Framing and reframing the EU's engagement with the Mediterranean: Examining the security-stability nexus before and after the Arab uprisings

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INTRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

EU policies towards the Southern Mediterranean after the Arab uprisings are predominantly seen in the literature as marked by continuity with the past. This is attributed to the fact that the EU still acts with the aim of maximising its security by preserving stability in the region. By examining a range of policy areas, this special issue aims to assess and qualify this claim. Its introduction outlines our case on both empirical and analytical grounds. Empirically, it is argued that we need to offer a more detailed analysis of each specific policy area to assess the extent of continuity and change. Analytically, this introduction proposes a framework that focuses on processes of frame definition and frame enactment to explain change and continuity in the EU's approach. More specifically, security, stability and the link between them – the security–stability nexus – are considered as the master frame shaping the EU's approach towards the Southern Mediterranean. This is enacted along two dimensions: the modalities of EU engagement with Southern Mediterranean partners; and the range of actors engaged.

Introduction

The preservation of stability in the region with the aim of maximizing EU security has long been identified as the key driver of EU policies in the Southern Mediterranean. Much of the literature suggests that this linkage continues to inform EU policies towards the region also following the Arab uprisings (e.g. Colombo & Tocci, 2012; Teti, 2012). Examining a wide range of policy areas, this special issue probes this reading from both an empirical and analytical standpoint. Empirically, the claim of continuity in EU policies in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings deserves further analysis, as most of the existing literature looks at the EU's overall approach and documents, without examining if and

how different EU policy domains have been affected. As the contributions to this special issue show, the claim of continuity needs to be contextualized, and partial change might provide a better description of what has happened.

Analytically, and challenging the dichotomy between interests and norms that exists in the current literature on EU policies towards the Southern Mediterranean, this special issue investigates frames and their policy enactment. While it is well established that frames matter in shaping policies (e.g. Bicchi 2007; Daviter, 2011; Hay, 2011), it remains less clear 'how' they matter. Drawing from existing literature, this special issue accepts that security and stability are key linchpins of the EU policies in the Southern Mediterranean, and argues that this security–stability nexus constitutes the 'master frame' shaping the EU overall approach to the region. However, instead of taking for granted the meaning of these two concepts, it proposes to discuss how this master frame – and hence security, stability and the link between them – is defined and interpreted in each policy area. This approach also assesses how this frame is enacted via the modalities of EU engagement with Southern Mediterranean partners as well as the actors that it engages with. There are two significant implications to this. On the one hand, the final policies adopted by the EU are not merely the application of a single frame, but are rather articulated through engagement with relevant actors in the region, and are thus the result of a dialogical interaction. On the other hand, the EU's degree of inclusiveness and the modalities of engagement also hold the potential of reflecting back on the frame, thus affecting how stability and security are understood and linked in each specific policy area.

In empirical terms, all contributions discuss change and continuity in EU policies with reference to the same timeframe, starting from the establishment of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and focusing on the EU's reaction to the Arab uprisings up until the end of 2015, and in light of the 'security-stability nexus'. To offer a comprehensive and detailed overview of change or continuity in the EU's approach, contributions address different policy areas or specific issues that have acquired relevance following the Arab uprisings. With respect to the Arab uprisings themselves, the contributions look at EU policies towards selected countries (Egypt, Tunisia and, to a lesser extent, Morocco and Jordan) or towards the overall region.

This introduction proceeds as follows. By surveying the literature on EU relations with the Southern Mediterranean, the first section questions current accounts of continuity in EU's approach and asks whether we can detect any form of change after the Arab uprisings in specific policy areas. The second section focuses on frames, and identifies in the security–stability nexus the master frame organizing EU policies towards the Southern Mediterranean. At the same time, neither stability nor security nor the nexus between them are self-evident, and indeed they are very much the result of contingent, and hence political, processes of construction, negotiation and also contestation. In light of this, the third section focuses on how the EU engages with the region on the basis of the frames that guide its actions. Attention is devoted to two aspects:

the modalities of engagement and the actors that the EU engages with. The final section briefly outlines the articles in the special issue, while an analytical account of the overall contributions to the literature is left for the conclusion.

Changing neighbourhood, unchanging policies?

Most research on EU relations with the Southern Mediterranean is characterized by an assessment of EU policies and instruments, often combined with an evaluation of the nature of EU power. The idea that the EU acts as a 'normative power' (Manners, 2002), driven by its values and promoting a new definition of what is 'normal' in international politics, has been severely challenged by the yawning rhetoric-practice gap observed in the case of Euro-Mediterranean relations. Calling a bluff on the EU's rhetorical commitment to democracy, the rule of law and human rights, most literature offers an interest-driven narrative of EU policies towards the region, in which security and economic concerns prevail (e.g. Cavatorta et al., 2008; Durac & Cavatorta, 2009; Joffé, 2008; Seeberg, 2009). Before the Arab uprisings, the EU was willing to support authoritarian regimes, providing them with much needed international legitimacy and financial support, whenever this was perceived as functional to achieving its security objectives, even if this was against the proclaimed imperative of supporting democracy (cf. Gillespie & Youngs, 2002; Volpi & Cavatorta, 2006).

After an initial phase of puzzlement, the EU response to the Arab uprisings (see European Commission, 2011a, 2011b) highlighted a need for a qualitative shift in its relations with its southern neighbours. This was embodied in the commitment for a 'more for more' approach, meant to differentiate among countries and reward those more committed to reforms. However, the academic consensus is that these changes have not really altered the substance of EU policies towards the Southern Mediterranean, which are still dominated by concerns revolving around stability and security (see Colombo & Tocci, 2012; Teti, 2012; Tocci & Cassarino, 2011). A return to a 'business as usual model', as aptly put by Zardo and Cavatorta (2016: 13), has been understood by some scholars as a function of internal institutional dynamics, with EU policies raising their profile only in those sectors in which significant common ground among its members could be found, such as migration and trade (Noutcheva, 2015). Following from this, support for 'deep democracy' and 'inclusive development' has lacked teeth from its very inception, as it was perceived as a possible threat for agreed economic and security interests. According to this literature, substantial continuity in EU policies towards the Southern Mediterranean, characterized by a strong preference for political stability, reflects substantial continuity in the EU's security and economic interests. Because these interests were served well before the uprisings and are still well served now, there might not be any need for substantive policy change. The 2015 Review of the ENP seems to confirm this trend (European Commission, 2015), as it demonstrates a limited grasp of the

root causes of the Arab uprisings, focusing squarely on cooperation on security, migration and economic issues.

Despite its *prima facie* plausibility, this special issue questions this interpretation, suggesting that it is limited in two important respects. On the one hand, it takes for granted what the EU interests are in its relations with partners in the Southern Mediterranean. As discussed in the next section, security and stability might mean significantly different things in different sectors at different times. On the other hand, interest-based explanations tend to downplay the degree of uncertainty generated by the uprisings within the EU and its member states, and the possibilities for transformative policy change that came with it (for exceptions, see Natorski, 2016; Pace, 2014).

Countering rational choice institutionalist approaches, we contend that interests are not given but rather socially constructed, and that they are plural, with the implication that interests are not naturally ordered, and often compete and clash with one another. On the first point, much literature on EU relations with the Southern Mediterranean implies a direct causal path whereby material factors determine interests, which in turn determine behaviour (Durac & Cavatorta, 2009). However, even in the most rationalist accounts this path holds only if two conditions are verified: actor's rationality and perfect information. Especially the latter hardly holds in international relations in general, and even more so with reference to the EU in the region. Here, imperfect information is likely to permeate both EU relations with Southern Mediterranean partners and relations between different actors with an input into the EU approach to the region. Most importantly, the rationalist approach entirely sidesteps the issue of perception, which is all the more relevant under conditions of imperfect information and bounded rationality, where actors cannot but act on the basis of established cognitive filters and paradigms, functioning as lenses through which they interpret the surrounding environment (DiMaggio, 1997; Levy, 2013; Vertzberger, 1990). As Hay puts it, 'actor's conduct is not a (direct) reflection of their material self-interest but, rather, a reflection of particular perceptions of their material self-interest' (2011: 70). Thus, interests are necessarily the mediation between material and ideational factors, to be understood not as an ontological dichotomy, but rather as an interactive duality (Giddens, 1984; Gofas & Hay, 2010). Additionally, the plurality of interests and their articulations is particularly visible in complex entities such as the EU, encompassing a variety of actors dispersed among different levels and types of governance. In this respect, the very definition of what an interest is, both in general and in specific sectors, is a political act which institutionalizes the contingent outcome of a political struggle. As such, there is not a predetermined and unambiguous definition of interests, to be then mapped onto a clear hierarchy of priorities to be pursued. Rather, there is a great degree of negotiation, competition and even conflict, both within the EU and in its engagement with Southern Mediterranean partners, on which

perceived interests are to dominate, and at times also on what specific meaning the same signifier, such as 'security' or 'stability', takes in different conjunctures.

In the scholarship on EU's external relations, the limitations of interest-based approaches have largely been addressed with reference to the 'Normative Power Europe' (NPE) template. Bringing back the scholarly attention on the *sui generis* nature of the EU as a foreign policy actor, the NPE literature has focused on the EU ability to promote specific norms through its external relations. This very emphasis on norms is arguably one of the main limitations of this literature, which has led Diez to ask 'whether the idea of normative power does not actually belittle the "power" aspect' (2013: 195). This tendency is to an extent replicated in the literature that is critical of NPE, which focuses either on cases in which norm promotion is abandoned in the pursuit of material interests (e.g. Cavatorta et al., 2008; Hyde-Price, 2006), or on cases in which norm promotion is functional to those very interests (e.g. Langan, 2012; Youngs, 2009). As a result, this debate has reified the analytical distinction between norms and interests into a dichotomy 'next to impossible to prove' in ontological terms (Diez, 2013: 201), with the additional complication that 'it is difficult if not impossible to empirically differentiate between foreign policy that is motivated by norms and foreign policy that is motivated by interest' (ibid: 197).

This increasing dissatisfaction with NPE has recently resulted in publications that aim to overcome the opposition between interests and norms by engaging with concepts such as hegemony (Diez, 2013) or normative empire (Del Sarto, 2015). On the one hand, Diez (2013) claims that the NPE literature has assumed away power differentials when studying how specific norms and practices have diffused from the EU towards other actors in the international system. In order to address this deficiency, Diez proposes an analytical shift towards questions of hegemony. On the other hand, with direct reference to the EU reaction to the Arab uprisings, Del Sarto (2015) has instead argued that the EU actions in the Southern Mediterranean region are better understood as those of a 'normative empire'. However, appeal to both hegemony and empire assumes the existence of such hegemony and empire, even if subject to constant renegotiation and contestation. This is not necessarily unproblematic when one looks at the long series of fiascos in the EU's engagement with the region. These detail the inability of the EU to persuade its counterparts of the mutual benefits to be derived from following the EU's material and ideational lead (an element characteristic of hegemony), as well as its limitations in effectively exploiting its power differential to force decisions onto Southern Mediterranean partners (an element traditionally associated with empire). Rather, the EU's increasing inability to shape what is normal à la Manners, and indeed its attempt to cope with an imposed 'new normal' (see Geddes and Hadj-Abdou [2017] on migration), together with the ability of some partner countries to project their own interests onto the EU (Durac [2017] on counterterrorism), suggest the importance of paying more sustained attention to these very interactions.

Moving in this direction, the next section proposes frames as a mid-range concept within which the articulation of both norms and interests held by a plurality of actors takes place. In contrast to discussions around empire and hegemony, frames have a much clearer scope of empirical applicability, thus allowing for more fine-grained empirical accounts across different policy areas.

Reframing frames: the security–stability nexus in Euro-Mediterranean relations

The literature on frames tends to mirror the dichotomy between rationalist and instrumentalist approaches on the one hand and constructivist approaches on the other hand. Instead of essentializing this analytical separation between material and ideational elements, this section proposes a relational definition of frames, conceived as the result of a process of social and political construction, negotiation and at times contestation among different groups. As narratives through which actors interpret uncertain and problematic situations, frames might change over time and take different interpretations depending on the policy area under consideration and the actors with access to defining the very frame.

In light of its pervasiveness in both the literature on and practice of Euro-Mediterranean relations, and following existing literature on frames in social movements, this section takes the security–stability nexus as the 'master frame' around which the EU defines the issues to be tackled when approaching Southern Mediterranean partners. It then discusses how security and stability, as well as the nexus between them, might take different meanings in different sectors at different points in time. Hence, rather than a change *of* the master frame, one might also identify changes *in* the master frame – that is: a 'reframing' (Laws & Rein, 2003) – brought about by the need to make sense of a changing situation and provide guide for action. The possibility of reframing rather than wholesale frame change is arguably enhanced by the fact that resonance – that is: the affinity of some ideas and proposed solutions to an already accepted framework – is known to be a key factor in whether a frame is successful or not (Benford & Snow, 2000; Payne, 2001). To fully grasp whether we see a change *in* or *of* the master frame, one also needs to pay specific attention to the modalities of EU's engagement with specific actors in the region, so as to understand not only how frames are enacted as policies, but also how they are transformed by this very engagement.

From a general and broadly accepted perspective, frames are ways of inter-preting information, by 'promot[ing] a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation' (Entman, 1993: 52). In doing this, they simplify reality by organizing events and pro-cesses in a way that permits to identify an issue and provides a roadmap for addressing it (Bardwell, 1991; Dery, 2000). Frames usually perform this function

by establishing relationships of 'cause-effect', 'good-bad', etc. (cf. Bicchi, 2007; Huber, 1991). Beyond this common ground, the literature bifurcates into two paths that to a significant extent resemble the discussion in the previous section.

On the one hand, in a rational-choice tradition, frames are mainly intended as strategic, manipulative and rhetorical tools that can be activated instrumentally by actors to influence policy dynamics and the distribution of resources. Through the strategic deployment of frames, actors mobilize biases and shape the agenda of policy-making, thus excluding certain issues from the debate and defining the scope of the conflict between alternatives (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Princen, 2011; Schattschneider, 1960). The contest of frames is thus aimed at influencing the policy process by shifting its outcomes closer to the exogenously formed preferences of the actor conducting the framing process (e.g. Daviter, 2011; Klüver et al., 2015; Trommer, 2011).

On the other hand, a constructivist understanding maintains that 'it is the frames held by the actors that determine what they see as being in their interests and, therefore, what interests they perceive as conflicting' (Schoen & Rein, 1994: 29). According to this tradition, frames only make sense in a process of interaction characterized by argumentation, discussion and persuasion in which there is an attempt to convince the other side of the validity of an argument, and change the perceptions of the actors involved. Snow (2004: 384) argues that 'meanings do not automatically or naturally attach themselves to objects, events or experiences we encounter, but often arise, instead, through interactively based interpretative processes'. In the case of the EU, frames are thus the result of processes of social construction both within the EU (e.g. among policy-makers) and between the EU and its partners (who can also shape how the EU perceives the 'other'). More importantly, it is not so much the contest of frames as stable objects and tools that matters, like in a rationalist reading, but the 'interplay between belief and doubt [which] generates efforts to make sense of a changing situation and to coordinate action' (Laws & Rein, 2003: 174). Frames can therefore change when actors face a new, uncertain and challenging situation.

At the same time, these processes of social construction do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, they are affected by material factors, or – more precisely – by the actors' knowledge and perception of relevant material factors, which in turn shape the understanding of their own self-interest, creating the conditions for (bounded) strategic action (Hay & Wincott, 1998). Reference to strategic action, on the one hand, implies that actors involved in framing can and do behave instrumentally, and engage in processes of 'strategic framing' (Barnett, 1999). On the other hand, reference to material factors points towards the relevance of power and politics to how framing works. This is visible with respect to what the social movement literature calls 'political opportunity structure' (Benford & Snow, 2000: 628). Within this special issue, the contribution on migration (Geddes & Hadj-Adbou, 2017) is especially forceful in pointing out the relevance

of constraints that the EU cannot really negotiate, but rather has to learn to cope with. The role of power and politics is also visible in how resources are mobilized towards maximizing the chances that one's own preferred frame prevails. With reference to the EU in the Southern Mediterranean, this is demonstrated here by the two contributions on the political economy of EU's relations with the Southern Mediterranean (Kourtelis, 2017; Roccu, 2017).

Because frames are the result of a process of interpretation and sense-making of reality (Weick, 1995), from the specific positionality of the actors proposing them, a broad and generic frame can be articulated in a series of different narratives. Here the notion of 'master frame' from the literature on social movements can shed some light on the scope for differentiation within the same frame. As suggested by Snow and Benford (1992), master frames are generic types of collective action frames whose articulations and attributions are sufficiently elastic, flexible and inclusive to the extent that different social movements can adopt and deploy them in different campaigns. While the literature on social movements has predominantly viewed 'rights' and 'equality' as master frames, Watson (2012) points out how 'security', especially as interpreted by the securitization approach, can also be conceived as a master frame. This consideration opens the door for understanding security as a socially constructed frame that informs policies.

This point is particularly relevant when it comes to the analysis of EU policies towards the Southern Mediterranean, which have long been characterized by what most of the literature considers a nexus between security and stability. Instead of considering security and stability as two exogenously determined and objective interests of the EU vis-à-vis the Southern Mediterranean, the security–stability nexus can be conceptualized as a socially constructed frame, with its core elements relationally and contingently defined. Security and stability can therefore take multiple meanings depending on the context (here: policy area), on the actors with access to 'fixing' such meaning, and on the impact of what are perceived as exogenous shocks, such as the Arab uprisings themselves. Precisely in light of this flexibility and elasticity, the security–stability nexus has over time come to constitute a master frame shaping the EU's understanding of how the Southern Mediterranean region functions, thus informing its policies and their enactment.

If one is to explore the transformations experienced by each of these terms, security is certainly the one that has seen the largest expansion in its potential uses. Traditionally, security has largely been intended as the protection of a territory and of a governance structure from material harm that can be caused by actors external to the polity. This idea of survival is based on a classical realist view of security (Mearsheimer, 2001; Walt, 1985). With the end of the bipolar world, this narrow conceptualization of security became increasingly contested, and in a particularly powerful and successful way in the securitization literature. While highly differentiated internally (cf. McDonald, 2008; Stritzel, 2007;

Waever, 2012), this literature has broadened the agenda of security studies to new forms of threats, including economic, societal, political and environmental ones. Certain issues can thus be portrayed and socially constructed as existential threats and brought beyond or outside 'normal' politics through a process of securitization that works via linguistic representations and utterances (speech acts) (Buzan et al., 1998). Securitization processes have for instance been applied to migrants and asylum-seekers, portraying them as existential threats to the sovereignty and identity of states (e.g. Bigo, 1998; Huysmans, 2000). Adding to these extensions of the concept of security, Mitzen (2006b) has proposed a focus on ontological security. This refers to the identity of the self and the need for each individual and state to 'feel secure in who they are, as identities or selves' (p. 342). Accordingly, this need for security is determined by the fact that agency requires stability of the cognitive environment, so that an actor knows what to expect and can thus relate means to ends and define which priorities to pursue.

Similarly, the meaning of stability is also far from self-evident. While certainly not underpinned by a sophisticated literature such as the one on security, stability can also take on a number of meanings in international politics (Dowding & Kimber, 1983). It can for instance be understood on a relatively micro level, as the expectation of a certain continuity in diplomatic and bureaucratic practices or the guarantee against unlawful forms of expropriation for a country's own companies acting abroad (Jandhyala et al., 2011). But stability can also be interpreted in broader terms, for instance as the low likelihood of a major change in the foreign policy orientation of a counterpart, or indeed as the substantial continuity with respect to the key power-holders with whom one negotiates (Hurwitz, 1973). These understandings of stability are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and indeed are often thought of as interdependent.

A similar relation of interdependence and mutual implication tends to link security and stability. If security can be understood as a status-oriented concept, in that it defines a specific goal that can be achieved in a variety of ways, stability is more process-oriented, as it implies a sense of continuity over time. Through explicit consideration of a temporal dimension, stability evokes at least the potential for change. In face of possible disruptions, stability can be re-established through processes of 'routinisation', which in turn enable the pursuit of security (Mitzen, 2006b: 346–7). Importantly, this holds from both a rationalist and a constructivist standpoint. For the former, instability is costly insofar as it heightens uncertainty (Morrow, 1994), and 'uncertainty can make it hard to act' (Mitzen, 2006a: 272). For the latter, a breakdown in stability has negative implications for the cognitive environment alluded to earlier, thus leading to ontological insecurity. This further highlights the importance of frames from both these perspectives, as the effects of instability on security can be dealt with either through the establishment of new frames for interpreting reality or through the adaptation of old frames in a way that is consistent with the new situation.

The EU's master frame with respect to the Southern Mediterranean projects the general idea that security is maximized through the preservation of stability in the region. As demonstrated by the EU preference for relatively 'harmless' projects focusing on children and women rights (Bicchi, 2009), and the very limited engagement with Islamist parties and movements (Durac & Cavatorta, 2009; Joffé, 2008), the EU has historically appeared rather reluctant to challenge the status quo in the region. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, stability was largely understood as referring to continuity in the ruling elites of partner countries, with this in turn considered the best guarantee for achieving the EU security, materially but also ontologically. This framing was also very much embraced, fostered and promoted by regimes in the region, which consistently portrayed their power and grip over society as necessary for political stability, economic development and a series of guarantees, such as migration control (Beinin, 2009).

As frames are not natural and neutral, but rather the result of processes of social construction and interpretation, a variety of actors are involved in their formulation, codification and institutionalization. Two sets of actors are involved in the construction of the EU's security–stability nexus vis-à-vis the Southern Mediterranean. On the one hand, the EU's multilevel governance structure (Grande, 1996; Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Krahmann, 2003) means that different actors have access to the policy-making process and contribute to framing practices. As highlighted in the literature on agenda-setting (e.g. Daviter, 2011; Princen, 2011) and lobbying (e.g. Eising et al., 2015; Kurzer & Cooper, 2013), this creates significant scope of conflict in the process of frame construction among EU institutions and the various interest groups aiming to influence issue definition as well as the prospective solutions offered.[1] On the other hand, actors in third countries, especially elites and regimes, are often in a privileged relationship with the EU and, via frequent interactions deriving from the highly institutionalized setting of the ENP, also wield some degree of influence on how a frame is constructed.

Hence, the key argument advanced by the special issue is that the specific articulations of the security–stability nexus, before and after the Arab uprisings, depend not only on the policy area under consideration, but also on the variety of actors involved, and on the forms of their involvement. Crucially, some of these actors are located in the partner countries, and it is imperative to study whether and how the EU deals with them. For this reason, the following section focuses on the EU engagement with the Southern Mediterranean.

Enacting the security–stability nexus: patterns of engagement in Euro-Mediterranean relations

The previous two sections have established the foundations for this special issue. We have first contested the tendency of existing literature to discuss EU

policies towards the Southern Mediterranean after the Arab uprisings simply in terms of continuity, and we have suggested that this limitation is partly related to debates on EU's external relations revolving around a not necessarily helpful dichotomy between norms and interests. We have then seen how a similar dichotomy between instrumentalist and constructivist approaches is replicated in debates on the role of frames in policy-making, and have thus argued for a relational approach to studying them. We have also shown that the security–stability nexus has been so pervasive in EU policies towards the Southern Mediterranean to be considered as a master frame, which can then find different instantiations depending on the policy area under consideration.

This section provides a framework that captures how and with whom the EU engages in the Southern Mediterranean, and how this affects the specific articulations of the master frame. Engagement is taken here in its more general meaning as the range of practices of contact, formal or otherwise, between the EU and relevant actors in partner countries. If frames are to be taken as relational, then the actors involved in their definition and enactment, as well as the ways in which they are engaged, might influence the ways in which the security–stability master frame is articulated in different policy areas.

The contributions to this special issue explore two different dimensions of engagement. The first refers to the *modalities* of engagement. Here a heuristic distinction based on the means of engagement is proposed, inspired by the distinction between logic of consequences and logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1998; Checkel, 2005). On the one hand, material means of engagement aim at altering the cost–benefit calculations of the counterpart, either through coercion or through the provision of material incentives such as EU funds and market access. On the other hand, discursive means of engagement encompass a wide range of tools, from dialogue – institutionalized or otherwise – to twinning programmes aiming to foster socialization and norm diffusion. The second dimension of engagement focuses on the *inclusiveness* of the EU approach in different policy areas, and thus looks at which Southern Mediterranean actors are included in the decision-making process. On the more exclusionary end of the spectrum, the EU engages only with government actors and the respective bureaucracy. There are then more inclusive forms of engagement, which might range from the inclusion of sectorial non-state elites to broader processes in which civil society organizations (CSOs) at large play a role. Depending on the policy area under consideration, a different articulation of the security–stability master frame leads to different forms of engagement. Because of this, while security and stability might always be at the core of the policies proposed by the EU in different sectors, as suggested by interest-based accounts, the very interests and norms underpinning the specific articulation of the security–stability nexus vary widely.

How? Modalities of engagement. *Material means of engagement*

The first and most evident form of engagement is based on material exchanges and builds on an incentive-based logic. Here, the aim is to tilt the cost–benefit calculation faced by the counterpart, conceived as acting strategically towards the maximization of its perceived interests. A tool that actors can use to influence the decisions of others is conditionality, which aims to influence an actor's behaviour by linking certain benefits to the fulfilment of previously established conditions (cf. Grabbe, 2001; Sasse, 2008; Smith, 1998). The nature of the obligations can vary greatly, from political criteria (e.g. democratic principles, protection of human rights, etc.) to economic and legal requirements (e.g. structural reforms, acquis communautaire).

   Although the effectiveness of conditionality has been assessed mostly in contexts where EU membership was at stake (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005), the replication of the enlargement framework in the ENP suggests that conditionality is expected to play a role also in relations with Southern Mediterranean countries (Kelley, 2006). ENP partners are promised a re-evaluation of their relationship, in terms of increased free movement of people and goods in the EU's internal market, if they make concrete progress on the priorities established in the Action Plans (European Commission, 2003). In the ENP South, the EU's material engagement with its partners is predominantly based on two types of resources. On the one hand, the EU provides third countries with money and funding, established on a multiannual basis and according to jointly agreed priorities. Indicatively, the EU was quick at increasing the money devoted to Tunisia and Egypt in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, with a view to supporting and contributing to the democratic transitions following the fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak. On the other hand, the EU offers to its partners another set of material incentives such as access to its internal market, relaxation of movement restrictions, and so on, in exchange for reforms in certain areas. The 'more for more' principle espoused by the Commission and the EEAS in the wake of the Arab uprisings conjoins these two mechanisms, as it provides increased support in terms of money, enhanced mobility and access to the internal market (also called the 3 M) to those countries that go furthest on the reform path (European Commission, 2011a).

   With respect to its targets, material engagement can work with different components in the society of a partner country, as incentives can be made available to various sections of civil society. However, the regime/government usually remains the preeminent target, as the EU normally engages and negotiates these issues, including financial incentives, with those in power.

Discursive means of engagement
Whereas the use of material incentives tends to be driven by a logic of expected consequences, the EU also relies on other forms of engagement that instead

place a greater weight on processes of socialization, learning, persuasion and argumentation, aiming to diffuse (EU) norms and values. Following the expectations of constructivist literature, actors tend to adopt either a logic of arguing based on normative suasion (Risse, 2000), or a course of action deemed appropriate for their role in the specific context at hand, and hence a logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1998). Conceiving means of engagement in terms of their operational logic is more productive than the tendency of the literature on civilian, soft and normative power (cf. Dûchene, 1973; Nye, 2004; Manners, 2002) to include all non-military tools in their respective category. This approach has been criticized in the literature, as the nature of the means does not necessarily imply that the mechanisms underpinning it are not coercive or based on a cost–benefit calculation, such as economic awards in the form of market access and technical assistance or aid (cf. Tocci, 2007).

Discursive engagement is also part of the EU policy toolkit in the Southern Mediterranean. Following the enlargement template, material incentives have been combined with the attempt to influence partners through the transformation of societal norms and the perceived interests and identities (Kelley, 2006; Tocci, 2007). It has even been argued that the ENP is a framework for socialization, understood as a process through which 'the EU reflects on the impact of its policies with the partner countries, in particular, through encouraging local ownership and practising positive conditionality' (Manners, 2010: 42). This is evident in the emphasis put on partnership and joint ownership in the ENP Strategy Paper (European Commission, 2004). It is also reflected in the ENP framework, which has established a series of venues (institutional and not) for dialogue between the EU and its partners, ranging from the highly political Association Councils to technical committees established according to policy areas. Through these venues, there is thus space for socialization, social learning and norm diffusion to take place.

As already exemplified with reference to enlargement and ENP, while material and discursive modalities of engagement are presented here as analytically distinct, they are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the EU can choose which modalities to use and with which intensity to employ them in different areas and we can thus conceive of the interaction between these two modalities as a continuum. This is especially important for how the security–stability master frame is enacted in different policy areas. On the one side, in some areas the EU might devote substantial material resources and resort extensively to discursive means of engagement in institutionalized settings. On the opposite side, we find those policy areas in which the EU has very limited engagement in terms of both its material and discursive means. This is a case where engagement is limited, predominantly informal and where there might even be a sort of 'delegation' to member states in their bilateral dealings with the third country. Between these two poles, there are intermediate cases in which the EU privileges one modality over the other. Where the different policy areas are positioned is a matter of

empirical analysis, carried out by the individual contributions and discussed comparatively in the conclusion to this special issue.

With whom? Actors along the inclusion/exclusion spectrum

While the EU is often presented as an open system providing access to policy-making to a range of actors (e.g. Geddes, 2000; Mazey & Richardson, 1993), the literature on Euro-Mediterranean relations finds that in the region the EU prefers to engage with the regimes in power, instead of reaching out to broader segments of the society (Cavatorta et al., 2008). Even when the EU engages with civil society, its support to the private sector tends to favour business actors tied to the regimes via patronage networks (Jünemann, 2002). Moreover, engagement with CSOs has also been rather selective, as the EU has preferred to deal with organizations that are not highly politicized or critical of incumbent regimes, usually excluding relevant components of the population, especially Islamist actors (Bicchi, 2009; Burgat, 2009; Cavatorta, 2006; Jünemann, 2002).

Engagement can therefore take various forms along an inclusionary–exclusionary continuum. While engagement with regimes and government has to take place almost by default, as part of the ENP framework, dealing only with those in power can be viewed as an exclusionary practice, as the majority of the actors are not involved in the process and also risk not receiving any benefit from the EU-partner country cooperation. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the EU engages with all sectors of the population, from the regime to various CSOs. This is the most inclusionary practice. Between these two extremes, there are various possibilities that lead to discretionary engagement.

With whom the EU decides to engage is shaped by the frame informing its policies, as it identifies the perceived interests to be protected and the partners best placed to do so. There are therefore a set of dispositions defining the EU decision about the actors to deal with. However, this in itself does not determine neither the modalities of engagement nor the actors to be engaged with, as local dynamics in the partner country, usually related to the highly uneven distribution of power, might prevent the EU from interacting with certain sectors of the society. By doing so, a given EU interpretation of the security–stability nexus could be challenged or, in contrast, confirmed and strengthened. This point on the importance of partner countries for frame enactment, and its feedback to frame (re-)definition, emerges from several contributions and we return to it in the conclusion.

As in the case of the modalities of engagement, the actors with whom the EU engages are subject to variation. These depend on both objective and contingent constraints. The former result on the fact that each policy area is composed of a given set of actors, whose relevance for EU policies can vary. Contingent constraints are instead related to how the security–stability master frame is enacted and to local power dynamics (and hence the possibilities of

interactions that exist). It is again an empirical question to find who is included and excluded by EU policies, whether engagement only takes place with those that hold power and concentrated interests, or whether those representing diffused interests are also involved.

While for analytical purposes the two dimensions are presented separately here, the EU's engagement is simultaneously defined by both of them. Depending on where the EU's engagement is located on both dimensions, there are thus different possible patterns of engagement ranging from full engagement to no engagement, with a large space in between characterized by different 'varieties of selective engagement'. This selectivity can occur both when the EU privileges one modality of engagement over the other and when it excludes or marginalizes relevant Southern Mediterranean stakeholders. Most policies are thus expected to fit into one of these varieties, on the basis of the way in which the master frame is enacted in each policy area as well as the interactions that take place on the ground. While we might expect EU policies to have become less selective in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, this remains an open empirical question. Whether policies have changed depends on an eventual change in the frame as well as on more contingent and domestic factors that influence the EU's perceptions and responses. Thus, the combination of modalities and actors is conceived as a heuristic tool providing the foundations for a comparison across policy areas in the conclusion.

Outline of the special issue

In light of the framework proposed above, each contribution to this special issue investigates whether there has been any change in their policy area, whether the interpretation of the security–stability nexus has undergone any change and how this translates into concrete policies through engagement. The first two contributions focus on the political economy of Euro-Mediterranean relations. Kourtelis (2017) discusses policy change in the agricultural sector, which has been embodied in the European Neighbourhood Policy Agricultural and Rural Development (ENPARD) programme. This aims at creating an integrated framework for agricultural development in ENP countries and at including SMEs. Although *Kourtelis* suggests that these changes are not merely cosmetic, this contribution also demonstrates that greater engagement has been skewed towards EU-based actors, which have in turn reinforced a specific understanding of security and stability. This situation undermines the position of local actors in the decision-making process, and especially the development of small producers. *Roccu*'s contribution reaches a similar conclusion with reference to EU-promoted regulatory reforms in the Egyptian banking sector. In this case, the pursuit of security, stability and profits on the part of the EU has been strongly influenced by ordoliberal ideas and practices. The EU's attempt towards broadening engagement after Mubarak's overthrow has been largely

predicated on these same assumptions, with the result that this continuity in the face of fast-changing circumstances has led to declining EU influence on Egyptian economic policy-making under Sisi.

The following two contributions focus on different aspects of political relations between the EU and Tunisia and Egypt. Dandashly (2017) focuses on EU democracy promotion activities, suggesting that they have changed only at the margins after the Arab uprisings. Importantly, the EU appears more successful in engaging with CSOs in Tunisia than Egypt. This differential engagement is attributed to the persistent influence of a traditional interpretation of the security–stability nexus in terms of hard security and regime stability as well as the reaction of partners in the two countries. In contrast, and with reference to Islamist political parties, Voltolini and Colombo (2017) show that the EU's interpretation of the security–stability nexus, interpreted in terms of threats to EU ontological security, has partially changed in the wake of the Arab uprisings. By differentiating between various forms of political Islam, the EU has started to engage with *Ennahda* in Tunisia, while its engagement with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has been less successful. In their analysis of the different forms of engagement, *Voltolini* and *Colombo* highlight how the transformation in practices has been highly selective, influenced by a form of pragmatism that is by necessity sensitive to the reaction on the part of local actors.

The ability on the part of Southern Mediterranean regimes to affect the EU's understanding of security and stability is also at the heart of (Durac, 2017) contribution on counterterrorism policy. In this sector the tension between democratization and security through regime stability is arguably at its highest. *Durac* suggests that the strong focus on relations with the regime intrinsic to counterterrorism has allowed partner regimes to engage in an 'externalisation in reverse', thereby leading the EU to abandon normative aspirations in favour of more traditional security considerations. This trend does not appear to have been altered after the Arab uprisings, thus leading *Durac* to suggest that EU's counterterrorism policy is still essentially geared towards avoiding 'destabilisation by democratisation' (Eder, 2011).

The final contributions look at policies increasingly understood as more directly security-related. Herranz-Surrallés (2017) focuses on Euro-Mediterranean energy relations, and her analysis suggests that the market-liberal frame orienting EU energy policies towards the region before the Arab uprisings has been partially reframed from within as well as 'misframed' from outsiders. However, and in line with other contributions, the implications of this reframing in terms of changes in policy and engagement are yet to fully materialize. Focusing more on the cognitive transformations on the EU side, Geddes and Hadj-Abdou (2017) examine the transformations in migration governance triggered by the Arab uprisings. They present a robust case for a more significant change in framing security and stability with reference to migration compared to most other policy areas addressed in the special issue. At the same time, this has not translated yet

into substantive change in EU migration governance because of the constraints posed by what the authors call 'migration politics' inside EU member states. Finally, Wolff (2017) contribution addresses the issue of religious diplomacy, a policy area that has arguably risen to prominence exactly as a result of the Arab uprisings, and of the EU's perception of having failed in the promotion of its secular-liberal model. This realization has resulted in at least two significant policy changes: the provision of training on religion focused on EU and member states' diplomats on the one hand, and the strengthening of relations with regime-controlled 'moderate' forms of Islam in the case of Morocco and Jordan on the other hand. At the same time, *Wolff* suggests that these changes are better understood as a recalibration aimed at better exporting the EU's secular-liberal model in the neighbourhood, and through this strengthening its security and stability, now conceived more broadly. Indeed, this broadening of the scope of the security–stability nexus appears as a common thread among the majority of the contributions to this special issue. Why this might be the case, and what have been the consequences on the modalities and inclusiveness of engagement, is explored in the conclusions.

Note

1. In order to avoid a further broadening of the scope of the analysis, the EU is the focal point of this special issue. While member states (beyond the Council formation) and other non-state actors are addressed in some contributions, this only occurs to the extent in which they bring something specific to EU policy, or when their own autonomous actions demonstrate the weaknesses of the EU's position and possibly even shape it.

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