

DEFINING EUROPEAN INTERESTS IN FOREIGN POLICY: Insights from the Mediterranean Case

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Introduction

Why, how and when does an issue become a European interest and a European priority? Under what conditions does the EC/EU decide to launch a foreign policy initiative? When does a topic get on the EC/EU agenda of foreign affairs? A quick look at the EC/EU attitude towards the Mediterranean area¹ emphasises the relevance of this type of questions. The Mediterranean has been on and off the agenda. The EC launched its first Mediterranean initiative at the beginning of the 1970s. This period of activism, which quickly run out of steam, was followed by a long period of neglect of Euro-Mediterranean relations by the EC/EU. At the end of the Cold War, a second period of activism began, continuing until the adoption of the ambitious Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in 1995. Therefore, the EFP towards the Mediterranean underwent to periods of activism (two “ups”), which were preceded by long periods

¹ In principle, the area comprises the countries that border the Mediterranean and are not members of the EC/EU. For the period before the Southern enlargement (1956-1980), the Mediterranean non member countries were Spain, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan (for its links to the Arab-Israeli conflict), Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus, Malta and Greece. Libya never manifested an interest in the EC/EU. The Balkans, on the contrary, have generally been considered as belonging to the Eastern bloc. After the Southern enlargement (1981-86), Greece, Spain and Portugal became members, thus since then the expression Mediterranean non members does not include them any longer. Moreover, since the Oslo Agreements the EC/EU has allowed an increasing presence to the Palestinian Authority.

of disinterest (two “downs”) during which Euro-Mediterranean relations ranked very low in the priorities of the EC/EU.

Therefore, in this paper I would like to raise the question of how, when and why do ‘European interests’ emerge, to which I will offer an answer by using the insights provided by the Mediterranean case. The starting point is how to account for a changing pattern of decisions, especially on the part of member states. The substance of this paper thus lies in the attempt to map out how, when and why crucial actors in EFP making change their mind and decide that the Mediterranean is more important than previously maintained.

By addressing this question, I highlight a gap in the literature that I aim at filling. Traditional approaches to European integration polarise around two positions. The liberal intergovernmentalist perspective suggests that the emergence of European cooperation occurs as a consequence of the overlapping of predefined national preferences. The supranational/neofunctional approach, on the contrary, stresses the unintended transformation of member states’ interests and their convergence towards a common core. By making use of other contributions in the literature of Political Sciences I will aim at an intermediate position. I will analyse the relevance of a model based on the deconstruction of previous national interests and their reconstruction around a common European core thanks to the activity of a specific type of policy entrepreneur. In other words, my argument is that there is room for taking preferences seriously while at the same time taking stock of constructivist insights.

The paper is organised as follows. I will first review the main traditional positions among European integration approaches on the issue of interest formation, comparing them with alternative suggestions. I will then present what are in my opinion the relevant elements for understanding changes in EFP. I will illustrate how these hypotheses hold for the Mediterranean case.

European cooperation and the formation of preferences

The debate about European integration has explored several explanations for European cooperation, but it has not incorporated the whole debate about policy making and preference change at the national level. The definition of national interest has been such a classical topic that it almost looked exhausted, until the recent 'argumentative turn' in Political Science. On the contrary, the analysis of interest formation and preference change has not been a privileged focus of European integration theories. However, the arguments presented about European integration offer a basis (at times implicit) from which to draw some considerations about preferences too.

Two issues in European integration are particularly important here. The first refers to the basis for European cooperation. According to a liberal intergovernmental view, the existence of a 'European interest' lies in the occasional overlapping of preformed national preferences. Member states act in the name of national interest and pursue at the European level the goals that they cannot achieve at national level (Moravcsik 1998, Pijpers 1991). It is a merit of liberal intergovernmentalism, especially as formulated by Moravcsik, to have delved into the national mechanisms of preference formation (1997, 1999). His favourite variant, although not necessarily for EFP (1998, 478) links socio-economic interests of domestic actors to the preferences pursued by national governments in European integration. The supranational/neofunctional approach is less clear in its analysis of the origins of national interests' convergence on European cooperation, in spite of a longstanding focus on European cooperation (Haas 2001; Jørgensen 1997; Øhrgaard 1997; K.Smith 1999; M.Smith 1998). A strand is ready to stress the availability of member states to compromise on their national interests (K.Smith 1999). Others suggest instead a slow convergence through socialisation towards a set of norms and of common principles (*communauté de vue*) as a basis for common action (*communauté d'action*) (de Schoutheete 1986; Øhrgaard 1997).

Second, scholars then address the question of which actors are most relevant in bringing about a cooperative outcome. The intergovernmentalist answer is straightforward. Member states are the key policy entrepreneurs in European

cooperation. There is very little they can not provide in terms of brokering deals and crafting new normative structures (Moravcsik 1999). Scholars in the supranational/neofunctional vein stress instead two different type of mechanisms affecting the definition of a common European interest. Some suggest that the main engine is to be found in the activism of the Commission (e.g. K.Smith 1999), while others emphasise the socialisation among member states as the key factor (e.g. M.Smith 1998; Øhrgaard 1997).

These two perspectives tend to polarise around two opposite cases. The first depicts member states as fully in charge and strategically oriented. The formation of a European interest occurs as the overlapping of predefined national preferences and implies only problems of collective action. The second suggests that member states are malleable to supranational intervention and likely to suffer the unintended consequences of their action. What the two perspectives share is the fact that they describe a process beginning in a condition of well defined or, more generally, unproblematic national interests.

Contributions from other branches of Political Science than European integration theories suggest that the pattern can be more articulated than this. In particular, several scholars in various fields have emphasised the role of inadequacy and uncertainty. Large part of this debate is expressed in the analysis of ideas and the role they play in policy making. There is a consensus that previous positions should be questioned if a change in the definition of national interest is to follow (Legro 2000; Florini 1996; Checkel 2001). Change is likely whenever there is a ‘failure of norms,’ i.e. when “the previous way of doing things becomes virtually impossible” (Florini 1996, 378). The reigning extant consensus collapses, as collective expectations and collective experience of critical events do not match (Legro 2000, 424). Otherwise, actors experience a more general situation of uncertainty about a certain issue. The preference about an issue has not already crystallised, nor is it embedded in normative and institutional structures. Persuasion, and thus preference change, is more likely in the case of “novice agents with few cognitive priors” (Checkel 2001, 563). In various ways, part of the literature on policy making and preference changes emphasises the role of ‘crisis,’ be it due to mismatch between previous attitudes and empirical evidence or to new issues arriving onto the agenda of policy makers.

Therefore, contrary to much of European integration approaches, these approaches suggest that uncertainty and crises are a precondition for the reformulation of national interests and for the definition of new policy initiatives. Only if there is a deconstruction of previous policy stances, attitudes and preferences, then is it possible to reconstruct a different approach embodying a new set of preferences. Following this suggestion not yet fully reflected in debates about European integration, there is an argument for focusing on preference deconstruction before analysing interest convergence and interest formation.

Deconstructing and reconstructing preferences

Applying the above described insights to the specific case of EFP lies the ground for the definition of a more articulated model for the analysis of preference change in this field. The model I will sketch here is based on three intertwined processes. First, it will describe under what circumstances the deconstruction of national interests occurs and what does it entail. I will suggest that deconstruction of national interests in turn creates a situation of widespread uncertainty about what is the best course of action, i.e. a situation of cognitive uncertainty. Second, I will argue that the policy entrepreneur most likely to contribute to preference change in EFP is a member state. However, I will also specify that there are different types of motivations for policy entrepreneurship, and they have different consequences on the overall process. Third, I will address the process of interaction taking place between the policy entrepreneur and the other European actors under these conditions. I will suggest that the early stages focus on ‘naming and framing’ the issues at stake and on defining new preferences about them, while later on bargaining techniques prevail.

The first part of the overall process of EFP making occurs at the national level, when national preferences come to be questioned. This process of deconstruction of national interests is particularly relevant in the case in which member states display no intention to formulate a EFP initiative. According to traditional approaches, a ‘change of mind’ would occur only because of a change in economic demands (liberal intergovernmentalism) or because of member states’ capacity to compromise the name of the common good, or through a slow process of preference transformation

thanks to consecutive positive experiences of cooperation (supranationalism/neofunctionalism).

I suggest a different approach. In my view, national preferences can be questioned when a mix of novelty and uncertainty occurs. Such a situation takes place when a new issue is perceived to be rising on the scale from no-politicisation (an issue belongs to the private sphere) to high security (an issue is central to political debates, and it is presented as an existential threat). According to Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, any issue can be located on

‘the spectrum ranging from nonpoliticized (meaning the state does not deal with it and it is not in any other way made an issue of public debate and decision) through politicised (meaning the issue is part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations (...)) to securitized (meaning the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure).’ (1998, 23-24).

Therefore, generalising from this definition, an issue refers to politics, to security (i.e. politics about existential threats) or neither, according to the place it has in relation to the responsibilities of public authorities.² In the shifting architecture of public authority, the politicisation or securitisation of an issue entails the crossing of thresholds (from private sphere to public sphere, from ‘ordinary’ politics to security politics). When an issue previously belonging to the private or to ‘ordinary’ politics enters the public sphere and/or the security domain within it, then such a shift places new problems and new responsibilities onto the policy agenda of public authorities.

The main consequence of an issue’s politicisation or securitisation is to create a condition of cognitive uncertainty. Its key characteristic is that it expresses doubts about the type of situation public authorities are experiencing and about the course of action to be adopted. Policy makers strive to interpret the new phenomenon, while they weigh alternative policy responses. From an operational point of view, indicators

² On the private/public distinction, see among others Weintraub and Kumar (1997) and Cohen and Arato (1992).

of cognitive uncertainty must be indirect. Uncertainty is revealed by states' attempts to reconstruct certainty, rather than by a direct measure of their incapacities. Therefore, indicators include increases in the debate, consecutive changes in regulations and practices, new powers to old actors or creation of new agencies to tackle the new problem.

Therefore, my first hypothesis is that interest change (and the possibility of convergence towards a new common European definition of interest) occurs when national policy makers perceive new political and security challenges and thus experience cognitive uncertainty. Their first reaction will be to reconstruct preferences at the national level. However, if a majority of member states faces a similar situation of cognitive uncertainty in a certain field, then it is likely that they would be available to discuss the new phenomena at the EC/EU level. Moreover, traditional answer coming from the national arena have failed, for a real uncertainty to occur. In other terms, cognitive uncertainty is intertwined with an at least latent crisis in national identity.³ I argue that cognitive uncertainty thus engenders a passive availability to debate the new phenomenon at the European level as a complement to the national level. Were the new phenomena to be on the EC/EU agenda, states experiencing cognitive uncertainty about them would buy that agenda because it would complement the debate at the domestic level. It is thus the sharing of cognitive uncertainty across Europe that constitutes the first condition for interest reformulation.

The second process that is, in my opinion, crucial to the definition of new EFP preferences among member states refers to the specific actor that take pains to put the new issues on the EC/EU agenda, namely the policy entrepreneur. Once member states' national interests are deconstructed, the possibility of reconstructing them in a different format, converging on a European common core, exists. For this second stage to take place, though, a policy entrepreneur is needed. Passive availability to evaluate interpretations of new phenomena can not be expected to lead automatically

³ On the link between identity and foreign / security policy, see Katzenstein (1996).

to a process of active reformulation of national interests. Therefore, what is the actor most likely to take the lead in this direction and what are the reasons for it to do so?

While the debate about policy entrepreneurship seems to be exhausted by traditional approaches to European integration, I suggest that it is possible to refine the analysis of entrepreneurship by a member state. A state that acts as a policy entrepreneur at the EC/EU level can follow different logics.⁴ The first distinction refers to the degree of specificity of its aim. An entrepreneurial state can try to push a well defined national interest (and this is the way liberal intergovernmentalism would see its action). Alternatively, if its own national interest is defined in broad terms, it might provide new momentum to a debate without constraining the discussion to a definite proposal. The supranational/neofunctional perspective tends to focus on a specific instance of the latter type, namely on the adoption of an ‘altruistic’ behaviour by a member state in the name of common good. But the range of possibilities can be expanded.

A second distinction in types of national interests can refer to the nature of the aim a state pursues. Its national interest might reflect a predominantly material component. The reason for pushing in a certain direction might be increased financial returns on investments or more bargaining power in the negotiation of certain agreements (e.g. Moravcsik 1999). Alternatively, national interests can also display a symbolic and ideational component (e.g. Weldes 1996). In this case, the rationale of a state’s entrepreneurialism springs from changes in state identity not directly traceable back to material or geographic considerations (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein 1996, 60-61). While both the material and the symbolic component might be present, one of the two might outweigh the other.

Therefore, in an approximative simplification, we might have four different types of national interests motivating a member state to take up the costly task of policy entrepreneurship: broad or specific material interests, broad or specific symbolic interests. I hypothesise that broad symbolic interests represent the motivation of

⁴ The same goes for any type of actor behaving as a policy entrepreneur at the EC/EU level. I explore here the case of entrepreneurial states because of its more direct relevance for the Mediterranean case, but much of the same logics could be applied to the Commission’s entrepreneurial efforts or to the action of specific lobby groups.

entrepreneurship that is most conducive to the definition of a common EFP interest because of the room they allow for debate at the European level.

While this hypothesis is similar to the supranational/neofunctional one, I would like to suggest a case of broad symbolic interest that is devoid of altruistic connotations. In my view, international legitimation is a particularly important case for the formulation of EFP. The entrepreneurial state, having gone through a national identity change with deep foreign policy ramifications, aims at an external recognition of its international role and thus of the importance of the issue it has raised. It has an interest in promoting a common initiative because its adoption by fellow member states would entail a recognition of its role in world politics. Therefore, its action is inspired more by symbolic reasons than by material interests and represents a direct enactment of “identity politics” (Jepperson, Wendt, Katzenstein 1996, 61). The entrepreneurial state has an interest in ‘doing something’ and might also have a clearer vision about what can be done, without however promoting a specific option. If its own goal is international recognition, the entrepreneurial state indicates a direction for Europe’s role, but it does not specify the form nor the content of the initiative to be adopted.

Therefore, the difference between the entrepreneurial state and its fellow EC/EU companions lies in their active vs. passive attitude towards the new challenges originating from the Mediterranean at the EC/EU level. Entrepreneurs are willing “to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money – in hope of a future return” in terms of policy change (Kingdon 1995, 122). The other member states would not spend resources to spark a debate in the European arena, but they are ready to participate to it because it resonates with their own domestic concerns.

This perspective, while less elegant than the intergovernmental one, starts from similar premises to arrive to a different point of view. An entrepreneurial member state does act ‘strategically’ to innovate in a European policy area. But it is possible and likely that its strategy does not lead it very far if its national interest is not specific enough. There is, therefore, an instrumental component in the entrepreneurialism by a member state that is derived from its domestic politics. Its effect, however, is limited to triggering a wider process of interaction in which the initial proposal of the

entrepreneurial state is most likely to be changed, and through which national and European interests are defined.

The third process that is crucial to the definition of a common interest in a EFP initiative is represented by the interaction triggered by the entrepreneurial state, to which the other EFP actors (member states, Commission, European Parliament) participate. This interaction process is the vehicle for the creation of a new, common understanding of the issues at stake, which in turn represents the core of the new European interest. The entrepreneurial member state triggers a process of interaction mainly among member states and with the Commission that reflects the process described by policy analysts as the construction of a social problem. The definition of a social problem begins with a group's attempt to assert the existence of some problematic condition up to the endeavour by the public authority to respond to it (Spectator and Kitsuse 1977, 142-54; Blumer 1971, 301 ff; see also Henshel 1990).

In the case of interaction among member states and with the Commission (and possibly the EP as well) about a foreign policy issue, the likely sequence leading to the definition of a new common EFP interest envisages three ideal stages. The interaction process is likely to take place at the margins of EC/EU meetings, as well as outside the EC/EU framework and in bilateral contacts. Diplomatic meetings, joint seminars, exchanges of information outside the COREU system, phone contacts, personal relations, participation to non-strictly governmental gatherings in another member states, all these are channels through which the debate develops.

In the first stage of the process ('naming'), the policy entrepreneur raises the issue among member states to tap into their concerns and check their availability to debate a foreign policy issue such as the Mediterranean. If a majority of member states responds, the definition of the Mediterranean as a 'problem' and the debate about its nature and possible solutions begins. Actors would start by discussing the issues linked to the Mediterranean that they consider problematic. They might offer a partial interpretation of the phenomenon, in its trend or in its cause-effect context. It is to be expected a divergence of opinion at first, as different actors bring to the discussion different elements.

In a second moment, the debate becomes more substantial and coordinated, under the guidance of the entrepreneurial state. This stage can be characterised as ‘framing.’ EFP actors draft proposals and modify them as feedbacks come in. The initial partial interpretations are slowly added up until they form a consistent story, able to resonate with key domestic audiences of member states. Numbers are attached to support interpretations. Counter-proposals might emerge as well and for a common EFP initiative it is crucial that a way is found to accommodate them. What happens at this stage is the construction of a common understanding of the phenomena at stake. The final understanding embodies an explanation of the new Euro-Mediterranean relations and points to the form of intervention member states can multilaterally pursue in the EC/EU framework.

The third stage opens with formal negotiations on a specific draft proposal. The issue is placed on the agenda until a formal decision is taken. At this moment the exchange of information taking place among EC/EU and national representatives changes in nature. Prior to the codification of a formal draft, negotiations centred on the type of problem at stake and on imagining possible solutions. Once formal negotiations are open, the exchange of information, which continues, comes to resemble classical negotiations accounts. Member states debate who should bear the costs of the proposal on the table, who demands side payments and who might be malleable to concessions. More traditional types of power games affect the negotiations up to the point of final decision.

Therefore, the transformation from a situation of cognitive uncertainty to the definition of a new European interest in foreign policy develops through the clarification of what the problem is, what the EC/EU has to do with it, what can the EC/EU do about it, and what is the specific contribution of single member states to the collective endeavour. The adoption of a formal initiative is based on the definition of a new common understanding of the situation and on the convergence of national preferences towards a common interest in intervening to change it. Thus, my third hypothesis reads that the final negotiation stage among specific options and entailing a tough bargaining among partners is preceded by a broader cognitive discussion about the type of problem at stake and the possible solutions the EC/EU can undertake. ‘Naming and framing’ and ‘bargaining’ are not mutually exclusive and

both type of interaction occur all the way through. But the former prevails in the early stages, while the latter in the final part of the negotiations.

I suggest, therefore, that there is an alternative path to European cooperation on EFP initiatives towards the Mediterranean to those put forward by other approaches. It starts from the parallel existence, on the one hand, of a widespread cognitive uncertainty about new international challenges and, on the other, of an entrepreneurial member state with a broad symbolic national interest in championing a European initiative for the Mediterranean. Thanks to these two factors, member states are involved in a process of interaction, exploring and debating different interpretations and possible solutions to the perceived problems. In this process they converge towards a common understanding of Euro-Mediterranean relations, which also resonates with their domestic debates. Such an understanding constitutes a new common European interest. On that basis, they agree to launch a common EFP initiative.

The empirical evidence: Europe and the Mediterranean

The evidence of EFP towards Mediterranean non members displays a neat pattern. While geographical proximity and request for action by Mediterranean countries are constant, the attention of the EC/EU towards the area has peaked in two points in time. We can distinguish four stages. First, from its birth until 1972, the EEC did not consider the Mediterranean to be a homogenous region and negotiated instead trade agreements with most of the riverain countries on a bilateral basis. Second, the EEC addressed the area for the first time as a region in 1972-1974, when it launched the Global Mediterranean Policy in 1972. Shortly afterwards, member states embarked in the Euro-Arab Dialogue, which included all the Arab Mediterranean countries, together with the other members of the Arab League. Third, the Mediterranean fell very low in the EC agenda during the 1980s.⁵ Things started to change again after the end of the Cold War when a revision of the Global Mediterranean Policy led to the Renovated Mediterranean Policy in 1990 and, more importantly, to the launching of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in 1995.

⁵ See Rosenthal (1982).

The empirical evidence on which I focus, then, consists of those time periods in which inactivity turns into activism and then into formal decisions: from the late 1960s until 1974 and from late 1980s until 1995. During these periods, the Mediterranean became a European interest in foreign policy, while in the rest of the time it was not. This is the whole universe of cases, which makes it even more important to understand what happened in these two periods. What can these two periods tell us about the hypotheses outlined in the previous section?

New challenges and the deconstruction of national preferences

In both periods under examination, before European initiatives, perceptions of member states' governments and public opinion towards Mediterranean issues worsened as a 'Mediterranean problem' rose on national agendas. This change in several member states' policy agenda was helped by the fact that in both periods international tension due to the Cold war was either low or absent. The early 1970s were the time of détente, while in the early 1990s, the Soviet threat had crumbled. In the shift among priorities that occurred as a consequence, the Mediterranean was politicised and at times securitised.

In the 1970s, terrorism and troublesome economic relations were the two new challenges that attracted the attention of member states, of public opinion and of the Commission. Terrorism first spilled over from the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1970 (Cooley 1997, 298; Mickolus 1980). The issue was securitised after events at the Olympic Games in Munich in September 1972. As a consequence, a majority of member states adopted new special provisions to target the phenomenon. New powers were assigned to police and army forces and new regulations for visa to Arab citizens and for airport security were issued.

Nationalisations, which peaked with the nationalisation of oil in Algeria in the early 1970s, started with Suez in 1956. They marked more than a decade of conflictual relationship between remnants of colonial times, aspirations of independence and reality of exchanges. Given the importance of interdependence for the development of Mediterranean countries, economic exchanges did not suffer (World Bank 1991, 37), and European investments at times even increased. Political relations were strained,

though, as aggressive nationalistic policies made economic relations with the Mediterranean non members a political matter and, in the case of oil at the time of the oil shock, a security issue. Oil became ‘a matter of national security’ (Lieber 1976, 15) with the oil shock in November 1973. Hints of the European dependence on Arab oil were already visible in 1970, when imports (excluding movements in the European area) as a percentage of supply reached 96.3%, which meant that almost the totality of the supply came from abroad (OECD 1973, 68) and most notably from the Arab countries. Oil, however, did not really play a role in the European interest in the Mediterranean that peaked with the adoption of the GMP, as at the times it only represented a part of troublesome economic relations. Its securitisation in 1973 was central, on the contrary, to the launching of the EAD.⁶

In a similar manner, in the 1990s, migrations, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism (of a different kind) rose to the top of the political and securitarian agenda of European governments. Terrorism acquired a new momentum in connection with Islamic fundamentalism. Apart from the attacks in France in August 1995, however, the issue remained more at the level of a possibility. Islamic fundamentalism represented a new and broader challenge. At the beginning of the 1990s and thanks to the Algerian crisis, Islamic fundamentalism came to be identified by many as a substantial challenge to the preferred European political order (Esposito 1999, 94; Huntington 1993).⁷

Migration was the main problem perceived by the Europeans in their relations with the Mediterranean non members at the beginning of the 1990s. Although the history of migrations across the Mediterranean is very long, the early 1990s witnessed a worsening of European perceptions of the phenomenon. Both countries with a long tradition of immigration and Southern European states facing the issue for the first time struggled to define new regulations and practices about migrants. Governments aimed at controlling the phenomenon, through internal and external measures (Brochmann and Hammer 1999, 12). They attempted to limit legal immigration by restricting entries, while police at the frontiers strove to prevent illegal immigration

⁶ Later oil shocks in 1979 did not trigger any rethinking of Euro-Arab relations, as the issue simply remained at the same level of attention in public authorities’ agendas as before – if it did not diminish in the meantime.

thanks to newly acquired powers. Between the mid 1980s and 1993, old immigration countries such as Germany and France tightened the regulations towards new immigration from sending countries (Turkey, North Africa, as well as Central and Eastern European countries), while deeply revising the provisions for granting asylum (Cornelius, Martin, Hollifield 1994, 207). Similarly, new recipient countries passed laws to the same purposes (Bonifazi 2000, 241; SOPEMI various years). New powers were entrusted to the police and at times to the Army, as for instance in Italy. Still, the debate remained very heated (Cornelius, Martin, Hollifield 1994, 190; Bonifazi 2000, 242).

Therefore, in both periods under examination, the Mediterranean came to represent a 'problem' in domestic politics of member states. Prior national policies and preferences seemed out of pace with the development of events. Issues linked to the Mediterranean appeared on the agenda of national policy makers, who had to make difficult choices that rarely were final. As I suggest, the periods preceding the formulation of a European initiative were characterised at the national level by cognitive uncertainty, revealed by the heated debates and the consecutive changes in regulations and practices.

Entrepreneurs for the Mediterranean

While a large number of member states perceived the Mediterranean as a source of domestic instability, there were two countries that manifested an interest in addressing those problems at the European level: France in the 1970s and Spain in the 1990s. Their interest in doing so belonged rather to the symbolic sphere, and was formulated in the broad terms of international recognition of their role in world affairs. Both France and Spain saw in the Mediterranean the setting for a change in their international profile. Part of this programme was carried out by upgrading their bilateral relations with the Mediterranean non members before promoting a European multilateral initiative towards the region. The final aim of consolidating their enhanced role in world politics, however, required interaction with their European partners so as to gain international recognition.

⁷ See also NATO Review December 1994-January 1995.

In France, the election of Pompidou marked the end of the ‘de Gaulle era,’ and thus a change in the way of sustaining France’s ‘grandeur.’ The new President sought a larger basis for a slightly downscaled project. The Mediterranean became a key component and as such was indicated in Pompidou’s first presidential speech of December 15, 1969.⁸ In spite of the difficult times, more substantial relations were soon established with all Western Mediterranean countries, at time cemented by questionable deals such as the sale of 100 Mirage fighter jets to the new Libyan regime of Gaddafi.⁹ A new discourse about the ‘natural’ French vocation for the Mediterranean followed concrete gestures, envisaging all forms of cooperation: cultural, financial, economic, political and military.¹⁰ The final aim, however, was not simply the reinforcement of France’ Mediterranean links, but the status of ‘big power.’ Having acquired a Mediterranean role, Pompidou aimed at demanding formal recognition of France’s global reach from its European partners and as such, Big Power status (Kolodziej 1974, 84-87). While attempts to revive the Big Four talks on the Middle East remained unsuccessful, the Mediterranean provided a less grand but more feasible opportunity involving European partners.

Similarly, but over a longer time span, democratic Spain made the Mediterranean a priority of its national foreign policy, while deeply rethinking its relations with the rest of the world after a long period of isolation. Full integration in Europe was a fundamental goal for the new regime, and with it an enhanced position for the new democracy on the world stage. The strengthening of relations with the Mediterranean fitted into this plan. Therefore, at the beginning of the 1980s the new socialist government set out to substantiate the traditional Arab policy of Spain with new fresh ideas and momentum (Gillespie 1999, 34-35; Marquina and Echeverria 1992, 43). Together with a reorientation of its defensive apparatus,¹¹ Spain formulated a positive policy institutionalising bilateral relations with Southern countries (Moratinos 1996, 23; Labatut 1995, 317ff.). But Europe and the Mediterranean were two sides of the same coin (Ortega 1995, 193). Spain perceived a new role for itself, acting as a

⁸ Quoted in *Le Monde* 17.XII.69, p.2.

⁹ See Diallo (1992, 177-184), Roussel (1994, 342-46), *Le Monde* (23, 24.I.70, and especially “Par-delà les Mirages” of André Fontaine, 4.II.70).

¹⁰ On French foreign policy under Pompidou, see among others Diallo (1992) and Bernstein and Rioux (1995).

¹¹ For specific activities, see *Actividades, Textos y Documentos de la Política Exterior Española, Año 1987*; Labatut (1995, 326) ; Grasa (1993, 69-71); Santos (1985, 590ff.).

Western European liberal democracy. As such, it joined the regional organisations of Western European democracies, such as the EC, NATO and the WEU, and enacted the key tenets of their foreign policy. These pointed in the case of Spain to good, substantial relations with its neighbours, matched by a strong defensive apparatus in case relations turned sour and affected Western European countries.

Therefore, in the policy entrepreneurship of France and Spain the symbolic component prevailed of material objectives, which tended on the contrary to be secured on a bilateral basis before European contacts begun. This is particularly clear in the case that raised most material issues, namely in the formulation of the Euro-Arab Dialogue. France was under very heavy pressure by its national industries and public opinion, given French dependency on Arab oil (Hager 1974, 35-36). However, access to oil in the aftermath of the oil shock was secured first and foremost through bilateral contacts. France as well as other European countries rivaled in seeking the attention of oil-producing countries, generally through arms-for-oil deals (Diallo 1992, 218-22). Therefore, by the time France invested in a European initiative, it had already secured its material interests.

The role of the Commission in foreign policy formulation was limited. In the first period under examination, the Commission kept a very low profile. While this could be expected in the discussion about the Euro-Arab Dialogue in the EPC framework, it is also true of the debate about the Global Mediterranean Policy. The debate about new agreements with the Mediterranean non members had begun in a very suitable environment for Commission action as the issue was raised by the perspective EEC enlargement to UK, Ireland and Denmark. The incorporation of the new members into old agreements required adjustments (Tsoukalis 1977, 429). However, even after France threw new ideas in the debate, the Commission for long was unable to take a position. At the end of the Cold war the Commission did act briefly as a policy entrepreneur, but its action led to the adoption of a half-backed project, the Renovated Mediterranean Policy in 1990.¹² It included few new ideas, such as multilateral

¹² The Commission's documents on which the RMP was based were: Commission of the European Communities, *Report on the Community's Mediterranean Policy (1975-88)*, SEC(89)1958, Brussels 10.X.89; idem, *Redirecting the Community's Mediterranean Policy*, SEC(89)1961 final, Brussels 23.X.89; idem, *Redirecting the Community's Mediterranean Policy: Proposals for the Period 1992-96*,

cooperation and the inclusion of private actors, but it lacked a broad political project and the necessary political momentum. Thus it could have had more of an impact than it did, but it was quickly superseded by the more imaginative debate promoted by Spain.

In both periods under examination, therefore, policy entrepreneurship was provided by a member state with broad and symbolic motivations. Material interests, where the case, were settled through bilateral relations. The Commission, for its part, displayed little activism compared to the political engagement of member states.

The definition of a European interest

In both cases under examination, the debate focused on definitional aspects before entering the stage of material bargaining. The policy entrepreneur sparked the discussion with a proposal, aiming at the evaluation of the partners' availability to discuss innovative solutions for the new challenges. The debate then addressed the broad tenets of a possible new European interests, with proposals and counterproposals coming in from various participants. Once the issue was formally on the agenda with a frame of its own, participants adopted more classical bargaining techniques, at times voiding the initiative of part of its substance.

The process of interaction sparked by France developed on a very short time span. Intervening in the debate about how to adjust agreements with Mediterranean non members to the accession of the UK, Ireland and Denmark, France suggested to negotiate new agreements with Spain and Israel along the lines of the one concluded with Portugal, which had established a 'free trade area' with the EC.¹³ 'From that moment on the situation developed very quickly.' (Tovias 1977, 70). At a meeting in June 1972, when the proposal was presented, the Netherlands and Germany reacted positively, the Netherlands immediately hinting to the possible developments of the plan in the sense of a global Mediterranean approach. In fact, Israel implied a parallel with the Arab countries. Italy, which opposed the initiative all the way through, raised

SEC(90)812 final, Brussels 1.VI.90. For an account, see among others Pierros et al. (1999, 128ff) and Khader (1994).

¹³ *Agence Europe*, (1.VI.72).

objections.¹⁴ France upgraded the debate by putting forward a proposal for a free trade area with *all* the Mediterranean countries.¹⁵ A coalition between France, the Netherlands, Germany and the EP came into being (Grech 1974, 37).

Once the issue was formally on the agenda, the debate became more heated, but it eventually culminated in the adoption of a common Global Mediterranean Policy. When negotiations started to focus on the details of the proposal, bargaining techniques were played and as a consequence several ideas were watered down. This was the case of the preferential approach to trade relationships, which the newly joined UK vehemently opposed. Key concepts however remained unchanged, among which the idea that the Mediterranean constituted a homogenous region. The EEC was to strengthen its relations with it, with a view to contribute to its economic development and to smoothen the regional and international tensions that plagued it.

Spain's entrepreneurship begun while the entrepreneurial attempt of the Commission was under discussion, in 1990. Its first substantial proposal for innovating on Euro-Med relations was not aimed at the EC/EU, though. Spain, together with Italy,¹⁶ presented in September 1990 a plan for a Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean including a vast number of Western countries. The project however received little support. From its failure Spain retained several lessons, among which the importance to centre future projects on a European dimension. Therefore, it concentrated its efforts on the EC/EU, where it had already presented policy papers and official analyses for European leaders since as early as March 1989.¹⁷ It launched the debate by focusing on the creation of a Euro-Maghreb partnership. But Northern European countries preferred an initiative including also the Middle East or part of it, where their traditional concerns and interests were located. In parallel, joint diplomatic seminars with Italy and France took place.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Agence Europe* (7.VI.72), *Le Monde* (9.VI.72, p.36).

¹⁵ *Agence Europe*, 19-20.VI.72.

¹⁶ The paternity of the idea remains contested (Gillespie 1996, 205; contra Badini - *an Italian diplomat* - 1995, 112).

¹⁷ One of the most influential was "Europa ante el Maghreb" presented by minister of Foreign Affairs Ordoñez to a Council of General Affairs in March 1992, in which Spain suggested that the whole area was a time bomb and the potential effects of mass migration in Europe disastrous (*Actividades, Textos y Documentos de la Política Exterior Española* 1992, 877)

¹⁸ By 1994, France was involved in the project almost as much as Spain. About the diplomatic activities, interviews in Italian and Spanish Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

During these years, the scope of the initiative came to be defined, the link between economic development and immigration was established, the relevance of economic liberalisation for Mediterranean non members' economies was strongly emphasised.¹⁹ As the idea of an overarching initiative towards the Mediterranean took hold, a period of frantic debates began from 1994 onwards. It culminated in few months of traditional and tough negotiations,²⁰ before the formal launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership at the Barcelona Conference in November 1995. The new initiative embodied the new definition of 'European interest' concerning the Mediterranean.

Therefore, in both periods examined, the definition of new European interests towards the Mediterranean displayed a similar dynamics to which several actors participated. The early stage of tapping into the availability of member states on the part of the entrepreneur was followed by a debate on the main conceptual components of a broad European interest about the Mediterranean. The final stages, on the contrary, displayed a more classical pattern of bargaining among participants.

Conclusion

This paper has stressed three points, from which few conclusions can be drawn. First, before a new European interest towards the Mediterranean emerged, previous national interests towards the area were deconstructed. Before getting on the European agenda, the Mediterranean escalated in the domestic arenas of member states from the private sphere or from the sphere of 'ordinary politics,' to the public and at times security sphere. The politicisation and securitisation of new challenges created a situation of shared cognitive uncertainty across several member states, as indicated by the repeated changes in regulations and practices.

¹⁹ See for instance the Resolution on relations with the Mediterranean countries of the EP (OJEC, C158, 17.VI.91), the Communications of the Commission, *Immigration* (SEC(91) 915final, Brussels, 11.X.91), and *From the Single to Maastricht and Beyond*, (COM(92)2000, 11.II.92, p.15), *Strengthening the Mediterranean policy of the European Union: Establishing a Euro-Mediterranean partnership* (COM(94)427 final, 19.X.94, p.2), *Strengthening the Mediterranean policy of the European Union: Proposals for implementing a Euro-Mediterranean partnership* (COM(95)72 final, 8.III.95).

²⁰ The most paradigmatic example of bargaining occurred at the Cannes Summit, in June 1995, when Gonzalez threatened Kohl of hindering the policy towards Eastern Europe if Germany did not agree to

Second, the policy entrepreneurship able to turn passive uncertainty into an active debate defining a common European interest for the Mediterranean was mainly provided by a member state. There was little Commission autonomy in this case. However, France and Spain acted as policy entrepreneurs not because of perspective material gains, but because of broad symbolic reasons. Promoting a European initiative for the Mediterranean represented for them a way of gaining international recognition of a new role in world politics, a goal that they pursued for different reasons in different periods of time.

Third, the debate and negotiations that led to the definition of a new European interest for the Mediterranean developed in stages, each stage displaying different characteristics. After a first period of ‘naming,’ several actors were progressively involved in the ‘framing’ of the main conceptual blocks of the new Euro-Mediterranean relations. Once these were in place, a more traditional stage of bargaining at the negotiating table occurred, lasting up to the formal adoption of a European initiative.

How thick was the ‘European interest’ so formed? To pass a definite judgement, more research would be needed to analyse how resilient the new vision and the new approach to the Mediterranean was after the adoption of the initiatives. However, the evidence provided here has shown a process that went deeper than what logrolling and bargaining techniques would expect. The involvement of member states in the process was substantial and it interlocked with a domestic process. If policy initiatives were the outcome of side-payments only, the previous crucial stages would have not taken place.

The overview of this case contributes to the debate about interest formation and European policy making. The model I have sketched contrasts with the traditional approaches to European integration. It casts doubts on the liberal intergovernmentalist approach. The findings presented here have shown a case of negotiations beginning in a condition of cognitive uncertainty and because of that condition. In other terms, the

a higher financial ceiling for the Mediterranean countries. The final outcome of the meeting included

issue at stake here has been a case not contemplated by intergovernmentalists, namely the lack of predefined interests at the national level. This could suggest that my conclusions and intergovernmentalist arguments are in fact focusing on two parallel sets of cases, the former applying to cases with cognitive uncertainty, the latter to cases with predefined preferences. However, I question the tight division between national and European processes that liberal intergovernmentalists seem to propose. The evidence shown here suggests that when several member states are redefining their national preferences on a given issue, there is in fact scope for an interaction process at the multilateral level that simultaneously shapes national and European interests, leading to a common vision and on that basis to a common initiative. Here, I have addressed national preferences change only in relation to national attitudes towards a European initiative. It would be interesting to analyse whether multilateral interaction at the European level on unsettled domestic issues has an effect also on domestic policy stances more generally, in an indirect form of Europeanisation.

These findings suggest a path that is not explicitly contemplated by the supranational/neofunctional perspective either. The evidence presented here suggests that more intentional coordination can occur under the spur of a member state than generally suggested by scholars in this vein. The passive availability of member states to discuss a multilateral initiative can be turned into an active process of interest formation at the European level under the momentum provided by an entrepreneurial state. While there might have been aspects of unintended coordination (and certainly the institutional setting of EFP was relevant to the outcome), in the case of the EC/EU Mediterranean policy there was also a lot of intended coordination. It was neither a process that flew effortless, nor an interaction that sprung from low levels of the hierarchy. It was a process that required assiduous commitment by the entrepreneurial member state at all levels involved, within and also outside the EC/EU, as well as a conscious, active participation of the other parties involved. Therefore, while the argument of the socialisation approach in the supranational/neofunctional vein could represent a background condition that reinforces interaction, the latter does not necessarily spring from the former. The two processes could, however, be seen in a complementary perspective. The supranational argument can in fact be strengthened

examples of both compromises and side payments.

by exploring intentional debates as a way for the transformation of national interests in the European setting.²¹

More research would be needed to check the limits of the generalisation that can be drawn from the Mediterranean case. However, these conclusions are relevant to the current debates about European integration and their implications go well beyond the case of European foreign policy towards the Mediterranean.

²¹ For an argument in this direction see Eriksen and Fossum (2000), as well as Dryzek (2000) and Elster (1998), though the latter two probably center on thinner preferences than most of the socialisation literature would agree on.

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