

European Foreign Affairs Review on The EU's Post-Normative Turn? The EU in the Middle East and North Africa

Posted on Saturday 22nd January 2011

Michelle Pace ([/staff/profiles/government-society/pace-michelle.aspx](#)) co-guest edited (with Francesco Cavatorta, Dublin City University) a Special Issue of the journal *European Foreign Affairs Review on The EU's Post-Normative Turn? The EU in the Middle East and North Africa* which was published as Volume 15, 2010

The fundamental objective of the Special Issue is to provide a broad understanding of the constraining frameworks of the European Union (EU) and to discuss a range of country-specific studies, which highlight the complexity and contradictions in EU foreign policy making in the context of what the contributors define as the 'postnormative turn' of the Union. It is very likely that the picture of the EU emerging from such studies will be a very complex one, as Middle-East and North African (MENA) polities and regimes often present radically different features and offer different challenges because of their very diverse social, economic, strategic, and political domestic characteristics. In addition, the recent post-war strategic scenario in the MENA compels the Union to take into account the rise of non-state actors in the region such as Hezbollah and Hamas.

Thus, the main research questions driving this project are to what extent the EU engages MENA regimes, polities, and non-state actors differently; what are the factors that determine such differential treatment; and how does this reflect on the current debate on the nature of the EU. It follows that the main contention of this Special Issue is that the theoretical debate between realism and normativity has become quite sterile as it is ultimately unsolvable because all policies can be interpreted as being fundamentally rationalistic and self-interested or normative, or a combination of both. In addition, all this ultimately depends on the values one espouses and it therefore often becomes a purely normative judgment.

Therefore, it becomes more interesting and more useful to examine the 'practice' of the policies of the EU in order to understand which mechanisms, values, and interests prevail; at what time; and which EU sub-actors are involved in pursuing such policies. In this context, the target country becomes crucial. While it is true that the instruments available to the EU such as Association Agreements follow the same format and are informed by the same beliefs and values, the way in which they are used varies considerably.

The EU, contrary to what some might believe, is aware of the context within which it operates and sensitive to local political, economic, and strategic realities. From this, it derives that, within the broader 'belief framework' of modernization, the EU is rather flexible as it seeks to adapt to new circumstances.

The Special Issue begins with three general articles dealing with the structural constraints and policies that the EU has in place and how these influence EU relations with the MENA. These broader articles set the stage for four others dealing specifically with country studies. The final contribution is an examination of the new challenges facing the EU in the region and the response these challenges are likely to draw from the EU.

Michelle Pace contributes two articles to the Special Issue :

[The Post-normative Turn in European Union \(EU\)-Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\) Relations: An Introduction \(PDF 350KB, opens new window\) \(/Documents/college-social-sciences/government-society/polsis/news-events/european-foreign-affairs-review-intoduction.pdf\)](#) (with Francesco Cavatorta).

[Interrogating the European Union's Democracy Promotion Agenda: Discursive Configurations of 'Democracy' from the Middle East \(PDF 400KB, opens new window\) \(/Documents/college-social-sciences/government-society/polsis/news-events/european-foreign-affairs-review.pdf\)](#)

[Privacy](#) | [Legal](#) | [Cookies and cookie policy](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Site map](#) | [Website feedback](#) | [Charitable information](#)

© University of Birmingham 2015

