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Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's Discourses and Practices in the Mediterranean

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Abstract

This paper will examine the discourse and practices of the two most active GCC countries in the Mediterranean, and will conduct its analysis through a discussion of such highlighted issues as economy, migration and political ideas. Adopting content discourse analysis, this paper studies documents from Saudi Arabia and Qatar to help better understand these countries' changing role and influence, as well as their policies and role perceptions in the Mediterranean area. Investigating their alternative discourses, the paper will highlight the conflicting, competing and also converging policies and visions of these actors regarding EU policies.

Introduction

The fragmentation of the Arab regional order and the corrosion of an Arab pivot for these states to gather around has since the 1980s opened the way for some of the non-Mediterranean Arab states to use their considerable financial and growing soft power to exercise influence in the wider region, including the Mediterranean. Such relatively small Arab countries as Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, all based in the Gulf Cooperation Council group of Arab monarchies, are the case in point. Weakness of the Arab core since the Camp David accords – that is to say the demise of Egypt as the champion of the Arab order – and fragmentation and polarization of the Arab order following the Kuwait crisis (1990–91), coupled with dramatic global changes in the 2000s which have led to some uncertainty about the long-term commitment of the United States to the security and safety of its Gulf Arab allies, are all factors which have further propelled the GCC states to act – and to act independently. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have emerged as the pioneers of action, of "intervention" to be more precise, and have as such emerged as important players in reshaping the geopolitics of the Mediterranean. Being important members of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), they stand out as among the richest countries in the region and their vast gas (in the case of Qatar) and oil resources (in the case of Saudi Arabia) have given them the privilege to accumulate an enormous amount of wealth domestically as well as internationally, particularly through their sovereign wealth funds. Moreover, they are important states because of their regional influence, which is partly derived from their membership in the Arab region's only viable (sub)regional organization, namely the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and partly through their power as members of the Arab League. Additionally, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) with its administrative centre in Jeddah grants Saudi Arabia a significantly privileged position to exert power in the

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Arab and Islamic worlds. What is more, Saudi Arabia gained increased leverage from its election to the United Nations Human Rights Council for a three-year term in 2016. Moreover, being a member of the G20 (the only member from this region), which consists of the 20 major economies of the world playing a leading role in the management of international economic and financial order, has given the Kingdom an unrivalled global edge as well. Further, both Saudi Arabia and Qatar are arguably the locus of conception as well as incubation of Sunni Islamic doctrines which have spread to fertile ground across the Arab region. Petrodollars in the hands of both governments and private sector have facilitated the proliferation and propagation of variations of Islamist thought and doctrine, and have been used in support of followers in and beyond the Mediterranean.

Furthermore, as GCC members, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have a significant position with regard to the European Union (EU), particularly in relation to commerce and alignment of security policies. In terms of economic relations, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have accumulated substantial assets in EU countries and play a pivotal role in the ongoing negotiations over enactment of an FTA between the GCC and the EU. For security, the interaction is even closer. Thus, while being on the periphery of the Mediterranean, Qatar has joined the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) with the aim of safeguarding security in its own (sub)region as well as in Europe; and in the wake of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have both played an active role in the (re) construction of the geopolitics of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, which of course is the EU's critical neighbourhood.

The Mediterranean as conceived by the EU does not really figure much in the Saudi and Qatari discourse, which instead tends to concentrate on the Arabic and Islamic world. At times their alternative discourses construct the Mediterranean in the form of resistance to the dominant knowledge produced by the EU. The GCC countries in general use alternative terms to describe different groups of countries situated in the Mediterranean space. For example, Maghreb – which usually means the countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. Sometimes Mauritania is also included in the definition of Maghreb since it is a member of the Arab Maghreb Union established in 1988. Saudi Arabia and Qatar see the Mediterranean either as part of Islamic/Arab world or as a space between two significant regions, the EU and the Middle East. Meanwhile the EU, at least until the 2000s, has tried to encourage the Mediterranean countries to act as a region. The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), as a case in point, addresses the causes of the current regional and socio-economic security and challenges, as viewed by the EU, to enhance sustainable regional integration and development. The aim and objectives are to be achieved through a set of projects and initiatives. These projects are carried out in the framework of strategic priority areas which include business development, social and civil affairs, higher education and research, transport and urban development, water and environment, and energy and climate action. As will be demonstrated, Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's priorities vis-à-vis the Mediterranean are geopolitical and security-oriented. Their interferences in the region, in particular following the Arab Spring, which will be discussed in detail, illuminate this point. However, in some areas such as business development, which brings high profit return, the priorities of Saudi Arabia and Qatar overlap with EU policies. Yet in social and civil affairs, whereas the EU's policy is to support civil society in the Mediterranean, the two countries' activities in the Arab Mediterranean are more towards securing their own geopolitical interests and safeguarding their security. Consequently, these policies at times come at the expense of civil society in the Mediterranean. In the case of Egypt, for example, while Saudi Arabia supported Sisi's seizure of power in 2013, the EU states had a critical approach towards this

action and expressed their concern about civil society under Sisi's government. In contrast, in Syria the EU, Qatar and Saudi Arabia came closer.

The discourse and practices of Saudi Arabia and Qatar show that when it comes to the Mediterranean, the two countries put their geopolitical considerations over other concerns, including agriculture, energy and migration. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the Mediterranean is not the main trading partner of these countries, as the statistics provided in this paper clearly demonstrate; second, the Arab Spring has created a situation in which GCC countries in general, and Saudi Arabia in particular, have felt their security and identity being threatened and challenged. Therefore, the concerns of Saudi Arabia and Qatar are first and foremost safeguarding security, and their identity, against these new challenges and threats, rather than prioritizing issues of agriculture, energy and migration vis-à-vis the Mediterranean. Hence, geopolitical considerations trump all others for the two countries. This paper contends that geopolitical considerations, especially safeguarding the security of the state against perceived threats from Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood, are the most decisive factors that could explain Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's framing of the Mediterranean. Yet, this by no means suggests that all of their foreign policy decisions can be explained from this perspective. In fact, these decisions are usually multicausal. What this paper focuses on is the most significant cause: geopolitical considerations.

This paper will examine the discourse and practices of the two most active GCC countries in the Mediterranean and will conduct its analysis through a discussion of such highlighted issues as economy, agriculture/water, energy, migration and political ideas. Adopting a qualitative content analysis, this paper studies documents of Saudi Arabia and Qatar[2] to help better understand these countries' changing role and influence, as well as their policies and role perceptions in the Mediterranean area. Investigating their alternative discourses, the paper will highlight the conflicting, competing and also converging policies and visions of these actors regarding EU policies (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2016). This specific issue will be discussed in the conclusion. The documents analysed in this paper are prime specimens of Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's discourses, in that they reflect reverberating concerns of the countries' leaders, officials, influential media and intellectuals in their framing of the Mediterranean area and construction of alternative discourses.

1. Political Ideas

The Arab Spring has caused many security challenges for the GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar. For instance, the rise of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was viewed by Saudi Arabia as a challenge to its state identity and claim to the leadership of the Muslim Ummah (see May Darwich's 2016 analysis). Qatar, on the other hand, saw the rise of the Brotherhood as an opportunity, especially since its state identity, manifest in the discourse of its leaders and in the coverage of its media, notably Al Jazeera, is different from Saudi Arabia's, in that Doha puts more emphasis on pan-Arabism, rather than pan-Islamism. Qatar has accordingly

2 The documents include key speeches by leaders of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the countries' vision plans, newspaper articles, research papers, journal papers and other documents in line with the concept paper of the Work Package 2 (WP2) of MEDRESET project (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2016).

promoted the Muslim Brotherhood and its political doctrine of Islam. In addition, sectarianism, although not a result of the Arab Spring, was significantly intensified following the Arab uprisings, especially the civil war in Syria and Saudi–Iranian rivalry in this regard. These security and geopolitical concerns of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in the context of the Mediterranean, to a large extent influence their framing of the Mediterranean. Thus, as shown in the previous sections, despite their rhetoric of Islamic and Arab brotherhood, the two countries' economic relations with the Mediterranean are highly affected by geopolitical considerations. To better understand these issues, in the following section we will analyse the political discourse of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, especially with regard to Iran, which is the other important Persian Gulf actor in the Mediterranean.

In order to better understand Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's worldviews that could extend to the Mediterranean, we will first investigate the political discourses of the two countries. These discourses, as already noted, rest on pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism. Second, we will explore the impact that the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood after the Arab Spring and Iran's increasing influence in the region have had on the political discourse of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

In its discourse, Saudi Arabia assumes a leading role in the Muslim world as the birthplace of Islam and home to two cities which are holy for all Muslims. Since King Fahad bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia, the monarchs of the kingdom have added Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques to their other titles. King Abdullah's speech at the 2005 extraordinary OIC summit is noteworthy in that it manifestly predicates Saudi Arabia's position as leader of the Muslim world and its aim of acting an Islamic model. He begins by addressing the leaders of Muslim countries as "[m]y brothers, the Leaders of the Muslim Ummah" and concludes by stating that "I look forward to a united Muslim Ummah and good governance that eliminate injustice and oppression for the sake of the comprehensive Muslim development that eradicates destitution and poverty" (Saudi MOFA 2005). As the set of predicates indicate, first and foremost he sees all the Muslim countries and people as Ummah, unified under, and identified by, the religion of Islam, and perceives the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as the leader of this Ummah.

Similarly, Prince Mohammad bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Defence, in a speech that emphasizes Saudi's claim of leadership in the Muslim world, states that:

> We in Saudi Arabia are at the front line in facing these challenges. Any terrorist organization, their primary target to recruit and spread their ideology is to start with Saudi Arabia, the house of – the holy city of Mecca. Once they put their hands on Saudi Arabia, they will get access to the entire Islamic world. That's why we are the primary target. (US Department of Defense 2017)

As implied, the concept of conquering Saudi Arabia as equivalent to conquering the entire Islamic world is based on the view that Saudi Arabia represents, and is the leader of, the Muslim world. Moreover, the former Saudi minister of foreign affairs, Saud bin Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, in one of his last speeches, during the 26th Ordinary Session of Majlis al-Shura, enumerates what he calls "[t]he constant pillars of the Saudi foreign policy, in harmony with Sharia principles" as first and foremost "defending Arab and Islamic causes" (Saudi MOFA 2015). This Islamocentric discourse is an indispensable and fundamental component of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy.

Furthermore, Iran occupies an important place in Saudi Arabia's discourse, especially since the Arab Spring. In Saud bin Faisal's words, Iran is a target of attack since it functions as the "other" against which Saudi Arabia's own identity is constructed (see Darwich 2016). Saudi's construction of identity as one of Muslim leadership and its concern with a danger that threatens this identity is manifest in Faisal's words:

> We were pleased when the Iranian revolution called it the Islamic Revolution, for we were expecting it will be a champion of Arab and Islamic causes, and helpful for us in the Islamic nation's service, and the consolidation of security and stability in the region, but we were surprised by the policy of exporting the revolution and destabilizing security and peace as well as the blatant interference in the affairs of the region's countries and stirring up discord among peoples of the same faith. (Saudi MOFA 2015)

The Islamic Republic of Iran's claim of leadership in the Muslim world has tended to undermine, arguably, the role that Saudi Arabia had always reserved for itself. Faisal resorts to a discourse of good versus evil, where the good is Saudi Arabia and the bad is Iran. Iran is dangerous, to him, because it divides "the Arab and Muslim world" and consequently the unity of Ummah, whose pillar is Saudi Arabia, is under attack. Iran, because of its assumed leading role in the Muslim world, is now destabilizing the narrative of Saudi Arabia. This destabilization and Saudi Arabia's "call for Islamic solidarity" are based on the premise that the Islamic Republic of Iran is promoting Shiism by exporting its revolution and therefore dismantling the solidarity among Muslims.

The present Saudi minister of foreign affairs, Adel bin Ahmad al-Jubeir, takes a more hostile stance towards Iran. As al-Jubeir puts it, "Iran believes in exporting its revolution, it is enshrined in its constitution. Guess to whom it wants to export its revolution? To us" (Saudi MOFA 2016). As implied, he presumes the Islamic Republic to be inherently dangerous to Saudi Arabia, as exporting its revolution is an indispensable part of the country's constitution, ideology and foreign policy. Moreover, he claims that Iran is destabilizing the solidarity among Muslims by taking a Shia leadership, as "they [the Islamic Republic of Iran] believe that every person who is a Shia belongs to Iran and not to his or her country. And this is unacceptable". He continues that "Iran is a country that supports terrorism" (Saudi MOFA 2016). But then he goes further to attach this destabilizing Shia Iran to terrorism, the implication of which is that Iran's revolutionary Shiism is the source of terrorism.

In an interview with Spiegel in 2016, al-Jubeir once again considered Iran as a destabilizing agent in the region. As for the conflict in Syria, al-Jubeir argued that "Iran sent its Revolutionary Guards into Syria, they brought in Shia militias, Hezbollah from Lebanon, militias from Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, all Shia, and they couldn't help" (Shafy and Zand 2016). By the same token, an association is made between Iran, Shiism, dictatorship and terrorism. In line with his argument that Iran is a threat to the Muslim solidarity, al-Jubeir adds:

> Iran has been a neighbor for millennia, and will continue to be a neighbor for millennia. We have no issue with seeking to develop the best terms we can with Iran. But after the revolution of 1979, Iran embarked on a policy of sectarianism. Iran began a policy of expanding its revolution, of interfering with the affairs of its neighbors, a policy of assassinating diplomats and of attacking embassies. Iran is responsible for a number of terrorist attacks in the Kingdom, it is responsible for smuggling explosives and

> drugs into Saudi Arabia. And Iran is responsible for setting up sectarian militias in Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Yemen, whose objective is to destabilize those countries. (Shafy and Zand 2016)

Al-Jubeir views the influence and expansion of Shiism, an interpretation of Islam which is different from that of Saudi Arabia, as threatening and destabilizing.

It is worth mentioning that Saudi–Iranian rivalry that is marked by its sectarian discourse does not reflect the majority of the Arab world public opinion. A survey conducted by Doha Institute shows that 67 percent of the aggregate Arab population named either the United States or Israel as the biggest threats to collective Arab security, while only 10 percent of the respondents cited Iran as the greatest danger. However when asked to name the country which posed the single largest threat to their home country's national security, over 50 percent of respondents in Saudi Arabia, and nearly a third of respondents in Iraq and Kuwait, named Iran (ACRPS 2016: 5).

After a turbulent sequence of events in the Arab Spring and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Saudi Arabia's discourse of Sunni Islamic leadership faced a competing narrative, that of the Muslim Brotherhood's doctrine of political Islam. As it is generally known, the country we today know as Saudi Arabia is a result of the al-Saud attempt to found an Islamic kingdom whose unity was brought about as an outcome of a union between Muhammed Ibn 'Abd al Wahhab and the al-Saud clan. Salman bin Abdul Aziz, when he was the governor of the Saudi capital Riyadh, confirmed and defended the religious teachings of Wahhabism by calling it "pure Islam" (Mahdi 2010). As May Darwich (2016) argues, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has challenged the identity distinctions that Saudi Arabia needs for its own existential security, and thus Saudi Arabia resorts to a stronger emphasis on Wahhabism to create this distinction once again.[3] The reason for this "ontological (in)security", as Darwich (2016) argues, is the rise of a new rival who attempted to assume the leading role in the Sunni Muslim world. Supporting her argument, she refers to Mohamed Morsi, the former Egyptian President, to demonstrate how the Muslim Brotherhood expressed an adherence to Salafism.[4] "The Salafi–Brotherhood intermarriage", as she puts it, "manifested in the group's intolerance toward other Islamic and nonIslamic groups" (Darwich 2016: 481).

Thus, Saudi Arabia's claim as the leader of the Sunni/Salafi Muslims was challenged with the rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood, which adopted a similar ideology (Salafism). What Saudi Arabia, as a consequence, tried to do was to reshape its sense of identity in a way that made it distinctive, and very different from the Muslim Brotherhood. Darwich argues that:

> The kingdom [Saudi Arabia] sought to discredit the MB's [Muslim Brotherhood] identity as a "true" Salafi group. The Saudi religious establishment denied the Salafi nature of the group, especially in the regime-influenced media outlets. In a local newspaper, Al Madina, leading Saudi sheikhs pronounced fatwas claiming that the MB had "no Salafi

3 The first instance of redefinition came after the 1979 revolution in Iran, when the Kingdom defined its identity as "Sunni" vis-à-vis "Shiite" Iran.

4 During his electoral campaign, Mohamed Morsi stated that "The Koran is our constitution, the Prophet Muhammad is our leader, jihad is our path, and death for the sake of Allah is our most lofty aspiration" (as quoted in Darwich 2016: 481).

roots" (Darwich 2016: 482).

Similarly, Asharq al-Awsat began to attack the Muslim Brotherhood in a run of essays (Asharq Al-Awsat 2014, Darwich 2016). In all of this we see Saudi's renewed emphasis on its Salafi/ Wahhabi identity.

Unlike Saudi Arabia which has defined itself as the Muslim leadership in terms of pan-Islamism (Sunni Islam), Qatar's discourse promotes a sense of pan-Arabism and support of the Muslim Brotherhood. Historically, Qatar has had an open foreign policy and therefore good relations with Arab countries, and has tried to be a mediator in times of conflict – the exception being Al Jazeera's coverage of the domestic issues of some Arab countries by hosting members of the opposition in those countries. This obviously created some temporary tensions between Qatar and the countries concerned. However, the Arab Spring affected this opening diplomatic strategy. With the downfall of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, for instance, Qatar became involved in the coalition against him and took more direct measures, and in the case of Syria, Qatar turned against Assad and tried to convince the Arab League to intervene. The Arab Spring caused a fracture in the relationship between Qatar and Saudi Arabia; it opened new spaces for competition between them. In addition, after an attack on the Saudi embassy and consulate buildings in Iran which followed the execution of a Shia cleric in Saudi Arabia resulting in Riyadh cutting its diplomatic relations with Tehran, Qatar recalled its ambassador to Tehran. Yet, the reaction did not match Saudi expectations. This made Saudi Arabia feel that Qatar was only seeking its own interest rather the security of the GCC states by not taking more serious measures against Iran. The climax of the tensions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, together with some other GCC members, eventually led to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE taking the unprecedented step of recalling their ambassadors from Doha in 2014. Saudi Arabia's officials also spoke of the possibility of a blockade of Qatar. However, due to Kuwait's mediation, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates agreed to return their ambassadors to Doha. After that Qatar has modified its foreign policy by returning to soft power and diplomatic approaches and therefore has temporarily recovered its relationship with Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries. For example, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have cooperated more closely over conflicts in Yemen and Syria. Also, Saudi Arabia has softened its approach towards the Muslim Brotherhood, especially in Yemen. However, incidents such as the Qatar hacking crisis in late April 2017 are a reminder that suspicions are still running deep between Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Despite all these ups and downs in Qatar's foreign policy, pan-Arabism has remained a key theme in its political discourse. A speech made by Qatar's minister of foreign affairs at the World Economic Forum special meeting held in Jordan in 2011 is replete with references to the concept of the Arab world, which is an indication of his construction of pan-Arabism. Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim used the terms "Arab world", "Arab people", "Arab countries", "Arab states", "the Arab region", the "Arab market", "Arab cooperation", "Arab economies", "Arab developments" and "Arab intellectuals" (World Economic Forum 2011), among others, numerous times. All these phrases shape Qatar's framing of countries not in terms of the Middle East or the Mediterranean, but as part of what it calls "the Arab region" (World Economic Forum 2011). Emphasizing fair distribution of wealth in Arab countries, the foreign minister called for "a sound democratic life that in turn will avail Arab people to live in free and dignified life" (World Economic Forum 2011). There is almost no direct reference to Islam and Muslim people in his speech. Although references to Islam and the Muslim world do appear many times in the discourse of Qatar's leaders, a pattern can be detected in which references to the Arab world

are significantly more frequent than references to the Muslim world or Ummah. This indicates a special care and awareness towards Arabness.

Moreover, Jassim assumed an assertive powerful tone as the leader of Arab countries, as if lecturing the world. Speaking of the necessity and possibility of "economic growth" in Arab countries, he emphasized the need to "ensure the sustainability of this growth through confirming to the citizens they are the objectives and means of the development process" (World Economic Forum 2011). Similarly and more recently, the rhetoric of Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Qatar's Emir, rests upon the same pan-Arab tendencies. As he stated in the 45th ordinary session of the Advisory Council in 2016:

> With regard to our foreign policy, the support of the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf, the strengthening and development of the relations between our brotherly countries occupy the forefront of our priorities, especially against the backdrop of the very serious developments gripping the world, and which have undermined the stability and security of many countries in our Arab region. (Qatar MOFA 2016)

And he continued, "Qatar has never lingered to assume the role dictated on us by our Arab and Islamic sense of belonging, in defending the causes of both our Arab and Islamic Ummas, first and foremost is the Palestinian cause, and we, God willing, will not be inactive in the future". (Qatar MOFA 2016)

The adjective "Arab" is used to back up Qatar's implied framing of the countries in the region. In addition, and by implication, what is given priority for Qatar is Arab countries, rather than other non-Arab countries in the region. Also, of high significance is the fact that the pan-Arab discourse of Qatar's officials and their support of Palestine's cause has been in harmony with Al Jazeera TV and website coverage.[5]

2. Geopolitics of the GCC and the Mediterranean

Looking at Qatar and Saudi framing of the Mediterranean, and paying attention to the discourse of their leaders, politicians and media, we understand that for example emphasis on brotherhood among Arab and Muslim countries is a reiterated theme in their rhetoric. However, this does not match the realities of economic relations among these countries. And, whereas the discourse of the leaders is more idealistic in support of unity in the Arab and (Sunni) Islamic world, there can be found a sub-discourse among academics and research centres, who work for academic and research institutions in the GCC countries, that rests on economic and cost/benefit logic. The reason for the leaders' idealistic view that does not reflect the real economic relations can be traced back to the Arab Spring and its aftermath; these countries encountered a political shock that coincided with the presidency of Barak Obama and his significant shift in American foreign policy from a Middle Eastern/European focus to an East/South Asian one. This shift in foreign policy was accompanied by an approach to Middle East conflicts, and especially the Libya intervention, that was termed "leading from behind". In other words, for

5 For more on Al Jazeera and its coverage orientation, see Zweiri and Murphy (2011).

Obama and his administration, the Middle East and Mediterranean did not enjoy the strategic significance they used to have. By the same token, the GCC in general and Saudi leaders in particular felt that they were facing an existential and security crisis, fearing that that the domino effect of the Arab Spring might reach them. Thus, they sought to find a solution, part of which was embodied in indulging their native population with financial gifts to decrease the threat of dissatisfaction and protest in their countries, with the other part being to actively participate in the making of a post-Arab Spring Arab world order.

Saudi Arabia felt an ontological insecurity with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. As a result, an antagonism towards the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt could be detected in the discourses espoused by Saudi clerics, which emphasized that the real representative of Salafi Islam is Saudi Arabia and not Morsi's Egypt. In addition, following election successes of Muslim Brotherhood-linked parties in Egypt and Tunisia, some of the GCC countries' local Muslim Brotherhoods were inspired and rejuvenated. This caused fear that the local Muslim Brotherhoods might become a viable opposition that some day would oust the monarchies of the GCC. This explains Saudi Arabia's immediate support of Sisi after the overthrow of Morsi's government, and the announcement of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization by Saudi Arabia in March 2014.

However, the GCC countries' reaction to the Arab Spring and its aftermath was not unanimous; this in turn indicates a degree of incoherent regionality in the GCC. Considering that Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt were strong and long-standing strategic allies of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom viewed their removal from power as a political vacuum that would endanger its security. By contrast, the new condition was grasped by Qatar as an opportunity to expand its political influence in the region through making alliances with the new actors, especially the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated political parties and their associate civil society organizations in Tunisia and Egypt. Saudi Arabia also did its best to fill the vacuum and extend its influence in the post-Arab Spring MENA region, through building and strengthening relations with the post-Arab Spring governments, utilizing the linkage with non-state actors such as Salafi groups in Egypt, and supporting various Syrian opposition groups.

Historically, Qatar enjoyed warm relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, and its media Al Jazeera has been a tribune for high ranking Muslim Brotherhood members such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi; therefore, its reaction to the Arab Spring was at times in contradiction to that of Saudi Arabia. Whereas the latter considered the rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in post-Arab Spring countries a threat, for Qatar it was an opportunity in that it felt it could play the major role in the new Arab world order. In addition, the GCC countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE had competed with each other in the Southern Mediterranean. These rivalries extended to the members' conception of the GCC's function and role. For example, in 2013 Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, following the concerns arising from the Arab Spring, called for the GCC to turn into a Union. Other GCC members opposed this initiative, arguably fearing that Saudi Arabia might use the to-be Union as a means to dominate them.

Other cases further illustrate these conflicts among the GCC members after the Arab Spring – for example, Saudi Arabia's overnight announcement that Morocco and Jordan were going to join the GCC, a declaration that was never implemented. The Arab Spring had dismantled the previous Mediterranean equilibrium, and this explains the confusion and inconsistency of the GCC countries' decision making vis-à-vis the Arab Mediterranean countries. However, since

2014 there has been more harmony and cooperation among them as far as relations with the Southern Mediterranean are concerned. For example, while under Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani, Saudi Arabia and Qatar at times competed with each other on Syria, the new Qatari administration has preferred to take a back seat and has allowed Saudi Arabia to take initiatives on matters related to Syria. Yet, this by no means indicates that all the disputes among the GCC members have been resolved. As far as the Arab Mediterranean is concerned, disagreement among the GCC members still exists. As a case in point, relations between Qatar and the Sisi government are still far from normal. Also, to add more uncertainty to the already complicated situation, after Saudi Arabia's Muhammad bin Salman formed a coalition of Muslim countries to fight the Houthis in Yemen, Sisi, who faced a persistent request from Saudi Arabia to enter actively into the war, made only a small contribution and did his best to keep involvement in Yemen to a minimum. Lastly, following the Arab–Muslim–American Summit in Riyadh in May 2017, relations between Qatar and three of its GCC partners deteriorated again, with allegations on the part of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE being made concerning Doha's support for the Muslim Brotherhood and what these three countries referred to as extremism. Diplomatic relations with Qatar were severed on 5 June 2017, in an attempt to isolate Qatar and pressure it to fall in line with the GCC's broader security and political agenda. Some would interpret the crisis as further evidence of structural tensions within the GCC, and forces beyond the Gulf itself impacting intra-GCC relations.

Sectarianism and the Saudi–Iran rivalry is yet another area which has affected GCC–Mediterranean relations. The Southern Mediterranean population is predominantly Sunni Muslim and therefore does not have the same problem of sectarianism that exists elsewhere in the Arab world. Yet, it cannot avoid the consequences of the discourse of sectarianism that has haunted the Arab world especially in the shadow of the Saudi–Iran proxy struggle. For example, Egypt's priority as far as Syria is concerned is making sure that Salafi and Jihadi forces will not take the upper hand in Syria because the overflow of these forces to North Africa would destabilize Egypt and its neighbours. By the same token, Egypt's policy towards Syria stands in sharp contrast to those of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Nonetheless, Egypt understands the magnitude of rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Syria. Thus, any action that would be interpreted as sympathy with the Syria–Iran–Russia coalition could be considered as a betrayal by the Saudis. This could explain Egypt's inconsistent behaviour towards the UN resolutions regarding Syria. Thus, in October 2016 Egypt voted in favour of two rival United Nations Security Council resolutions on Syria, one drafted by Russia and the other by France. Also, this sectarian rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has prevented the latter from forming closer ties with Southern Mediterranean countries apart from Algeria, which historically has tended to enjoy normal diplomatic relations with Iran.

As mentioned before, Saudi–Iranian rivalry is not representative of the majority of the Arab world public opinion. The majority of the Arab population still consider the United States and Israel to be the biggest threats to the security the Arab world, whereas only 10 percent regard Iran as the greatest danger. Yet, for over one half of Saudi respondents, Iran is the largest threat to the national security of their homeland (ACRPS 2016: 5). This is an indication that the Saudi stance towards Iran could be said to have the support of domestic public opinion but not necessarily that of the whole Arab world. However, such views of Iran have prevented the normalization of relations between Iran and some Arab Mediterranean countries.

3. Water and Agriculture

As part of our discourse analysis, we will look at the discourse and rhetoric of Saudi Arabia and Qatar regarding water and agriculture in general, and then will examine how this reflects in the context of the Mediterranean. The National Vision Plans of both countries (announced by Saudi Arabia in 2016 and Qatar in 2008) together with other relevant documents, indicative of the countries' policies, are studied with regard to their discourse and rhetoric, starting with Qatar.

Water and food security are serious challenges and issues for the GCC countries. Al-Farra (2015) reports that "[f]our of the GCC's six member states – including Qatar – are among the world's top ten countries in terms of vulnerability to severe water scarcity". As a case in point, Qatar is in the "highly stressed" category as indicated in the Maplecroft report (Maplecroft 2013, Al-Farra 2015). An awareness of the criticality of the food situation is also reflected in the vision plans of both Saudi and Qatar. As the Saudi Vision Plan reads under "Protecting Our Vital Resources":

> We will continue to build safe and sufficient strategic food reserves, to better guard against emergencies. Aquaculture will be promoted, as will strategic partnerships with countries blessed with natural resources such as fertile soil and water reserves. In Saudi Arabia, the use of water in agriculture will be prioritized for those areas with natural and renewable water sources. We will also continue to collaborate with consumers, food manufacturers and distributors to reduce any resource wastage. (Saudi Government 2016: 65)

Qatar shares the same concern as Saudi Arabia and expresses its care about environmental issues in the same vein, and therefore has adopted a similar policy of securing water in its own vision plan:

> The environmental pillar will be increasingly important as Qatar is forced to deal with local environmental issues, such as the impact of diminishing water and hydrocarbon resources, and the effects of pollution and environmental degradation, as well as international environmental issues such as the potential impact of global warming on water levels in Qatar and thereby on coastal urban development. Assessing the severity of risks and dealing with anticipated changes will require mobilising capacities and coordinating efforts to tackle problems that arise. (Qatar GSDP 2008: 30)

Accordingly, both countries have taken strategic measures to secure their respective water and food supplies. For example, Saudi Arabia adopted a strategy in the 1980s known as "greening the desert". However, due to the scarcity of its water resources Saudi Arabia has decided to guarantee food security by externalizing food production and has almost abandoned "the idea of food self-sufficiency", investing instead in lands outside the country (Ferragina and Canitano 2015: 49). Saudi Arabia's vision plan thus emphasizes land purchase or lease in other countries for agricultural purposes, as an efficient strategy.

Regarding Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as part of GCC, Eugenia Ferragina and Giovanni Canitano state that some members of the GCC have adopted a set of long-term food security strategies by encouraging their people to undertake overseas investments in food production. The

policy includes an exclusive focus on food projects, investment subsidies and investments in agriculture in other countries. These states with the help of their sovereign wealth funds either buy or lease farm land overseas (Ferragina and Canitano 2015: 47-48). In the following, we will explore the political and geopolitical implications of such strategies in the context of the Southern Mediterranean.

Since 2011, the GCC countries and the Arab Mediterranean countries have shown a strategic interest in each other, and the unrest and turmoil in the post-Arab Spring countries has propelled this partnership. Since that time, the GCC countries have sought greater influence in the administration of these countries by providing them with financial and political aid. Although the Arab Mediterranean countries are looking into new economic ties to help overcome their financial hardship, they are wary of possible political agendas behind the GCC's intentions and enthusiasm for investment. Whereas the GCC's investment in the region has been on the rise, it is much lower in total when compared to their investments in other developing regions. Moreover, agriculture and water constitute a smaller part of this integration, as will be discussed in the following section. Nevertheless, fear of rising GCC influence remains. According to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA),

> The Arab region is one of the least integrated regions of the world in terms of trade. Intraregional exports did not exceed 5.2 per cent of the total exports of the Arab region in 2010, or 18 per cent if oil and its derivatives are excluded from calculations of Arab exports. In both cases, it is a very modest ratio compared to exports between the European Union countries, which amounted to 65 per cent of the Union's total exports, or exports within the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) zone, which amounted to 49 per cent of the total. The Arab ratio is also low compared to other developing regions, such as ASEAN, within which intraregional exports accounted for 24.8 per cent of the total, or Africa, where the figure was 12.4 per cent. (ESCWA 2014: 50)

Also, numbers in inter-Arab trade for 2010–2012 show a steady decline from 21.9 to 18.9 percent respectively in exports, and from 20.9 to 15.7 percent in the import of agricultural products (El-Khoury 2015: 292).

As the statistics above show, the Arab region is one of the least integrated regions of the world in terms of trade. This stands at odds with the Saudi Arabian and Qatari national visions which emphasize safeguarding Arab and Islamic ties; the emphasis in their vision plans does not correspond with the hard data, which reflect the countries' real practices considering inter-Arab trade. In Qatar's vision plan, the term "Mediterranean" is never mentioned; rather, the terms "Arab" and "Islamic" are frequently used in the text. This implies an inclination, or hierarchy to put it differently. Qatar's vision plan reads that the strategy should aim at "[c]oordination with Gulf Cooperation Council states and with Arab and regional economic organizations to establish trade, investment and financial ties" (Qatar GSDP 2008: 27).

Similar to the EU that has a hierarchy of significance in its discourse descending from the EU countries to neighbourhood and rest of the world, for Saudi Arabia and Qatar the pyramid starts with GCC countries to Arab and Islamic countries and then the rest of world. Moreover, although many of the Mediterranean countries are included in the Arab and/or Islamic categories, Qatar's vision plan gives almost no credit to Western naming of the Mediterranean.

As for Saudi Arabia's vision plan, significant attention is given to Islamic and Arab values, terms that are practically used as a collocation pair. The plan reads: "[w]ith a GDP of SAR 2.4 trillion, our economy is already the largest in the Middle East. We enjoy close economic ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council and other Arab countries, as well as constructive relations with Islamic and foreign countries" (Saudi Government 2016: 58). Nonetheless, the statistics are proof of the discrepancy between the proposed focus on cooperation with Arab and Islamic countries and their practices.

To further explore the relation and discrepancy between the practice and discourse of GCC members with regard to food and agriculture in the Southern Mediterranean, a case in point is a study carried out by the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies that explains the contributing factors to an increase in the GCC investments in Morocco:

> GCC balance between investment in tourism or agriculture is a policy of wagering on the strengths of any economy. But although agriculture contributes about 17% of the GDP and provides about 44% of jobs in Morocco, dealing with such issues is not just about helping Morocco but also about Morocco's competitiveness and thus revenues. The Moroccan economy enjoys many competitive advantages in the hospitality sector such as tourist compounds, hotels, restaurants and other supplementary facilities like entertainment facilities. GCC countries are famous, of course, for investing in agriculture in countries like Egypt, Sudan and Pakistan – which is why all these issues have been mentioned. The pumping of money by the Moroccan government into the agricultural sector is thus understood, as it is the first source for job opportunities. However, this is not the case for GCC investments which, in turn, loo[k] for the best use of limited wealth. Surely, those investments are not grants to be given away, but are financial surpluses that seek best returns. (Hussein 2012: 4)

The text emphasizes the existence of a purely profit-seeking perspective. The GCC countries would expect to gain the highest interest in return for investing their "limited wealth"; which arguably demonstrates a strong interest-seeking logic. The rhetoric gives little significance to Morocco's aspirations for investing more in the agricultural sector in the hope of creating more jobs. This view stands in contrast to the spirit of Qatar's Vision Plan that promotes cooperation with, and investment in, Arab and/or Islamic countries for the sake of kin and religious unity. Qatar's national interest takes precedence over the needs of Arab and Islamic Southern Mediterranean countries. Moreover, it is at odds with Qatar's and Saudi's discourses of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism. This profit-seeking rhetoric is also expressed in Sharif Shaba'an Mabrouk's report published in a monthly journal on GCC affairs, based in Saudi Arabia:

> Gulf investments go to strong places in Moroccan economy, those relating to the sectors of tourism, such as the creation and development of tourist resorts, hotels and apartments; on the other hand we cannot talk about the existence of a huge Gulf investment in the agriculture sector in Morocco in spite of the existence of the need to bridge the food gap, according to the British Economist Foundation the food import bill of the six Gulf states was estimated at 27 billion dollars in 2011. (Mabrouk 2016)

When talking about strong sectors of the economy, it is important to note that the GCC and the Mediterranean views are not necessarily the same. Mabrouk's article indicates that agriculture is not considered a strong sector of Morocco's economy. This, despite agriculture's accounting

for about 13 percent of Morocco's GDP in 2016 (CIA 2017a).

However, profit-seeking tendencies among the GCC countries does not solely account for their inter-Arab relations. At times investments in Southern Mediterranean countries are regarded as a geopolitical imperative, rather than exclusively seeking economic agendas in the region. A case in point is the GCC's relations with Egypt. As far as agriculture and food are concerned, the GCC's relations with Egypt have been subject to more frequent ebbs and flows, resulting from Egypt's particular experience with the Arab Spring. Therefore, in the case of some GCC states, attention has shifted from Egypt to other countries such as Sudan and Ethiopia regarding agriculture (Young 2016). After Sisi's ascendance to power, Egypt received generous financial aid from Saudi Arabia, but Egypt's actions in return, to the disappointment of the Saudis, fell short of their expectations. The reason for this, according to Mahmoud A. El-Gamal, is that for Egypt, geopolitical considerations take precedence over regional integration. Egypt's limited military support in the Yemen war and its unwillingness to send ground troops to the country in support of the Saudi-led military campaign there has decreased Saudi eagerness for huge investments in Egypt – a further indication that Saudi Arabia considers regional investments as a geopolitical phenomenon, rather than seeking purely economic agendas in the region (El-Gamal 2016: 7).

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has adopted an economic policy that encourages its investors to put more money into Sudan, aimed at exploitation of the Nile water to expand its agricultural projects. Egypt has found this investment disastrous and threatening to its water security because it affects its share of the Nile water resource. Apparently, what Saudi Arabia is seeking to achieve by expanding its presence, and investment, in countries like Sudan, Ethiopia and Mauritania is to multiply its ties in order to secure food by expanding agricultural production in countries that have a significant amount of water and land in the Nile Basin region. The more Saudi Arabia invests in the Nile Basin, the more Egypt's share from the Nile is subject to reduction. Whether this is a measure aimed at retaliation against Egypt is unclear, yet these developments in the context of agriculture and water suggest that political considerations due to rivalry in the Mediterranean exceed economic logic.

It is worth noting, however, that after a one-to-one meeting between King Salman and Sisi at the Arab League Summit, relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia envisaged improvement that could include more investments in agriculture and water in Egypt. Even before this rapprochement meeting, some influential voices in the GCC had suggested that overall, Egypt occupies a significant position among Arab countries and therefore cannot be neglected. Abdulrahman al-Rashed, a prominent Saudi columnist at Al Arabiya, states with regard to the GCC's grievances against Egypt that:

> As for allegations that Egypt is supplying rebels in Yemen with arms, I rule that out as Egypt is aware that this is a dangerous act as Houthis have killed Saudi civilians after they intentionally used their missiles to target cities and towns inside Saudi Arabia. All these narratives about relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia are being promoted by figures affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Some Iraqi parties' announcement that the government intends to supply Egypt with oil products to replace suspended Saudi oil shipments is not possible. It is difficult for Iraq to supply this because it does not have enough for its own use and it cannot continue to provide them for free. (Al-Rashed 2016)

As he continues:

> Saudi-Egyptian disputes are over bilateral issues and will end in agreement after a month or a year or they may not be resolved. Relations must not be left for compromise because they are strategic. It is wrong to believe that Egypt's position is out of solidarity when it supports Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries against Iran. Egypt's position against Iran serves Egypt's larger interests by preventing Iran from expanding and dominating in Syria, Iraq or the Gulf. (Al-Rashed 2016)

The tone is kind, intimate and brotherly. The text takes it for granted that Egypt "is aware of" the dangerous consequences and therefore should change its policy in this regard. Al-Rashed presumes Saudi Arabia as the big brother who can advise on what Egypt needs to do. Egypt is viewed as a brother who has made a mistake but can be forgiven out of the generosity of Saudi Arabia. However, the main implication in the text is that Egypt should be viewed through the lens of sectarian rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Also, the Muslim Brotherhood is blamed for the spreading of false accusations against Egypt, to tarnish its relation to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, once again geopolitical considerations, especially safeguarding security and identity, come to play a decisive role in framing the relations between Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are in desperate need of investment in agriculture in different parts of the world (via land lease or ownership), especially in countries which are close enough to minimize the transportation costs. Although this sounds like a rational strategy, it causes suspicions of "land grabbing" as the terms and conditions of the land leases are unclear (Mahmoud 2016: 13). Besides, the investment is also subject to climate change in the overseas farmlands. Accordingly, as local criticism of these investments increases, like the 2012 attack on the Saudi Star farm in Ethiopia, focus has started to move away from the neighbouring countries and towards developed countries in order to expand agricultural connections while keeping the risk as low as possible. A case in point is the Saudi food company Almarai, which purchased ten thousand acres of farmland in the USA (Mahmoud 2016: 14). Therefore, relatively low agriculture and water investments by Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the Southern Mediterranean countries could also be attributed to the minimization of risk in the food industry (risk of both local attacks and climate change) in favour of investment in developed countries, a strategy that is boosted by the low cost of trade with Europe.

4. Energy

According to ESCWA, Arab funding bodies have made enormous contributions to the development of Arab regional integration, such as projects focusing on energy and modernization of communication systems, and the linking of water and road networks (ESCWA 2014: 43-44). Also, natural gas from Arab countries is mainly exported via three major pipelines: the Dolphin project, the Arab Gas Pipeline and the al-Ain-Fujairah gas pipeline. The Arab Gas Pipeline exports Egyptian natural gas to Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Israel. The other pipelines are designed for gas export among the GCC members. However, according to the Arab Monetary Fund, in 2015 only 2.7 percent of the MENA region's oil export destinations were other countries in Africa. Also, natural gas exports from Arab countries to Africa and the Middle

East combined total 31.6 bcm while their export to Europe is 68.2, and to Asia and Pacific is 90.9 (Arab Monetary Fund 2016: 162-164). Thus, oil and gas exports of Arab countries to the GCC members and the Southern Mediterranean do not constitute a significant part of their total energy trade.

To further investigate the discourse and practices of the GCC states, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar in particular, with regard to energy in Southern Mediterranean, we will examine the course of events following the Arab Spring and its generated narratives. In an interview with Al Arabiya in April 2016, Prince Mohammed bin Salman clarified Saudi Arabia's vision plan by stating that the country aims at putting an end to its dependence on oil by 2020 and turning the country into a global economy, by for example selling 5 percent of Aramco, the Saudi national gas and natural petroleum company, to investors. As he put it, "[w]e have a case of addiction to oil in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the part of everyone. That issue is serious. It disrupted the development of many sectors in the past years" (Al Arabiya 2016). As the predicate "addiction" implies, Saudi leaders regard the dependency on oil as a symptom that needs to be remedied – which, as an aside, is not dissimilar to Iran's current approach. This is read in line with the country's policy of self-reliance. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia is also interested in the use of renewable energy and plans to invest in this field, and to do so by attracting foreign investors. As the Vision Plan reads, the country "will work towards localizing renewable energy and industrial equipment sectors", and also towards "the gradual liberalization of the fuels market" (Saudi Government 2016: 44 and 49).

In a similar vein, as the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani recapitulates the country's plan:

> Our pursuit for economic diversification and reducing the dependence on oil and gas does not mean that we will not pay adequate attention to maintain and develop this sector, because this sector has enabled us to achieve growth rates during a period of fifteen years, which are among the highest growth rates in the world, and this growth is the one that helped to achieve qualitative leaps in all economic, human and social fields, and it will remain for a long time a major component of the GDP and a source of wealth used to expand the production base for future generations. (Qatar News Agency 2015)

As the term "dependence" indicates, Qatar's goal is to decrease reliance on oil while still developing the country's industrial base. He also emphasizes Qatar's cooperation in the GCC framework as well as with other Arab countries:

> I emphasize here on continuing our efforts with our brothers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to strengthen our collaboration at all political, economic, social, and security levels, and on developing the Council's action mechanisms, so as to be able to face the regional and global challenges and changes, and to achieve the interests of our peoples. We are also most keen to strengthen the fraternal relations with all brotherly Arab countries; which are desperately in need of unifying their ranks and positions and to deepen cooperation to cope with the risks and challenges they encounter. (Qatar News Agency 2015)

Once again, Qatar's discourse gives precedence to "Arab countries", which is also an indication of a tendency, at least in the discourse, towards collaboration among the countries based on Arab ties. This once again shows the hierarchy in Qatar's discourse, which is favourable towards the GCC and Arab countries.

As Qatar's and Saudi Arabia's vision plans show, a focus is placed on a decrease in reliance on oil and diversification of their economies. Nevertheless, the statistics indicate that oil and gas trade of the two countries with the Southern Mediterranean do not constitute a significant part of their total energy trade. With regard to renewable energy, reports show that Saudi Arabia plans to invest hugely in solar energy in countries such as Morocco and Egypt. Although these are promising propositions, what should be kept in mind is that historically economic cooperation between Saudi Arabia and countries of the Southern Mediterranean, such as Egypt, has been subject to geopolitical considerations. Such geopolitical realities as the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and later, during the Sisi presidency, the wars in Syria and Yemen, continue to dominate policy considerations. An example of how political considerations override economic logic is the case of Saudi oil exports to Egypt. Aramco, which suspended its export to Egypt in 2016 apparently as a consequence of Saudi Arabia's reaction against Egypt's vote in favour of a Russian resolution in Syria, has recently resumed its exports. Abdul Menhem Said, the director of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, considered the resumption of Saudi petroleum shipments to Egypt as "a good sign for renewed Saudi-Egyptian understanding, after months of open disputes, especially on the Syrian issue. This delayed the transfer of ownership of the islands to the kingdom, angering Saudi Arabia and prompting it to suspend the shipments" (Gomaa 2017). This shows the vulnerability of energy relations among the GCC countries and the Southern Mediterranean, which could be subject to severe turbulence after a political dispute.

5. Migration

The GCC countries have over 17 million international workers who send home more than 80 billion dollars in remittances every year (Daily Sabah 2016). As such, the GCC countries were ranked third globally in terms of migration flows in 2013. Migrants accounted for more than 45 percent of their population in 2013, which is an increase from over 38 percent of their population in the 1990s. Of the total number of migrants in the GCC countries in 2013, 22.5 percent (5,026,479) were from other Arab countries, most of them from Egypt (2,443,556). However, the majority of Southern Mediterranean migrants head to Europe (ESCWA and IOM 2015: 31). This is while, according to statistics, the rates of unemployment among youth are twice as high as overall unemployment rates in the GCC countries (World Economic Forum 2014: 6).

In such conditions, the GCC countries have taken resourceful measures, especially Saudi Arabia which has the largest population of all the countries of the GCC, with 30.4 percent youth (aged 15 to 24) unemployment in 2014 (CIA 2017b). One of the solutions adopted by Saudi Arabia is the replacement of foreign workers with Saudi nationals in the private sector, a policy known as the Saudization of the workforce. However, in reality the policy has failed to achieve its aim because many Saudis are either unwilling to do manual jobs or unable to do skilled technical jobs for which they are not qualified (Hertog 2010). Moreover, whereas the policy

of Saudization aims at creating more job opportunities for native Saudis, it might backfire by inspiring a climate of instability where foreign investors who are settled in the country decide to leave. Therefore, Saudi Arabia is keen to point to a strategy in which the country encourages entrepreneurs to remain and invest further in the country. So far, this policy has mainly affected expats from Asian countries. However, considering the high number of Egyptians who work in Saudi Arabia, it is possible that the policy will apply to them also, especially since the Saudi vision plan aims at economic reforms including reduction of reliance on foreign expats and the assignment of these jobs to Saudi nationals, designed to curb the unemployment rate to 7 percent.

Moreover, another important issue in the context of migration is the Syrian refugee crisis. Despite the high incomes of the oil-rich Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and a common language and culture with Syrians, they have taken an insignificant number of Syrian refugees (Winter 2016). This stands at odds with Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's emphasis on brotherly relations between Arab and Muslim countries and their claim to support Syrian people as manifested in their discourse, which will be discussed further in the next section. In fact non-Muslim countries like Germany have been more welcoming and accepted far more Syrian asylum seekers than the GCC countries, especially Saudi Arabia.

Regarding the gender dimension of migration, Dr. Aicha El-Tayeb, a professor of sociology at the University of Dammam (Saudi Arabia), presented a paper at a conference Sixth Annual Conference on the Social Sciences and Humanities held in Doha in March 2017, titled "Migration of Arab Youth: Especially Young Arab Women". Noting the issue of young women joining terrorist groups such as ISIL, Dr. El-Tayeb pointed out that migration of Arab young women is a new phenomenon that is due to gender discrimination against women and economic conditions in their home countries. She also emphasized that the solution to the problem is through understanding the marginalization and the economic situation of women in these countries. Also, Marise Younes, a professor at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Lebanese University, in her paper "The Migration of Lebanese Women Workers to the Gulf States" mentioned that "[t]he economic situation and the deteriorating living conditions in Lebanon are among the most important reasons for the migration of Lebanese girls to the Gulf states". She added that the desire for self-reliance or achieving "self-stability" is another factor for the migration of Lebanese girls. She spoke about the difficulties faced by Lebanese immigrant women, notably the "difficulty of integration in the Gulf society" as well as "discrimination against women in the workplace", which leads to unequal opportunities for career development.

6. European Union

The EU and the GCC countries had a total trade in goods that amounted to 138.6 billion euros in 2016, helping the GCC rise to the fifth biggest trading partner of the EU and fourth most important export market, with exports of 100.8 billion euros (European Commission 2017). However, for about 20 years the negotiations between the EU and the GCC failed to bring about significant fruition with regard to a Free Trade Agreement. Yet, since the new millennium, economic and political earthquakes, such as the global financial crisis and the Arab Spring, have created new arenas of cooperation between the two sides. Thanks to their huge sovereign wealth funds, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been very attractive for EU members

seeking a revival of their economy. Moreover, in the context of the Mediterranean, the Arab Spring, with its backlash in Syria, Libya and Egypt (Southern and Eastern Mediterranean), has created spaces for cooperation between the GCC and the EU, especially in matters related to security. One such arena of cooperation is the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative launched in 2004, which will be explored below.

Looking at the GCC Mediterranean relations from the perspective of Europe, it could be argued that most approaches and initiatives by the EU incline towards safeguarding the security and interests of European Union members, as in the case of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, whether on war against terrorism or immigration waves from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean to Europe. The Mediterranean Dialogue which consists of Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia was formed in 1994 with the aim of a mutual cooperation between the members of the Dialogue and NATO on regional security and stability. A decade later, in 2004, NATO leaders decided to expand this agreement to a broader scope to include some countries in the region that is called the "Middle East". The decision led to the formation of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative which consists of Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia and Oman decided not to join but did not reject the invitation. The main goal and concerns of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative are to "contribute to regional security and stability" (NATO 2004). The enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue, as the Initiative is also known, requires bilateral cooperation and activities including:

1. tailored advice on defence transformation, defence budgeting, defence planning and civil-military relations;
2. military-to-military cooperation to contribute to interoperability through participation in selected military exercises and related education and training activities that could improve the ability of participating countries' forces to operate with those of the Alliance; and through participation in selected NATO and PfP exercises and in NATO-led operation on a case-by-case basis;
3. cooperation in the fight against terrorism, including through intelligence-sharing;
4. cooperation in the Alliance's work on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery;
5. cooperation regarding border security in connection with terrorism, small arms and light weapons and the fight against illegal trafficking;
6. civil emergency planning, including participating in training courses and exercises on disaster assistance. (NATO 2011)

As all six items indicate, the focus on the enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue is on security issues: defence, fight against terrorism and weapons. The emphasis on security issues as the main concern of Qatar in its cooperation with the GCC is a reiterative theme that can also be highlighted in occasion of the "NATO Workshop on Cooperation in the Framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative" held in 2010 in Qatar: "Qatar and other GCC countries have a leading role to play, along with NATO, in dealing with burning issues like Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran's nuclear programme, a top official of the military alliance said in Doha" (Mathew 2010, see also Bisogniero 2010).

7. How Do the GCC Countries See the EU's Role in the Mediterranean?

In a conference held in 2013 in Sudan's capital Khartoum, Mohammad Jamal Al-Deen Mazloum from Naif Arab University for Security Sciences in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia delivered a paper entitled "Towards a Future Arab Strategy Within the Framework of International Partnerships (Neighbouring Countries)". In his paper, Dr. Mazloum provided a summary analysis of the EU's role in the Mediterranean:

- *European interests with the Arab states*: (1) that the achievement of stability in the Arab region embodies an important element in attaining security on the southern shore of the Mediterranean and preventing threats such as smuggling and illegal migration; (2) that political relations between the two sides should be based on the element of consensus; (3) in the economic field [Arab world] is a wide market for various European products, especially industrial ones; (4) A supplier of raw and primary materials, especially petroleum and other raw materials.
- *European motives for partnership with Arab countries*: (1) geographical proximity to the Arab countries; (2) shared interests with Arab countries (economic and political); (3) guaranteeing the import of raw materials, especially oil and gas; (4) large [Arab world] market which is close to 400 million people.
- *European aspirations in the Arab region*: (1) that the entire Arab region become an area of influence for the European Union; (2) making use of the strategic location of the Arab states and controlling the channels and waterways; (3) to strengthen political and economic ties between the Arab countries and the EU; (4) procurement of energy and raw materials; (5) use the Arab region as a region and a jumping off point to other regions.
- *What Arab States gained from partnership with Europe*: (1) support Arab positions towards the crises experienced in the region, in the international forums; (2) opening European markets to Arab products; (3) supplying Arab countries with advanced technology; (4) an opportunity for the export of skilled and specialized labour to European countries, which has special returns for those states [European states], especially since the Arab states on the Mediterranean coast are labour-exporting countries. (Mazloum 2013: 24-25)

As Mazloum indicates, Europe operates with an instrumental view of the Arab Mediterranean, which it regards as a "jumping off point" for other parts of the world. As mentioned in the text above, ensuring the supply of raw materials and energy holds particular importance for European countries. Moreover, their interest in keeping the Arab Mediterranean secure lies in their concern with trafficking and illegal immigration resulting from insecurity and instability in the region. On the other hand, a prevalent perspective is held by the Arab states that proximity to the European Union ought to improve their position in their respective regions, as well as on the international stage. In addition, partnership with Europe grants them access to European markets and modern technology. Also, this proximity opens the doors to the European labour market for their workforce.

The EU and GCC have similar views in many cross-regional issues. They cooperated in Afghanistan, have a similar stance regarding Iran's nuclear programme and share common concerns in Syria. However, cooperation with regard to the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean mainly concerns different security aspects, such as war against terrorist organizations or

tackling the issue of migration from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean to Europe. Indeed, there are hurdles in the way of expanding the cooperation to include important issues such as promotion of good governance and economic growth in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. These obstacles include the EU raising human rights concerns, which is usually faced with rejection by the states (Colombo 2014: 133-134), authoritarian political systems of the GCC states which tend to resist pressures for reform, and falling oil prices with their backlash on the Gulf states. All these decrease the possibility of constructive tripartite cooperation between the EU, the GCC and the Mediterranean.

Conclusion

It is important to keep in mind that Saudi Arabia and Qatar are hereditary monarchies in which political power and decision making are in the hands of groups of individuals and institutions firmly controlled by members of the ruling families and their associates. However, both states have created consultative bodies with some supervisory powers. The councils are appointed by the rulers and have limited advisory role. Therefore, when considering the multi-actor lever of analysis it is noteworthy that Saudi Arabia and Qatar have insignificant civil society participation in governance. Moreover, the rulers, King Salman of KSA and Emir Tamim of Qatar, have the ultimate say in the determination of national policy. In Saudi Arabia the monarch has vested enormous power in his son, the Vice Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who not only oversees the operations of the country's state oil company, but has also initiated the most radical economic reform programme of the Kingdom, known as the Vision Plan 2030. The implementation of V2030 is not under the jurisdiction of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, who might have been expected to manage the programme. In Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim, the former prime minister and minister of foreign affairs who was once perceived as the country's second most powerful individual, lost his posts of prime minister, foreign minister and head of the Qatar Investment Authority after Emir Hamad bin Khalifa abdicated in favour of his son the crown prince. The absence of institutional clarity and ambiguity in the division of responsibility in many instances means that one is never clear how much influence each actor (apart from the monarchs) has in the process of decision making. This consolidation of power into the hands of a few, together with the dynamics of an oil- and gas-based rentier economy that encourages a rent-seeking behaviour among the ranks of the political system, gives Saudi and Qatari leaders a self-image of the providing father – a self-perception which is compatible with a system of patrimonial, modernizing autocracies. Also, this self-representation is accompanied with a sense of purpose and mission towards the Arab and Muslim worlds, which is evident in the leaders' discourse. This perspective then presumes the other Arab states and nations as "younger brothers" which need to be provided for and guided by the "wise fathers". Thus, although they are similar in terms of religion, culture and political system, Saudi Arabia and Qatar compete hard for geopolitical advantage in the Arab and Muslim worlds including the Arab Mediterranean region, as both assume a father figure role.

The EU as a normative power would like to export its model to the Mediterranean. In terms of economic organization this model takes the form of liberalization, while in the socio-political sphere it signals democratization and in the socio-political area it involves respect for human rights and the upholding of such values as equality for ethnic/religious minorities and gender equality. Likewise, Saudi Arabia tends to spread its norms not only to the Mediterranean but

also to the Muslim world. These norms are those of Wahhabism and Salafism that emphasize implementation of Sharia. Saudi Arabia does not give credit to the EU's version of human rights. Issues such as gender equality are not given any significance in Saudi discourse, and democratization is not part of its value system. However, the GCC countries including Saudi Arabia do not stand against economic liberalization in the Mediterranean, because they also can benefit from the results of a free market economy. Saudi Arabia recognizes that investment opportunities can be better exploited in the Mediterranean countries in the context of a deregulated market framework.

The EU's rhetoric and discourse towards the Mediterranean has undergone a shift from the use of the term "the Mediterranean" following the Barcelona Process to "the southern neighbourhood" in the 2000s, and then towards the "surrounding regions" (Cebeci and Schumacher 2017: 4-5). After the rise of new threats in the neighbours of the Mediterranean, i.e., war and civil crisis in Syrian and Libya and the flow of refugees to Europe, the EU's priority changed and it began to regard its southern neighbourhood as its "surrounding region", technically consisting of vulnerable countries that could not deal with their own problems and would need the EU's direct help and intervention. Consequently, the Israel–Palestine conflict, which was once the most important security concern for the EU vis-à-vis the Arab Mediterranean space, was replaced by the new threats from the area that is now referred to as the surrounding region. This in turn has underlined the previous EU approach towards treating the Mediterranean as a region. In a similar vein, engaged countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar have also played their part in changing the political and social environment in the Mediterranean. Their interventions have been piecemeal and localized, driven by their strategic interests which have required deep involvement in the Arab countries of the Mediterranean. Their involvement therefore has checked any efforts to create region-building efforts in the Mediterranean space, thus contributing to the fragmentation of the Mediterranean space and its "regionality". The near absence of the Palestine question from Mediterranean discourses and Arab concerns about national security following 9/11, the rise of al-Qaeda, war in Iraq and finally the Arab Spring have meant that the historical and emotional glue for regional Arab action has been weakened to such as extent that neither the GCC nor the EU is putting its energies behind the resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict. In fact, both regional organizations are more concerned with Syria. For the EU it about the flow of refugees and related violence, while for Saudi Arabia the most urgent security matter in the context of the Mediterranean is its rivalry with Iran. This is why as the rhetoric of Saudi Arabia towards Iran is getting tougher and stronger, references to Palestine and the Palestinian–Israeli issue in its discourse are fading. This sense of insecurity is generated due to the possible future return of the Muslim Brotherhood in countries such as Egypt.

Not dissimilar to the EU, which has a hierarchy of priorities, descending from the EU countries to its "near abroad" and then the rest of the world, Saudi Arabia and Qatar too have developed a strong order of priorities in their international engagements. For them the GCC countries are the closest circle, followed by the Arab region, the wider Muslim world, and then the rest of world. The discourse and practices of Saudi Arabia and Qatar show that these countries see the Mediterranean region as fragmented and contested, which is in fact a view shared by the EU. The discourses and practices of these countries do not help boost regionalization in the Mediterranean. Consequently, such attempts at regionalization as the UfM or the Maghreb Union have not been successful. From a layered multi-level perspective, the conduct of these countries in post-Arab Spring situations in Yemen, Libya and Syria demonstrates that Saudi

Arabia and Qatar would like the GCC to take the lead role in managing and addressing the regional problems in MENA. With regard to other regional organizations in the Arab and Islamic world (the Arab League, OIC, Organization of Arab Exporting Petroleum Countries-OAPEC, and others), Qatar and Saudi Arabia would prefer such multilateral bodies to work closely with the GCC sub-regional organization and thus bring their own influence to bear on these major bodies. They prefer the GCC to complement these entities and influence their workings and thus avoid tensions and competitive pressures. The behaviour of the two countries within the framework of the GCC regarding the Arab League, OIC, OPEC and OAPEC are examples of their attempts to keep the leading role for the GCC.

Going forward, there is considerable overlap in perspectives on the Mediterranean. Both the EU and the GCC want political stability to be returned to the Arab region and would like to see the implementation of the Abdullah Plan (land for peace) and of the two-state solution. Both have similar concerns about Syria, violence in the Levant, the stability of Libya and erosion of central control at the heart of the Maghreb.

With regard to the policy area of water and agriculture, food security is a major concern of the GCC countries as agricultural land is limited and water resources are under pressure. In order to guarantee their food supply, they need to import agricultural products from around the world. Therefore, as a measure to overcome their concern, they have invested mainly in agriculture (by leasing or buying farmland) in other countries. However, the GCC's investments in food production in such Mediterranean countries as Egypt and Morocco are considerably less than their investments in the Red Sea countries of Ethiopia and Sudan. Moreover, the GCC states are acutely aware of their food investments in the Mediterranean being affected by political disputes, as shown in the tensions between Egypt and Saudi Arabia over Syria, Yemen, and the Tiran and Sanafir islands. On the policy area of energy and migration, the integration between the GCC and the Arab Mediterranean is not very significant. For example the major oil and gas customers of the GCC are outside the region, and the population of migrants in the GCC are mainly from South and East Asia – the exception being Egypt whose nationals constitute a considerable number of immigrants in the GCC. Migrants from other Southern Mediterranean countries, apart from Egypt, tend to head for Europe rather than the GCC.

The EU does not share Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's priorities in terms of access to agricultural land in the Mediterranean, and in fact competes with the Southern Mediterranean countries in key agricultural products. With regard to energy, the EU's path diverges from that of Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The more emphasis the EU places on imports from North Africa, the less market space is likely to remain for Qatar's natural gas exports and Saudi Arabia's oil exports. With the GCC countries very keen to develop their downstream presence in Europe for greater market access, they will be motivated to use such investments to safeguard their long-term market presence in the EU. For the EU, however, access to the rich deposits of Algeria, Libya, and of course the emerging gas giants of the Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Cyprus and Palestine) is a priority, which turns the focus of its energy providers to the Southern Mediterranean.

Both sides show concern for the humanitarian crisis unfolding across the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, but their approaches are rather different, as indeed are the consequences of the flow of migrants. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are keen to invest in refugee centres in the Levant and have resisted mass migration to their countries. The EU, on the other hand, has been

confronted with massive refugee inflows that have to be accommodated on its territory. There does not seem to be a coordinated approach to handing this humanitarian crisis.

A recognition of their shared interest in the stability of the Mediterranean region, common interest in combating terrorism and the defeat of ISIS, as well as realization of the two-state solution should provide sufficient basis on which to build a broader mutually beneficial relationship, but this can only happen if the two GCC countries under discussion show willingness to change their current priorities in the Mediterranean in search of a collective approach to regional security. That could happen with EU encouragement, and progress being made on the EU–GCC dialogue.

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