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EUROPE AND ITS 'OTHER': FREE TRADE AND THE GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINERIES OF EURO-MEDITERRANEAN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

The creation of a Free Trade Area is the main pillar on which regionalization in the Mediterranean has been pursued since the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in 1995. The aim of this paper is to reflect upon the relation between commercial integration and region-building in the Mediterranean from an interpretative perspective, in order to offer a critical evaluation of the aims, the impact and the evolution of Euro-Mediterranean policies. To this end, we will show some evidence about the intensity and spatiality of cross-Mediterranean trade relations. We will see how the idea of constructing a Mediterranean region does indeed coexist and conflict with other geographical imaginaries: the idea of the Mediterranean as a border and the attempts to establish a regime of managed and differential relations in the area. Moreover, we will present the different delimitations which have been proposed for the Euro-Mediterranean area, in order to give an idea of the struggle between alternative geopolitical representations which is behind regionalization strategies in the Mediterranean. We will discuss the attempts to use conditionality to promote reforms in the partner countries, and the Eurocentric character of such attempts. Finally, we will reflect upon the concept of 'selective' Europeanization: the spatial metaphor that, in our opinion, best captures the content and the outcome of the recurrent attempts to construct a Mediterranean region.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership (EMP), in 1995, the EU has been dedicating considerable political and financial resources to the management of relations with Mediterranean countries.

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The content of Euro-Mediterranean strategies, as we will see in the next sections, were not entirely new with respect to the policies that European countries had been previously conducting bilaterally with non-EU Mediterranean countries. What was new was the greater emphasis on their regional dimension: the idea of conducting those policies multilaterally at the level of the whole basin, and the prospects for integration and regionalization in the area, reflecting a growing belief among European political elites that a Mediterranean region can be 'made' (Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2009, 83).

The creation of a Free Trade Area (FTA) is the main pillar on which regionalization in the Mediterranean has been pursued in the last two decades. The idea of establishing a FTA was the first, and is still, one of the most important components of Euro-Mediterranean policies, although those policies have evolved and diversified since the prospects for a FTA was first formulated, in 1995, during the Barcelona Conference.

The aim of this paper is to reflect upon the relation between commercial integration and regionalization in the Mediterranean from an interpretative perspective. In order to highlight the complexity and ambiguities which are implied in the attempts to construct a Mediterranean region, we will offer a review of how Euro-Mediterranean policies evolved, what their explicit and implicit goals are and upon which geographical imaginaries those policies are constructed, in light of the function that the creation of a Free Trade Area is supposed to play in this frame.

In the next section, we will offer some evidence about the intensity and spatiality of cross-Mediterranean trade relations and reflect upon both the expected and actual results of commercial integration in the area. In section three, we will show how the idea of constructing a Mediterranean region does indeed coexist, complement and conflict with other geographical imaginaries: namely the idea of the Mediterranean as a border to be securitized and the attempts to establish a regime of managed and differential relations in the area. In section four, we will present the different delimitations which have been proposed for the Euro-Mediterranean area in order to give an idea of the struggle between alternative geopolitical representations which is behind regionalization strategies in the Mediterranean. In section five we will discuss the issue of conditionality in Euro-Mediterranean policies: the attempts to promote political and economic reforms in the partner countries and the Eurocentric character of such attempts. In the final section we will offer some concluding remarks and reflect upon the issue of Europeanization: the spatial metaphor that, in our opinion, best captures the content and the outcome of the recurrent attempts to construct a Mediterranean region.

2. FREE TRADE AND REGIONALIZATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The strategy toward the creation of a Free Trade Area in the Mediterranean was first formulated during the Barcelona conference, in 1995, upon the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) between the European Union, its member states and 12 non-EU Mediterranean partners.

The EMP was not the first[1] yet surely the most ambitiously coordinated and multilateral effort to establish a common policy toward the Mediterranean. The content of the initiative, as we argued earlier, was not entirely new. The FTA, for example, was supposed to include all Mediterranean countries that, since the 1970s, had already signed trade agreements with the EU. In addition to the establishment of the FTA, the partnership aimed at increasing the financial support the EU had traditionally directed toward non-EU Mediterranean countries. What was defined as the "Barcelona process" attempted only to make those efforts more systematic and more ambitious.

What was new was more the container rather than the content: the idea of a multilateral partnership (plus Free Trade Area) regarding the whole Mediterranean basin. Such an emphasis on regionality reflected a belief that a Mediterranean region does indeed exist and that commercial, economic and social integration in the Mediterranean should constitute one of the main priorities for European foreign politics.

Given the prioritization of trade liberalization, some critics accuse the EMP for being an attempt by European countries to reinforce their economic hegemony in the Mediterranean and to increase the economic dependence of Southern Mediterranean countries (Amoroso 2007, Attinà 2003).

The Barcelona Process is not, however, exclusively a commercial strategy; it is a more ambitious process whose final aim is to turn "the Mediterranean region into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation" (Barcelona Declaration, 1995).

In terms of commercial relations, the Mediterranean indeed ceased to be a crucial region for global trade in the Seventeenth Century (Braudel 1985, 53). The EU is an important commercial partner for some non-EU Mediterranean countries (Tunisia and Libya, and, to a lesser extent, Algeria and Morocco). If we exclude energy resources, however, cross-Mediterranean trade relations are minimal (Figure 1), and they have even been decreasing in recent years, due to the increase of exchanges with Asian countries. South-south exchanges are even weaker, as they account for only 5 percent of the total trade of non-European Mediterranean countries (Cugusi 2009, 48). "At the present time, it cannot be said that there is a system of international trade between the countries of the Mediterranean" (Tovias-Bacaria 1999, 5).

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[1] Since the 1970s, with the establishment of the Global Mediterranean Policy, several Euro-Mediterranean cooperation programmes have been launched.
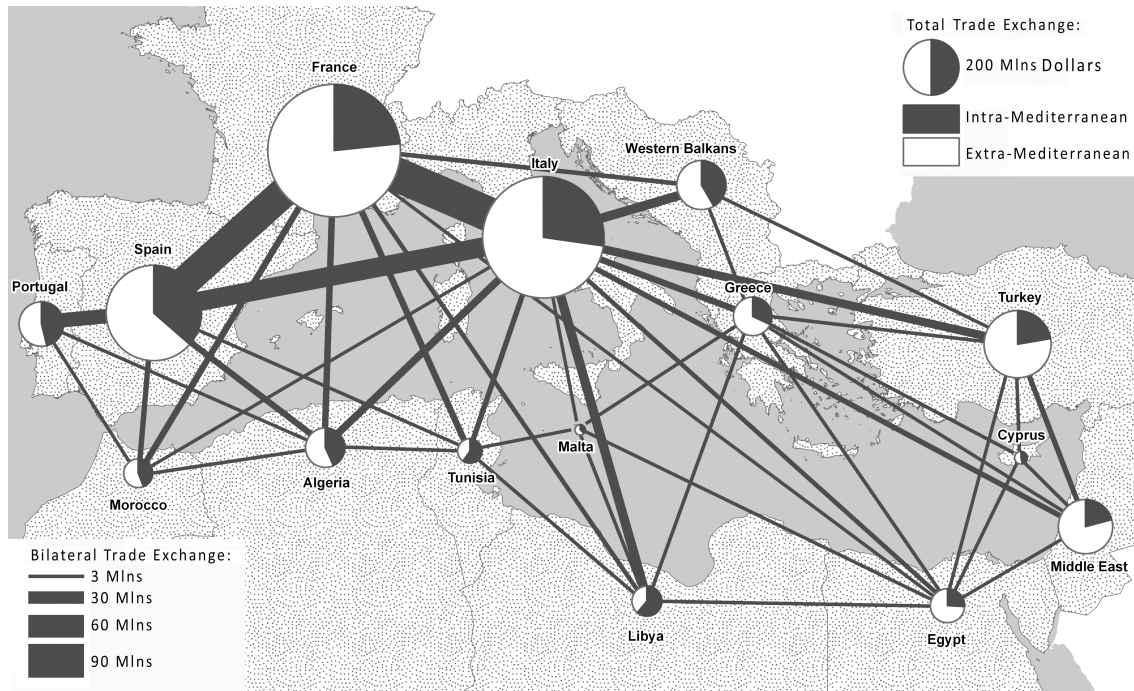
Figure 1 - *Average yearly trade exchange in Mediterranean countries, 2008-2010*
Source: designed by the authors based on UNCTAD Trade Statistics

The Mediterranean recently became an important hub for container traffic, for example, and many Mediterranean ports (Port Said, Malta, Gioia Tauro, Algeciras and Tanger among the others) are trying to accommodate this renewed centrality and to gain competitive advantages with respect to northern European ports. Container traffic, however, is for the most part directed far away from the Mediterranean shores and it cannot be said to display regionalizing effects.

Such evidence shows, first, that trade liberalization in the Euro-Mediterranean has not experienced the effects that were initially expected. Most observers agree on this point and many other criticisms have been raised with respect to the EU's strategy toward commercial integration. The component of Euro-Mediterranean politics that has progressed the most (even if many think it has not progressed enough), is indeed trade liberalization for manufacturing products. Although the 2010 deadline for the official establishment of the FTA was not met and has since been postponed, European countries have signed free trade agreements with the all of its Mediterranean external partners, with the exception of Syria and Libya.

Critics have emphasized the asymmetry and neo-colonialism which is implicit in the prioritization of manufacturing trade - an industry in which European countries have relevant competitive advantages - and the protectionism that still characterizes other components of the so called "four freedoms" of regional integration: persons, goods, services and capital (Amoroso 2007, 507). Agricultural trade, for example, has been excluded from the initial prospects for the creation of the FTA, with the aim of safeguarding European agriculture and the European Agricultural Policy, given the comparative advantages that Southern Mediterranean countries have with respect to the EU in agricultural production (Tovias-Bacaria 1999). This has raised much criticism and discontent in the partner countries. Consequently, the EU has recently upgraded preferential market access for agricultural and fisheries products from Egypt and Jordan, and several other agreements in this field are being negotiated or are at the approval stage, with Morocco, for example, also in the field of free trade in services (EU 2011).

The prioritization of trade is surely indicative of a peculiar approach to regionalization. The strengthening of Euro-Mediterranean relations - it is argued - should first and foremost be based on strengthening commercial relations. Many authors have stressed that such prioritization is the result of a utilitarian and neoliberal ideology (Latouche 2007): "the economy comes first". This is also coherent with the use of the term "partnership", borrowed from the commercial domain to indicate that "partner" countries will remain fully autonomous, but they agree upon fostering commercial integration as long as - according to neoliberal ideologies - trade relations are mutually beneficial to all partners.

The Euro-Mediterranean partnership can indeed be said to constitute a 'commercial' approach toward regionalization, but the perspective on the establishment of a FTA is never considered an end in itself. The fostering of trade relations is rather supposed to be a 'stick' for fostering other kind of relations. The prioritization of free trade, in this frame, has much to do with the (Braudelian) idea that, in history, trade flows are the primary connections upon which any other (political, social or cultural) relation is constructed. Even if supporters of a truly integrated area would say that the FTA is not enough, most observers agree that it is a starting point for any kind of regionalization process: it is the history of European integration itself.

Euro-Mediterranean politics, in the meanwhile, have evolved and diversified considerably, especially after the launch of the "European Neighbourhood Policy" (ENP) in the 2000s. The final aim of these policies should be "to share everything but institutions", as famously declared by the former Head of the European Commission Romano Prodi in 2002. The idea is that relations between the EU and its neighbouring countries should somehow replicate the same degree of integration that exists among

European countries, although Mediterranean partners have no prospect for accessing the EU because they are not "Europeans"[2].

Among the many differences between the EMP and the ENP, which will be analyzed more in detail in the next sections, we may say that the 'commercial' approach that characterized Euro-Mediterranean partnership during the 1990s, has been replaced with a more explicitly 'normative' approach toward regionalization in the Mediterranean during the following decade. The 'normative' approach of the EU in its foreign policies has been highlighted by Manners (2002), indicating the EU's preference for soft power with respect to the 'harder' power which is typical of US policies in the area, for example. Within the framework of Euro-Mediterranean policies, the approach is normative as long as it emphasizes the need to use trade and aid as 'sticks' to promote political reforms in non-EU countries, with a strong emphasis on the 'civilising' mission that the EU is supposed to play in the partner countries.

Commercial integration and the establishment of a FTA continues to constitute a priority but it is more than ever a tool - rather than a goal in itself - within an ambitious strategy that aims at promoting inter-institutional dialogue, creating development and prosperity which, in turn, will cause peace, stability and the securitization of the Mediterranean frontier:

> "Our aim is a political one; political in the sense of stability. We got into this business of association agreements and free trade in order to engage them in the process of political reform, not so much because there was a general economic interest" (EU Official, cited in: Jones 2006, 424).

It is to such ambivalences that we will now turn the attention, as they can offer a much better understanding of Euro-Mediterranean policies and of the role that trade liberalization is supposed to play in this frame: the apparent oxymora of a policy that aims at promoting the political transformation of Mediterranean countries, while at the same time seeks stability in the area (Balfour 2009, 104); the apparent contradiction between fostering regionalization in the region while at the same time promoting the securitization of the Mediterranean border.

3. FREE TRADE AND THE GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINERIES OF EURO-MEDITERANEAN POLITICS

There is an ambivalence regarding the geographical imaginaries that characterize any politics toward the Mediterranean: the tendency to consider the sea as a region, on the one hand, and the tendency to see it as a border, on the other.

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[2] Countries from the Southern Mediterranean do not qualify for EU membership according to Article 49 of the Treaty of the EU. Access was denied to Morocco in 1987, for the reason of "not being a European country".

Examples of the latter imaginary are frequent and they have gained prominence over the last decade, especially after September 11, 2001: the representation of the Mediterranean as a space of differences, as a boundary between clashing civilizations and as the locus of cross-border security threats such as illegal migration and terrorism. The most relevant advancements of European policies toward the Mediterranean, in recent years, are indeed aimed at the securitization of the EU's external border through inter-governmental cooperation in the control of migration (Kausch-Youngs 2009) or by strengthening the role of the EU in the military management of its external border (through the FRONTEX Agency).

On the other hand, throughout their policies toward the Mediterranean, European institutions try hard to balance this emphasis on security by prioritizing other goals of cooperation – to promote "prosperity", to address "common challenges", to promote "common values", etc. In those cases, the imaginary is constructed upon the tradition of seeing the Mediterranean as a "liquid continent" and as a historically unified space of homogeneity and continuity (Giaccaria-Minca 2011), hence making reference to a regional imagination. The problem is how to foster integration between countries that are otherwise considered very distant in political, social and cultural terms. The Braudelian idea of a Mediterranean region with a long history of relations that flourish thanks to geographical proximity, maritime connectivity and economic exchanges represents a strong narrative in this regard. It emphasizes a common belonging, a common history and – hopefully – a common future of increased cooperation, convergence, integration.

Many authors have criticized Euro-Mediterranean policies for such ambivalence: they seek to regionalize the area by fostering integration while, at the same time, they strengthen the border between the enlarged EU and the outside world in many ways. Those policies promote the image of a borderless Euro-Mediterranean area, through the emphasis on cooperation, cross-border relations and "people-to-people contacts", as much as they stress the securitization of the Mediterranean as their main goal and the control of migration as one of their main priorities (Beck and Grande 2007, 176). The image of a "fortress Europe" is an often cited spatial metaphor in this regard and – apparently – it contradicts the commitment toward regionalization in the Mediterranean.

The parallel regionalization and bordering of the Mediterranean, however, is neither contradictory nor paradoxical: the two goals are intimately linked and produce a peculiar strategy that, although controversial, is coherent and, to a certain extent, effective. What these two imaginaries have in common - or where they find a synthesis - is in the representation of the Mediterranean as a space of relations and flows.

European policies toward the Mediterranean may be seen, accordingly, as an attempt to create a regime of managed and differential mobility across the Mediterranean; an area of asymmetrical and controlled relations. Some flows that are considered beneficial - e.g. trade in industrial products - are

fostered and enhanced while other flows - trade in agricultural products and services or "illicit trafficking", for example - are limited. The same applies to migration which is considered beneficial or, at least, as a necessary evil, when it is managed, controlled and legal, and the opposite when it is unmanaged, uncontrolled or "irregular".

Consequently, in terms of geographical imaginaries we may identify a further alternative between topographical/territorial representations of the Mediterranean on the one hand (whenever the sea is considered as an integrated region or as a dividing border), and topological/relational representations on the other: when the Mediterranean is considered as a space of flows and relationships.

Topological representation of sea spaces are indeed very common and, as stated by Steinberg in his historical analysis of oceans' representation in cartography (2009), the construction of the sea as an 'outside' space of mobility is a fundamental ingredient in modern spatial politics as it is intimately linked to the construction of 'inside' space as a series of territories of fixity, sovereignty and stability.

The various imaginaries of the Mediterranean are therefore not contradictory but complementary: in the next sections we will see further how they coexist and what their function is within the construction of a Euro-Mediterranean political space.

4. THE POLITICS OF DELIMITATION

The first problem of any Mediterranean policy is how the area (or region?) should be delimited. The seemingly simple question of who's Mediterranean and who's not is indeed crucial in debates about regionalization and cooperation in the Mediterranean. The difficulties in compiling a list of "Mediterranean countries" in any meaningful and coherent way reveal a lot about the contents and scope of Euro-Mediterranean politics.

The EMP, for example, initially excluded Libya as the country had been sanctioned by the United Nations; the country has been lately included in the partnership as an "observer". On the other hand, the partnership includes Jordan and Mauritania, despite the fact that these two countries do not border the Mediterranean, because they are integral parts of Mashreq and Maghreb respectively. At the same time, the partnership excludes many other Arab countries based on the idea that those countries are not "Mediterranean".

Surprisingly enough, however, most of the problems incurred when deciding the boundaries of the Mediterranean are about which European countries - rather than about which non-European countries - should be included. All of the EU's member countries are partners in the EMP. The partnership, consequently, includes many northern European countries that have some strategic or commercial interests in the basin, yet are far away from its shores, while it excludes other European Mediterranean countries -

among the Western Balkans in particular - as long as they are not EU members.
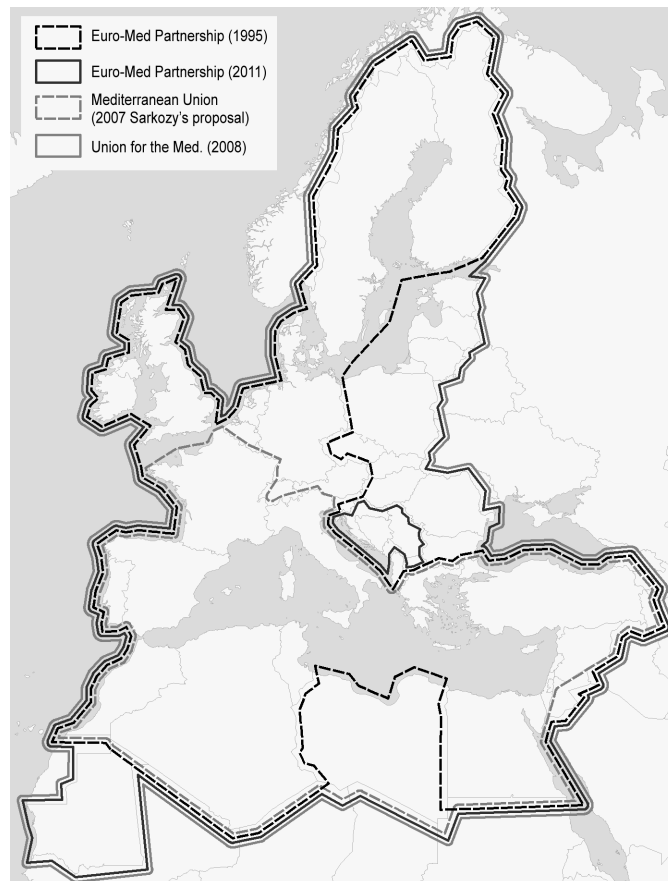

Figure 2. - *Delimitations of the Euro-Mediterranean area within EU policies towards the Mediterranean*
Source: designed by the authors

The number of partners, moreover, has progressively increased due to EU enlargement toward Eastern Europe, from 27 member countries in 1995 to 40 today. Many fear the partnership is too wide in order to constitute the foundation for any proper regionalization process. "The Barcelona group is too diverse for a cross-pillar approach to be realistically formulated and implemented" (Pace 2004, 305). The creation of macro-regions in the Mediterranean, similar to the Baltic macro-region, has been recently discussed in this frame (Stocchiero 2010), with proposals for the constitution of an Adriatic-Ionian macro-region. Many others sub-regions have been previously identified, at various geographical scales, within the different components of Euro-Mediterranean policies (Celata-Coletti 2011). The

delimitation of these sub-regions is never solely justified for functional reasons: sub-regional programmes refer often to some form of regional identity and are always aimed at "region-building".

The entire Mediterranean basin, however, is still the primary and most important scale for the implementation of EU external policies along the southern border of Europe, and this surely applies to the prospects for establishing a Free Trade Area.

Debates about the geographical significance of the Euro-Mediterranean area have multiplied since the EU launched the so called "European Neighbourhood policy" (ENP), in 2003, which included 45 partners and was carried out with the participation of many Eastern European, non-member countries. Even the European Parliament expressed doubts about "the meaningfulness of the ENP's geographical scope, as it involves countries which are, geographically and culturally, European together with Mediterranean non-European countries" (Resolution A6-0414-2007). "You cannot have a coherent policy for such heterogeneous countries" (EU official, cited in: Dimitrovova 2010, 472).

Although the EU insisted that the ENP would "reinvigorate the Barcelona process" and the perspectives for integration in the Mediterranean, many feared the opposite: the new policy constituted a shift in the priorities of the EU toward its Eastern frontier (Aliboni 2005). The EMP was indeed the outcome of an EU enlargement in the 1980s and 1990s, with the accession of Spain, Portugal, Greece and – more recently – Cyprus and Malta. The ENP, on the other hand, was a response to the EU's eastern enlargement and – according to many observers – was primarily concerned with the challenges that the enlargement would pose for the relations between Eastern European countries that have become member states and their non-EU neighbours (Zaiotti 2007, Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005).

More generally, within the Barcelona Process, the Mediterranean constitutes the 'centre' of an ambitious multilateral project (even if the extent of the partnership was too wide to constitute a proper 'Mediterranean region'). Within the ENP, on the contrary, "the Mediterranean is diluted into a disordered archipelago of countries surrounding the European and western 'centre'" (Amoroso 2007, 496). The inclusion of both Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean within a single policy not only implies a further widening and extension of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, but also a symbolical shift. "The EMP stressed the importance of north-south and south-south cooperation, along with the notion of partnership. [The ENP], conversely, explicitly conveys a centre-periphery approach – with the EU obviously standing at the centre" (Del Sarto-Schumacher 2005, 27).

Even if we cannot say that Euro-Mediterranean policies were ever truly multilateral (Giaccaria, 2005), the ENP has indeed been criticized for challenging the perspectives of a regional approach toward the Euro-Mediterranean (Kausch-Youngs 2009, 965). "The ENP abandons the prevalence of the principle of *regionality* that was inherent in the Barcelona

Process, and replaces it with *differentiated bilateralism*" (Del Sarto-Schumacher 2005, 21).

In brief, the 'politics of delimitation' is not neutral: the geographical coverage of different European policies towards the Mediterranean is both symbolic and performative, as it emphasizes certain political priorities over others, as well as it favours the interests of some countries over others. In this frame, the French proposal to establish a "Mediterranean Union", in 2007, was an explicit attempt to increase the centrality of Southern European countries with respect to, or even against, the leading role that continental Europe has within the EU. The proposal caused debates and criticisms especially because the Mediterranean Union was supposed to include only European and non European countries that border the Mediterranean (Balfour 2009, Kausch-Youngs 2009). The inclusion of only 'truly' Mediterranean countries was, on the one hand, a response to the aforementioned criticisms about the EMP being too wide and about EU disengagement from the Mediterranean. On the other hand, such a geographical delimitation emphasized the commitment toward the establishment of a truly Mediterranean "Union", rather than a simple multilateral partnership, and it was founded by French President Sarkozy upon a peculiar emphasis on 'region building' in the Mediterranean:

"While Europe's future is in the South, Africa's is in the North. I call on all those who can do so to join the Mediterranean Union because it will be the linchpin of *Eurafrica*, the great dream capable of enthusing the world. The Mediterranean Union is a challenge, a challenge for all of us, (…) Mediterraneans" (Sarkozy, Morocco, October 2007).

At the same time, paradoxically, the inclusion of only a few European countries was criticized because it challenged the ability of the EU to speak with a single voice in the area and, consequently, the perspectives for multilateralism in the Mediterranean, and contradicted the initial spirit of the EMP (Balfour 2009, 103). Even if the EU has recently conceded that regionalization in the area can proceed at "variable geometry" (EU 2011), the French proposal has been fiercely criticized not only by Northern European countries but also by Italy and Spain, as it was supposed to weaken the role of the EU.

The proposal was quickly abandoned in favour of a less ambitious "Union for the Mediterranean" (UfM), established in 2008, which includes all countries that are part of the EMP, plus Monaco and the Western Balkans (with the exception of Serbia and Macedonia), and that is little more than a sum of projects with few prospects for regional integration (Kausch-Youngs 2009).

It is clear, from this brief review, that the idea that the Mediterranean "exists a priori", based on the "natural evidence" of the physical extent of the sea (Giaccaria-Minca 2011, 348), is insufficient. The geography of the region is indeed suggesting its delimitation, as much as it is its product: it is just one ingredient in a never ending struggle between alternative

geopolitical representations. In the end, we still need to decide both where the Mediterranean ends and what it is: the two questions are intimately linked.

The various alternative delimitations, however, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Although any of the above mentioned programmes has its own orientations, their goals are coherent and they can easily coexist. Each of those programmes includes, for example, perspectives for further commercial integration and trade liberalization. Perspectives for a Euro-Mediterranean FTA, moreover, coexist and overlap with other trade agreements along the northern shore (EU, EEA and CEFTA), and along the southern shore: the COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa), the GAFTA (Greater Arab Free Trade Area), and the proposal for an Arab Maghreb Union (Figure 3), not to mention other inter-governmental partnerships such as the Arab League, which was included as a partner in the "Union for the Mediterranean".

The Mediterranean is therefore, in some cases, the object of regionalization attempts while, in many other cases, it is the crossroads of (or the border between) alternative integration processes: Europe, the European Union, the Arab countries, Maghreb, Mashreq, etc.

The first point that we can deduce from this brief analysis, is that regionality and multilaterality should not be considered synonymous but are rather alternatives to each other. If the Mediterranean area is diluted to include the whole of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, the possibilities for a multilateral policy for the area increase as relations can be managed at a multilateral level by supranational bodies such as the EU and the Arab League (Amoroso 2007). On the other hand, if the partnership is too wide, its geographical significance decreases and the perspectives for effective regionalization weaken.

Another point refers to the above mentioned ambivalence between 'bordering' processes versus regionalization processes in the Mediterranean. Any integration process weakens the borders among those that are included as much as it strengthens the borders with those that are excluded. The EU has been accused, for example, of challenging the association among Arab countries through the selective inclusion of some countries and the exclusion of others from the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. Such inclusions/exclusions are dictated mainly by political and strategic criteria, but are masked behind the apparently self-evident idea that those countries which are excluded are not "Mediterranean countries"[3].

Within this frame, the strongest divisions in the Mediterranean may be seen as resulting from European integration itself. European Union

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[3] The inclusion of Israel in the same basket with Arab countries, for example, is supposed to favour friendly relationships among those countries, but has raised discontent from both parties. The exclusion of Iraq or Saudi Arabia, to give another example, is regarded by some observers as being aimed at excluding those countries in which the US has strong strategic interests.

institutions seem to acknowledge this problem very clearly when declaring that their external policies should try to avoid the creation of new "dividing lines" (EC, 2004). The "dividing lines" that EU policies are trying to avoid do not only refer to historical and cultural divisions, but also to divisions that the EU integration process itself is creating through selective enlargement[4], institutional and cultural bordering, militarization, etc.

The perspective for increased freedom of movement for manufacturing products may therefore be not enough to promote a borderless Mediterranean. Euro-Mediterranean policies may be regarded as nothing more than a "consolation prize" the EU is offering to an area that, willing or not, it contributes to de-structure (Del Sarto-Schumacher 2005, 19).
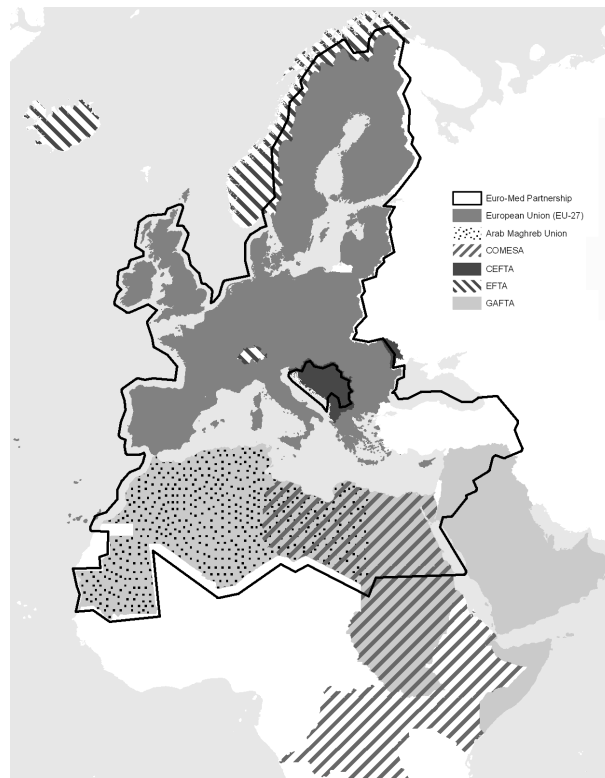

Figure 3. - *Free Trade agreements in the Mediterranean area*
Source: designed by the authors

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[4] See the accession of Cyprus in the EU, for example, and the perspectives for including Turkey.

5. EXCHANGING TRADE FOR DEMOCRACY? CONDITIONALITY AND EUROCENTRISM IN EURO-MEDITERRANEAN POLICIES

If we look at the latest evolutions of Euro-Mediterranean policies, it is clear that these policies are more European than Mediterranean: it is the EU that decides the scope of these strategies, which countries should be included or not, etc. Despite the attempts to promote partnership and co-ownership, Southern Mediterranean countries often only have the option of agreeing or not agreeing upon contents that the EU is proposing (El Kenz 2007, 530).

Euro-Mediterranean policies, as already argued, have never been fully multilateral. Free trade agreements, for example, differently from other FTAs such as the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), are signed between the EU and each partner country individually. Some have defined it as a "hub and spoke" approach, which challenges the creation of a FTA for the whole area (Zaim 1999). The real issue, according to these critics, is in promoting south-south commercial relations. While trade barriers among Southern Mediterranean countries have decreased in the 1990s and 2000s, they are still some of the highest in the world.

It is the EU, moreover, that provides the funding for Euro-Mediterranean policies and it is also the EU, consequently, that decides on their allocation. Although such allocation is traditionally based upon strategic and geopolitical priorities, there is an increasing emphasis - at least in theory - on conditioning the distribution of benefits from Mediterranean policies towards the implementation of political reforms and "good governance" in partner countries (Aliboni 2005).

The Barcelona Process introduced the principle of "negative conditionality" which is, in theory, a suspension of relations with partner countries that have violated human rights. The ENP is instead based on the principle of "positive conditionality": relations will be only fostered with those countries that express their commitment toward political reforms (Del Sarto-Schumacher 2005).

Such a 'soft' and 'normative' approach, as it has been defined in section two, has succeeded in keeping relations between the EU and its partners "cordial and constructive" (Emerson-Noutcheva 2005), with respect to the more problematic relations the US has with several Mediterranean countries, for example. However, the EU "has failed to use its more positive image (…) to set out an alternative reform path" (Youngs 2006).

At times, there is the impression that European values themselves, as once stated by the EU Commissioner for External Relations, Ferrero-Waldner, (cited in: Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011, 136), are supposed to constitute the "weapons" (sic) for pushing neighbours toward meeting the requirements of the EU and adopting the norms of liberal democracies.

Notwithstanding such a normative approach, the 'sticks' of conditionality have never been fully applied (Del Sarto-Schumacher 2005, Balfour 2009). The failed attempts to promote democratization in the Mediterranean are

often justified by the scarcity of incentives: "we can't buy reform, we are conscious of the fact that we don't have the money to buy reform" (EU official, cited in Jones 2006, 426). European leaders repeat that "democracy cannot be imposed" while - according to many observers - they do not even try to use conditionality properly (Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011, Kramsch 2011). European countries have been often silent about the lack of democratization in some of the most preferred partners, which have even been praised for their achievements in this domain[5]. In previous years before the Arab revolutions, "some critics detect a return to the continent's traditional approach to the region - supporting authoritarian governments in exchange for natural resources and stability" (Youngs 2006, 5).

There is much ambivalence with this regard. The commitment of partner countries toward migration control, for example, has been included in the conditionality clauses of the ENP (Kausch-Youngs 2009, 966), and migrants readmission agreements are, in some cases, included in the Action Plans (Smith, 2005). Migration controls and readmission, however, often implies violations to the same human rights that the policy assumes as its main principles and goals (Fekete 2005).

Another ambivalence regards the Eurocentric content of the "good governance" model that is pursued in the Mediterranean: "The Commission does not leave any doubts that the 'commitment to shared values' - such as democracy, liberty, rule of law, respect for human rights and human dignity - refers to the values of the EU and its Member States" (Del Sarto-Schumacher 2005, 23).

Many authors have stressed the neo-colonial nature of Euro-Mediterranean policies (Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011, 131), and the image of the Mediterranean as a post-colonial sea (Chambers 2008, Giaccaria-Minca 2011).

We may say that the design of Euro-Mediterranean policies is influenced, on the one hand, by the colonial past of European countries that forces them to respect the autonomy of their partners and not to intervene too much in their internal politics. There is, on the other hand, the "colonial present" (Gregory 2004), in which European institutions "continue to think and to act in ways that are dyed in the colours of colonial power" (15). Europeans cannot resist considering European values as universal, intrinsically good and, therefore, superior - something that most external partners still do not possess but will probably adopt in the future, with the help of the EU and through modernization, institutional reforms and economic development.

Diez defined this ambivalence as the "normative power paradox" (2006): notwithstanding the emphasis on "common values", the idea that those are

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[5] A standing example is Tunisia. On a visit to the country in 2008, Sarkozy declared: "What other country can boast of having advanced so much in half a century on the road to progress, on the road to tolerance and on the road to reason?" (cited in Kausch-Youngs 2009, 973).

primarily European values reinforces the border between the EU and the outside world. The EU's external policies - it is argued - are structured in such a way that non-European partners are the subjects of policies rather than partners (Dimitrovova 2010, 477). The EU "on the one hand creates an image of an inferior neighbour that urgently needs to move towards European standards and on the other hand produces a speech politics of mutuality and dialogue" (Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011, 130). "Both the content and form of the initiative reinforce the asymmetry characterizing the two sides" (Zaiotti 2007, 151). "The approach is dominative, rather than universalistic or cosmopolitan" (Barbé *et al.* 2009, 379). Euro-Mediterranean policies, according to those criticisms, are reinforcing the same image of a "fortress Europe" that they are trying to eliminate, not only through political and military means, but also through "cultural bordering" (Kostadinova 2009, Dimitrovova 2010, Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011, Delanty 2006).

A clear demonstration of the above mentioned limits of European policies toward the Mediterranean may be found in the so called "Arab spring" (a Eurocentric definition itself: 'spring' is a concept that is hardly applicable to the tropical climate of Arab countries). The Arab revolutions have shown that democratization is a rather complex process and that we still need to learn how to deal with it through soft means and pro-actively, rather than through the 'hard' power of ex-post military intervention.

Not surprisingly then, protesters in Arab countries are sceptical with respect to the commitment of European countries in this regard, although they are fighting for the same democratic ideals that the Mediterranean politics is promoting. They fight for our 'common values' but are sceptical toward our 'common politics' and while some local actors perceive Europe as a controversial ally, others think that it may be even an obstacle toward democratization:

"The European Union continues to promote an agenda for trade and investments which has already proven to be useless for the developing needs of partner countries and that, if confirmed and enhanced, could seriously challenge the ongoing democratic transitions" (Arab NGO Network for Development, February 2012).

6. EUROPE AND ITS 'OTHER'. FREE TRADE AND EUROPEANIZATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

A common spatial metaphor that is used to capture the Eurocentric character of Euro-Mediterranean policies, and that may be considered one of the main dimensions of regionalization attempts in the Mediterranean, is that of "Europeanization" (Jones 2006, Lavenex 2008). According to Featherstone and Radaelli (2003, 333), Europeanization is a set of "processes of construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things,' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in

the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, political structures and public policies".

Europeanization has both an internal and external dimension (Jones-Clark 2008a). In relation to the Mediterranean, it may be regarded - inter alias - as a geopolitical strategy which aims to make the sea a European *Mare Nostrum*.

Europeanization is also an attempt to replicate, in the Euro-Mediterranean area, the same integration model that has been experienced within the EU (Barbé *et al.* 2009, 379); to adopt, for example, the same timing and path toward closer integration that is applied to those countries that bid for accession to the EU. The prioritization of trade liberalization is a standing example in this regard. Enlargement, therefore, does not only represent the challenge that the strategy wishes to respond to but it also serves - somehow - as a 'model' for its design (Zaiotti 2007, Celata-Coletti 2011).

Partner countries, moreover, are asked to adopt EU-specific norms, rules and standards. In the commercial domain, any external partner wishing to participate in the Free Trade Area must bring their entire regulatory system in-line with the *acquis communitaire*, although the cost of alignment with the *acquis* is enormous and may be much greater than the benefits of commercial integration (Del Sarto-Schumacher 2005).

Besides regulatory convergence in the field of trade (indeed a prerequisite for the creation of the FTA), partners are asked to comply with other regulatory and institutional rules that, differently from candidate countries, are not justified nor exchanged within the perspective of accession to the EU (Barbé *et al.* 2009).

Partner countries do not only express a generic commitment toward democratization. The Barcelona Declaration includes commitments toward the creation of an "environment conducive to [foreign] investments", the empowering of civil society, political and administrative decentralization, "the promotion of the role of women in development", etc.

The strategy, however, is aimed at institutional convergence as well as at discursive isomorphism: it is constituted by 'soft power' and political imaginations rather than perspectives for 'hard' reforms (Bialasiewicz 2008). It is a postcolonial, rather than a neo-colonial, strategy.

We may distinguish between what could be defined as "hard" Europeanization – the promotion of political and economic reforms in the partner countries – and "soft" Europeanization: the diffusion of specific practices, ways of doing and thinking which are imposed to those actors, in the partner countries, which are more directly involved in Euro-Mediterranean policies: as Jones and Clark put it, it is "the microgeographies of everyday worked life of specific actors (…) which determine the (re-)production of Europeanization" (2008b, 309).

Although the EU has been unable to promote any kind of political reform in the partner countries, beyond some regulatory convergence, they have otherwise succeeded in 'framing' Euro-Mediterranean relations according to

a particular discourse on what those relations should look like and how they should evolve in the future.

This is not to say that Europeanization does not encounter contestations and opposition from partner countries or from specific actors/institutions within those countries which repeatedly denounced the hegemonic and Eurocentric character of Euro-Mediterranean politics. Most of the ruling elites in Southern Mediterranean countries have been increasingly sceptical with respect to the EMP as they fear that 'soft' integration may generate spill-overs that undermine their power status (Del Sarto-Schumacher 2005, 35).

The result of such a controversial strategy may be defined as "selective Europeanization": it succeeds mostly among those actors and social groups that are more directly affected by European policies as they are beneficiaries of EU funding, participate in the Euro-Mediterranean policy community or think they could be empowered by the Europeanization of their political system. Several actors and agencies, moreover, are directly created within the partner countries to implement Euro-Mediterranean policies; like modern-day missionaries, these actors may be regarded as predicators of the 'logos' of Europeanization.

Euro-Mediterranean policies, and Europeanization more generally, are therefore not unitary but fragmented and heterogeneous processes that distinguish between different actors, different policy domains, in order to adopt a strategy of simultaneous inclusion/exclusion, openness/closure, cooperation/control (Berg-Ehin 2006, Walters 2006). Europeanization is, moreover, a contested process opposed by some local actors while appropriated by others, in order to be adapted to their specific interests and goals.

Also within Europe, strategies toward the Mediterranean are not unitary but ridden with conflicts between different geopolitical priorities and different models of action. The making of the Euro-Mediterranean region, in this frame, "has become one of the critical ways in which the EU seeks to define itself as much as order its relations with the outside world" (Jones 2006, 420). Struggles over the conceptualization of the Mediterranean 'other', are indeed struggles over the European 'self'. Regionalization in the Mediterranean is just one of the pluralities of rescaling processes on which the same perspective for further integration within the EU are based.

One of the primary issues that needs to be addressed in the EU's strategies toward its external partners is the need to mediate between the role of the EU vis-à-vis the role of member States in foreign politics. Since the 1950s, the Mediterranean has been the first and most important test for the EU's ability to speak with a single voice toward its external partners (Amoroso 2007, 502). The belief that a Mediterranean region can be 'made', in this frame, is the belief that the European region is already in the making and a legitimization for the EU's increasing role in the international arena. This can also be regarded as a form of Europeanization: "a discourse

production which renders logical and legitimate European interventions in the Mediterranean" (Jones-Clark 2008a, 567).

If the 'making' of the Mediterranean is the 'making' of Europe, the limits of the former are limits to the latter. As we don't know how Europe itself will evolve in the future, we cannot say how Euro-Mediterranean relations will look at the end of both the global economic recession and after the Arab revolutions. At the moment, it may be possible that Mediterranean politics will flourish again with concrete perspectives for the constitution of the Mediterranean as "an area of peace, stability and prosperity", or they will continue their "slow and tortuous agonía" (Kausch-Youngs 2009, 963). In both cases, it is worth searching for the "alternative modernities" that the Mediterranean may suggest (Giaccaria-Minca 2011), to go beyond the one proposed so far.

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