

The Possibilities and Constraints of the EU in the Middle East

Between Democratic Ideals and Autocratic Reality

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Normative Power Europe

Ian Manner's idea of **Normative Power Europe** (2002):

Quote

'the EU as a normative power has an **ontological quality** to it – that the EU can be conceptualized as a changer of norms in the international system; a **positivist quantity** to it – that the EU acts to change norms in the international system'¹

¹Manners. "Normative Power Europe: A contradiction in terms?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40:2 (2002):2.

A Decline of Normative Power Europe in Middle East?

Argument: EU has declined as a normative power in the Middle East, partly, due to prioritization of hard measures to **control migration** and **hinder violent spillover**.

Three factors:

- Critical events and crises
- Lack of principled conditioning of diplomatic support and aid
- Ideational impact of authoritarian regimes

The EU, violent extremism, and critical events

The PvE policies of the EU in Middle East determined by critical events and crises:

Quote

'The EU conducts policies and actions that are **increasingly focused on reducing migration and preventing terrorism** – even if this sometimes happen at the expense of human rights. And the reason why this logic kicks in, we argue, is a perception of *urgency*: When an event or situation is perceived as a threat to the EU's more immediate security, the EU is more likely to abandon some of its core principles.'²

^bRieker and Riddervold. "Not so unique after all? Urgency and norms in EU foreign and security policy." *Journal of European Integration* 44:4 (2019):464.

The EU, violent extremism, and critical events

EEAS representative 1 on EU PvE policies and critical events:

Quote

'Let us be honest about this, we do so because **we are suffering from violent extremism in Europe**. So, in the case of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, the **top priority is to prevent the impact of radicalization** in the region and the way it is exported into the EU and to minimize the impact'

Quote

'European policymakers prioritize civilization over [democratic] change [in the Middle East].'

The EU, violent extremism, and critical events

EEAS representative 2 on changing premises:

Quote

'**Before**, we used to build schools for the sake of building schools – **because it was a humanitarian project**. Now we do it to prevent violent extremism instead. Before, we used to train children for the sake of training children, because it was a humanitarian project. But **now we do it to prevent violent extremism**. The term violent extremism has been employed to securitize everything that we are doing ... What I am trying to say is that this was a genie coming out of the lamp ... It is a **monster out of control**.'

A Decline of Normative Power Europe in Middle East?

Implementing partners working on EU PvE and CT projects in Middle East largely confirmed this view:

- Did not view their project as PvE/CT
- PvE framing complicated trust on the ground
- Possible geographical clustering of projects

The Ideational Impact of (and on) the EU

The complicated landscape in the Middle East affects both aims and aspirations of the EU:

- EU depends on the goodwill of autocrats
- EU: Desire to improve governance and strengthen human rights
- Autocrats: No interest in implementing projects threatening their own interests

The Ideational Impact of (and on) the EU

EEAS representative 3 on influencing problematic stakeholders:

Quote

'We do not spare any opportunity to raise our concerns about human rights violations ... We have seen that **a lack of dialogue is worse** because we do not even have the opportunity to raise our voice. So, we need to find cooperation in key areas such as countering terrorism and [preventing violent extremism] and **use those joint agendas to raise our concern.**'

The Ideational Impact of (and on) the EU

- EU depends on the goodwill of autocrats
- EU: Desire to improve governance and strengthen human rights
- Autocrats: No interest in implementing projects threatening their own interests

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- EU's perceived strongest asset: Talking with 'everyone'
 - Finding small overlaps (short term) to build interpersonal trust (long term)
 - Causing a 'contagion of liberal values' through continued contact

The Ideational Impact of (and on) the EU

Two counter-acting factors:

- 1. Reluctance of autocrats to implement democratic reforms
- 2. Arab regimes have ideational impact on the EU, as well
 - Saudi Arabia and UAE lobbying European policies on Islamism and terrorism
 - Interfaith dialogue projects implemented to legitimate autocrats' own normative claims

Necessarily, the EU must navigate between *what is* and *what ought to be*

The Ideational Impact of (and on) the EU

EU diplomat on action plans in the Middle East:

Quote

'These countries use all the words that sound nice to the ear of the EU bureaucrats, but it does not lead to anything. So there is a nice paper published, such as in Iraq, where we receive a nice PvE booklet, which on the face of it is perfect, with **all the words of the EU resolutions**. Yet, they have **no impact in real life** and are [there] just to tick the boxes of EU expectations.'

The Ideational Impact of (and on) the EU

- Arab autocrats appreciate Moscow's approach
- Continued dialogue or pushing autocrats into the arms of Russia and China?
- Autocrats have leverage over the EU:
 - a) threat of mass migration
 - b) terrorist spillover

Temporal or institutionalized measures?

The 3 factors contributing to the normative decline:

- Impact of critical events and crises
- Lack of conditioning of diplomatic support and aid
- Ideational impact of authoritarian regimes