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## RE-IMAGINING MEDITERRANEAN GEOPOLITICS: THE ROLE OF EIGHT KEY POWERS

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to provide MEDRESET Work Package 2 (WP2) partners with the conceptual and methodological guidelines that we will pursue in our research. The primary theoretical approach to be used in our research is constructivism and discourse analysis, as elaborated in the WP1 concept paper. The purpose of WP2 is to observe the changing role and influence of different leading stakeholders (the US, Russia, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and Israel) in the Mediterranean area, as well as their policies,² in order to show how they construct the region which is called the Mediterranean and to see if these policies are conflicting, competing or converging with the EU's policies.³ This paper provides the framework for such an analysis, encouraging our partners to design their research in such a way as to support the argument that challenges and problematizes the Western and Euro-centric assumptions underlying the dominant mode of knowledge about regionalism and geopolitics of the Mediterranean.

### INTRODUCTION

Global-level transformations now taking place are increasingly structural in nature and will have long-term implications for the EU and its place in the international order. The emergence of a multipolar international order, resulting from the process of "systemic shift" (steady transfer of economic power Eastwards and with it also broader political influence), has ushered in the rise of new players at both global and regional levels, with which the EU needs to negotiate new relationships. The EU also needs to consider its standard Global South economic diplomacy strategy to be fit for the purposes of a "post-Washington Consensus" world. The erosion of the Washington Consensus model of economic development will have policy as well as political implications for the West's engagement with the Global South, as well as with the Western-dominated international instruments of finance and development (IMF, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, etc.). By the same token, the EU will need to engage more fully with the "alternative" global and regional economic bodies such as the BRICS, the BRI, and AIIB, to name but a few, in order to ensure that it maintains its high place in the emerging global division of labour. The EU will also need to be mindful of the potential challenges to the post-1945 Bretton Woods international system arising from systemic shift and multipolarity. Therefore, the EU will

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<sup>2</sup> WP2 will be relying on the working papers of Cairo University (United States), CIDOB (Russia and China), PODEM (Turkey) and ASI-REM (Israel) to present a geopolitical "map" of the Mediterranean space for the Istanbul public conference in April 2017.

<sup>3</sup> This will be done on the basis of WP1's analysis of the EU's policies, and its construction and framing of the Mediterranean space.



need a strategy that can deal with the influence of the emerging regional powers (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and Israel), and those with greater influence and major power ambitions (China and Russia). But the EU cannot develop a wholly independent strategy to deal with the challenges and opportunities arising from systemic shift, without having "renegotiated" its relationship with the United States as well. Security continues to drive the US' interests in the Mediterranean area, which it sees as a main strategic route to other associated regions, such as the EU and the Middle East and North Africa.

Russia has reappeared in the Mediterranean theatre with Soviet-type resolve: Seeking to create spheres of influence and recovering alliances with the Southern Mediterranean countries. Indeed, since the collapse of the Qaddafi regime in 2011 Russia has shown a willingness to intervene in promotion of its interests. It has aimed to recover "lost ground" and has intervened militarily in Syria to underline the seriousness of its strategic intentions. Syria today has a central place in Russia's attempts to shape the geopolitics of the region. Russia has been emboldened for it assumes the emergence of a multipolar system of international relations that really reflects the diversity of the modem world with its great variety of interests.

China, the more distant influential actor, has developing interests in the Mediterranean largely based on the enhancement of trade and investment relationships. Energy has driven much of China's emerging relations but Beijing's interest in a preeminent role in the multipolar international system cannot be overlooked. Moreover, China's instinct in refraining from interference in domestic and regional political issues has made it a more attractive economic partner for the Arab and other Middle Eastern countries. Moreover, its standing is enhanced in this region by the virtue of it being perceived as a prosperous twenty-first century leader in the global economy. The introduction of the "One Belt One Road" strategy in the mid-2010s can only enhance its position.

The MENA region is in turmoil and likely to remain unstable for an extended period, thus weakening considerably the prospects of Mediterranean regionalism. In this dynamic environment, active and emerging regional actors are having an increasingly direct, and dramatic, impact on the EU's southern, non-European, neighbourhood. Non-Mediterranean Middle East states are increasingly influential in the East Mediterranean and the Maghreb, and are acting more assertively and independently of the West than ever before. In so doing, they are importing into the Mediterranean region their own disputes, worldview prejudices, and tensions. Typical of this trend is the role that such Persian Gulf states as Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia have come to play in the Mediterranean since the Arab Spring.

Further, it is also evident that size and even statehood are no longer measures of impact and influence. Such small Gulf Arab states as Qatar and the UAE have arguably carried as much policy weight in shaping the Arab Mediterranean in post-Arab Spring period as the West. But, such non-state entities as Hezbollah, IS and al-Qaeda are arguably as instrumental in shaping many of the societies and polities of the Arab region. It is an acute sense of insecurity and geopolitical flux which drives these actors. Economic imperatives play a secondary role. Yet, the persistence of old problems, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, act as "open wounds" to challenge the EU's efforts to create the conditions for peace and security in the Southern Mediterranean, and efforts at region building. The very real danger of state collapse in more than one Arab Mediterranean country also acts as a further inhibitor of the EU's strategic planning. In this increasingly uncertain and precarious regional environment two issues are



likely to remain constant going forward: The flow of refugees; and the need to have secure access to the energy deposits of the Mediterranean. Both of these issues will require closer observation of the rise of the Eastern Mediterranean as a new energy hub and the ways in which such regional powers as Israel and Turkey articulate their policies and approaches.

The purpose of WP2 is to evaluate the effectiveness and potential of EU policies in the region in light of the new geopolitical configuration which is emerging in the Mediterranean area. WP2 will observe the changing role and influence of different leading stakeholders in the Mediterranean area as well as their policies and role perceptions. It will, through this process, highlight the conflicting, competing or converging policies and visions of these actors with regard to EU policies. In so doing, it will prepare the ground for developing a new regional perspective for the EU. To achieve this objective, WP2 will:

- 1. Observe the changing role and influence of eight other key powers (the US, Russia, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Israel) in the Mediterranean area; which policies they drive in terms of actors, policy instruments and priority policy areas; and if these policies are conflicting, competing or converging with those of the EU. These countries have been chosen for their capability (normative/material power) and their willingness (claim to leadership) to influence the future of the region. The three countries of the Persian Gulf have come to play a critical part in the shaping of the "Arab Mediterranean," but the role of Qatar and Saudi Arabia is particularly significant, for three reasons. First, these two GCC countries have taken the lead in the influencing the political process and economic conditions of virtually every Arab state affected by internal turmoil. Secondly, they have intervened in the region in a coordinated manner and at times in apparent competition with each other in various "Arab Mediterranean" contexts. Their policies have adapted to local circumstances but in very different ways, in Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. Thirdly, these states are representative of a broader trade and investment engagement by the GCC states in the "Arab Mediterranean" countries.
- 2. Identify how other key powers have been constructing, or at least have attempted to construct, different geopolitical imaginations of what the EU has labelled the Mediterranean, as part of their foreign policy and geopolitical considerations.
- 3. Analyse how these framing practices relate to the identity, role understanding and self-representations of these powers and inform and guide their foreign policy narratives and practices vis-à-vis the Mediterranean countries ("self" vs. "other").
- 4. Elaborate what the findings mean for the EU's policies, particularly highlighting how EU policies still match the changing geopolitical configuration of the Mediterranean space.

While the EU's initiatives and conceptual work on EU-Mediterranean relations have hitherto treated the notion of the Mediterranean as a natural fact – a concept, if you will (see Cebeci and Schumacher 2016) – the notion that the Mediterranean is a constructed space has continued to gain validity, which is perhaps best reflected in the different framings of this space by its inhabitants and stakeholders. This is made evident in the fact that "the countries of the Mediterranean do not perceive themselves as sharing common strategic goals or even a collective identity" (Calleya 2005:127). Furthermore, as will be apparent in the work of WP2, different states, despite their ideological, cultural and geographical proximity to the EU,



have constructed particular understandings of the Mediterranean space based on their own identities, national interests and strategic concerns.

Nonetheless, it remains a fact that the geographic space defined by the EU as the Mediterranean is indeed a key strategic region or space in the world, emerging as the crossroads of geopolitical interactions in the so-called Eurasia and thus the wider international system. The Mediterranean has emerged as a contested region. Its problems like itself are socially constructed and defined according to the dominant discourses. Although this should not be taken as an outcome of the present research, some common issues in the realm of the four policy areas – political ideas, agriculture and water, industry and energy, and migration and mobility – in the region which the EU defines as the Mediterranean can be suggestively summarized as:

- weak state structures;
- authoritarian rule which has emasculated society;
- · weak economies, corruption and cronyism; and
- absence of representative and responsive governments.

Additionally, and in particular after September 11, the threat and use of force have magnified the above problems, accentuating the rise of communalism (sub-state identity formation, sectarianism). In this process, with groups such as the so-called IS expanding into several states of the Mediterranean (Libya, Egypt and Syria in particular, and non-Mediterranean Iraq), radicalization in the Mediterranean has increasingly been seen as constituting a direct threat to international peace and security. It is also perceived as a threat to the fabric of society: a social threat to communities within the states as well as to many recognized achievements and/or efforts at social levels, particularly in terms of human rights, gender equality and social justice.

In part as a consequence to this, the refugee crisis which has followed the post-Arab Spring unrest in the region has come to reflect a hitherto invisible dimension of the complexity of the Mediterranean space, in the sense that mass movement of people is said to be posing new challenges beyond the traditional conceptions of security. In this new world, security "exists not only in terms of the military, but also in civilian sectors" (Boening 2014:68).

However, it is important to look at how the diverse powers that we will observe in this WP actually frame this – in other words, what do they name as the most pressing issues in the region which the EU defines as the Mediterranean, and beyond?

# 1. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The virtue of constructivism lies in its opening a different analytical front which emphasizes inclusion and a focus on issues thus far "bracketed" by the dominant theories, such as identity and interest (Checkel 1998:325). As the maxim goes, "constructivism without nature goes too far" (Wendt 1999:72). Constructivism thus finds itself in the "middle ground" between materialist/rationalist and idealist/interpretive philosophies of science, thereby increasing its explanatory value (Adler 1997:323-35). As a result, constructivism is able to appreciate how "systems of meaning define how actors interpret their material environment," and more importantly how "institutionalized meaning systems are thought to define the social identities of actors" (Price



and Reus-Smit 1998:266). The emphasis on identity, and how it is shaped, is in fact crucial in this theoretical framework, as identity shapes state interest and thus also state action (Ruggie 1998:863). Yet, the question here is whose identity the state adopts and whose voice it represents. For example, in a patriarchal discourse, the diversity of voice and representation of interests may be undermined. Even in constructing systems and meanings, the association and interpretation can be misguided. In order to handle and prevent this prejudice, it is highly suggested that a knowledge and approach of the feminist discourse pertaining to our intended research, which consciously lays bare the underlying patriarchal assumptions, be brought into our account.

Moreover, "it is important to recognize that ideas, consciousness, culture, and ideology are bound up with more immediately visible kinds of political, military and economic power" (Walker 1984:3). More specifically, such an approach speaks to the importance attached to discourse in the MEDRESET project, understood here as a combination of social practices that determines how actors perceive themselves and their behaviour (George 1994:29-30). According to Milliken (1999:228-30), as part of a "shared argumentation format," scholars using discourse analysis build their research on a set of "theoretical commitments" which identify discourses in terms of "systems of signification," "discourse productivity" and the "play of practice." In this categorization, discourse is a system of signification, which largely provides meaning to the material world (Milliken 1999:229). As a result, discourse is a system of meaning that creates "regimes of truth" which exclude other identities and consequently actions (Milliken 1999:229). To recap, in order to assess how the EU's policies still match the changing geopolitical configuration of the Mediterranean, we will seek to examine the role, influence and impact of the rising powers and stakeholders – in particular regional powers such as Iran, Israel, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and global powers such as China, Russia and the US - on the Mediterranean. Using discourse analysis, as elaborated in the WP1 concept paper (Cebeci and Schumacher 2016), and following the WP1 recommendations, we will inquire into how other stakeholders in the Mediterranean construct the Mediterranean, to reveal if there are any similarities and differences in their definition of, and practices on, the Mediterranean when compared to those of the EU. We will examine how different stakeholders (key regional and global players) perceive and practice "their" Mediterranean into being on the geopolitical level and in respect to four geopolitically relevant and contentious policy areas: political ideas, agriculture and water, industry and energy, and migration and mobility. Adopting a broad geographical focus, WP2 case studies will include five key regional players (Iran, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar) and three external/global actors (China, Russia and the US). WP2 follows the MEDRESET integrated approach (multi-actor, multi-sector, multi-layer framework; see Huber and Paciello 2016:11-13), meaning that this WP will investigate which policies these eight key powers drive in terms of actors (EU, Mediterranean countries, non-state actors, IOs), policy instruments (unilateralism, bilateralism, multilateralism) and priority policy areas (including, among others, how they relate vis-à-vis the four project areas: political ideas, agriculture and water, industry and energy, and migration and mobility). Also, a gender perspective should be applied to the MEDRESET general framework: stakeholders, policy issues (with a focus on the four policy areas observed in MEDRESET) and the instruments.

We will complement discourse analysis by engaging with the wider IR literature, such as the security complex literature (Buzan and Waever 2003). Thus, whilst adhering to MEDRESET's general emphasis on constructivism and discourse analysis, theoretical eclecticism is indeed deemed crucial in order to speak to the Mediterranean's geopolitical realities and the role of



#### external powers.

Following Milliken (1999:230, 243) we will use the following research questions in alignment with the WP1 theoretical and methodological framework and inquire into how other stakeholders in the Mediterranean construct the Mediterranean, to reveal if there are any similarities and differences in their definition of, and practices on, the Mediterranean when compared to those of the EU. WP2 will also look into how these actors construct the EU, especially when evaluating its role in the Mediterranean. We believe that it is very important not to reproduce the EU's geopolitical approach in the analysis on other stakeholders in the region. Thus, rather than approaching them as rivals (or potential rivals) to the EU, WP2 will attempt to see the differences and overlaps in how the Mediterranean is constructed by those countries, including the silences and exclusions that become apparent when their constructions are compared with those of the EU.

A set of questions that WP2 papers can employ in their analysis is as follows:

- How do alternative discourses construct/predicate the Mediterranean perhaps in resistance to the dominant knowledge produced by the EU? (following Milliken 1999:230)
- What are the oppositions, exclusions and silences that their discourses/practices regarding the region entail? How can they be compared to those of the EU?
- How do their discourses regarding the Mediterranean overlap with each other and with those of the EU?
- · How do the other stakeholders construct the EU's role in the Mediterranean?
- How do these powers frame the four policy areas (political ideas, agriculture and water, industry and energy, and migration and mobility) with regard to the Mediterranean? Which priorities do they set in this respect?

## 2. ADDED VALUE OF THIS RESEARCH

Literature on key states' relations with the space that the EU calls the Mediterranean mainly relies on approaches such as realism (Nopens 2013, Roucek 1953) and those that reduce regionalism to energy-politics dynamics (Agdemir 2015, Bahgat 2015, Hafner and Tagliapietra 2013, Paraschos 2013, Tagliapietra 2012). As this section demonstrates, the dominant approaches to Euro-Med relations, being Euro-centric, fail to bring into consideration the intricacies of international political thought in the non-Western world and therefore misrepresent it. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (2010) question the lack of a non-Western theory in IR. This is particularly reflected in the linear worldview presented by the "realist" theories of IR, in which for example the lack of successful regionalism in the Arab world becomes presented as a failure vis-à-vis the global standard: the EU (Silvia Ferabolli 2014:4). Thus, despite Martin Wight (1966) asking 50 years ago why there is no international theory and Acharya and Buzan's (2010) subsequent attempts to call out and challenge the state of the field in order to mend its shortcomings, little significant change appears to have occurred, as the literature review below suggests. The consequence of the Western and Euro-centric approach to the conceptual foundation goes beyond the moral issue of the protection of the current order (Acharya and Buzan 2010:3), and is even counterproductive for the current order in the sense that the reductionism espoused provides a distorted picture which limits the knowledge it is possible to attain in the field (Ferabolli 2014). Thus, whilst the "holy grail for theorists is the highest level of generalization



about the largest number of events" (Acharaya and Buzan 2010:4), contemporary theoretical approaches to regional affairs seem to have struggled with moving past the regions in which they were written. Instead, WP2 proposes to assess the literature through a critical approach that questions the application of Western IR theory onto the geopolitics of the region and to examine how the literature has approached the geopolitical dynamics in a region which the EU labels Mediterranean in order to better analyse actual policies, role and influence of the eight key powers. To that purpose, each working paper in Work Package 2 will also present a literature review specific to the countries observed. The following research could be useful in this respect.

# 2.1 Post-structuralist Approach to Geopolitics of the Region and Regionalism

Building upon post-structuralist approach of theorists including Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard, Gerard Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail) is amongst proponents of the innovative view that geopolitics is a form of power/knowledge which plays a significant role in shaping geopolitical worlds. Toal's contribution is *Critical Geopolitics* (1996), a collection of essays that lays bare and questions the underlying assumptions of geopolitics textuality.

Silvia Ferabolli in *Arab Regionalism* (2014) argues against the assumptions of the dominant regionalism theories in which Arab regionalism is either overlooked or, when given attention, is presented in negative terms. Drawing on post-structuralism's critique of subjectivity, she deconstructs the notion of region and criticizes the constructivist dichotomy of region as object and region-makers as subject as taken by IR. According to this constructivist view which is based on the logic of causality, region-builder precedes and therefore pre-exists the region – whereas for Ferabolli both concepts are embedded and materialized simultaneously through reiterative regional discursive practices. It is worth noting that this perspective also reinforces the power structure in the region and the roles of different states – a system that is mirrored eventually by many of the governments of the regional states vis-à-vis their own constituencies.

#### 2.2 Non-Western IR Thought

International Relations and Non-Western Thought (2011) by Robbie Shilliam covers a range of essays which approach the discourse of modernity from non-Western perspectives. International relations, as a Euro-centric discipline, is mainly concerned with (and therefore limited to) Western thought, which overlooks non-Western thought in constructing an epistemology of the modern world. The book explores the global conditions through which colonialism and imperialism helped fashion modernity. The essays in the book in a way draw upon and reverberate Homi K. Bhabha's contention, as especially put in *The Location of Culture* (1994), that the relation between the colonizer and the colonized is not simply that of master and slave but one of resistance and recalcitrance, whereby the latter have a say in the formation of their identity and today's norms.

Similar to Acharaya and Buzan (2010) who criticize the dominance of Western IR, which many times misrepresents non-Western international relations, and acknowledge contrasting insights of non-Western IR approaches, Tickner and Waever's *International Relations Scholarship* 



Around the World (2009) argues that international relations as an academic discipline is not international at all and therefore is partial in its approach. It does so by exploring the evolvement and practice of IR around the globe. Covering sixteen different cases (countries) from all continents, the book gives comprehensive insights into the ways in which IR was fashioned and provides a multiple "geocultural epistemologies." Consequently, it questions the dominant assumption of IR known and practiced in the US academies.

Crafting Cooperation (Acharya and Johnston 2007) provides arguments of different ideologies of regionalism, pointing out that as opposed to more advanced countries which follow more integrative regional strategies, developing countries have a greater tendency towards regional cooperation in order to protect their state sovereignty. It also clarifies that the world's regions do not fit a Western style; they instead have their own distinct ways to deal with geographic, cultural and geopolitical issues.

A critical view of geopolitics using a post-structuralist "strategy of reading" in order to challenge the dominant mode of knowledge about geopolitics of the space which is called Mediterranean should be brought into account. In so doing, it could be an instrumental asset which enables us to problematize these Western assumptions (see for example Dalby 1994, 1996). Also, non-Western approaches to regionalism help us understand the eight key states' framing of the so-called Mediterranean space. By the same token, literature produced by non-Western scholars (especially from the non-Western states out of the eight key powers) which provides a critique of Euro-centric approaches towards IR and regionalism is worth exploring.

## 3. RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

WP2 aims to employ several research techniques for an in-depth analysis of the eight key powers' constructions of the Mediterranean, and their policies regarding this space. The research techniques that we propose for WP2 are:

- An analysis of the actual policies as well as discourse analysis of all the official documents including policy documents of the key powers on the EMP/UfM, the ENP, the "Arab Spring" (e.g., declarations, communications, common strategies, Action Plans and Strategy Papers) and the sectors that the project has specified (political ideas, agriculture and water, energy and industry, and migration and mobility) and key speeches by the governmental leaders of the above states. Gender equality perspective will not be neglected, in particular relating to access to and power over resources, and accountability and equality frameworks.<sup>4</sup>
- An extensive literature review of relevant scholarly books and articles in journals/special
  issues on Mediterranean geopolitics, Mediterranean relations, UfM, ENP, the "Arab Spring,"
  etc., as well as documents produced by think tanks which also help the key states shape
  their policies or which criticize the EU and its role in the Mediterranean, notably the Arab
  Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS), the Aljazeera Center for Studies and the
  Doha Institute for Graduate Studies in Qatar; the Emirate Center for Strategic Studies and

<sup>4</sup> Further advice on how to integrate a gender perspective in this WP will be provided by our partner ASI-REM.



Research (ECSSR) and the Future Center for Advanced Researches and Studies in the UAE; the Al-Ahram Centre's *al-Siyasiyya al-Dawliyya* (International Politics) and *Al-Ahram Strategic File* in Egypt; the Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS) in Lebanon; the Institute of Diplomatic Studies (IDS) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Saudi Arabia; the Gulf Research Center (GRC); the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), the Institute of West Asian and African Studies (IWAAS) at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in China; the Center for Strategic Research, the Majlis Research Center, the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) and the *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs* in Iran; the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI), the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA) and the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA) in Israel; the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS), the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) and *International Affairs* (journal) in Russia, and others including review of the grey literature in the local language not taken into account by Western authors.

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