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EU and the Mediterranean Bazaar: Mediterranean Competition and Multiplication of Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation Initiatives*

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Abstract

EU has developed a plethora of initiatives to deal with the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. From Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the so-called Barcelona Process to European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), different regional programs have been implemented in the Mediterranean region. The diversity and increasing number of countries involved have led to a feel of Mediterranean bazaar with diverging directions. Thus, one question appears to remain unanswered: In what ways have ideational foundations affected the EU initiatives in the Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea? The research hypothesis states that differences in ideational foundations of the Mediterranean powers, namely, France, Italy and Spain, in moments of crisis have led to the multiplication of initiatives and brought in at times conflicting arrangements between the north and the south of the Mediterranean Sea. The research question was answered under the Constructivist Institutionalism using the qualitative methodology of content analysis. Research findings reveal that when confronted with moments of self-doubt (crisis), each of the Mediterranean powers has effectuated an institutional change according to its established ideas and cognitive filters.

Keywords: Barcelona Process, EU, Euro-Mediterranean, France, Identity, Italy, Spain

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1. Introduction

EU-Mediterranean ties have been deepening by a plethora of initiatives, from Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) or the so-called Barcelona Process, to European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). Despite the fact that the number of initiatives and involved countries have increased substantially, there seems to be no clear guiding framework underpinning the relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea. While the Barcelona Process is founded upon multilateralism, the UfM rather supports bilateralism, and ENP mostly replicates the EU approach toward Central and Eastern European countries in the Mediterranean region. Thus, such diverging approaches to the Mediterranean region bring the unintended consequence of a feel of Mediterranean bazaar or driver-less car heading to nowhere. The main research question is as follows: In what ways have ideational foundations affected the EU initiatives in the Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea? The research hypothesis states that differences in the ideational foundations of the Mediterranean powers, namely, France, Italy and Spain, in moments of crisis have led to the multiplication of initiatives and caused conflicting arrangements between the north and the south of the Mediterranean Sea. While some studies highlight the role of exogenous factors, from the fall of communism to the US role, this study focuses on endogenous factors capable of explaining the twist and turn in the development of Euro-Mediterranean relations. In order to investigate the Euro-Mediterranean relations, a qualitative methodology was chosen and the theoretical framework drew on Hay's constructivist institutionalism.

2. Literature Review

An expanding body of academic literature has focused on France, the wider EU role in the immediate neighborhood of the Mediterranean Sea. Topics such as Franco-Italian rivalry in the region, EU's approach to the region through the Barcelona process and EU's neoliberal approach to the region are among the most investigated ones. In ““Competing Missions”: France, Italy, and the Rise of American Hegemony in the Mediterranean”, Alessandro Brogi investigates the oft-overlooked triangular interplay between the United States and its two main Mediterranean allies, France and Italy in 50s and 60s, as well as their ideational differences; the results reveal that French and Italian rivalry was reflected in diverging notions on the very nature and development of the Western alliance under U.S. hegemony and the decolonization, and that the debate on decolonization and European integration reignited issues of national prestige, national identity, and self-assigned missions (Brogi, 2006). In “the Barcelona Process, the role of the European Union and the lesson of the Western Mediterranean”, Attina investigates the ontology of the Barcelona Process and argues that southern EU states (especially France, Italy and Spain) brought the idea of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as a reaction to the exclusive attention of Germany and other northern European countries to the Central and Eastern Europe and the exclusive direction of the nascent EU foreign policy towards the East at the expense of the South underpinned by programs (such as PHARE) and the pre-accession strategy of the Central and East European Countries. He concludes that the expectations of greater economic and political integration with the Maghreb area (western Mediterranean region), reinforced by the idea that western Mediterranean states in the South are more modern and receptive to

EU values were not fructified and the regional integration programs such as Arab Maghreb Union are rather stalled (Attinà, 2004).

In “Populism and Euro-Mediterranean cooperation: The Barcelona process 25 years after”, the role of populism in shaping the relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea is investigated by analyzing the landscape of the political contestation of Mediterranean cooperation in Europe, focusing on France, Italy and Spain as well as the Visegrad 4 states that have become veto players in Mediterranean affairs. The article concludes that the ideologies shape the main thrust for the populist treatment of the Mediterranean issue by shaping the agenda on migration; while the impact of right-wing populism overweighs that of its left-wing counterpart, and it varies across Europe with regional populism predominant in Spain and market-liberal populism overall in decline and regional populism is mainly an issue only in Spain (Woertz, 2022). In “Adapting to French ‘Leadership’? Spain's Role in the Union for the Mediterranean”, Gillespie (2012) analyzes the role of Spain in the Union for Mediterranean (UfM). It is argued that despite expectations that Spain will be less than enthusiastic about President Sarkozy’s Mediterranean initiative of 2007–08, not only Franco–Spanish rivalry did not come to the fore, but acceptance, adaptation and eventual support became the Spanish response, which guaranteed Spain a visible, though not substantial, role in UfM. The article highlights the way in which Spain began to adapt to a quite supportive role for UfM, while maintaining Spanish influence and ensuring that the unilateral French initiative does not cause lasting damage to the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (Gillespie, 2012).

In “The Eastern Partnership, the Union for the Mediterranean and the remaining need to do something with the ENP”, Kochenov

investigates the main drawbacks of the ENP and considers whether the ‘Eastern Partnership’ and the ‘Union for the Mediterranean’ initiatives could remedy the key deficiencies of the policy. The paper concludes that instead of targeting the main drawbacks of the policy, new initiatives are built on the ENP’s questionable core, i.e. the practice of conditionality, the grouping together of countries with little in common between them, and the lack of real incentives for the EU’s neighborhood partners such as accession, and over-reliance on EU values, which only increases the complexity of the EU relations with its southern neighbors (Kochenov, 2009).

While the review of the literature indicates that the Euro-Mediterranean initiatives have been broadly assessed from an EU policy perspective, there is a clear gap with regard to the role of European Mediterranean powers in creating and shaping such initiatives. Therefore, we believe that our study will bridge the gap, shedding light on the manner through which the European Mediterranean powers effectively shape the Euro-Mediterranean initiatives through their own ideational foundations at times of crises.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In order to capture the change in EU institutions with regard to the Mediterranean region, we will draw on Constructivist Institutionalism (CI) and the view that institutions are ‘built upon ideational foundations which exert an independent path-dependent effect on their subsequent development’ (Hay, 2008, p. 65). In other words, such approach stresses the significance of ideas, likened to policy paradigms and cognitive filters in leading to a periodization of institutional formation and change. Constructivist

institutionalists thereby give space to the inevitable role of distinctive national traditions and cultures of political economy in the formation of institutions, which in turn shape the behavior of state actors. The relations between institutions (including economic ones) and cultures are mutual since institutions also perpetuate a particular understanding of political economy. In a way, it transcends both calculus and normative logics. The latter relates to the appropriateness of actions according to the norms, and the former the pure material interests. CI puts the emphasis on the *perceived interests* for a strategic actor with normative orientation; In other words, actors act according to “a reflection of particular perceptions of their material interests” (Hay, 2008, p. 64). Importantly, political agents are both objects and subjects, as they act strategically under situations of uncertainty and established ideational framework, while capable of innovating and path-breaking under normative (such as political, ethical and moral) orientations. Although institutions can shape and constrain political strategies, they themselves derive their essence (conscious or unintended) from deliberate political strategies of political conflict and choice. The institutional setting and perceptions of such circumstances and agent’s stake in various conceivable determine the behavior of political actors (Hay, 2008, p. 63). This means institutions provide a policy paradigm; however, the changes in the paradigm, or the path-shaping itself depend on the strategic actors who, in situations of uncertainty, have their interests actionable only through ideas. The latter, then, plays an important role in understanding the conditions of existence of significant path-shaping institutional change, such as the moment of crisis.

Crisis is conceptualized as moments of doubts regarding actors’ perceptions of their own self-interest. Consequently, the resolution

of such doubts leads to the restoration of the so-called “normal” conditions, in which actors’ interests are once again made transparent to them. Simply put, crises bring about the ground for intense ideational contestation, where agents compete with one another to propose compelling and convincing arguments for the reforms appropriate to the resolution of the crisis (Hay, 2008). The overall concepts of CI are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Concepts of CI and Institutional Change in Moments of Crisis

Moments of Crisis	Political Actors as Strategic Actors	The Resolution of Crisis
as moments of doubts regarding actors’ perceptions of their own self-interest	the perceived interests	Institutional innovation
	the restoration of the so-called “normal” conditions (established ideational framework)	
	Institutional change	

Source: Authors’ Elaborations on Hay, 2008

As shown in Table 1, we will search for moments of crisis when political actors are confronted with doubts regarding their perceived interests. Then, we analyze the path-shaping changes according to the ideational foundations of the Mediterranean powers. In other words, we trace the link between moments of crisis to institutional innovation in the Euro-Mediterranean space under the influence of and supported by main cognitive and established ideas of strategic actors. Since we are to investigate the change in institutional setting and multiplication of institutional innovations in the Euro-Mediterranean relations, the CI is deemed

to be the most pertinent to the realization of our goal. Therefore, through the application of CI, we trace the institutional innovation for each Euro-Mediterranean initiative by looking into both main European Mediterranean power's ideational foundations as well as the type of institutional crisis that such innovation is intended to resolve.

This study is a qualitative research in both its research objectives as well as its research method. Considering the adopted theoretical framework, it was important to have an in-depth content analysis of speeches delivered by government officials and heads of states in order to shed light on the way in which ideational foundations affect the institutional architecture in the EU-Mediterranean relations. Thus, speeches made by French, Spanish and Italian officials were analyzed and categorized according to the Constructivist Institutionalism.

4. Mediterranean Political Economy and Euro-Mediterranean Relations

Dirigisme culture is an important tradition of political economy not only in France, but also in other Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Spain. In the French case, although undergone changes to post-dirigisme under the EU liberalism, it still retains important features such as state-interventionism and public and private elite penetration. Civilizing mission and national prestige are still present in France as cognitive filters in the country's relations with the global South and Africa in particular.

In Italy, the notion of *Trasformismo* operates at both domestic and international levels. It is like an umbrella concept with numerous definitions and, as a consequence, numerous referents in

terms of politicians. It is the ‘chameleon-like ability to reinvent and present themselves anew to voters’, i.e. particular ability at changing opinions and affiliations (Valbruzzi, 2014, p. 171). By its opponents, it is an Italian concept for *immobilismo* (immobilism and passivity), reminiscent of practical work of ordinary politics, and day-to-day business. By its supporters, it reflects the art of unifying, such as the unification of Italy.

In Spain, following the generation of 98, a return to and rediscovery of the peninsula was the fertile ground for the tradition of *Europeidad* (Europeanization), i.e. believing in its moral superiority, Spain is anchored in and universalized through Europe (De Michelena, 2007, p. 197). *Europeidad* was further backed by the “meridional tradition” or the “African links” of the South (Beyme, 2013, p. 67). Therefore, EU policies in the Mediterranean region pass through cognitive filters of the main actors, the Mediterranean powers, with a peculiar combination of statist and dirigist (Mediterranean) political economy, as well as cultural traits of the initiator. Our theoretical framework and its relation to Mediterranean politics are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Cognitive Filters and the EU-Mediterranean Relations

CI	Italy	France	Spain
Cognitive Filters (Established Ideational Framework)	Trasformismo-Statism and regionalism	Post-dirigism and mission civilisatrice	Europeidad-Statism
Institutional Innovation	Support for EU-led institutions; Italy-led institutions in energy domain; UfM	French-led UfM; Expanding ENP to SEMCs	Barcelona Process

Source: Authors

Internal negotiations in the Council and European Council over the proposals, pushed by the Commission and endorsed by the EU parliament forms the final policy outcomes. However, there is a visible South-North divide in these negotiations, exacerbated by differing political economies: the Export-led growth model of the north and Germany in particular vs. the Consumption growth model in the South. France, in particular, is characterized by a post-dirigist political economy, where the government is a strong stakeholder in significant national economic champions and there is a public and private elite penetration. Considering the heavy investments by Southern EU members in the Mediterranean partner countries, it is only natural that Southern EU states seek to create favorable conditions for their companies operating in the region. This, coupled with the cultural issue in the guise of “non-dits” (the unspoken issues), tick the balance of Mediterranean policy-making in favor of the EU Southern members, France, Spain and Italy in particular; the so-called “non-dits” comprise a set of taboos or unwritten cultural norms or red-lines for each, country, things that are reserved to a set of countries whose legitimacy is barely questioned and are simply taken for granted (Huerta, 2016, pp. 107-108). All in all, policy-making on the Mediterranean issues in the EU can be seen as a legitimate area of interest of EU littoral powers such as France, Spain and Italy with strong cultural, historical connections to the Mediterranean Sea. This is further epitomized by Mediterranean cooperation measures being initiated mostly by the EU Southern members, France and Spain in particular.

4.1. Spain in the EU and Middle East Peace Process Leading to Barcelona Process

Displaying a region-building approach to Euro-Mediterranean

security, the Barcelona Process was inspired by the positive developments in the Middle East peace process of the early 1990s, and designed to foster regional integration and cooperation. Spain, in particular, played a crucial role in pushing a multilateral and even integrative process with the Southern Mediterranean region. For Spain in the EU, after a decade of membership, was absent from the Middle East peace process initiated by the US. Not only did it mean that the EU was losing the ground in its own neighborhood, it also meant that Spain's integration in the EU did not enhance the role Spain aspired to play in its backyard. Thus, Spain decided to secure an important role for herself in the EU. In fact, Spain's Prime Minister, Felipe Gonzalez, clarified in the parliament: "for the Spanish Government this [Mediterranean policy] was a priority objective. ... Government's priority to develop a Mediterranean policy at European level that results in greater security for all the inhabitants of the region". Furthermore, he emphasized that "a Euro-Mediterranean policy as a priority for the Union, and not only for the countries of Europe bordering the Mediterranean, is one of our greatest ambitions for this semester" (The Virtual Centre for Knowledge on Europe, 2008, p. 43). Furthermore, Gonzalez discussed the wider agricultural policy of Spain, in which protecting Spanish farmers in the face of competition from Southern Mediterranean region was one of his priorities (The Virtual Centre for Knowledge on Europe, 2008, p. 47). Thus, what Spain vehemently sought was an EU-wide initiative, not limited to the littoral states. The Spanish agenda was led by its tradition of "*Europeidad*," in which Spain tries to expand its capacities, using its position that is anchored in Europe. In other words, Spain follows the EU integration and Europeanization, asserting a "European Spain" in the Mediterranean region and not a "Mediterranean Spain" in Europe. Overall, Spain remains a

significant actor in Euro-Mediterranean relations and, as an advocate for ‘more Europe’ among the southern European states; thus it reinforces and expands the already established multilateral framework of the EU to the Mediterranean region (De Michelena, 2007, p. 197). Spain’s African link, referred to the idea that the Spanish people have African roots, would naturally underpin the legitimacy of Spain to expand EU’s multilateral framework to the Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It is to note that the overall EU policy faced considerable challenges in the 90s with the enlargement prospect of the EU to Central and Eastern Europe as well as the crisis in the Balkan. Thus, these crises provided the ground fertile for moments of doubts regarding Southern European states’ perceptions of their own self-interests. As a result, Spain after having secured the funding for the Euro-Mediterranean project in Cannes European Council pushed for a Mediterranean policy influenced by its own cognitive filters (see Table 3).

Table 3. Barcelona Process and Spain’s Guiding Principles

Moment of Crisis	Spain in the EU; Middle East Peace Process
Cognitive Filters	Europeidad; Europeanization (European Spain); African Link (bridge between Africa and Europe)
Institutional Innovation	Barcelona Process; EU-wide Mediterranean Project; multilateralism; negative conditionality; Facilitating the EU funds for the Southern Mediterranean States

Source: Authors’ Adaptation of the Virtual Centre for Knowledge on Europe, 2008

The Barcelona Declaration of November 1995—along with its political and economic liberalization policies for the Southern Mediterranean countries—was an important change in relations

between the countries around the Mediterranean Sea. The expectations of the Barcelona Process were to lift the economic performance of the southern Mediterranean countries in terms of productivity, investment, job creation and overall prosperity through policies of internal and external economic liberalization. According to the wishes of its architects, the partnership between the European Union (EU) and the southern Mediterranean countries, as expressed in the Barcelona Declaration of November 1995, was intended to increase the perception of ownership in political and economic terms through framing the Mediterranean sea as *Mare Nostrum* (our sea), while advocating the creation of as an area of “peace, stability and prosperity” (Winter, 2020). The measures in the three chapters of the declaration, earmarked a range of policy goals from political and strategic issues to economic and financial co-operation, and to social, cultural and human affairs. Political dialogue, the pillar of the political chapter is to be informed by a host of references to 'human rights', 'fundamental freedoms', 'diversity and pluralism', the 'rule of law' and 'democracy'. However, the declaration also refers to principles and objectives that would enable the EU to support the status quo and the existing regimes against the opposition, such as respect for the 'sovereign equality of states', the 'right of each of them to choose and freely develop its own political, socio-cultural, economic and judicial system' and the fight against 'terrorism' (Kienle, 1998). More importantly, the association agreements with Morocco and Tunisia, the two most liberal nations on the Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, barely hint at democratic principles and human rights.

4.2. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)

In 2004, the relations between the southern and Northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea were subject to another layer of the EU policy-making, i.e. the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The declared aim of the ENP is ‘to share the benefits of the EU’s 2004 enlargement with neighboring countries in strengthening stability, security, and well-being’ (European Neighbourhood Policy, 2023). The Commission stresses that the ENP is designed to prevent the emergence of “new dividing lines” between the enlarged EU and its neighbors’, while offering them the ‘chance to participate in various EU activities’, through greater political, security, economic and cultural cooperation (European Neighbourhood Policy, 2023). It was suggested by EU commission that the ENP is complementary and compatible with the Barcelona Process. However, it is argued that the ENP has introduced differentiated bilateralism (Del Sarto & Schumacher, 2005). Largely built on the model of the EU integration process, the experience of European integration in the Central and Eastern Europe had shown the EU the difficulty to treat a whole diverse region as composition of similar units (Sasse, 2008). Consequently, treating the countries individually, the ENP offers to upgrade relations to those neighbors that are at a more advanced political and economic stage of development or the ones that are more on board with reform agenda of the EU, showing commitment to undertake serious political and economic reforms. Second, the transition from the EMP to the ENP transformed the conditionality principle. Barcelona Process was largely built on the ‘negative conditionality’, i.e. suspending agreement with respective partner state violating the fundamental freedoms such as human rights, although never really applied; the ENP, pushed by Mediterranean

powers such as France, was explicitly based on the principle of positive conditionality (Del Sarto & Schumacher, 2005). One of the main reasons never the suspension clause of the Barcelona Process effectively triggered is the nature of trade relationship between Southern Mediterranean countries such as France, Italy and Spain with the SEMCs. In fact, many Southern European Multi-national enterprises (MNEs), energy giants such as Total Energies and ENI are lobbying for increasing relations with SEMCs in the decision-making process at the EU level. In fact, even before the ENP being formulated at the EU level, the then president of France, Jacques Chirac, on his visit to Morocco hinted at a neighborhood policy and Mediterranean policy, saying that our countries are engaged with determination “a la construction d'un espace euro-méditerranéen de sécurité et de prospérité”¹ or when he highlighted that more than half of foreign investment in Morocco is of French origin (Chirac, 2003a). Even in his historic visit to Algeria, the first after Algeria's independence, he declared that France will ensure that “the EU in the process of enlargement, offers Algeria and its partners in the Maghreb and the Mediterranean “an ever closer relationship” and that we believe in “l'intégration régionale, aux solidarités de voisinage”² (Chirac, 2003b). Such enthusiasm from Italian and French business leaders is tightly linked to the political risk factor in the Foreign Direct Investment flows as well as business deals from southern European countries to North Africa as a developing region. Southern European MNEs have gained negotiating skills from their experience with their own, which help them maneuver in a region with significant political risk (Jiménez, 2011). They set out a preferential bias toward a region with political risk, where they

1. In English: to construct a Euro-Mediterranean space of security and prosperity

2. In English: regional integration and neighborhood solidarity

succeed to secure competitive advantages over their competitors due to their negotiating skills and the ease with which they can benefit from corrupt systems. Many studies point to evidence that Southern European MNEs are prepared to undergo political risk in exchange for advantages of physical and cultural proximity and that the political capabilities allow MNEs to attain competitive edge over their competitors; co-optation of and friendly relations with local governments due to fragile political stability and bureaucratic inefficiency is an effective means to establish presence in the region (Jiménez, 2011). The problem that ENP tried to answer was related to the lack of incentive under the Barcelona Process. Considering that EMP was based on negative conditionality, the progress of Mediterranean partner states in policy convergence did not translate into additional funding. The ENP, on the other hand, follows the positive conditionality for EU policies and relies on benchmarking approach, Commission progress reports, and peer review, which result in a mechanism whereby only those states who are advancing in incorporating EU's political and economic values will gain the most from the ENP (ENP-South – European, 2023).

4.3. Big Bang Expansion of the EU to the Eastern Europe Leading to the Union for Mediterranean

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was launched in 2008 and reunited all EU Member States, the 10 Southern Neighborhood partners, as well as Turkey, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Mauritania (Delimatsis, 2021). Due to strong ties between German businesses and Germany's experience of east policy (Ost-Politic), any significant enlargement to the Eastern Europe could mean a stronger German influence in the EU. With

the prospect of a big bang enlargement of the EU becoming more serious, thus the increase in political weight of Germany in the EU more imminent, France perceived the future enlargement as the moment of crisis. Therefore, the restoration of the so-called “normal” conditions in which French interests are once again made transparent to them was the main impetus under which Nicolas Sarkozy announced his project in June 2007 during his presidential election campaign speech.

Details indicated that the framework of the ‘Union de la méditerranée’ would resemble that of the early European Economic Community, and crucially only the EU members bordering the Mediterranean would be included (Cardwell, 2011, p. 229). The root of French interest in the Mediterranean region beyond the obvious proximity and economic interest is also tied to French nationalism, drawing from Rousseau’s notion of collective personality and active participation. In other words, French nationalism is deeply intertwined with the development of citizenship; this kind of nationalism has resulted in 1) a constant effort to link citizens and state, thus turning prestige into a catalyst for consensus; and 2) forced the political actors to keep up with the abstract idea of national unity (Brogi, 2006). Having a unifying cause, such as the return to the Mediterranean politics, brings a sense of prestige and national unity in France, reminiscence of France’s grandeur. In fact, this democratic ethos traditionally reinforced France’s sense of entitlement and prestige for setting the pace for the rest of the world, including the domination of North Africa to make it in line with French enlightenment and *Mission Civilisatrice*. Such notion of civilization was evident when President Sarkozy, in his statement on the founding of the Union for the Mediterranean, highlighted that the peoples of the Mediterranean have so often torn each other apart, not because they

were too different, but because deep down they were too similar [semblable]” and that these peoples share “le même rêve de civilization [the same dream of civilization]” (Sarkozy, 2008). In a very subtle manner, however, the French President put the spotlight on Europe, and its experience as the role model for the South, echoing national prestige for French public opinion at home and the colonial superiority of French and Europeans over other peoples of the South when he declared “what we Europeans [nous les Européens] have been able to do, there is no reason why the peoples of the Mediterranean [peuples de la Méditerranée] should not succeed” (Sarkozy, 2008). As a result, the followings constructs are clearly highlighted by the French president: i) similarity between the peoples of the South and North of the Mediterranean Sea; ii) French and European success in the north as the role model for the south; iii) same civilization mission and dream; iv) differentiation between peoples of the Europe and peoples of the Mediterranean (Sea) (see Table 4).

Table 4. UfM and French Cognitive Filters

Concepts	Definition	Instances of Concepts
Moment of crisis	Big Bang Expansion of the EU to the Eastern Europe	Increase in German political clout in the EU
Cognitive Filters	Civilizing Mission National Prestige	European Peoples versus Mediterranean Peoples
	National Prestige	French success in European Peace
Institutionalization Innovation	co-presidency: president of the North versus president of the South	France as facilitator in the EU: Agenda Setting and Net Fund Donor; the South as Net Fund receiver
Political Economy	State-support and Dirigisme	Intergovernmental and Bilateralism; Positive Conditionality

Source: Authors

What we in fact witness is a reproduction of the Euro-Mediterranean relations through French cognitive filters of civilizing mission, national prestige, and European superiority and acting as a role model for the others. In fact, the emphasis on European and Mediterranean peoples is indicative of the old division of the civilized Europe and the barbaric rest of the world.

Furthermore, cognitive filters also affect the political economy of the new initiative. Considering the increasing focus on Eastern Europe by the EU, Sarkozy's interests for such initiative were mostly led by the French political economy of post-dirigisme, with public and private elite penetration. The interests of noteworthy French companies indexed in France's stock market index CAC40 for energy and consumption market in the SEMCs requires deeper direct and bilateral ties. Focusing on littoral states naturally excludes Germany, a potential rival for consumption goods in the South. In fact, there is a clear cleavage between multinational French companies indexed in CAC40, who enjoy state support and tax reduction for their foreign operations, and PME (SMEs in English) sector, which has less state support (Radio France International, 2012). Considering energy multinationals such as TotalEnergies, Sarkozy tried to form a Union in which through direct bilateral and intergovernmental framework, French companies can be protected from EU competition law in SEMCs, enjoying the influence of French state to win more favorable business deals. Such state patronage can be seen in Sarkozy's state visit to Syria, where the CEO of TotalEnergies was the only boss to have accompanied president Sarkozy, signing multiple gas and oil contracts (France 24, 2008). Even before the official proposition of Mediterranean Union, such use of state influence to gain contracts for major French companies was evident in another state visit by

Sarkozy to Algeria, in which TotalEnergies won 1.5 billion euros worth of contracts along with other CAC40 indexed companies, winning significant contracts (Créquy, 2007). Although German Chancellor was reportedly vehemently against the exclusion of Germany from the future Mediterranean cooperation framework, it was the EU and its competences that unmistakably set the terms regarding the future UfM and forced the Sarkozy government to pedal back and bring the new program in line with and a follow-up to the former Barcelona Process. Therefore, exclusive plans for the Mediterranean cooperation broke down since it would have been violating the EU's exclusive competences; the EU avails itself of the exclusive competences on the matters of EU internal market and any commercial agreements affecting the internal market would stop short of getting realized. On this occasion, the Commission opposed the Mediterranean Union publicly, and explicitly indicated that any economic union excluding EU Member States was unacceptable (Cardwell, 2011, p. 229). Although the UfM ended up being a repackaged version of EMP, there are several important changes in what constitutes 'the Mediterranean'.

After the establishment of the UfM, it is associated with the Southern Neighborhood of the ENP. As prescribed by the ENP, cooperation is undertaken not only through flexible, country-specific agreements, but also a regional cooperation framework, i.e. UfM. The "Mediterranean" therefore remains flexible according to the policy definitions of the EU, with policy frameworks and legal relations drawing on one or more of the following policies/frameworks: ENP, Western Balkans, ACP (Mauritania), enlargement and pre-enlargement (Albania) (Cardwell, 2011, p. 230). UfM is based on intergovernmentalism (which implies a process of *de-communitarisation*), based on co-ownership and

equality and concerning the concerted management of public goods (the environment, water, energy), specific structuring, visible and regional projects (civil protection, land and sea motorways) or shared ambitions (universities and research). These projects can be carried out on a voluntary basis within the framework of strengthened sub-regional cooperation (the notion of variable geometry) (Khader, 2009). The EU reinforces the Mediterranean cooperation by having ENP supplementing the earlier Euromed (EMP). Importantly, it is now the UfM (as the latest version of EuroMed) that remains the central structure of the system of governance in the Mediterranean with ENP playing a supporting role. UfM is further pushed by the preferred method of positive conditionality (cooperation and funds as incentive) among French and Italian diplomatic corps, as opposed to the negative conditionality (punishments for non-adherence) preferred by the German political culture (Huerta, 2016, pp. 107-108). In sum, while EuroMed in the form of EMP had a clear emphasis on promoting common norms and values, as well as bottom-up reforms, having been framed in terms of negative conditionality would add to the political risk for the Southern European companies, hence not a desirable framework for investment. The revised EuroMed under the UfM symbolizes a return to a more intergovernmental agenda, supported by a variable geometry concept in which cooperation among select MPs (Mediterranean Partners) on transferring and implementing EU policies would be rewarded with more market access.

When it comes to Italy, there is a clear *trasformismo* in the manner in which the then Italian Prime Minister –silvio Berlusconi– began touring the region, in particular Egypt, in order to promote Italian interests in bilateral as well as multilateral framework. Despite not bringing the desired outcomes, he did not

call the process as a “failure [*fallimento*]” and rather embarked on a bilateralism through state support for Energy giants such as ENI in Egypt and cultural cooperation with the South (Reuters, 2008). Cultural cooperation ranging from the return of archaeological finds to Italian expertise and help in the restoration of the Midan Tahrir museum (Cairo's museum of Egyptian antiquities), to the establishment of the Italian-Egyptian university were all in the direction of co-opting the UfM as one supported by Italy under the multilateral framework; on the other hand, engaging with the south in a bilateralism mode with cultural and civilizational undertones supported Italian enterprises active in the energy sector. Furthermore, contrary to French divisive, bipolar approach to the Euro-Mediterranean relations, Italy clearly defines herself as a “Mediterranean state”, seeking to establish good ties with the Arab world as the natural bridge between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea, as it is evident in the foreign ministry’s historical – diplomatic analysis, programming and documentation paper in which Italy is defined “as a great Mediterranean nation [*grande nazione mediterranea*], calling for cooperation between the two shores of our sea” (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2008, p. 19). In fact, then Italian foreign minister, Frattini, in the mentioned document highlights that:

on the eve of the launch of the Union of Mediterranean... we all understand how important the geographically projected role in the Mediterranean region that Italy naturally plays, namely that of a *real bridge between the West and the Middle Eastern and Balkan scene*... anchored to the *Western framework*, but, *at the same time*, has a natural role as a *geographical bridge* towards the Middle East (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2008, p. 25 [*emphasis ours*]).

Emphasizing the importance of having the Balkan as well as Turkey and Arab League in the UfM shows how Italy was playing both as a bridging role between Muslim and Christian world as well as EU-member states and non-EU European states. Furthermore, Italy made the presidency of G7 (G8 in 2008) a part of the Italian bridging role for Arab and Muslim countries in the South, in which the presence of Italian troops in Lebanon as part of the UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon) were highlighted as other layers of the UfM. In fact, it is Italy that credits herself with the idea of bringing in the Arab League, Turkey and the Balkan states in the UfM, as the then foreign minister Frattini clarifies that “Sarkozy's idea was brilliant, but now it has to be filled with content” (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2008, p. 100). The Italian conduct thus follows through the cognitive filters of *trasformismo* and Mediterranean political economy (*dirigisme*) (see Table 5).

Table 5. Italy's Role in the UfM

UfM	Definition	Instances of Concepts
Cognitive Filters (Established Ideas)	trasformismo	Changing the EU project and co-opting French initiative
	Bridge between the Muslim and Christian World; interreligious dialogue	Advocating for the addition of the Arab League and Turkey to UfM
Institutionalization	Changing the French Mediterranean Union under the EU project	Advocating for including UfM under ENP
Established Political Economy	State-led economy and support for energy enterprises; positive conditionality	Inter-governmental structure; bilateralism; union of projects

Source: Authors' Adaptation of Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2008

Therefore, Italy pursued the following goals: i) asserting herself as the bridge between the West and the Arab world; ii) claiming leadership in bringing Turkey and the Balkan states into the UfM; iii) complementing the French idea with content and pragmatism; iv) deepening relations with the Arab League and Muslim world. Overall, Italy has been driven by *transformismo* and its own statist political economy, in which giant energy enterprises such as ENI prepare the ground for foreign policy in the Mediterranean region.

5. Conclusion

This contribution looked at the different, sometimes divergent, Mediterranean initiatives the EU has undertaken since the Barcelona Process. The main research question was: In what ways have ideational foundations affected the EU initiatives in the Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea? The research hypothesis stated that differences in ideational foundations of the Mediterranean powers, namely, France, Italy and Spain, in moments of crisis have led into the multiplication of initiatives and brought in at times conflicting arrangements between the north and south of the Mediterranean Sea.

Research findings reveal that indeed particular cognitive filters affect the way in which the EU frames its relations with the Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, we showed how various moments of crisis have lead different Mediterranean powers to initiate a project for their southern neighborhood. Spain, a decade after joining the EU was not happy being absent from the peace process in the Middle East that was initiated and directed mainly by the US. Such a moment of crisis triggered the restoration of what was perceived by Spain as its normal role. Driven by

Europeidad, advocated an EU-wide relation with its immediate southern neighbors and called for EU funding and replicate of other EU policies in the Mediterranean region. In fact, Spain's Mediterranean policy was to highlight a European Spain advocating for cooperation with its Southern neighbors. On the other hand, a Mediterranean neighborhood policy was advocated by France, although it was nothing more than a Mediterranean hue to the EU neighborhood policy. However, the consequent big bang enlargement in 2004 faced Southern European powers such as France and Italy with doubts about their own self-interests, observing how Germany was benefitting from the Eastern enlargement. Therefore, Germany has become an influential actor in the Eastern Europe by shaping the economic and political landscape there. In front of such a lopsided German influence in the Eastern Europe, which effectively translated into a moment of crisis and self-doubt with regard to French identity and interests in the Mediterranean Sea, French president Sarkozy advocated for a different Mediterranean project. This time imbued in French sense of nationalism and civilizing mission and post-dirigist political economy, the Mediterranean project, dubbed UfM, faced an inter-governmental turn with bilateralism on the agenda. French civilizing mission came forth when the French president emphasized the existence of Mediterranean and European people, the latter being the possible role model for the former. Italy, on the other hand, informed by *trasformismo*, co-opted the French project, changing it by lobbying for the addition of the Arab League, Turkey and the Balkan states. In fact, Italy presents itself as the natural Mediterranean state and the bridge between the Muslim and the Western and Christian worlds. From the ongoing discussion, we can conclude that EU policies vis-à-vis Southern Mediterranean countries have not been very coherent, resulting in member states

taking initiatives based on their own ideational foundations. Furthermore, since such initiatives are introduced in the time of crisis, they lack a forward-looking spirit and an EU-wide perspective.

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