

Return to Geopolitics: The Evolution of EU Policies towards the Middle East and North Africa and Its Implications for the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract

Today, an important part of the threats facing the EU comes from its southern neighborhood namely the MENA region. Along with this trend, the EU's approach to the MENA region has been constantly evolving since the end of the Cold War. In this framework, aiming to analyze regions' policies towards each other during different periods generally, and EU's approach towards MENA in particular, by using an eclectic theoretical model in order to illustrate the relevance, and even growing prominence of geopolitics in 21st century's global and regional politics, this article asks "how and why has the EU's policy towards the MENA changed since the 1990s?" To answer this question, by using the proposed theoretical model, the current EU interests and challenges in the MENA are discussed; then, drawing on a historical analysis, it is showed how have intra-regional dynamisms of the EU, interregional dynamisms between the EU and the MENA, and trans-regional developments prevalent on their relations evolved during three recent decades; and the reflection of the EU's "return to geopolitics" in its policies towards MENA are documentarily examined. In other words, the article exemplifies how the EU has changed its policy towards the MENA, from Geo-culture-based to Geo-economics-based, and at last, to Geopolitics-based. Finally, while summarizing the possible research achievements, its implications for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially in its relations with the EU, are pointed out. Given that we, on the one hand, have developed a causal model for analyzing regions' policy towards each other, and on the other hand, have analyzed the EU's policy documents, drawn on both explanatory and descriptive methods simultaneously.

Keywords: EU, MENA, Geopolitics.

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1. Introduction

Political developments in recent years have put the MENA region in its geopolitical turning-point, putting an end to some decades of relative political tranquility. The crippling international sanctions against Iraq during the 1990s, Iraqi occupation in 2003 by US intervention, Arab uprisings in 2011, wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, the emergence of ISIS in Iraq and attempted coup in Turkey, all have caused in the form of geopolitical changes a high level of destabilization and unpredictability in the MENA region and today this dynamism has put its effects on intra, inter and trans-regional orders (Hafeznia, 2017: 5-10).

This trend unprecedentedly challenged the European Union, posing some important threats like state failure, terrorism, and wave of refugees emanated from its southern borders or the MENA region. Adding Crimean Crisis and Russian geopolitical rising in the eastern borders of the union to these challenges, one can reach to this conclusion that the EU is being surrounded by an arc of crises (House of Lords, 2016: 13). Under such circumstances, the EU policy towards the MENA region have undergone different phases of changes depending on different self-perceptions of its intra, inter and trans-regional relations, which have led into different and even paradoxical policies.

This article seeks to examine what kind of changes has the EU gone through regarding its policy toward the MENA region since 1990 and what are the reasons behind them? In doing so, at first we will develop a theoretical framework on analyzing regions' policies toward each other generally and the European Union policies toward the MENA region in particular. Having discussed the current challenges and interests of the European Union in the MENA region, we will try to apply the theoretical framework used in this paper through articulating a three-level analysis on EU's return to the geopolitics. In the following, we will try to document the "return to geopolitics" in the European Union's policies towards MENA. And finally, having summarized the eventual findings of present research, its implications for the Iran's foreign policy making specifically towards the EU will be pointed out.

In this article, both explanatory and interpretive methodologies have been used: in the one hand, we have tried to provide a causal model, and on the other hand, embarked on interpreting the EU policy documents by content

analysis through drawing on library and web resources. On this basis, at first, an innovative theoretical model will be presented as follows.

2. Theoretical Framework

The contemporary world prominently consists of inter-regional relations within a globalized context. That is to say, given systemic pressures over Westphalian state during the age of increasing globalization, regions play a considerable role in world politics along with other actors such as individuals, NGOs, and social movements, becoming most progressively influential actors in shaping the global developments, a situation which has led us to consider regions as subjects in becoming rather than objects in being (Cantori and Spiegel, 1970:406-412). In the meanwhile, regions act as super-states having both will and interest, and understandably some certain policy, although they may vary in terms of region-ness (Hettne & Soderbaum, 2002: 39-46) and actor-ness (Hettne, 2007: 111).

Thus, it can be asked "why do regions as units of analysis, on the one hand, adopt different policies towards each other and on the other hand, their policies vary over time?" in answering this question, it seems necessary to present a theoretical model which explains both inter-regional relations and variations in regions' policies towards each other during different periods; an intellectual endeavor that few scholars on regional studies and international relations has addressed consciously and directly.

In doing so, we seek to develop an eclectic theoretical model, call as regionalized utilitarian neorealism (RUN). According this model, we can identify four type of related and successive statements (which may open some new horizons on analyzing regions' policies towards each other), and in light of them, infer some relevant theoretical rules.

2.1. Founding Theoretical Statements

We mean statements inferred from and articulated in terms of conventional IR theories, and relying on two attributes of an eclectic theory for explaining regions' policies (that is. Leveling and Ranking) (Checkel, 2013: 225), as following:

1- Identity is constituted in intra-regional level (Slocum and Van Langenhove, 2004), that is, in terms of constructivist conception, and in phase of identity constitution, any regional entity underlines necessity of making other regions' norms proportional to its own norms in order to

validate and legitimize itself. As a result, the following rule can be formulated:

First theoretical rule: if internal elements of policy-enforcing region(s) identification reach an acceptable cohesion, its approach will become geo-cultural.

2- interest is pursued in inter-regional level (Paul, 2012: 26), that is, in terms of liberal conception, any regional entity seeks to maximize its economic interests, entering into utilitarian relations with other region(s). Thus, its policy towards other region(s) will be based on promoting its economic interests, emphasizing the necessity of trade liberalization and increased economic relations (Khani, 2018: 285-286). As a result, the following rule can be formulated:

Second theoretical rule: if a region prioritizes economic goals, its approach towards other region(s) will be will become geo-economic.

3- Power configured in the context of trans-regional relations (Roloff, 2006: 24), that is, in terms of realist conception, power requirements, operating at international level, which understandably originated from a kind of an uneven power distribution, may dominate both intra-regional geo-cultural considerations and inter-regional geo-economic imperatives, leading the policy-adopting region e.g. EU to feel threatened by policy-targeted region e.g. MENA. Under this circumstance, because of pressures created by international power dynamics, policy-adopting region will seek to balance the threats against other region(s) rather than to make its (their) norms proportional or to establish a utilitarian relation with it (them). As a result, the following rule can be formulated:

Third theoretical rule: if a region feels threatened by other region(s) in any way, its approach towards other region(s) will be will become geo-political.

Connecting Theoretical Statement

We mean statement which can give the meaning to theoretical analysis, solidifying the founding statements, as follows:

4- Drawing on realism, liberalism and constructivism, it can be argued that three-fold variables of power-security, interest, and identity, generally constitute any region's policy towards other region(s), but what extent they affect will depend on channeling statements.

Fourth theoretical rule: within the different spatial and temporal contexts, depending on the effect of any power-security, interest, and identity implications, regions adopt various policies.

2.3. Channeling Theoretical Statements

We mean statements concerning factors affecting on regions' policies. What is behind them is the emphasis on necessity of pursuing a historical sociological approach to analysis on regional policy in which the different spatial and temporal contexts are addressed; this approach prevents us from seeing regions' policies as natural, eternal and reified (Hobson and Lawson, 2008).

5- spatial variable means where each of policy-enforcing and policy-targeted regions do position in the structure of international system, or where are their positions in the international system. According to this variable, structural factors in international system play their roles depending each of policy-enforcing and policy-targeted regions' structural weakness and strength. As a matter of fact, spatial variable reflects the power of maneuver possessed by each of policy-enforcing and policy-targeted regions in the context of inter-regional relations. Thus, we can identify the following rule:

Fifth theoretical rule: ideal-typical situation on the power of maneuver possessed by each of policy-enforcing and policy-targeted regions emerges when both of them have the structural strength (defined as region-ness)

6- temporal variable means when each of policy-enforcing and policy-targeted regions are in the evolution of international system, and as a result, what is pressures and opportunities which are formed by international processes within the temporal context and regions policies are affected by them. As a matter of fact, temporal variable act as a criterion for the persistence of policy. Thus, we can identify the following rule:

sixth theoretical rule: the most persistent scenario in inter-regional relations may emerge when both policy-enforcing and policy-targeted regions establish a friendly interaction with the dominant framework of international system.

2.4. Determining Theoretical Statement

Determining theoretical statement and its corresponding theoretical rule are of high importance in that they can predict inter-regional relations in terms of “region-ness” and “actor-ness”, since they can provide a reasonable analysis on future of inter-regional relations.

7- at the first stage, the abovementioned pre-policy factors which can be named as ground-providing factors, and then, upon enforcing the policy, any region’s policy towards other region(s) does vary given that each of policy-enforcing and policy-targeted regions may exist in situations of “region-ness” or “actor-ness”. Thus, we can identify the following rule:

Seventh theoretical rule: the positive balance in inter-regional relations is formed when both policy-enforcing and policy-targeted regions are actors; the negative balance in inter-regional relations is formed when both policy-enforcing and policy-targeted regions are regions.

3. The EU’s current interests and challenges in the MENA region

The EU consists of a geopolitical domain, which is also the most affected region in the world by developments in the MENA. In the meantime, the more we have distanced from the 1990s, the more we have witnessed the EU interests and challenges in the MENA region become urgent and pressing. As a result, this union seems to be taking more specific and more different measures with regard to this region. Thus, we try to examine these interests and challenges in the context of regional dynamisms in the past three decades, especially in recent years.

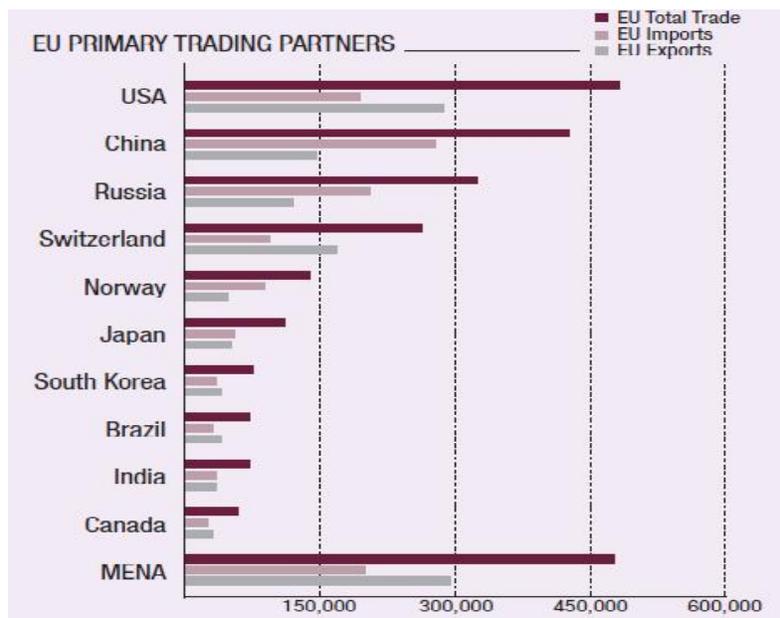
3.1. Interests

The EU approach towards the MENA region has a direct relationship with its interests and challenges faced by it in this region. At the present time, a major part of the EU’s stability, security and progress is affected by developments in the MENA region, especially given that both the EU and regional countries are faced with various economic, security and political challenges. However, the MENA region provides the EU with important economic benefits – including energy, trade in commodity and services, financial source, as well as political, security, and social interests.

Economic interests: The EU has important economic interests in engaging with the MENA region in such fields as energy and its transport corridors (Sazmand et al, 2017), trade of commodities and services, arms

sales and provision of financial resources. In addition, closer economic cooperation with the MENA countries, especially in North Africa, will provide both sides with a great number of opportunities (Borck, 2017: 3).

Figure 1. EU trade with main partners and MENA (in millions euro) (Youngs, 2015:3)



Political and security interests: Following terrorist attacks on its soil in the early years of the 2010s, and faced with the wave of immigrants from various MENA countries, the EU finally found out that instability in its southern neighborhood may pose such major threats as immigration; spread of arms; increase in organized crimes, especially drug trafficking; and a sharp rise in the number of terrorist organizations (Gugan, 2017:534).

Social interests: The MENA countries are grappling with various forms of social instability. Therefore, due to the high probability of spreading this instability into the EU states, the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures is planning to take steps to bolster social relations between these two regions (Geri, 2016). Moreover, the EU plays an important role in the social development of the MENA region, offering

mechanisms of inter-cultural dialogue on a vast variety of issues between young people in the MENA region and Europe (Moshashai, 2017).

3.2. Challenges

The challenges faced the EU in the MENA region can be analyzed at two levels: 1) internal level; and 2) external level.

3.2.1. Internal challenges

Lack of suitable tools: The first internal challenge faced by the EU in the MENA region is that it doesn't have suitable tools to implement its proclaimed policies. For example, a glance at the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) will reveal that this policy is devoid of real incentives for the countries that are members of the Union for the Mediterranean or other countries in the region. That policy is also silent on measures that must be taken to promote democratic trends in the MENA region (EU-Aussenpolitik, 2011:2). All these factors have caused the EU not to be able to work in a solid manner, giving some belated answers to developments, and lacking a powerful, coherent, and timely strategic approach.

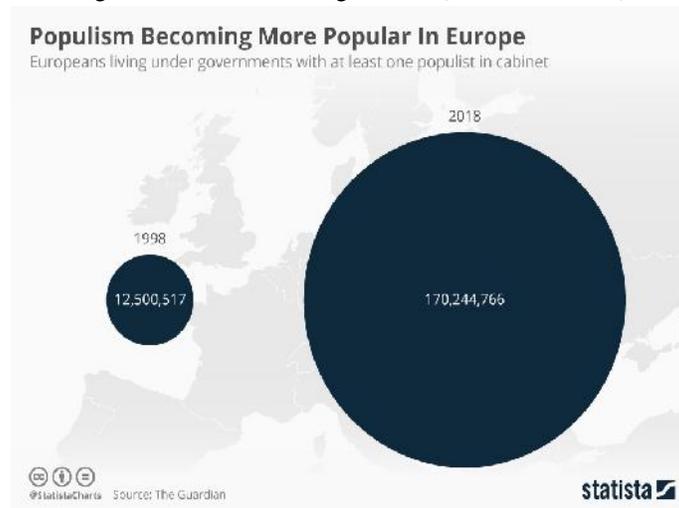
Conflict among member states of the EU, and preference of national interests: Although the EU has been constantly trying to adopt a unified approach to challenges that it faces, in many cases, there are conflicts among the interests of various member states. On the other hand, there are cases in which the interests of member states are at loggerheads with the general interests of the European Union, e. g. over finding the best way to deal with challenges in the MENA region, notably the difference between positions taken by the UK and France, on the one hand, and Germany and other European countries, on the other hand, regarding developments in Libya in 2011 (Feichtinger, 2011:4).

The conflict between interests and values: The EU has always gone through the political stability/promotion of democracy dichotomy: The EU's policy in the MENA region has been constantly vacillating between the democracy/stability dichotomy as well. This dichotomy has existed as in no other region as in the MENA region, and has not only caused incoherent implementation of the EU's policy, but also scuttled the EU's credit and leverages (Colombea et al, 2017: 26).

Strengthened far-right groups: Social and economic policies in many European countries have been changing as a result of the empowerment of

far-right groups in them (Goodwin, Matthew, 2017). At the same time, these groups have taken great advantage of these challenges and have managed to turn challenges with the MENA region into a matter of their countries' domestic policies in order to take advantage of them against traditional parties in Europe and to strip them of their democratic votes.

Figure 2. The rise of far-right in EU (Lewis et al, 2018)



3.2.2. External Challenges

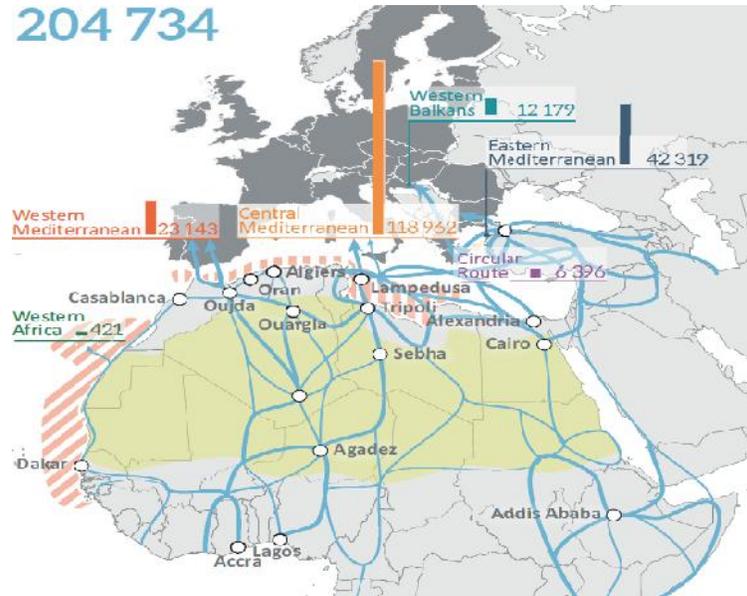
The EU losing credit in the eyes of the MENA people: The EU has not been able to adapt itself to demands of citizens of the MENA region, the most important of which is the realization of social justice and economic rights. On the contrary, the European Union is more interested in promoting its own limited discourse on stability and democracy, leading to support non-democratic rulers and to implement liberal economic policies. In reaction to this situation, there is a general understanding among people in the MENA region that the EU is just trying to build a security belt around itself to protect and maintain its own security, peace and stability without having any plan to bring democracy to these countries, improving situation of human rights, or encouraging economic development in its peripheral regions (Teti and Abbot, 2017).

Weapons of mass destruction in the MENA region: The rivalry among governments in this region over development of their own missile capabilities and proliferation of other forms of weapons of mass destruction is a serious threat to security of Europe. As for the nuclear weapons, the Israeli regime possesses nuclear armaments. At the same time, peaceful nuclear proliferation is rapidly underway across the region, which may easily turn into non-peaceful proliferation of such weapons. Banking on the alleged Iran threat, Saudi Arabia has found itself obliged to achieve such weapons and has also talked about the possibility of taking advantage of Pakistan's nuclear umbrella. In addition, there is a precedent for the use of chemical weapons by the former Iraqi government against the people of Iran and also the Kurdish people in Iraq's own Halabja city (Samaan, 2017:4-5).

Terrorism and the possibility of return of Takfiri terrorists: Since terrorist attacks in the Spanish capital, Madrid, the relationship between the security of the EU and the security of the MENA region has increasingly been highlighted. Starting from 2013, about five thousand European nationals went to Syria and Iraq, and later terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels were organized by terror networks trained in Iraq and Syria. The inevitable outcome of these developments was the idea that terrorism must be first contained in countries located in south of the EU (European Parliament, 2017:5).

The challenge of immigration and asylum seeking: Although asylum seekers have arrived in European countries during various years, it was in the year 2015 that a crisis of immigration caused a major change in the policies of the EU with regard to preventing immigration. The flood of Syrian asylum seekers through Turkey and Balkan countries into the EU and an increasing rate of economic immigrants coming from Africa through the Libyan route and the Mediterranean have faced it with many security challenges and has also led to a resurgence of populist sentiments across the continent (Eurostat, 2016).

Map 1. Detections of illegal border crossings in the EU in 2017 (European Parliament, 2017)



The abovementioned review of the EU's current interests and challenges in the MENA region reveals that on the whole, and over the past decade, the European Union's challenges in the MENA region have greatly increased in terms of both volume and the impact. As a result, the European understanding of the threat posed by that region has somehow changed and the perception of threat has been invigorated as well. In better words, the policy adopted by the EU regarding the MENA region proves that the EU is showing some sort of geopolitical reaction due to the increased number of security threats posed to it by MENA. On the other hand, it is the case that the EU attaches great importance to European values and the economic interests that it pursues through any kind of policies with regard to the MENA region. However, due to the urgency of addressing security threats posed by the MENA region, less priority is given to those values and interests. The aforesaid crises have prompted the EU to put the necessity of addressing threats and management of their consequences on top of its political agenda.

4. A Three-level Analysis on the EU's Return to Geopolitics on the MENA

The aforementioned security dynamics have been affecting the EU's interests and challenges in the MENA. Therefore, it is shown here how intraregional dynamisms of the EU and interregional dynamisms between the EU and the MENA have become increasingly a function of Three-level developments.

4.1. EU's Intraregional Developments

The challenge to the EU as an idea: Developments like increasing rivalry among various models of welfare state; changing relations among governments, capitalism and democracy; and tendency toward such models as state capitalism, stem from the challenge to the European Union as an idea. This issue has faced the EU with ontological problems (Aspen Institute, 2017).

Intensification of normative and institutional confrontation with rogue states in Central and Eastern Europe: Inadequate cooperation with or lack of adaptation to European rules and norms by some countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including in the fields of democracy and refugee policy, have turned out to be a clear reality across the EU (Independent, 2017).

Lasting functional and institutional challenge of the EU: According to the existing polls, many Europeans have doubts about the project of European integration in general, and also about the way that the financial crisis and such phenomena as immigration and asylum seeking have been handled by the EU (European Commission, 2017: 12).

Relative continuation of the financial and economic crisis: Reduced share of the EU from total global gross domestic product, extensive effects of the economic recession that Europe experienced in 2008 and 2009, and the Eurozone foreign debt crisis have all had considerable impacts on the economic outlook of the European Union. As a result, economic growth of member states has been falling and unemployment has been soaring in many of those countries (Eurostat, 2018). In addition, economic inequalities within the EU have led to new tensions and have given birth to new political groupings within the union (Archick, 2017).

Significant damage to Europe's security architecture: The security structure that was inherited from the Cold War and had imparted adequate and foreseeable transparency to the European security is currently

crumbling. The annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia has challenged the Helsinki Accords, while other treaties related to conventional forces in Europe have been also weakened. This gradual structural destruction has had grave impacts on the security of Europe.

Britain's withdrawal from the EU: Brexit will most probably affect the internal balance of power and groupings within the EU, because the UK is known as the northern, big and liberal member of this union. For example, following Brexit, northern European allies of the UK such as the Nordic countries and the Netherlands will see their standing within the union undermined. At the same time, the southern members of the union will have a better place in making decisions. As a result, one of the outcomes of this issue can be an effort by the Nordic countries and the Netherlands to find new allies, which may lead to more division within this union (Gruyter, 2018).

Higher tendency within the EU toward strategic autonomy: Enhanced understanding of internal and external threats and weakening of transatlantic relations have made the idea of European sovereignty in defense and security more attractive (Eder, 2017). Apart from those Nordic countries, which have been traditionally impartial, almost all other members of the EU support the idea of a "security-oriented Europe" (VoteWatch, 2017).

4.2. Developments in Interregional Relations between the EU and the MENA Region

Europe and the British peace in the MENA region: The British Peace (*Pax Britannica*) was the first form of discernible interregional interaction between the MENA region and Europe. In this sense, the concept of borders and order in the MENA region was to a great extent, a legacy of the European colonialism (Hourani, 1991: 263). Up to the end of World War I, the priority of regional geopolitical order was influenced by absolute superiority of the Great Britain in West Asia, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and occasional troubles caused by Russia and France to affect this order. During that period, North Africa was more influenced by the colonialist policies of France and Spain, and it was according to policies of these two European powers that Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Libya came to know their borders and entered the 20th century (Kamel, 2014: 14). From the end of World War I up to the termination of World War II, the security

order in the MENA region was influenced by the League of Nations Mandate and peace arrangements reached following World War I (Bassion, 2009: 16). The falling hegemony of Britain in the MENA region as a result of economic issues had made its presence in this region limited to the southern rim of the Persian Gulf. However, by the end of the 1960s and after countries in that region gained independence in 1971, about two centuries of British interference in the affairs of Middle East came to an end (Kamel, 2014: 18). From 1950 onward, the future of the MENA region was shaped by the withdrawal of Britain and other European countries from this region, the rise of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, geopolitical rivalries between the Eastern and Western blocs in this region, and rivalries between various members of those blocs until the end of the Cold War.

The European Economic Community and American Peace in the MENA region: Victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 and the subsequent emergence of the resistance axis were new determining factors, which gave a new direction to developments in the regional order and faced the United States and its regional allies with new and, of course, serious challenges (Norton, 2007). From that time on, one can witness the second form of interregional interaction between the European Union and the MENA region in the form of the European Economic Community and the American peace in that region. In fact, from the 1990s up to the 2000s, Europe accepted the regional order desirable for the United States and continued to play a role within its framework. During that period, Europe did its best to support multilateral and bilateral negotiations between the Israeli regime and its Arab neighbors. Other measures taken by Europe with regard to the MENA region during that period included supporting neoliberal economic reforms pioneered by the United States, integration of the MENA region's economy in the global economy, helping implementation of US policies (such as containment of Iran and the resistance axis) in the region, and countering all parties that challenged the American order in this region (El-Shazly and Hinnebusch, 2002).

However, this period of Pax Americana in the MENA region came to an end as a result of a number of factors including the failure of the peace process between Israel and Palestinians in 2000; opposition of Arab nations to normalization of relations with the Israeli regime; increasing opposition to the United States' neoliberal economic policies; increasing insecurity and

unemployment following the invasion of Iraq by the United States in 2003 (Hazbun, 2015) and occupation of this country under the pretext of the “war on terror;” and finally the defeat that the Israel suffered at the hands of the Lebanese Hezbollah in 2006 (Ehteshami, 2009).

4.3. EU Developments at Trans-Regional Level

Weakening of the rule-based international order: One reality facing the modern world is a steep rise in nationalistic, unilateral and non-liberal tendencies. The outcome of this issue has undermined norms underlying international institutions and regimes. As a result, those institutions and regimes have lost part of their power in the face of global challenges, especially following the election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States (Munich Security Report, 2018).

Ambiguities surrounding transatlantic relations: There is a host of evidence to prove the weakening of transatlantic bonds both in the field of security and in the area of trade. The three fundamental principles in transatlantic relations including facing insecurity through active engagement; that the policy of engagement would work the best through cooperation of Europe and America; and the idea that the member states of NATO have no better allies than themselves, all have been challenged in the era of Trump (Valášek, 2017).

Ambiguities about the position of Europe in forming the global agenda: The EU has had remarkable achievements in the field of foreign policy. They include the nuclear agreement with Iran, building consensus about imposing sanctions against Russia, initiating effective dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, strengthening governance in some African countries like Mali, and implementation of the refugee agreement with Turkey. However, the cases in which the European Union’s foreign policy has failed are not few. Examples of EU’s foreign policy failure range from inability to enforce a coherent refugee policy to failure in bringing to fruition the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as inability to properly manage political and military crises in Ukraine, Libya, and Syria (Falkner, 2017).

All told, as a result of having to deal with economic, security, immigration, efficiency, normative and institutional crises and developments at global level, the European Union is now far from its ideal

times in the beginning of 1990s. That time was a period of “common norms and interests” and a period of meeting the economic interests by paying the lowest security costs on a limited scale. At the present time, the EU is moving toward implementation of geopolitical and more realistic policies, and is also focusing more on hard power to deal with all kinds of threats. This reality, however, does not mean that the European Union is turning its back on “soft power,” which is based on the liberal system’s norms, but it means that the priority from now on will be more given to geopolitics and hard power (Vincenti, 2016).

To wrap up the above assessment, one can say that at intraregional level and due to internal challenges nagging the EU, the ability of this union to influence security in the MENA region has decreased. On the other hand, internal dynamisms of the MENA region have moved in a direction to pose more threats to the European Union. Those dynamisms include the increasing role of rising powers such as China, India and Russia in the MENA region; intensification of geopolitical regional rivalries; emergence of such non-state actors as Daesh; and the rise of such quasi-state actors such as the KRG in Iraq. In fact, this study shows that challenges, which the MENA region poses to the EU, remarkably outweigh its benefits for that union. As a result, the EU’s approach to the MENA region seems currently more of a security and geopolitical nature than a normative/ geo-cultural or utilitarian / geo-economic nature.

Even at trans-regional level, one can see the reduced impact of the European Union on international order, and on the regional order, including in the MENA region. The EU’s role in the security of the MENA region is increasingly affected by dynamisms of the international order and increased dynamism in the MENA region, so that it has been forced to take a security-oriented approach to the MENA region. All these findings corroborate that synergistic interaction among changes at intraregional, interregional, and trans-regional levels in the EU’s relations with the MENA have made its policy towards MENA more security-oriented. In better words, the EU’s foreign policy in the MENA has been taking a geopolitical turn and is now more based on Europe’s security concerns than being founded on the basis of normative and economic concerns.

5. The Reflection of the "Return to Geopolitics" in the EU's Policies towards MENA

Can we see in the EU's policies how, with the evolution of the context and the emergence of new dynamisms, the importance of MENA for the EU has turned from emphasis on the Geo-culture and the Geo-economics to the Geopolitics? This part reviews the dynamisms mentioned in the previous section at three levels of EU's policies regarding the MENA region.

According to historical evidences, because of America's leading role in stabilizing the MENA region from 1970 to 2003, and converging European interests with the United States in this area, and providing approximate security interests by US, Europe was more focused on geo-cultural and geo-economic approaches based on its soft power and hoping to "spillover effects" to secure its other main interests including energy and trade, and at the same time as a normative power, to seek good governance and democracy in the region (Günay, 2016: 7). This is well supported by European Union's policies and the organizations it has set up to engage with the MENA region by the year 2003.

In this regard, the Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) (1972) is based on bilateral trade agreements and treaties with third countries of the Mediterranean (TMCs) with three main headings for business cooperation, economic and financial cooperation, and social partnership (GMP, 1972). The new Mediterranean Policy (RMP) (1990) follows the same line of global Mediterranean policy; it has a greater emphasis on respect for human rights, the strengthening of civil society, the modernization, and protection of the environment in the MENA region, and allows the European Parliament to suspend the union's financial assistance in the case of any human rights abuses in each of the counterpart countries (RMP, 1990).

These two policies are in accordance with the characteristics of the geo-cultural approach and show very well the importance of values and geo-cultural factors and prioritize them in the interregional interaction between the EU and the MENA region. According to this approach, if ideas, norms and processes are appropriately designed, then the policies of the regions towards each other will be co-operative and therefore beneficial, and the regionalization process is of paramount importance.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), or the Barcelona Process (1995), with same characteristics, has a strong normative view to the MENA

region, with the difference that its utilitarian and to some extent its security aspects are much bolder and EU seeks to address its security threats, such as preventing illegal immigration pursuing by good governance programs (Günay, 2016: 29).

The rapid expansion of the European Union in the early 2000s increased its territorial coverage by up to 40 percent. In response to this expansion, the Commission published on March 2003 the document "Wider Europe Neighborhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbors", which became the basis of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in 2004. This document has been released when the European Union feels less threatened by the MENA region and therefore its main objective is to create a "circle of friends around the European Union" to gain more benefits, with the difference that, instead of the institutional cooperation emphasized in Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), it seeks more functional cooperation to prevent the transfer of instability and peripheral dangers into the union (Sadek, 2016: 59).

The European Union in its "Neighborhood Policy" (ENP) is seeking to provide its own version of security, which is more based on soft and economic power; in fact, the deficit of hard power, the secondary importance of the MENA's security (i.e. security threats are not such as to disturb the order of the European security complex) and the possibility of securing the energy and business benefits by using the existing structures, will also place the EU as an external intervener next to the United States in the MENA region.

Therefore, the Union prioritizes securing of its economic interests, and maintains relations with authoritarian, but stable, regimes. In this case, the contradiction of all European policies towards the MENA region is visible through the contradiction between neoliberal preferences and the realities of the region; however, it tries to pursue different tactics for the MENA's stability and security compared to United States and to act more tolerant and interactive (at bilateral and multilateral levels) with the region.

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was inspired by Nicolas Sarkozy's ambition to pull out the European Commission and its previous plans for engagement with the MENA region. The policy was implemented in July 2008, although at the outset it was intended to include only the Mediterranean countries of the EU and its southern neighbors; but this was

quickly opposed by Germany and the Northern members of the Union on the one hand, and the opposition of countries such as Algeria, which saw the Sarkozy's plan as a return of French hegemony on the other, and it became a European policy and, in fact, were placed within the framework of the Barcelona process. The rationale behind this policy is to bring through the definition of important and concrete projects, more utilitarian and economic benefits by interregional integration between Europe and MENA, and more integration between the states of the MENA region (Sadek, 2016: 64). But this policy was not successful, especially as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict which destroyed the foundations of political cooperation in the new form. The euro zone financial crisis has also affected all the projects proposed by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and since 2008 no meetings have been held and no agreement has been reached between the members. The Arab Spring has further diminished the strength of the European Union's soft power, and the subsequent developments have made it less effective in shaping the security of the MENA region. Indeed, at this moment, it is possible to see that the EU is more attentive to the balance of threats posed by the MENA region, and to assure its security, which shows a stronger move from geo-cultural and geo-economic approaches to a geopolitical one.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), and The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) are more in line with the EU's maximum economic and trade benefits and in accordance to its geo-economic approach. The geo-economic approach does not ignore the role of norms in international politics, but reduces their impact on executive functions, and believes that states, as the main actors, respond to disorders in the international system by establishing and concluding treaties as appropriate instruments for cooperation, and cooperation and institutions are the proper framework for managing interdependencies between actors.

Over time, and especially since 2011, the European Union has taken on a review of its neighborhood policy in response to structural and agent-based changes in the MENA region, and its weakening influence on the security of the region. In 2015, the European Commission published "The Review of the European Neighborhood Policy", which, more than a radical overview of the policy, was more likely to be followed by the implementation of Union policies and instruments under the new conditions. In this document,

the European Union has ceased to provide strong support for democratization in the Arab countries after the start of the unrests in 2011 and has given priority to stabilizing the region through security cooperation, the fight against terrorism and economic cooperation (Günay, 2016: 13). In addition, the European Union has proposed the "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements" (DCFTAs) that opens the doors of the single European market to the countries of the MENA region on condition of political reform. This mechanism is based on the logic of "more for more" or, more access to the European market through more political reforms, which fits to its geo-economic approach. By this, the European Union hopes to achieve desirable results in the MENA region, while it does not have the power to impose conditional provisions on relations with the countries of the region, and because of being in a state of weakness and tolerating severe international pressure, it has to accept the regional dynamisms, including cooperation with authoritarian regimes such as el-Sisi regime in Egypt, or a brutal leader like MBS in Saudi Arabia (Sadek, 2016: 67).

The European Neighborhood Policy Review is a serious step by the Union to prioritize the balance of threats and security in its engagement with the MENA, which is in the framework of the geopolitical approach and reflects its response to changes of the structure of power in the international system. Indeed, because the EU, due to its intra, inter and trans-regional challenges, is not capable of shaping the MENA's security, focuses more on inter-regional security interactions, and emphasizes on the structure and distribution of power as constraints on region's policies toward each other. In this framework, the European Union's policy towards MENA in accordance with geopolitical approach is based on guaranteeing the continuity of the union (its regional survival) and simultaneous pursuit of balance of threats and balance of power. In this process, the difference in the level of the region-ness and the actor-ness of the European Union should make it dominant in the inter-regional engagement with the MENA region due to its power and legitimacy, but the intra, and trans-regional pressures, especially from the MENA, are an obstacle to this and the EU, affected by the dynamisms of the MENA region, perceives its insecurity and instability as a critical threat. Therefore, in The European Neighborhood Policy Review, EU engagement with the MENA is more security-based, and EU seeks its relative interests and survival of its own region, rather than being

inspired by institutional engagement or social learning and considering absolute gains.

In the overall assessment of EU policies towards the MENA region, it is possible to identify three policy areas, each with a particular priority (including identity and norms, economic and trade benefits, and the removal of security threats and providing security). Of course, this does not mean that the priorities listed in each of the above policies have not been followed or pursued in others, but the highlight of priority in each policy is the criterion of classification and in the real world, the EU has often pursued all these three categories at the same time.

Accordingly, the Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) and The new Mediterranean Policy (RMP) have emerged in the pretext of the European Union formation, and in such policies due to the increasing trend of European integration, norm and identities are prominent, and their focus in interregional interactions is more prone to values, so they are in line with the characteristics of the geo-cultural approach. In the three policies of The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), and The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the prominence of maximizing utilitarian and commercial benefits is evident, and while the European Union emphasizes the preservation of values in interregional engagement with the MENA, it gives priority to more pragmatic achievements that are in line with the geo-economic approach. Finally, in recent years, The European Neighborhood Policy Review, with an emphasis on the balance of threats and assuring the security of the European Union vis-à-vis the MENA region, more than economic benefits and normative values, is in the search of the elimination of threats and creating the stability in its southern periphery, and can be understood in the realm of the geopolitical approach and the EU's response, to the developments of power at intra, inter, and trans regional levels.

6. Concluding Remarks and Implications for the Islamic republic of Iran

Considering the above-mentioned evolution, the following points can be concluded:

1. a) when the EU's internal identity-based factors have acceptable cohesion and at the same time its internal challenges are trivial, and as a result, its intra-regional pressure increases; b) when the level of EU's region-ness and

actor-ness are superior to those of the MENA, and the EU has proper ability to meet the MENA's challenges, and c) when EU's intra-regional pressure is proportional to or equal to international pressure, and its inter-regional pressure is the result of equal intra- and trans-regional pressures, then its approach toward the MENA region will become geo-cultural; it means EU will give the priority to the norms and values in its policies towards MENA and will adopt an identity-oriented approach.

2. a) when the EU's internal identity-based factors are coherent so that its actor-ness level increases significantly; b) when the level of EU's region-ness and actor-ness are much superior to those of the MENA and most importantly c) when EU's intra-regional pressure exceeds international pressure, and its inter-regional pressure is the result of more intra-regional and less trans-regional pressures, then its approach toward the MENA region will become geo-economic, meaning that EU will give the priority to the commercial benefits and economic gains in its policies towards MENA and will adopt an interest-oriented or utilitarian approach.

3. a) when the EU's internal identity-based factors are weakened by external challenges to the extent that all its capabilities and abilities are spent for eliminating them and strengthening its internal integration; b) When the level of EU's region-ness and actor-ness are not superior to the MENA and the EU doesn't have proper ability to meet MENA's challenges, and MENA affects the international developments rather than being affected by them, and the system's anarchy increases along with its dynamism; and finally c) When the power politics at the international or trans-regional levels derives from an unbalanced distribution of power such that it overcomes intra-regional identity-based and inter-regional utilitarian considerations, and the intra-regional pressure over the EU is much less than international pressure over it so that the inter-regional pressure is the result of less intra-regional and more trans-regional pressures, then its approach toward the MENA region will become geopolitical, meaning EU will give the priority to accepting the trans-regional balancing against the MENA and will adopt an power/security-oriented approach, greatly emphasizing on the balance of threats.

According to these findings, underlining the evolution of EU's policies towards MENA from the geo-culture to the geo-economics and finally to the geopolitics, the understanding of Iran's role in the region becomes more

important. Therefore, Iran's policy towards the EU should address the three approaches, depending on the circumstances. Accordingly, if the anarchy at the international level are high and international pressure over EU overcomes the intraregional pressure over it, as in the current situation, Iran's policy towards the Union and its key actors must be power/security-oriented, relying on geopolitical variables. If, with the reduction of these dynamics and international turmoil, the EU prioritizes an interest-oriented approach with an eye to normative issues, then Iran must adopt a geo-economic approach towards EU. And finally, if the EU creates a balance between international and intra-regional pressures, then it will act as an actor rather than just region towards the MENA and will have a normative and value-based engagement with Iran. Therefore, Iran must also prioritize the geo-cultural approach in its policy towards the EU.

In sum, the model put forth in this research makes way for Iran to achieve three major goals in order to realize its desirable economic and security interests in relation with the EU. Those goals include: 1) testing the feasibility of changing the existing paradigm in Iran's relations with the European Union in basis on the model presented in this research; 2) testing the feasibility of offering initiatives related to developments in the MENA region by Iran's foreign policy apparatus in order to come up with a common discourse between Iran's national interests and the goals and principles followed by the EU; and 3) setting clear goals by Iran's diplomatic apparatus to be used for gaining more influence within the European Union.

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