

## Egypt – A Dichotomous Partner

*Exemplifying the Challenges for the EU's Envisioned Global Strategy*



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### 1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the Cold War and the end of confrontation between East and West, the European Union has grown to become a driver of stability and prosperity. Only a decade after its constitutional foundation following the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, the EU based its global security strategy on the assumption that “Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free”.<sup>1</sup> Just one decade later, the opposite could not be more evident.

In light of the crises-ridden situation in both the EU's eastern and southern periphery, the Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, has now announced an indispensable review of Europe's foreign policy strategy by 2016. Despite the many challenges which the EU faces in re-establishing its status as an assertive and confident power in the international arena, Mogherini has stated that “as Europeans, we can only expect to be a credible global player if we act as a responsible power at our doorstep”.<sup>2</sup> In outlining a revised global strategy, it will be crucial for the European Union to develop a sustainable approach to dissolving the chaos in its immediate neighbourhood.

Both the eastern and southern neighbourhood reflect many of those challenges that the EU's recently published Strategic Review Paper outlines as the main obstacles facing European foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> In a “more connected, contested and complex world”, the European member states are directly affected domestically by the influx of irregular migration stemming from crises in the southern Mediterranean. At the same time, ungoverned spaces, regional realign-

ments as well as failed and failing states have given rise to terrorists and warring factions that pose a threat to European security. Fuelled by the appeal of identity politics, socio-political cleavages are fostering fragmentation and unbalanced power shifts throughout the EU's neighbourhood.

All this calls for European foreign policy to adopt a more geopolitical stance – addressing a neighbourhood that has in the past few years become overtly geopolitical, in which different regional and international actors compete for influence and the realisation of their ideas for a political order. As the EU is drawing up a new foreign policy scheme, its approach in dealing with the crises in its southern neighbourhood will be decisive for the development of a global European strategy. It will therefore be vital for the EU to find a sustainable solution on how to deal with the chaos in its near abroad in order to develop a viable approach to regaining its impact on the far abroad as well.

In assessing how the southern Mediterranean illustrates the core challenges which the EU will have to overcome in creating a progressive global agenda, its relationship with Egypt serves as an ideal case to highlight both the obstacles and opportunities for an updated European foreign policy. Egypt was a forerunner of democratic aspirations throughout the Arab Upheavals, but has since developed into an ambivalent partner for the EU. Nevertheless, Egypt and its superficially democratic political structure represent the type of regime which constitutes the majority among Europe's immediate and wider neighbours, towards which the EU will thus have to develop an effective and substantial strategy. Against this backdrop, the following analysis will

<sup>1</sup> The European Union Institute for Security Studies, *European Security Strategy*, 2003, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Mogherini, *Speech at the Munich Security Conference*, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> The European External Action Service, *The European Union in a Changing Global Environment*, 2015, 1.

briefly outline the main challenges arising in the EU's southern neighbourhood, before assessing how Egypt ideally depicts its type of regime, towards which the renewed European foreign policy strategy will have to develop a more profound and effective approach. In a final section, this analysis will then give some recommendations concerning which aspects to focus on in developing a new foreign policy agenda for the EU.

### **II. The European Neighbourhood in Crisis: a Litmus Test for Europe's Global Strategy**

When the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched in 2004, it was designed to fit a geopolitical context in which the EU perceived its neighbouring countries to have entered a gradual process of economic modernisation and political liberalisation. Towards the east, the so-called *big bang enlargement*<sup>4</sup> led to the EU-Russia Strategic Partnership, which envisioned the creation of “common spaces [...] on the basis of common values and shared interests” between Russia and the EU.<sup>5</sup> However, Russia's assertive policy to recapture its former sphere of influence, disembodying into the continuous crisis in Ukraine, has revealed the weaknesses of Europe's attempt to integrate the eastern neighbourhood. Towards the south, “the ENP was premised on a relatively predictable if not benign geopolitical environment in which the US was the global hegemon”.<sup>6</sup> Yet in a region where the US is struggling to effectively employ its *leadership from behind*, the Arab Upheavals have left the EU confronted with extremely diverse national realities along the Mediterranean.

It is thus evident that a neighbourhood in crisis, in which Mogherini rightly observed

that “complexity, conflict and interdependence seem to be the only elements we can be sure of”,<sup>7</sup> requires the EU to redefine its approach to both the east and the south. Focusing on the southern neighbourhood, the subsequent section will show that this region indeed reflects the main challenges which the EU faces in redefining its global strategy. While the EU is hence seeking to adapt its foreign policy to what it has discerned as an increasingly connected, contested and complex world, dealing with exactly these characteristics in its direct neighbourhood will be the litmus test for a global strategy.

### **III. New Realities in the South**

In 2011, the Arab Upheavals and the people's call for regime change in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, caught the EU flat footed. After a period of rather timid reactions, European policy-makers ultimately expressed their support for what was perceived to be the first step on an irreversible path towards democratisation. In two subsequent communications, the European Commission delivered its response by reviewing the ENP with the intention to enhance democratisation through the EU's economic and political leverage.<sup>8</sup> Whereas the underlying assumption that appeared to have guided the European response was that economic modernisation and political liberalisation would yield stability, the current situation in the southern neighbourhood reveals that the EU is instead surrounded by an arc of instability.

Looking south, the EU faces a region torn by humanitarian crises that have dominated the international political agenda for the past few years. The predominant “atmos-

<sup>4</sup> The 2004 EU Engagement included accession of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

<sup>5</sup> The European Commission, *The European Union and Russia*, 2007, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Tocci, *The Neighbourhood Policy is Dead*, 2014, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Mogherini, *Speech at the Munich Security Conference*, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> The European Commission, *A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean*, 2011; The European Commission, *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood*, 2001.

phere of deepening social and political polarisation”<sup>9</sup> in Europe’s southern neighbourhood has not only shaped global politics, but also reflects many of the core challenges that the EU faces in developing a profound global strategy. Unsurprisingly in light of the EU’s need to redraw its foreign policy, its transformative policies had little impact on shaping the post-Arab Upheavals environment. The European member states have learnt that the continuous crises in the south are in turn creating new political realities, much different from how the EU had envisioned them.

With that said, the EU is in need of a geopolitical strategy that incorporates an effective agenda on how to deal with regimes that, despite their declared subscription to democratic norms, fall short on their dedication to good governance and the rule of law. Such regimes have come to typify the EU’s immediate and wider neighbourhood and, despite Europe’s ambivalent relationship towards them, European policy makers will have to accept that the re-emergence of an apparent security paradigm favours the survival of such governments. A close look at the challenges that arise in dealing with such regimes in Europe’s neighbourhood will thus be critical for establishing a global geopolitical European agenda.

#### **IV. Connected, Contested & Complex: The Case of Egypt**

When the ENP appeared challenged during the Arab Upheavals, the case of Egypt and its subsequent development put the most pressure on its framework. In fact, Cairo’s path before, during and after the 2011 revolution seems to stress the need to take a re-defined approach in developing a new European foreign policy strategy.

#### **IV.1 Dealing with a New Neighbour**

One of the essential aspects of such a process, underlined most visibly during the Arab Upheavals, was that of dealing with states whose government and inner circle of power appear as a black box, exhibiting a high degree of non-transparency in decision-making processes. Such cases are often referred to as authoritarian regimes, suggesting that they show limited pluralism as well as a discourse of securitisation in which the leader defends the nation and repression of oppositional groups, although these regimes can also exhibit some limited democratic elements at times. Dealing with such states seems to put many of the EU’s proclaimed goals of promoting democratic structures in its neighbourhood to the test because a trade-off between said targets and security considerations may be the result. The EU’s foreign policy framework for its neighbourhood, the European Neighbourhood Policy, has therefore had to forfeit much credibility.

In fact the Egyptian state has been dominated politically by the country’s armed forces: presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956-70), Anwar Al-Sadat (1970-81) and Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) were leading members of the military before assuming Egypt’s highest political office. Since the *Coup of the Free Officers* in 1952, the armed forces have, however, not only become very influential in Egypt’s political landscape, but they also professionalised and have become the dominant actor in the economy since the late 1960’s.<sup>10</sup> This entailed a slow pulling-out of political institutions – under Nasser one third of the ministers had a military background, while in Al-Sadat’s final cabinet this was only the case for the defence and foreign affairs ministries<sup>11</sup> – and resulted in the military’s approach to politics focusing on *vetoing* rather than *policy-making*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Mason, *The International Politics of the Arab Spring*, 2014, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Cook, *Ruling but not governing*, 2007. This development was accelerated by the peace treaty with Israel in 1979, which led to a decrease in troop strength from almost 900,000 men in 1973 to 300,000 to 450,000 men in the 1980’s. Cf. Springborg, *Mubarak’s Egypt*, 1988, 95-104.

<sup>11</sup> Springborg, *Mubarak’s Egypt*, 1988, 95-96.

<sup>12</sup> Albrecht, *Revolution oder Coup d’État?*, 2013, 65.

With the military's increasing involvement in Egypt's politics and economy, the so-called deep state (al-dawla al-'amīqa) has grown in importance since the armed forces began to control many sectors of the country's economy, with profits distributed among its members without state control. This parallel structure also included preferential health care, social services and housing as well as above average salaries. Before and after the revolution, it relied on three pillars essential to its functioning: firstly, a high level of threat perception and a resulting securitisation of politics; secondly, the aforementioned economic independence of the military; and thirdly, a permeable line between military and civil sectors.

The deep state has played a pivotal role in what was long considered to be Egypt's social contract: the state would provide basic services, health care, social security and employment while in return its citizens would refrain from challenging the status quo. Economic stagnation and increasing demographic pressure, however, have led to an erosion of the state's ability to deliver on its part, opening an informal space in state-society relations. Dealing with such non-transparent, black-box-like regimes can obviously be difficult for external actors, in particular when considering financial support.

On February 11, 2011, the decision not to support Mubarak but instead to allow for his resignation did not reveal a demise of the military's influence in the country's future. As a matter of fact, despite initially backing the members of the *ancient régime*, the military accepted replacing Mubarak, Omar Suleiman and Ahmed Shafiq<sup>13</sup> from their positions. This day can thus be seen not as the beginning,

but as the end of the revolution, simply because this choice demonstrated the armed forces' goal of maintaining their influence.<sup>14</sup> To that end, an interim constitutional declaration was passed in the subsequent months, granting the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces a variety of executive and legislative powers while also paving the way for parliamentary elections, which were held in January 2012 and yielded a victory for Islamist and Salafi parties.<sup>15</sup> In June 2012, Mohammed Morsi, the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, won the presidential ballot against Ahmed Shafiq, the aforementioned remnant (al-falūl) of the *ancient régime*.

### IV.2 Back to Square One

The EU seemed enthusiastic at first when Hosni Mubarak resigned from office on February 11, 2011. Not long after, however, the dilemma of democracy promotion versus its reliance on stability re-emerged in the EU's approach, coupled with hesitation caused by the swift rise of Islamist parties and political groups in post-Mubarak Egypt's struggle for a redefinition of the political space and state-society relations. It became evident that the Union's approach to its southern neighbourhood required reform. The EU thus coordinated its efforts with the US – acknowledging that the latter had a substantial leverage in Egypt.

Being in the position of power, however, posed a challenge to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) while the political climate in Egypt was growing more confrontational. Despite initial attempts to improve the country's foreign relations with the EU,<sup>16</sup> Egypt's new president became involved in geopolitics, aligning with

<sup>13</sup> Omar Suleiman was Vice President from 29 January 2011 until 11 February 2011 and the Director of the General Intelligence Services from 1993 until 31 January 2011 and Ahmed Shafiq became Prime Minister on 29 January 2011 and stayed on office until 3 March 2011. Both were seen as close members of Mubarak's inner circle of power and have a military background.

<sup>14</sup> Albrecht, *Revolution oder Coup d'État?*, 2013, 65-68.

<sup>15</sup> This victory was in part due to the military pushing for elections before a constitution was agreed upon. After the banning of the National Democratic Party, the MB was the only organisation capable of mobilising voters across the country.

<sup>16</sup> For instance by establishing the EU-Egypt Task Force in late-2012. Cf. European Union, *EU-Egypt Task Force*, 2012.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, the region's foremost promoters of Sunni political Islam. More than that, the armed forces have received significant support from Saudi Arabia – with the heated regional power play impacting the escalating confrontation in Egypt. This has laid the foundation for a power struggle between two ideologically opposed factions, turning a previously external conflict into an internal one for Egypt.

Domestically, however, Morsi was unable – in part due to institutional resilience, but also a lack of experience and focus<sup>17</sup> – to provide for economic improvement in Egypt. Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) appeared unwilling to compromise with other societal actors, such as secular groups and organisations, causing popular unrest. The tensions between the MB and the military heightened in mid-2013, eventually yielding a *coup d'état* against the country's first democratically elected president.

After then field marshal and Deputy Prime Minister Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi had reinstated the military's claim to power, a period of criticism from the European Union followed, particularly regarding the country's decreasing civil liberties.<sup>18</sup> In a report on the state of the EU's action plan<sup>19</sup> by the European External Action Service (EEAS), concerns about freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, transitional justice, procedural deficiencies and the lack of security sector reform were expressed.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the situation of human rights groups has deteriorated greatly since the mid-2013 (a process that had already started beforehand), and several well-known organisations have reported an ever tighter grip by the state on civil society groups, aiming to “slowly strangle [their] work” and eventually seeking their “eradication”.<sup>21</sup>

Soon, however, this stance was softened again as it appeared that the EU feared losing vis-à-vis other players in seeking to expand its influence in Cairo. To that end, the amount of aid was raised from EUR 450 million to 600 million and a potential trade agreement was brought to the table. At the same time, Egypt received billions of USD from Saudi Arabia in particular,<sup>22</sup> emphasising once again the geopolitical dimension of Cairo's struggle. Meanwhile, the EU decided to provide an observer mission to the elections that made Al-Sisi president in June 2014 – gaining 90% of the vote as turnout was low and only one competitor ran. The considerable logistical and organisational issues of this mission have led many to criticise the positive résumé presented afterwards.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, it was seen as direct support for Al-Sisi and his government by many, especially by civil society groups, and criticised accordingly. In reality, the EU got itself entangled in regional power plays, without a clearly defined intention.

Another facet of the EU-Egyptian relations is an increasing securitisation of regional and Egyptian domestic affairs. For one, the confrontation between the military regime and the Muslim Brotherhood intensified during the immediate aftermath of the *coup d'état* in July 2013 in particular, leading to clashes and hundreds of casualties. The atmosphere has been tense since, as the persecution of members of the MB, including death sentences, followed.

In addition, growing unrest and terrorist attacks in the Sinai have bolstered this securitisation. Here, Egypt's military is engaged in a counterinsurgency campaign aimed at defeating the groups involved. Dissent in the peninsula is mostly grounded in continuous

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hamid, *Temptations of Power*, 2014, 4.

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed comparison of Egypt's constitutions of 1971, 2012 and the draft of 2013 see Dahl, *Comparing Egypt's Constitutions*, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> EEAS, *EU/Egypt Action Plan*, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> EEAS, *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Egypt*, 2015, 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> The declaration was signed by 20 of the country's most active rights groups. See Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, *Egyptian government clamps down on rights groups, seeking their eradication*, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> One lump sum of USD 23bn was necessary immediately to avoid Cairo's insolvency.

<sup>23</sup> Brozus and Roll, *Die EU-Wahlbeobachtung in Ägypten war ein Fehler*, 2014.

political and economic neglect and solving those issues will be key to finding a lasting solution. At the same time, the regional threat of the Islamic State (IS) has also aided Cairo in securitising its policies – especially given that local groups have expressed sympathy with IS – and led it to present itself as guarantor of stability while favouring a non-interventionist view regionally. An increasing securitisation plays into the hands of the armed forces – and they are but one player in the new regional landscape.

### **V. The Southern Neighbourhood: Exemplifying Europe's Foreign Policy Challenges**

With regard to the conclusions that can be drawn from the development of its political system following the Arab Upheavals, the Egyptian case exhibits most of the main challenges the EU faces in redefining its approach towards both the immediate and wider neighbourhood.

In an increasingly contested region, a substantial driver of instability is the growing number of ungoverned territories, which lack the full control of respective national governments. This is evident for large parts of southern Algeria, Libya, Egypt's Sinai, Syria and Iraq, as well as Yemen.<sup>24</sup> The reason why these regions “have become security vacuums” lies to some extent in the inability of many post-Arab Spring regimes to democratically enforce state sovereignty and their subsequent “overstretching of security institutions” in order to fight opposition forces.<sup>25</sup> A case in point is the Muslim Brotherhood's aforementioned suppression in Egypt, which – although the Brotherhood itself is not a jihadist organisation – serves as a source of legitimacy for radical Islamists throughout the region to violently enforce their ambition of toppling domestic regimes and reshaping the

political landscape. Both unstable domestic governments and the thrift of trans-regional terrorist groups are ultimately contributing to “a crumbling regional order” on the European doorstep and the threat of dissolving state structures.<sup>26</sup>

As a matter of fact, relationships between former and emerging powers in the region are being reshuffled. Characteristically for the growing complexity which shapes the southern Mediterranean, this creates an opaque web of shifting alliances between state and non-state actors. While Egypt, for example, was part of the 2012 Islamist's Alliance along with Turkey and Qatar, it moved to “become the junior partner in a revisionist alliance consisting of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates” after the military coup in 2013.<sup>27</sup> Other traditionally influential powers, such as Tunisia, Libya or Iraq, are too caught up in domestic turmoil to assert significant influence. In a region of rampant instability, geopolitics is thus left to those few states that manage to retain a relative level of internal stability, like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Iran.

The Gulf is therefore emerging as a new geopolitical hub for several decades. Benefitting from the economic crisis in 2008, which curbed the EU's ability to employ substantial financial assistance to the southern Mediterranean, the Gulf countries “are now pivotal regional players, deploying unprecedented political, military and economic resources across a range of theatres”.<sup>28</sup> The impact of this process can clearly be seen by the aforementioned leap of Saudi Arabia to a position of influence on Egyptian politics. Even so, the divergence in political interests between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and especially between the Saudi kingdom and Iran, prevent a unified agenda for the region and instead fuel polarisation and conflict. In fact, the surge of identity politics not only heightens

<sup>24</sup> Missiroli & Stang, *A changing global environment*, 2014, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>26</sup> Grevi & Keohane, *Challenges for European Foreign Policy in 2015*, 2015, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Missiroli & Stang, *A changing global environment*, 2014, 60.

<sup>28</sup> Barnes-Dacey, *Responding to an Assertive Gulf*, 2015, 2.

the cleavages between Saudi Arabia and Iran, but further spurs antagonism between Sunna and Shia throughout the entire Middle East.

Perhaps the most evident repercussion of chaos in the Middle East is the substantial increase of irregular migration across the Mediterranean to Europe. The influx of refugees seeking shelter within European boundaries, causing many tragic deaths, has unveiled the EU's inability to cope with an increasingly connected world in which instability easily spreads across geographic boundaries. Here, the EU is heavily dependent on progressive co-operation with Egypt. Both the European Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) in Libya as well as the Commission's recent plans to destroy smugglers' boats along the North African coast rely on support from the Egyptian authorities.

### VI. The Neighbourhood as Geopolitics

With core European interests at stake, the European Union finds itself in a situation in which co-operation with regimes like Egypt represents the only possibility to avoid being impacted by the trajectories of its neighbouring countries without impacting these in return. Both the aforementioned state-internal and regional sources of instability, however, require the EU to rethink its strategic approach towards its southern neighbourhood. As the EU prepares for a strategic review in 2016, this relationship with Egypt and the entire southern neighbourhood might provide some conclusive remarks.

The rise of geopolitics is perhaps the most profound consequence shaping the current relationship between regional actors in Europe's southern vicinity – as is increasingly becoming the case on a global level as well. Naturally, the EU will have to take this development into consideration when adjusting its foreign policy strategy. Yet despite claims to the contrary, geopolitics has never been absent in the EU's approach towards its neigh-

bourhood. Taking into consideration its inability to conduct foreign policy in complete isolation from member state policies, the EU has developed its very own geopolitical strategy. "On the basis of voluntary inclusion rather than imposed coercion" the EU has pursued an approach of gradual approximation which Richard Youngs terms "inclusion as geopolitics".<sup>29</sup> The European ambition to assert influence on its neighbourhood thus rests on the willingness of its respective partners to adopt political and economic reforms. Under the theme of conditionality, the EU has adopted a foreign policy based on the assumption that it itself was "a model of political and economic organisation that partnering states should aim to match".<sup>30</sup> However, the developments outlined above have triggered preconditions in Europe's southern neighbourhood under which the EU's partnering countries are significantly less willing and able to pursue further integration with the Union and its *acquis*.

The EU is thus "less able than ever to set the rules of the game"<sup>31</sup> within the new geography of power in the Middle East. A redefinition of Europe's approach to its neighbourhood is therefore inevitable. This should be the first step of Mogherini's declared grand review, reassessing the EU's capabilities in a new neighbourhood. Since the EU is no longer, and has perhaps never been, able to act as a hegemon in the South, it is more dependent than ever on cooperation with regional partners. While there exists an argument that the EU should refrain from strengthening partnerships with countries lacking sufficient democratic aspirations, co-operation will be necessary to deploy leverage in a reordered environment.

### VII. What Next?

As the crises in Europe's southern neighbourhood have steadily expanded, ultimately engulfing the entire region, the EU has to realise that its impact is – and might remain –

<sup>29</sup> Youngs, *The EU's Geopolitical Crossroads*, 2015, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Rasche, *Political Conditionality in the Mediterranean*, 2015, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Dennison et al., *The Road Back to European Power*, 2015, 1.

limited. By seeking to enhance its credibility and ability to act, the EU should prioritise efforts on issues of immediate concern, such as preventing the humanitarian crisis of migrants losing their lives while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea, and attempting to repel the threat of further state collapse.

This could also be the starting point for an adjusted geopolitical approach enshrined in the EU's neighbourhood policy. Rethinking the incentives and narratives of European geopolitics will be necessary for a renewed foreign policy strategy that effectively deals with the type of ambivalent regimes that have come to shape Europe's immediate and wider neighbourhood, thus laying a cornerstone for the EU's global strategy. Connectivity, complexity and contest can hence only be dealt with if the EU finds a viable approach to re-defining its relationships with the ambivalent regimes characterising Europe's neighbourhood, such as that of Egypt.

However, the EU should refrain from overemphasising classical geopolitical tools of coercion at the expense of its traditional efforts to pursue a more value-based foreign policy. Attempts to enhance democratisation, pluralism and equality before the law must not be compromised by a re-emerging paradigm of increased securitisation. Perceiving the southern neighbourhood merely through the lens of securitisation will on the one hand hamper efforts to tackle the sources of instability and thriving extremism, and on the other hand legitimise the further militarisation of regional politics. In addition, opposition forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt would suffer further oppression as a result of such policies – undermining the EU's leverage as a mediator. The EU thus needs to find the right balance so as not to mollycoddle regimes that fall short of democratic commit-

ments while simultaneously not compromising such regimes as vital partners in a fast-changing environment.

The question of financial assistance should therefore assume a more symbolic importance, devoting substantially more support to regimes that have chosen a credible path towards democratisation, such as Tunisia, without completely neglecting assistance to others. The EU needs to be aware that many of its traditional partners have become *swing states*, fluctuating between the very different foreign policy agendas of the EU and competing actors such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey or Iran.

In adjusting its foreign affairs agenda, these aspects will be crucial for an effective European foreign policy – also due to the fact that the United States is gradually stepping down from its position as the most influential power in Middle East politics. Since the EU is neither able nor willing to fill this gap, it will have to encourage regional actors to take responsibility themselves for tackling regional security threats. The success of such a strategy, however, will depend on whether the EU's member states, especially Germany and France, will be able to convert their economic ties with the Gulf countries into substantial and coherent political leverage and de-escalatory diplomacy.

Taking stock of global and regional security, the EU finds itself in a completely altered environment compared to when its previous strategy was developed. The re-emergence of geopolitics is testing Europe's ability to act. Prioritising an effective dialogue with the ambivalent partners in its immediate neighbourhood should be the starting point for developing a new agenda that is better suited to re-establishing the EU's credibility as a global actor.

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