

Panel 01: Troubled borders and new orders: The impact of altered border dynamics on the international relations of the MENA region

Thursday 17, 11-13, Auditorium Giancarlo De Carlo

Convenor: **Raffaella A. Del Sarto** (European University Institute/Johns Hopkins University SAIS Europe)

Discussant: **Arturo Marzano** (Università di Pisa)

Following the recent upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), many territorial borders in the region are under pressure, and the relationship between the MENA region and its neighbours are in turn affected. While borders in much of the MENA region were never hermetic frontiers, this panel explores how the many challenges to national sovereignty, and subsequently to existing state-society relations, have impacted relations in the wider Euro-Mediterranean area. Observing how insecurities along domestic borders have implications for inter-state and inter-regional relations, and for the power of national elites, the papers in this panel seek to unpack how border challenges impact on the relationship between domestic actors, and between domestic actors and their neighbours. The papers thus seek to conceptualize the changing relationship between borders and power in the MENA region – whether at the domestic level, or in foreign policy – in order to better understand how territory, borders, authority and regionalism are interlinked in the wider Mediterranean region.

Paper givers:

- 1) **Raffaella A. Del Sarto** (European University Institute/Johns Hopkins University SAIS Europe), *Borders in the Middle East and North Africa: Context and Concepts*

In light of the current transformation process in the Middle East and North Africa, exploring the altered nature and function of borders in a comprehensive and theory-informed manner, together with their domestic, regional, and international implications, is long overdue. As a starting point to such an endeavour, this paper provides a historical context to the problem of contested borders in the Middle East and North Africa. It revisits the key political developments that have affected the configuration of state authority, legitimacy, and territoriality since the formation of the modern state system in the Middle East until today. Based on this discussion, and considering current developments, the paper subsequently addresses the question of whether prevailing conceptualisations of the state and its borders are adequate to understand past and present developments in the region. It concludes by suggesting a number of alternative concepts.

- 2) **Mohamed Limam** (Collège Méditerranéen pour la Recherche Scientifique, Tunis), *The EU and democracy promotion: Insights from the troubled southern border*

Prior to the uprising of 2011 in the EU's southern neighbourhood, the discrepancy between the EU's narrative on democracy promotion and its realpolitik has been noticeable.

However, the new political context after 2011 provides the EU with an unprecedented opportunity to rectify this gap. In its communication of 2011 (COM(2011)200), the EU made its *Mea Culpa* and claimed to outline a new Framework for EU Democracy promotion and assistance. This paper aims to show that the EU however, has failed to move significantly away from a “doing business as usual” perspective. Based mainly on the case of Tunisia, this paper evidences, first, that the EU’s cooperation policy remains an “interest driven approach” with an ostensible strategic use of EU’s norms. The Mobility Partnership concluded with Tunisia (and with Morocco as well) is of a particular relevance for this purpose. Second, the paper demonstrates that the EU’s policy still derives from a top-down approach based on a unilateral norms transfer approach. Despite a de façade concerted and participatory approach, the EU is still behaving as a “democracy promotion instructor”, in conformity with its self-perception as a ‘normative power’. Third, the paper argues that the EU is, even more than before, perceived as a “split identity instructor”. Indeed, the misleading opinion of the Venice commission on the Tunisian’s Constitution draft of 2013, and the disregard shown by the EU regarding corruption and nepotism’s allegations related to EU’s democracy promotion programmes, has led to significantly discrediting the EU’s values, central to its alleged “normative identity”.

3) **Asli Okyay** (European University Institute), *Change in the nature and management of the Turkish-Syrian border and its implications for domestic politics*

This paper examines how the Arab upheavals and the Syrian crisis impacted Turkey’s approach to its Syrian border and analyses the implications of the altering nature and management of the border for domestic politics. The impact of the transition process on Turkey’s regional foreign policy and the state’s changing security concerns in the face of the empowerment of non-state actors across the border were crucial in reconfiguring policies and politics of the border. The objections of various societal and political groups to what they perceive as the selective (im)permeability of the border reflected already existing identity boundaries demarcating the population and reinforced contention around ethno-sectarian fault-lines. The resonance of the altered nature and management of the Turkish-Syrian border in domestic politics makes visible the incongruity of identity boundaries and territorial borders. It also highlights how such incongruity might further complicate the relationship between state authority, territorial sovereignty, and popular sovereignty.

4) **Jean-Pierre Cassarino** (Institut de Recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain, Tunis), *Border mobility and Power in Tunisia before and after 2011*

The adoption of Tunisian Law 2004-6 by the then Ben Ali administration was officially aimed at tackling irregular border-crossing. It was also adopted to respond (in appearance) to pressures exerted by the EU and its Member States. Today, more than ten years after its adoption, there is ample evidence that its use and implementation by the Tunisian judiciary and executive powers allowed the former regime to reinforce its own monitoring and control over society. In other words, external transfers were readjusted by the former regime in order to buttress its own regulatory and disciplinary functions on Tunisian society at large.

Following the 2011 uprisings, irregular border-crossing continues to be sanctioned in accordance with Law 2004-6 despite local CSOs' recurrent calls for its abrogation. While taking stock of the theoretically informed IR literature on policy transfers and the diffusion of norms and values as well as their internalization and re-appropriation by recipient countries, this paper sets out to address the resilience of Law 2004-6 by investigating and comparing its past with its current rationale, at domestic and international levels.

- 5) **Simone Tholens** (European University Institute/Cardiff University), *Hybrid (b)orders in the Euro-Mediterranean relationship: Practices of contestation and the 'Normative Powers' of the Neighborhood*

This article approaches the study of how power is generated in EU external relations with a focus on practices and the way these form a 'hybrid order' of interactions. In the EU's relationship with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) the discrepancy between rhetoric and practice is particularly salient: despite the EU's de facto insistence on extending the framework of rule export relations are here dramatically different from those on a path to formal EU membership. In order to scrutinize how power is generated in the densely institutionalised EU-MENA context, the article develops a tripartite 'hybrid order framework': first, it conceptualizes EU policies towards the MENA region as practices seeking to claim competence in specific policy areas; second, it tackles MENA countries' contestation practices vis-à-vis these policies; and third, it describes the assemblage of formal and informal practices as making up a 'hybrid order', where practices partly confirm EU attempts at claiming competence but partly also contest these. Empirically, the article sketches the situation of hybridity in the EU 'Borderlands' in the MENA region, before providing a micro analysis of the interaction practices during 2011-2014 which sought to establish a typically EU type 'Energy Community' with the region. It concludes by reflecting on how the 'normative powers' of the 'Neighbourhood' are significant, diverse, and effectively influencing the order of things.