*, «Strategic Studies», vol. 38, n. 4, 2018, pp. 90-109.
- Ministero Del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, *La Comunità marocchina in Italia: rapporto annuale sulla presenza dei migranti*, 2023.
- OECD, *Regional Integration in the Union for the Mediterranean: Progress Report*, 2021: <https://t.ly/5OHva>.
- Owens P., *Between War and Politics: International Relations and the Thought of Hannah Arendt*. Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Perona Calvete C., *Italy's Mattei Plan*, «The European Conservative», 2023: <https://t.ly/tKxh>.
- Pinto T.N., *What next for divided Spain?* GIS Reports Online, 2022: <https://t.ly/Wc91z>.
- Rankin J., *Macron sparks anger by saying Europe should not be 'vassal' in US-China clash*, «The Guardian», 2023: https://t.ly/3U1_q.
- Rohac D., Christensen L., *After the Eurozone Crisis: Causes, Consequences, and Lessons for European and US Policymakers*, American Enterprise Institute, 2017: [jstor.com/stable/resrep03285](https://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep03285).
- Rizzi A., Varvelli A., *Opening the Global Gateway: Why the EU Should Invest More in The Southern Neighbourhood*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2023: [jstor.org/stable/resrep48492](https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep48492).
- Stancati M., *Italy's Berlusconi Attacks Ukraine's Zelensky, Sparking a Storm in Rome*. «The Wall Street Journal», 2023: <https://t.ly/jBC6W>.
- Tereszkiewicz F., *The Politicization of European Union Trade Policy*. «Journal of Economic Integration», Vol. 36, n.3, 2021, pp. 409-436.
- Terna, *Italy-Tunisia Interconnection (#Tunita)*, 2023: <https://t.ly/M0vgs>.
- Tidey A., *Hungary mailin poll on Russia sanctions dismissed by Brussels*. «Euronews», 2023: <https://t.ly/zYZ-q>.
- Ue: *Conte, l'Italia è stata lasciata "da sola" ad affrontare il coronavirus*, «Agenzia Nova », 2020: <https://t.ly/NksUG>.
- Van Dijk T. A., *Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis*, «Discourse and Society», vol. 4, n.2, 1993, pp. 249-283.
- Varoufakis Y., *Let The Banks Burn*, «DiEM 25», 2023, <https://diem25.org/let-the-banks-burn/>
- Vera C.G., *América latina frente a la tensión chino-estadounidense. ¿Hacia un mundo iliberal?* in F. Estensoro, J.P. Vázquez Bustamante (Eds.). *La geopolítica ambiental de Estados Unidos y sus aliados del norte global: implicancias para América Latina*, CLACSO, 2022.

World Politics Review, *Global Migration Is Not Abating Neither Is the Backlash Against It*, 2023: <https://t.ly/K8uHG>.

Wright Q., *Political Realism and Political Idealism: A Study in Theories and Realities* by John H. Herz, «World Politics», vol. 5, n. 1, 1952, pp. 116-12.