

# MOVING BEYOND THE NORMATIVE-GEOPOLITICAL AMBIGUITY OF THE EU'S IMPERIAL POLITICS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: THE CASE OF LEBANON

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# Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	5
2.	The EU's imperial politics	6
3.	EU-Lebanese Relations until 2011: ENP – a 'normative fig leaf'	9
4.	EU-Lebanese Relations since 2011: Increased impact due to more realism on the ground	12
5.	Conclusion and recommendations	17

## **Abstract**

Since 2005, the European Union intensified its political commitment in Lebanon. The same year an Association Agreement was signed and the first Action Plan published in 2007. The Arab Uprisings of 2011 – and on its coat-tails the brutal war in Syria – fortified an enduring imperative of stability. Over the last years, the EU became more realistic in its ambitions – more assertive in its claims for influence, and demonstrated a greater capacity to play to its political strengths. An increasing realism was obscured by prevalent normative discourses reflected in EU documents. A particular normative-geopolitical ambiguity in its external relations is caused by the imperial nature of the EU. This paper argues that Brussels operates in legacies of imperial rule in its efforts to stabilize and transform the Near East. The first chapter of the paper conceptualizes the EU's imperial politics. The second section analyzes contents of the bilateral agenda, as formulated in the Action Plan, which can be compared with 19th century 'standards of civilization' developed by European states; whereas the stabilization policies resemble geopolitical concepts. The third chapter examines the current role of the EU in Lebanon, especially in light of the "three M-approach" introduced by the revised ENP of Spring 2011 and beyond "three M" addressing security issues. Despite its successes, the Union still remains an underestimated actor in the Levant. This is the case mainly because the ENP suffers from its normative-geopolitical ambiguity, demanding at the same time a geopolitically motivated stabilization of the peripheries (in terms of power) and a sustainable transformation of the neighbourhood converging with the value system of the EU (in terms of norms).

# 1. Introduction

Since the eruption of an open power conflict with Russia in the Eastern Neighbourhood, potential reform ideas of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) are on the top of the agenda. In its *March 27 Communication* the Commission acknowledges, that the “EU should continue to reflect on how the policy and its instruments can better respond to the very diverse contexts in partner countries, and how some components may need to be adjusted, including through the use of additional policy instruments.”<sup>1</sup> This self-critical assessment and current analyses reflect fundamental doubts about the arrangement of ENP hitherto. This paper argues that in the last years the Union has become more assertive in its claims for influence, and demonstrated a greater capacity to play to its political strengths.<sup>2</sup> Below the radar, ENP safeguarded its main strategic interest in stability quite well. An increasing realism in its ambitions was obscured by persisting normative discourses reflected e.g. in the Union’s annual evaluation packages. This normative-geopolitical ambiguity of the EU’s external relations is caused by the imperial nature of the EU. The imperial paradigm was introduced into EU debates already a couple of years ago<sup>3</sup>, but never gained ground in standard international relations literature. However, the concept is useful in explaining some imbalances of present EU politics in the neighbourhood as well as the hesitation on side of the partner countries of ENP.

EU politics in Lebanon since 2011, after the beginning of the war in Syria, reflect the advantages of external relations guided by norms

and values but prioritizing short and mid-term stability objectives over an ambitious long-term reform agenda as reflected in the ENP *Action Plan*. The EU’s obsession with convergence hinders the implementation and perception of an efficient neighbourhood policy originally designed to promote the EU’s own strategic interests. The causal link between the imperial nature and a superficial dominance of normative programming in the bilateral agendas of ENP highlights the importance of becoming aware of that nature. To overcome the geopolitical-normative ambiguity, a conscious re-balancing of both components in favor of realist short and mid-term measures in response to challenges arising in the neighbourhood is necessary.

The imperial nature of the EU is based on three essential elements. First, a certain system of governance: Overlapping zones of various levels of integration in Europe and its neighborhood. Such flexible means of governance have their merits particularly in ethnically, confessionally, and along other lines divided regions, prevalent in the European periphery. Second, a geopolitical mindset – based on an asymmetrical distribution of power – emphasizing as core objective the stabilization of the peripheries. Third, a civilizing mission of European norm diffusion, aiming at the creation of a favorable “external environment by socializing third countries to one’s way of doing things”<sup>4</sup> and assuming the “normative project of the West”<sup>5</sup>.

Geopolitical mindset and imperial mission as external elements of an Empire cause the ambivalence within the EU’s external behavior, caught between the principles of stability and convergence. The first resembling the imperative of a conventional, possession- and goal-oriented foreign policy, the second serving as internal legitimacy in absence of a narrow national identity and – given imperial success – socialization of

1 European Commission (2014) *Neighbourhood at the Crossroads: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2013*, Joint Communication JOIN(2014) 12 final, Brussels, 27.03.2014.

2 Cp. Roland Dannreuther (2007) *Recasting the Barcelona Process: Europe and the Middle East*, in: Peter Seeberg (ed.), *EU and the Mediterranean. Foreign Policy and Security*, Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 38–58, 54 f.

3 See Jan Zielonka (2006) *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union*, Oxford: Oxford UP; Alan Posener (2007) *Imperium der Zukunft. Warum Europa Weltmacht werden muss*, München: Pantheon; Hartmut Behr (2007) *The European Union in the Legacies of Imperial Rule? EU Accession Politics Viewed from a Historical Perspective*, *European Journal of International Relations*, 13(2), 239-262.

4 Tom Casier (2010) *The European Neighborhood Policy: Assessing the EU’s Policy toward the Region*, in: Frederiga Bindi (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of the European Union: Assessing Europe’s Role in the World*, Washington DC: Brookings, 99-119, 102.

5 A formulation of the German historian Heinrich-August Winkler, cited in: Volker Steinkamp (2013) *The West and the Rest*, FAZ, 07.10.2013, 7.

elites in neighbouring countries. In European foreign policy, convergence usually trumps the stability principle, which can be explained by the evolution of the Union's external relations: ENP was designed as a spin-off of Enlargement policy and maintained its inner logic of accession. In other words, blinded by its most successful foreign policy tool of accession politics, the EU sticks to its strategy of normative programming, benchmarking, monitoring – publishing progress reports which evaluate annually how far the neighbours came along the track of finally resembling 'us'.

Despite EU rhetoric, the realist stability principle became more dominant. As considerations of stability increasingly surfaced, target countries of ENP became growingly suspicious. Problems of adopting the norm corset of the EU aside, a Union acting more conventional behind a 'normative fig leaf' is in danger of being accused of adopting double standards much more vehemently. Recent public opinion polls indicate a declining image.<sup>6</sup> This constitutes an imperial dilemma the EU currently faces in its Southern neighbourhood.

Dynamics of the imperial nature of ENP can be shown well in the case study of Lebanon. Lebanon appears, besides Israel, as the most democratic and pluralistic country in the Southern neighbourhood. Thus, on the one hand the ambitious norm agenda targeting a harmonization of European and partner countries' standards in theory fell on fertile ground. On the other hand, from the start in 2005, progress reports blamed the overall political situation for the impasse in moving forward on the 'mutually' agreed reform agenda, which increasingly prioritized the principle of stability. The main objectives reflect a rather realist agenda: 1) consolidation of Lebanese sovereignty (e.g. border management to avoid the smuggling of goods and weapons to/from Syria); 2) strengthening the Lebanese state and its political institutions (e.g. role of Hezbollah, electoral reform, national dialogue); and 3)

stabilization of Lebanon in its neighborhood, until 2011 this comprised foremost the adherence of the cease-fire with Israel and since then the containment of spillovers of the Syrian war into the country. Despite this shift in priorities, annual progress reports since 2008 are based on the results on the ENP reform agenda spelled out by the *Action Plan*. As a consequence the role of the EU in Lebanon remains underestimated.

The first chapter of the paper conceptualizes the EU's imperial politics. The second section analyzes contents of the bilateral agenda until 2011, as formulated in the *Action Plan*, which can be compared with 19th century 'standards of civilization' developed by European states; whereas the stabilization policies resemble geopolitical projecting during the era of imperialism. The third part examines the role of the EU in Lebanon since 2011, especially in light of the "three M-approach" (*money, markets, mobility*) introduced by the revised ENP and a more stability oriented security agenda to advocate more honesty in Europe's external relations by acknowledging the imperial nature of the Union.

## 2. The EU's imperial politics

When addressing the actorness of the European Union in global politics two schools of thought collide<sup>7</sup>: Inclusive discourses focusing on the relevance of common norms and values (democracy, rule of law, human rights) and highlighting concepts of soft power. The inclusive school observes the EU either as 'normative power', one that diffuses universal norms, or as 'civilian power', projecting its own understanding of norms to the rest of the world.<sup>8</sup> Opposed to them,

6 GlobeScan, *Views of Europe Slide Sharply in Global Poll, While Views of China Improve* <http://www.globescan.com/84-press-releases-2012/186-views-of-europe-slide-sharply-in-global-poll-while-views-of-china-improve.html> (last access: 06.01.2014)

7 Charlotte Bretherton/ John Vogler (2006) *Nature of the Beast: the identity and roles of the EU*, in: Bretherton/ Vogler (eds.), *The European Union as a Global Actor*, London: Routledge, 37-62, 41 f. See as well Mathias Jopp/ Peter Schlotter (Hrsg.) (2007) *Kollektive Außenpolitik – Die Europäische Union als internationaler Akteur*, IEP-Reihe Europäische Schriften, Bd. 86, Baden-Baden: Nomos.

8 Federica Bicchi (2006) *Our size fits all: Normative power Europe and the Mediterranean*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 12(2), 286–303, 287; on 'civilian power' see e.g. François Duchêne (1972) *Europe's Role in World Peace*, in: R. Mayne (ed.), *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, London: Fontana, 32-47; on 'normative power' see e.g. Ian Manners (2002) *Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms?* *Journal of*

Bretherton and Vogler conceptualize the more realist exclusive discourses based on protectionism, a ‘Fortress Europe’ build upon exclusionary practices like subsidies, health standards etc. These accounts converge around “relatively fixed geographical and cultural boundaries” as what is to be considered European”.<sup>9</sup> Reading the EU as empire allows combining both approaches.

Imperial politics resemble a structure of domination based on asymmetrical distribution of power. Furthermore, “an empire is a geographically extensive group of states and peoples (ethnic groups) united. (...) An imperial political structure is established and maintained (...) as a coercive, hegemonic empire of indirect conquest and control with power.”<sup>10</sup> The imperial nature of the Union essentially rests on three elements: political *structure*, external *behavior* based on a geopolitical mindset and a sense of civilizing *mission*.<sup>11</sup>

The imperial *structure* is established on vertical and horizontal multi-dimensional governance, leading to a ‘variable geometry’ of vertically arranged supranational, national, regional, and local authorities, enmeshed in horizontally overarching policy networks and resulting in constant “negotiations among nested governments at several territorial tiers”<sup>12</sup>. Such flexible arrangements allow different grades of autonomy for its members and constant negotiations between the imperial core and the regions in

bilateral frameworks. Empires usually represent a reduction in integration from the centre to the periphery, as concentric circles, corresponding to decreasing adherence to the common body of law and diminishing possibilities to take part in the decision making process of the centre.<sup>13</sup> For the EU, imperial fluidity was further strengthened by differentiated integration – capable of integrating non-EU members. It includes: 1) enhanced cooperation, which allows a group of states to advance integration in any area without other members being involved<sup>14</sup>; 2) opt-out clauses (e.g. for Denmark and the UK in the Euro zone or Schengen area)<sup>15</sup>; or 3) transition periods within the accession treaties (e.g. for free movement of labour within the single market for the new member states of 2004).<sup>16</sup>

Imperial power rests on a series of concentric circles based on abating legal bindings of the periphery towards the core (*behavior*). Empires follow a geopolitical logic of appeasing their peripheral regions by investing a considerable share of their wealth into the development of adjacent territories.<sup>17</sup> In bilateral arrangements various degrees of integration are established, thus imperial rule frazzles on the edges in not clearly demarked border areas. “This does not imply that borders are non-existent, rather actors perceive

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Common Market Studies, 40(2), 235-258.

9 Charlotte Bretherton/ John Vogler (2006) *Nature of the Beast: the identity and roles of the EU*, in: Bretherton/ Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, London: Routledge, 37-62, 38; see e.g. Adrian Hyde-Price (2006) ‘Normative’ power Europe: *A realist critique*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(1), 217–234; for the South: Stefano Costalli (2009) *Power over the sea: The relevance of neoclassical realism to Euro-Mediterranean relations*, *Mediterranean Politics*, 14(3), 323–342; for the East: Andrey Makarychev/ Andrey Devyatkov (2014) *The EU in Eastern Europe: Has Normative Power become Geopolitical?* PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 310, February.

10 A popular definition of “Empire” provided by Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empire> (last access: 10.04.2014).

11 Cp. Jan Zielonka’s ideas on imperial structures, behavior and mission, in: Jan Zielonka (2012) *Empires and the Modern International System*, *Geopolitics*, 17(3), 502-525.

12 Gary Marks (1993) *Structural policy and Multi-level governance in the EC*, in: Alan Cafruny/ Glenda Rosenthal (eds.), *The State of the European Community: The Maastricht Debate and Beyond*, Boulder (CO), 391-411, 392.

13 Herfried Münkler (2005) *Imperien. Die Logik der Weltherrschaft – vom Alten Rom bis zu den Vereinigten Staaten*, Berlin: Rowohlt, 17; cp. Julian Pänke (2013) *The Empire Strikes Back: 1989, 2011 and Europe’s Neighbourhood Policy*, in: Astrid B. Boening/ Jan-Frederik Kremer/ Aukje van Loon (eds.), *Global Power Europe (Vol. 2): Policies, Actions and Influence of the EU’s External Relations*, Berlin: Springer, 111-129; Adam Watson (1992) *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis*, London: Routledge, 16.

14 In March 2011 this procedure was introduced for European divorce law and patents.

15 The Schengen area comprises 26 members, of which three countries (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland) are non-members of the EU – the UK and Ireland opted-out. The Euro zone currently has 18 members with Denmark and the UK opting out and Montenegro and Kosovo as non-members using the Euro as national currency.

16 Steven Blockmans (ed.) (2014) *Differentiated Integration in the EU – From the inside looking out*, Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS); Claus Giering (1997) *Vertiefung durch Differenzierung – Flexibilisierungskonzepte in der aktuellen Reformdebatte*, *Integration*, 20(2), 72-83.

17 Cp. Herfried Münkler (2005) *Imperien. Die Logik der Weltherrschaft – vom Alten Rom bis zu den Vereinigten Staaten*, Berlin: Rowohlt, 9.

their location and significance to be variable and somewhat open to manipulation. As such, borders do not separate equal political entities, instead they represent grades of power and influence.”<sup>18</sup> Brussels emphasized such a “ring of well-governed states” in the European Security Strategy as well as in ENP, conveying the “image of an EU that will be ‘fading out’ towards its external borders”<sup>19</sup>, while establishing the principle of stability. From that perspective, the Union may still apply soft, civilian or normative policy tools but is quite aware of the unequal power relations between itself and its neighbours. Increasingly the EU displays the willingness to use that power to pursue its foreign policy interests, thus being first and foremost interested in securing itself.

Due to internal heterogeneity and the absence of a narrow national identity, imperial identities provide legitimacy by projecting some higher aim or *mission* to the exterior. Ideologies and narratives might differ, e.g. supporting the spread of freedom and democracy or the diffusion of socialism, but imperial missions in any case pretend to be an instrument against the eruption of chaos. In case of the EU this mission is represented by the “normative project of the West”<sup>20</sup>, through the ‘re-unification of Europe’ and successful socialization of Central and Eastern European elites in the accession process between 1993 and 2004 the principle of convergence sustained essential ground of legitimacy. As a result ENP after 2003 appeared somewhat trapped in Enlargement,<sup>21</sup> staying on track of the external dimension of internal politics, in line with constructivism and ‘critical geography’ of “‘defining authority’ proclaiming political and legal standards which function as apparently ‘objective’ and which

have to be accepted for participating in the game of power”<sup>22</sup> – a civilizing mission<sup>23</sup> – with the intention to gradually expand Europe’s zone of influence by socializing the neighbouring elites to adopt the European ways of doing things. But since a clear membership perspective was omitted, the EU’s transformative power lost its appeal.

The European Union as Empire was established after the end of the Cold War. Brussels external activities in the Eastern half of the continent established those legal concepts, principles and rules that govern today’s union. Eastern Enlargement and the implementation of the single market realized multi-dimensional governance in the 1990s, creating overlapping zones of various degrees of integration. The year 1993 marked the formulation of the Copenhagen Criteria which defined the benchmarks for joining the union, thus formulating common values to the exterior for the first time; and the Treaty of Maastricht allowed for differentiated integration in the future.

As in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, imperial rule of the EU is based on politics of ‘standards of civilization’, comprising three general features: “first, the general self-perception of European states as those who authoritatively define the standards; second, regulations which define different steps and paces of cooperation between European and non-European states; and finally a geopolitical model projecting a world order with European states at the centre and zones of less politically developed states at the peripheries.”<sup>24</sup> Harmonization is monitored in evaluation procedures in the tradition of imperial bureaucracy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that “occupied itself (...) with classifying people and their attributes; with censuses,

18 Karen Barkey (2008) *Empire of Difference. The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 21.

19 Raffaella A. Del Sarto/ Tobias Schumacher (2005) *From EMP to ENP: What’s at Stake with the European Neighbourhood Policy towards the Southern Mediterranean?* European Foreign Affairs Review, 10, 17-38, 26.

20 See footnote 5.

21 On similarities of Enlargement and ENP see Tom Casier (2010) *The European Neighbourhood Policy: Assessing the EU’s Policy toward the Region*, in: Frederiga Bindi (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of the European Union: Assessing Europe’s Role in the World*, Washington DC: Brookings, 99-119.

22 Hartmut Behr (2007) *The European Union in the Legacies of Imperial Rule? EU Accession Politics Viewed from a Historical Perspective*, European Journal of International Relations, 13.2 (February), 239-262, 241.

23 In a civilizing process described by Norbert Elias, see Norbert Elias (1939) *The Civilizing Process. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell (2000).

24 Hartmut Behr (2007) *The European Union in the Legacies of Imperial Rule? EU Accession Politics Viewed from a Historical Perspective*, European Journal of International Relations, 13(2), 239-262, 240; cp. Ole Wæver (1997) *Emerging European Analogies to Pre-Nation State Imperial Systems*, in: Ola Tunander/ Pavel Baev/ Victoria Einagel (eds), *Geopolitics in Post-Wall Europe: Security, Territory, and Identity*, London: Sage, 59-93.

surveys, and ethnographies; with recording transactions, marking space, establishing routines, and standardizing practices.”<sup>25</sup> On their annual tours, EU representatives appraised, through the use of ‘safeguards’, ‘benchmarks’, ‘monitoring’ and ‘screening’, the ‘progress’ of the accession candidates<sup>26</sup> - and now the ENP countries. Perceptions of this asymmetrical relationship, contradicting all claims of joint ownership, were further intensified by a long history of colonialism in the European neighbourhood – in the East by German actors (as Prussia, Habsburg, the German Reich) or Russia (USSR), in the South by direct colonialization by European powers like Great Britain, Italy or – as in case of Lebanon – France. These individual imperial legacies further complicate EU politics in the Southern Mediterranean.

Imperial politics mix conventional stability policy in the sense of security politics and a strategic foreign policy of long-term norm diffusion aiming at a sustainable transformation – and thus deeper stabilization – of the peripheries. A “strategic use of norms (democracy promotion, human rights, market logic)”<sup>27</sup> is established but ENP rhetoric of ownership and a symmetric partnership is not accompanied by a restructuring of hierarchical patterns of interaction. Since the EU uses instruments of the hard power toolkit (financial support, market access), there remains a hesitation to consider the EU as adopting a “soft imperialism” or as an “empire lite”<sup>28</sup>. From

the perspective of its partner countries, the EU’s norms and values run danger to be perceived like an ideology in a Marxian sense, as concealing and therefore legitimizing actual distributions of power. The EU has to overcome the negative repercussions of its image in its neighbourhood and at the same time – seemingly contradictory – learn to deal with its imperial nature.

### 3. EU-Lebanese Relations until 2011: ENP – a ‘normative fig leaf’

In parallel to the establishment of imperial Europe and the development of EU foreign policy instruments in the 1990s, the Europeans have gradually increased their political involvement and moved to assert their interests in the Near East more forcefully. These interests are largely inspired by geographic proximity and geopolitical considerations and include perceived security threats emanating from the Southern neighborhood; mainly spillover of conflicts, terrorism, organized crime, or uncontrolled migration.<sup>29</sup> While the Union was increasingly guided by security considerations and willing to project its power in the neighbourhood, the civilian agenda of democracy and human rights promotion was threatened to be perceived as ‘normative fig leaf’.

Lebanon should be the perfect target country in the Southern neighbourhood for diffusing normative policies, as it does “not present the same authoritarian institutions and character as other Arab countries in the region.”<sup>30</sup> At the same time, security considerations favor the adoption of less ambitious and more conventional approaches to stability. The civil war from 1975 to 1990, the continuing conflict with Israel and the spillovers from the war in Syria can jeopardize Europe’s security. Political leadership in Lebanon is based

25 Cooper, Frederick/ Laura Ann Stoler (1997) *Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda*, in: Cooper/ Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1-56, 11.

26 Alan Posener (2007) *Imperium der Zukunft. Warum Europa Weltmacht werden muss*, München: Pantheon, 94; cp. cp. Julian Pänke (2013) *The Empire Strikes Back: 1989, 2011 and Europe’s Neighbourhood Policy*, in: Astrid B. Boening/ Jan-Frederik Kremer/ Aukje van Loon (eds.), *Global Power Europe (Vol. 2): Policies, Actions and Influence of the EU’s External Relations*, Berlin: Springer, 111-129, 119.

27 Björn Hettne/ Fredrik Söderbaum (2005) *Civilian Power or Soft Imperialism? The EU as a Global Actor and the Role of Interregionalism*, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 10(4), 535-552, 550.

28 Michael Ignatieff (2003) *The American Empire: The Burden*, *New York Times Magazine*, 05.01.2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/05/magazine/the-american-empire-the-burden.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (last access: 22.03.2012).

29 Cp. Muriel Asseburg (2009) *European Conflict Management in the Middle East: Toward a More Effective Approach*, *Carnegie Papers*, No. 14 (Carnegie Middle East Center, Beirut), Berlin: SWP, February, 1.

30 Peter Seeberg (2009) *The EU as a realist actor in normative clothes: EU democracy promotion in Lebanon and the European Neighbourhood Policy*, *Democratization*, 16(1), 81-99, 82.

on a “cross-sectarian power sharing pact”; five groups can be identified among the Lebanese elites: religious rebels (including Hezbollah, Sunni salafist movements), Syria’s clients, the entrepreneurs (among them the Hariri clan), and military personnel.<sup>31</sup>

In 2005, when the first *Country Report* in preparation of an *Association Agreement* was published, Lebanon and the EU already had strong trade relations and the member states and Brussels were the main financial contributors to Lebanon. In 2006 the *Association Agreement* was signed, followed by the *Action Plan* of 2007, which serves as base for the ambitious reform agenda of ENP and seeks to “significantly advance the approximation of Lebanon’s legislation, norms and standards to those of the European Union”<sup>32</sup> in the spirit of convergence. While adapting to Lebanese realities, Brussels quickly reduced the agenda to rather short-term stabilization of political institutions – as electoral reform and supporting the national dialogue. And as a result, European politics adopted a realist agenda aiming at short-term stability, emphasizing “the important objective of restoring Lebanon’s full sovereignty and territorial integrity” and the importance of the overall regional stable security environment<sup>33</sup> as the *sine qua non* precondition for all further attempts of reform.

All three elements of European imperial politics (*authority, behaviour, mission*) are easily identifiable in the EU’s politics towards Lebanon. Contents of the EU documents rhetorically emphasize transformation and gradual convergence of Lebanese with European standards, while promoting conventional foreign policies serving the Union’s security interests. Unfortunately the security agenda appears somewhat hidden in the documents, causing the

impression of an instrumental use of normative ambitions. This misperception is the result of a one-size-fits-all approach to norm diffusion carried out by bureaucratic imperial agencies – in this case the EU commission – resulting in a technocratic process unaware of the realities on the ground and thus merely imitating meaningful cooperation.

The ENP *EU-Lebanon Action Plan* was adopted by the European Union in October 2006 and by Lebanon in January 2007; opening the “perspective of moving beyond cooperation to a significant degree of economic integration, including a stake in the EU’s Internal Market, and the possibility for Lebanon to participate progressively in key aspects of EU policies and programmes”<sup>34</sup> through normative programming. The *political dialogue section* emphasizes to “work together to promote the shared values of democracy and the rule of law including good governance and transparent, stable and effective institutions.”<sup>35</sup> This represents a typical formulation for an ideal and non-binding narrative. Behind the ambitious reform agenda, hard security interests surface in the sections on *cooperation in the field of justice, freedom and security* as well as *regional and international issues*. These passages demand that Lebanon should “prevent and control illegal immigration into Lebanon and the European Union” by improving “cooperation regarding readmission of own nationals, stateless persons and third country nationals”<sup>36</sup> Thus, since internal security of Europe is understandably of paramount importance, Brussels in line with similar documents in the Southern Neighbourhood, focuses on migration issues. Furthermore, the Union is softening the bilateral approach by highlighting its regional interests since the main objective is to “promote (...) once conditions are favourable, a Euro-Mediterranean Peace and Stability Charter.”<sup>37</sup>

31 Ibid., 84; on Lebanon see e.g. Theodor Hanf (1993) *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon. Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation*. Oxford: Oxford UP; Rola El-Husseini (2004) *Lebanon: Building Political Dynasties*, in: Volker Perthes (ed.): *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 239-266; Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007) *A History of Modern Lebanon*, London: Pluto Press.

32 Ibid., 2.

33 European Neighbourhood Policy (2007) *EU-Lebanon Action Plan*, 1.

34 European Neighbourhood Policy (2007) *EU-Lebanon Action Plan*, 2.

35 Ibid., 4.

36 Ibid., 18.

37 European Neighbourhood Policy (2007) *EU-Lebanon Action Plan*, 7+8. Cp. Peter Seeberg (2009) *The EU as a realist actor in normative clothes: EU democracy promotion in Lebanon and the*

The fixation on the ambitious goals of normative programming in the *Action Plan* leads to an unbalanced evaluation of EU politics in Lebanon. The annual *Progress Reports* (for Lebanon published since 2008) focus on the process of harmonization and in a technocratic procedure run through the reform agenda and mark with checks all accomplished goals. The *Reports* covering the years 2007-2011 were basically critical with very few positive expressions on acknowledging slow progress in fields of human rights, judicial reform, social sector reform and trade issues. Besides the technocratic nature of monitoring, which led to a somewhat simulated cooperation, the complex political realities hindered any substantial progress along the track of convergence. The May 2008 clashes between the government and Hezbollah led to a political deadlock which blocked draft laws in line with the *Action Plan*.<sup>38</sup> In context of the June 2009 parliamentary elections, “progress was achieved in the area of electoral reform”; accompanied by an EU Election Observation Mission (EOM).<sup>39</sup> In 2010, “the controversy over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon tasked with investigating the killing of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri (...) polarised the Lebanese political arena and paralysed the functioning of key institutions including parliament and the cabinet. Due to the political impasse, the Lebanese parliament was not able to adopt a significant number of laws, which are essential for the implementation of the ENP Action Plan.”<sup>40</sup> The example of Lebanon shows that the continued focus on convergence in the spirit of Enlargement is destined to fail in light of the political realities in the Southern ENP countries, worsened by imperial agencies far away from their potential partners; and bound to invite

misunderstandings concerning the evaluation of quality and impact of EU’s neighbourhood policy.

The declared objectives in the ENP documents concerning Lebanon are predominantly normative, while the Union actually considers its own security, e.g. embedding Lebanon into a the regional context and focusing on migration issues. Analysts identify “a dramatic mismatch between short-term realist-inspired instruments promoted by the ENP in Lebanon and the highly idealistic and constructivist objectives that call for the shared values of democracy and rule of law”<sup>41</sup>. This is a result of a normative-geopolitical ambiguity originating in the imperial nature of the EU. The internal exchange values of the principle of convergence as ground for new legitimacy gained strength by the failed public referenda in France and the Netherlands in May 2005 on a European constitution; visible in the *Action Plans* of the Southern neighbourhood and seemed to dominate at least until 2011. The ENP’s normative agenda runs danger to be “incomprehensible to both member and partner states”, while demotivating both parties.<sup>42</sup> The *Action Plans* turn into “an objective *per se* and instead of supporting integration they will be merely imitating the process.”<sup>43</sup> To accomplish a fair evaluation of EU politics in the Near East, Brussels has to reconsider its imperial nature, strengthen positive readings of political outcomes in stabilization in favor of its transformation record.

#### 4. EU-Lebanese Relations since 2011: Increased impact due to more realism on the ground

Uprisings in the Arab states with their geopolitical implications along with changes of the Treaty of Lisbon concerning EU foreign policy, represented a shift away from normative expectations; the first demanded a new focus on stability and the

*European Neighbourhood Policy*, Democratization, 16(1), 81-99, 81.

38 European Commission (2009) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2008, Progress Report Lebanon*, Staff Working Document SEC(2009) 518/2, Brussels, 23.04.2009.

39 European Commission (2010) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2009, Progress Report Lebanon*, Staff Working Document SEC(2010) 522, Brussels, 12.05.2010.

40 European Commission (2011) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2010, Country Report: Lebanon*, Joint Staff Working Paper SEC(2011) 637, Brussels, 25.05.2011, 2.

41 *Ibid.*, 573.

42 On the Eastern Partnership: Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz (2011) *Integration or Imitation? EU policy towards its Eastern Neighbours*, OSW Studies, issue 36, April, Warsaw: OSW, 10.

43 *Ibid.*, 12.

second created the institutional capacities for a new approach to implementing ENP. The EEAS enhances the local room of manoeuvre and allows ‘tailor made responses’ of the Union. With the beginning of the war in Syria in March 2011, the context of EU-Lebanese relations changed significantly. The war forced the institutions in Brussels and the EU Delegation in Beirut established in January of the same year to quickly adopt to new circumstances in the country which naturally required a stronger focus on short-term stability and pushed the reform agenda of the *Action Plan* to the side. As successor to Patrick Laurent, Angelina Eichhorst as new head of the Delegation enjoyed more competences and had a significantly higher impact on EU politics in Lebanon than the former Delegation of the Commission. To stabilize an increasingly fragile security situation Eichhorst, reflecting the EU’s normative-geopolitical ambiguity, emphasized that the EU should “provide both ‘soft’ assistance to address social issues like lack of education and jobs, combined with more ‘hard’ power by furnishing aid to the security services and the Lebanese Army.”<sup>44</sup>

The involvement of Lebanese actors in the Syrian conflict lead to intensifying eruptions of violence since summer 2011; e.g. visible in fights between between Sunni and Alawite neighbourhoods in the Northern city of Tripoli. In politics, the Syrian conflict aggravated the tensions between the government coalition and the pro-Syrian opposition on the controversial Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), probing the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005. The gridlock on the STL led to the toppling of PM Saad Hariri in January 2011, mainly by Hezbollah. The wealthy Sunni entrepreneur Najib Mikati formed a Hezbollah-led coalition in June 2011. Despite Hezbollah dominating the government, Mikati emphasized the importance of neutrality and successfully negotiated the Baabda Declaration of June 2012, hallmarking the disassociation of all Lebanese

actors from the conflict in Syria.<sup>45</sup>

In 2013, the spillovers of the Syrian war were highly visible. Borders are as porous as ever, and the spiraling refugee crisis needs close attention. As of January 2014 there are nearly 930,000 refugees, registered with UNHCR, in Lebanon who fled the violence in Syria since the start of the crisis. Lebanese officials repeatedly called the international community for more support to help the country to deal with the crisis. Based on official numbers, Syrian refugees represent 25% of the current population in Lebanon, turning it into the country with the world’s highest per-capita concentration of refugees worldwide.<sup>46</sup>

Since political leadership in Lebanon is still composed along dynastical lines, and the militias of the civil war – a war in which Syria had played a decisive role – are mirrored in today’s political structures, the present refugees create an extremely sensitive security environment by destabilizing the socio-economic environment and the balance of political forces. In October 2012, the bomb attack on Internal Security Forces (ISF) General Wissam al-Hassan reintroduced political assassinations to the streets of Lebanon. In the first months of 2013, supporters of the rebels in Syria, followers of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) clashed in the Northeastern Bekaa valley, close to the contested areas in Syria around Homs and the corridor linking Aleppo and Damascus. Sunni sheikhs with salafist ideologies, called for Jihad in Syria and attacked Hezbollah as supporters of the Assad regime. As Lebanese actors got increasingly involved (border smuggling of weapons and fighters) in the Syrian war – thus violating the Baabda declaration – Prime Minister Mikati resigned in March 2013. A few weeks later, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah openly acknowledged direct military involvement of the Lebanese militia

44 Interview with Kareem Shaheen (2014) *Cabinet proof there is hope for deal: EU envoy*, The Daily Star (Lebanon), 19.02.2014.

45 Baabda Declaration issued by the National Dialogue Committee on 11 June 2012, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Lebanon%20S%202012%20477.pdf> (last access: 10.01.2014)

46 Earlier on Sunday, the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said, <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/545875-eu-supports-dissociation-policy> (last access: 04.05.2014)

in Syria. In June, supporters of radical Sheikh Assir fought the LAF in the multi-confessional city of Sidon, south of Beirut. In the clashes nearly 20 soldiers died. Since fall 2013 Lebanon witnesses casualties in suicide bombings almost every week.<sup>47</sup> The formation of a new Lebanese government stalled until 15 February 2014, when the designated Tammam Salam finally was inaugurated as Prime Minister of a national coalition government; until then, Mikati had remained caretaker prime minister.

Due to intensified EU-Lebanese relations caused by the Syrian crisis the tone of the *Progress Reports* changes significantly in 2011, reflecting on the reformed ENP and e.g. referring for the first time to individual performances of Lebanese politicians and clearly highlighting the stability principle. “The new cabinet of Prime Minister Najib Mikati, which took office in July, showed strong commitment to cooperation with the EU. High level visits, which were carried out, gave the bilateral relations an additional impetus.”<sup>48</sup> It concludes that “in the context of a volatile situation in the Arab world, and most importantly in the neighbouring Syria, Lebanon successfully preserved its political stability, sovereignty and internal unity due to the policy pursued by the government.”<sup>49</sup> Stabilizing a deteriorating security situation, support of durable and legitimate political institutions (through timely elections e.g.), and reviving a depressed economy represent the priorities for EU politics in Lebanon since 2011.

Forced by the Syrian war, the EU favored quite efficient stability politics over the reform agenda

47 For more information on the attacks (mainly targeting Hezbollah strongholds in retaliation for their active support for the Syrian regime), see e.g. Kareem Shaheen/ Antoine Amrieh, *Syria-linked clashes in Beirut leave on dead*, Daily Star (Lebanon), 24.03.2014; Kareem Shaheen, *Twin suicide car bombings kill six in Beirut*, Daily Star (Lebanon), 19.02.2014; Dana Khraiche, *Suspected suicide bombing in Beirut suburb kills four*, Daily Star (Lebanon), 21.02.2014; Dana Khraiche, *Car bomb in Beirut kills four, wound 77*, Daily Star (Lebanon), 02.02.2014; Rima Aboulmona, *Suicide Bomber kill 25 near Iran Embassy in Beirut*, Daily Star (Lebanon), 19.11.2013.

48 European Commission (2012) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Lebanon: Progress in 2011 and recommendations for action*, Joint Staff Working Document SWD(2012) 117 final, Brussels, 15.05.2012, 2.

49 Ibid., 2.

formulated in the *Action Plan*; significantly strengthening Brussels’ influence in Lebanon and better anticipating the expectations in the Southern neighbourhood. Opinion polls of the *EU Neighbourhood Barometer* indicate, that the societies in the Southern ENP would appreciate a focus on the principle of stability more than a continued focus on convergence. Among the ‘most beneficial areas of EU and ENPI South’, respondents highlighted: Trade 26%, Tourism 23%, Economic Development 21%, than Democracy 18%, Education 15%. On ‘most important areas’: Peace and security 40%, Trade 36%, than Human Rights 25%. Focus in the future should be: Peace and security 31%, Trade 18%, Human Rights 14%.<sup>50</sup> A less ambitious reform agenda enables the Union to move beyond colonial history with its hierarchical patterns of claimed ‘superiority’ and diffuse the continued “suspicion and mistrust of European initiatives to disseminate its values, norms, structures, and institutions to the southern partners. (...) [questioning] the intensions and credibility of that hegemonic power to the north,”<sup>51</sup> as Sally Khalifa Isaac Atwan noted.

The political impact of the Union is now analyzed in terms of the adopted “three M-approach” (*money, markets and mobility*), and given the fragile security environment, complemented by EU initiatives addressing *security*.

## Money

The EU is Lebanon’s most important trading partner (followed by Syria and the United States): it accounted for 29% of Lebanon’s total trade in 2011, amounting to €5.6 billion. Exports to the EU represent around 11%; Lebanese imports from the EU amount to 38% of Lebanese trade.<sup>52</sup> Since the mid-1990s, the EU has been the leading donor to

50 ENPI – EU Neighbourhood Barometer, Autumn 2012, 20.03.2013, 19.

51 Sally Khalifa Isaac Atwan (2010) *The Quest for Intercultural Dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: Opportunities and Challenges*, EUI Working Papers, RSCAS, 2010/74, Florence: EUI, 13; cp. Sheila Carapico (2001) *Euro-Med: European Ambitions in the Mediterranean*, Middle East Report, No. 220 (Autumn), 25-27.

52 Ibid., 10.

Lebanon. The total amounts of funds committed under MEDA I (1995-1999) were €182 million, €235 million under MEDA II (2000–2006), €187 million under the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) (2007-2010), and €150 million 2011-2013.<sup>53</sup>

The annual support, amounting to approximately €50 million, was expanded to help Lebanon handling the Syrian refugee crisis. Until December 2013, the European Commission has allocated an additional €222.8 million. Of these funds, €85 million have been contracted through the ENPI budget to the Lebanese government; whereas the remaining €135.3 million are channeled via the Humanitarian Office of the European Commission (ECHO) through UN agencies and NGOs.<sup>54</sup> The financial support makes the EU the most important contributor in the refugee crisis in Lebanon, and represents a remarkable commitment of the Union; given the tragic role refugees had played in the past of Lebanon's violent history; when Palestinian refugees after being expelled from Jordan were an important factor in igniting the Civil War in the mid 1970s. EU funding in the refugee crisis helped substantially to stabilize the country and gave Brussels considerable leverage in Lebanese politics, if financial instruments could be applied more flexible to be capable to react quickly to short-term challenges this leverage would be much higher.

## Markets

Stakes in the EU's Internal Market represent a potentially very powerful tool of ENP. The EU Delegation in Lebanon indicated potential uses: The work force of the Syrian refugees represents a serious security risk to the social fabric of Lebanon – especially in the agricultural areas of the North and the Bekaa valley in the East. The EU has identified socio-economic measures as helpful leverage to avoid a radicalization of farmers in these areas by stabilizing their profits though

competitive pricing, when facing the challenge of Syrian agricultural goods flooding the market and cheap labor provided by Syrian refugees. In summer 2013, in order to alleviate pressure from rural Lebanon and to avoid the Syrian war to spread, the European Commission allowed imports of ware potatoes not intended for planting, and originating from the two most important Lebanese agricultural production regions of Akkar (in the North) and the Bekaa valley.<sup>55</sup> Lebanese potatoes were sold on the internal market or exported to Jordan and Turkey, now transport routes are blocked by the war in Syria and prices cannot compete with Syrian potatoes offered at dumping prices. The decision will allow Lebanon to benefit from a 50.000 tons duty free quota for potatoes negotiated under the *EU-Lebanon Association Agreement*. The political intention is explicitly mentioned.<sup>56</sup> Currently the EU considers similar arrangements for other agricultural good as well, as honey, dairy products and meat. The biggest challenge remains the high sanitary standards to export them to the Union. Thus, the Delegation in Lebanon gives grants for rural developers to keep employment stable and projects which enhance the sanitary quality in the mid-term.<sup>57</sup>

## Mobility

ENP highlights the importance of “people-to-people”-contacts and the necessity of *mobility partnerships* to facilitate visa processing – especially for students and active participants of civil society. As mentioned earlier, the Union focused very much on its own security by

53 Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Lebanon, [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/country-cooperation/lebanon/lebanon\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/country-cooperation/lebanon/lebanon_en.htm) (last access: 12.01.2014)

54 Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Lebanon, EU response to the Syrian crisis, 16.12.2013.

55 European Commission (2013) *Implementing Decision of 30 July 2013 authorising Member States to provide for derogations from certain provisions of Council Directive 2000/29/EC in respect of potatoes, other than potatoes intended for planting, originating in the regions of Akkar and Bekaa of Lebanon* (notified under document C(2013) 4683) (2013/413/EU), Official Journal of the European Union, L 205/13.

56 “The possibility to export potatoes into the European Union is expected to provide substantial economic opportunity, particularly for those agricultural regions most affected by the impact of the Syrian crisis.” Lebanon Potatoes to EU – Now possible for Lebanon to export potatoes from Akkar and the Bekaa to the European Union (09/09/2013) [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/lebanon/press\\_corner/all\\_news/news/2013/20130909\\_2\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/lebanon/press_corner/all_news/news/2013/20130909_2_en.htm)? (last access: 17.01.2014)

57 Interview with EU diplomats at the European Delegation, Beirut, 14.01.2014.

highlighting illegal immigration into Lebanon and the European Union.<sup>58</sup> The failure to agree on a readmission clause remained the biggest obstacle for agreeing on a *mobility partnership*, similar to those which the Commission signed with Morocco in summer 2013 and Tunisia in March 2014. A second tool for increasing mobility is the so-called *Blue Card* – an EU-wide work permit allowing high-skilled non-EU citizens to enter the Union’s Schengen-area.<sup>59</sup> Applicants require at least 1.5 times the average gross annual salary paid in the Member State (€46.500 in Germany) and a relevant higher professional qualification (Master degree in Germany). So far, the initiative turned out to be a flop; this is mainly the fault of the member states, as many states had not even implemented the legislation after the deadline of June 2011. Germany had enacted the *Blue Card* legislation fully only in April 2012. As of January 2014, Berlin issued 7.000 Blue Cards. 4.000 of these were given to foreigners who were already residing in Germany. In 2012, only 35 Lebanese emigrated to Germany with a *Blue Card*.<sup>60</sup> Even if the delay in transposing the *Blue Card* Directive suggest it to be too early to draw meaningful conclusions, the entry hurdles seem too high of an obstacle to attract substantial numbers of migrants.

The EU evaluates Lebanon’s research and innovation potential as high, which would open opportunities for enhanced “people-to-people”-contacts in that area. “According to the Global Innovation Index 2012, Lebanon ranked 61st in the world ranking of innovation, and in the 11th place among North African and Western Asian countries.”<sup>61</sup> Until 2011 Lebanon’s participation in the *7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development* remained limited”; project funds amounted to €1.8 million (since

2007).<sup>62</sup> In the *Marie Curie programme*, fostering international research collaboration, 13 Lebanese fellows participated. By 2013 funding increased by €2.7 million initiating new projects and 32 participants in the *Marie Curie programme*.<sup>63</sup> The increased numbers indicate the impact of the EU Delegation in Beirut in raising awareness for EU programs and responding to difficult national contexts – in the Lebanese case a very de-centralized and heterogeneous education landscape. The Lebanese Scientific Research Council (CNRS) embracing initiatives within the funding framework *Horizon 2020* indicate that a shift of EU politics has been acknowledged and the presence of the EU delegation is appreciated.

### Beyond “three M”: Security

A more realist focus on immediate security concerns started to dominate EU-Lebanese relations since 2011. According to the head of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Angelina Eichhorst, the “adherence to the policy of disassociation” is the only way to get out of the Syrian crisis “sound and sane.”<sup>64</sup> “Moreover, the EU will explore possibilities of strengthening the capabilities of Lebanese state security structures as a way to improve the stability of Lebanon and the stability of the region as a whole.”<sup>65</sup>

In December 2011, Brussels and Lebanon signed a new project *Developing National Capability for Security and Stabilisation*, worth €12 million, further enhancing ISF (Internal Security Forces) organizational competences.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the Union identified support for

58 European Neighbourhood Policy (2007) *EU-Lebanon Action Plan*, 18.

59 With the exception of Denmark, Ireland, and UK; cp. Council Directive 2009/50/EC.

60 <http://www.heise.de/newsticker/meldung/BA-Chef-Weise-Nur-7000-Zuwanderer-mit-Blue-Card-2073163.html> - as well feedback of DG Home on my request (18.01.2014).

61 European Commission (2013) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Lebanon: Progress in 2012 and recommendations for action*, Joint Staff Working Document SWD(2013) 93 final, Brussels, 20.03.2013., 16.

62 European Commission (2012) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Lebanon: Progress in 2011 and recommendations for action*, Joint Staff Working Document SWD(2012) 117 final, Brussels, 15.05.2012, 15.

63 European Commission (2014) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Lebanon: Progress in 2013 and recommendations for action*, Joint Staff Working Document SWD(2014) 92 final, Brussels, 27.03.2014, 19+20.

64 Interview with Kareem Shaheen (2014) *Cabinet Proof there is hope for deal: EU envoy*, Daily Star (Lebanon), 19.02.2014.

65 European Commission (2013) *Towards A Comprehensive EU Approach to the Syrian Crisis*, Joint Communication JOIN(2013) 22 final, Brussels, 24.06.2013, 5.

66 European Commission (2012) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Lebanon: Progress in 2011 and recommendations for action*, Joint Staff Working Document SWD(2012) 117 final, Brussels, 15.05.2012, 5.

the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) as part of a comprehensive response to the Syrian war. And Brussels rightly identified the LAF as “well-respected and as it is cross confessional in structure, it is perceived as being impartial and neutral.”<sup>67</sup> The response includes the deployment of an EU Military Expert at the EU Delegation to advise on security issues and give support to the LAF.<sup>68</sup> The EU strategy paper of summer 2013 was intended to encourage EU member states to provide direct support to the LAF. A first result is the \$3 billion weapon deal brokered between France and Saudi Arabia in December 2013, where Riyadh provides the money to be invested in French military equipment; the largest support for the Lebanese army since Lebanese independence in 1943.<sup>69</sup>

Due to the growing cross-border threats from Syria, the EU needs to maintain its focus on strengthening Lebanon’s border management capacities, namely increased inter-agency co-ordination on border strategy and greater intelligence sharing. The Commission allocated the above mentioned €12 million for this aim – and a number of member states, including France, Germany and the UK, also provide individual support.<sup>70</sup> The *EU Progress Report 2014* asserts that “numerous IBM [Integrated Border Management] awareness-raising sessions were conducted within the agencies involved to improve understanding of the IBM concept.”<sup>71</sup> Despite the difficult context of strengthening border control in the Syrian war, stakeholder participation and ownership in this area was commendable, as state actors seem to embrace the importance to counter sectarian trends in security issues.

Even if the EU seeks to avoid any potential strengthening of Hezbollah; unlike the US, the European Union talks to Hezbollah which holds “a role that will be key to ensuring that Lebanon does not descend into chaos.”<sup>72</sup> As indicated by the before mentioned public opinion polls, the Union is considered as a more neutral arbiter than the USA or the Gulf states. The Union remains the most important Western actor capable of moderating Hezbollah and reaching out to Iran (e.g. in the current negotiations on Tehran’s nuclear program). At the same time, Brussels aims at strengthening Lebanese state institutions against Hezbollah by criticizing its declared right on autonomous military capacities, which turn the militia into a ‘state in the state’. The complicated relations of the Union towards Hezbollah were very visible in July 2013, when Brussels added Hezbollah’s ‘military wing’ to a list of terrorist organizations, “while making clear that dialogue with all political actors in Lebanon and cooperation with state institutions would continue.”<sup>73</sup> The Union had to respond to accusations of Bulgarian authorities that Hezbollah members were involved in a bombing, targeting Israeli tourists in Burgas and intended to send a strong symbol against impunity while keeping channels of dialogue with Lebanon’s most important security actor open. Head of the EU Delegation, Angelina Eichhorst twittered in July 2013: “Our work w/ Hezbollah party members who r only politically active, including members of government or parliament, will continue.”<sup>74</sup> And indeed it seems that the blacklisting of the party’s military wing has not substantially affected the relationship with Hezbollah’s political side.

Last but not least, EU efforts focused on strengthening Lebanese governing institutions and aimed at increasing the population’s trust in the state and the central government. The

67 European Commission (2013) *Towards A Comprehensive EU Approach to the Syrian Crisis*, Joint Communication JOIN(2013) 22 final, Brussels, 24.06.2013, 12.

68 Ibid.

69 Rainer Hermann (2013) *Paris und Saudi-Arabien rüsten die libanesische Armee auf*, FAZ, 31.12.2013, 2.

70 Julien Barnes-Dacey (2012) *Lebanon: Containing Spillover from Syria*, ECFR/61, September, 8.

71 European Commission (2014) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Lebanon: Progress in 2013 and recommendations for action*, Joint Staff Working Document SWD(2014) 92 final, Brussels, 27.03.2014, 13 f.

72 Julien Barnes-Dacey (2012) *Lebanon: Containing Spillover from Syria*, ECFR/61, September, 7.

73 European Commission (2014) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Lebanon: Progress in 2013 and recommendations for action*, Joint Staff Working Document SWD(2014) 92 final, Brussels, 27.03.2014, 3 f.; see as well Official Journal of the European Union, C 212/5, 26.07.2013.

74 Angelina Eichhorst on *Twitter*, 22.07.2013, <https://twitter.com/aneichhorst> (last access: 17.01.2014).

EU is especially interested in electoral reform, in the long-term capable of overcoming the confessionalist system, but more importantly in the short-term to preserve stability through legitimizing the current government. In December 2013 and April 2014, the European Council called for the implementation of the Baabda Declaration, therefore “urging the formation of a government, looking forward to the timely holding of parliamentary and presidential elections.”<sup>75</sup> Indeed the continuous messaging of the Lebanese political actors on the importance of elections, remained top priority of the EU Delegation.<sup>76</sup> Further visible signs of intensified EU-Lebanese relations were high level visits of Prime Minister Najib Mikati to Brussels in April 2012, Catherine Ashton to Lebanon in October 2012, June 2013, as well as Commissioners Štefan Füle, Kristalina Georgieva and Michel Barnier in March, May and November 2013, respectively.<sup>77</sup>

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

While a majority of EU analysts focus on the shortcomings of the ENP, especially in the Southern Mediterranean,<sup>78</sup> this paper argues that impact capacities are much higher than usually estimated. With the example of Lebanon, it shows

how successful a normatively less ambitious but conventionally more determined foreign policy in the Southern neighbourhood can be. Until 2011, the normative-geopolitical ambiguity of the ENP – inherent to all imperial politics – leaned too far to the normative side of the equation, culminating in an overly technocratic process aiming at convergence, but resulting in a dangerous procedural fixation, where *Agreements* and *Action Plans* imitate genuine partnership behind a ‘normative fig leaf’ obscuring asymmetrical power relations. The impact of the EU on Lebanon increased substantially after 2011. This was caused mainly by two developments which mutually re-enforced each other: The war in Syria with its dramatic geostrategic consequences for the Middle East and the introduction of the EU’s External Action Service allowing a local – and through extended competences substantial – influence on EU decision making. The radical bilateralization of the “more for more” principle, short-term programming in the *SPRING* programme, and the “three M-approach” in better addressing the actual needs of the Southern partners, reflects a more realistic approach in Euro-Mediterranean relations; a departure from the narrow corset of the *EU Action Plan* and normative programming in spirit of convergence. Since 2011, the focus shifted towards the geopolitical component of the ambiguous imperial politics of the EU in Lebanon. To avoid accusations of “regulatory imperialism” the EU should continue to strengthen the local capacities of the Delegations and roll back the bureaucratic apparatus of the Commission. This paper recommends the following for the ENP in general and EU politics in Lebanon specifically:

**1) More Realism in the Neighbourhood:** The EU in its entire Neighbourhood suffers from normative-geopolitical ambiguity, demanding at the same time a geopolitically motivated stabilization of the peripheries (in terms of power) and a sustainable transformation of the neighbourhood according to the value system of the EU (in terms of norms). In the framework of the ENP, the EU should be more straightforward regarding the question of what its genuine interests are and focus foremost on short and mid-term stability objectives which are in the

75 European Commission (2014) Joint Staff Working Document, *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Lebanon: Progress in 2013 and recommendations for action*, Joint Staff Working Document SWD(2014) 92 final, Brussels, 27.03.2014, 3 f.

76 See for instance Statement by the Spokesperson of EU High Representative Catherine Ashton *on the government formation in Lebanon*, 140215/01, Brussels, 16.02.2014; Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Lebanon, Press Release, *The European Union regrets that elections will not be held on time*, Beirut, 31 May 2013; and Angelina Eichhorst on Twitter, 06.02.2014, 29.01.2014, 19.01.2014, 26.12.2013... <https://twitter.com/aneichhorst>

77 European Commission (2012) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Lebanon: Progress in 2011 and recommendations for action*, Joint Staff Working Document SWD(2012) 117 final, Brussels, 15.05.2012; European Commission (2013) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Lebanon: Progress in 2012 and recommendations for action*, Joint Staff Working Document SWD(2013) 93 final, Brussels, 20.03.2013, 2.

78 For the Southern Mediterranean see e.g. Thorsten Gerald Schneiders (Hrsg.) (2013) *Der Arabische Frühling. Hintergründe und Analysen*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

best interest of the ENP partners as well. In the eyes of potential partners, a ‘neo-imperial’ attitude especially linked to a snobbish convergence agenda, and raising high expectations which are unachievable, are much more dangerous than a conventional foreign policy guided by norms and values, while pursuing in a transparent and self-confident fashion its interests step-by-step. Besides, a more realist approach would include an honest reflection on the limited resources of the Union. Concerning Lebanon, the *second EU-Lebanon Action Plan*, negotiated since 2011 and currently awaiting the completion of legal procedures, should be reviewed and streamlined to avoid a technocratic and overambitious reform agenda.

**2) Strengthening the role of the EEAS:** The local perspective of the EU Delegations, with their extended competences between the Commission and the Council, is an indispensable asset in filling some of the core objectives of the ENP with life: ownership, tailor-made approaches to the needs of the partner countries, “more for more” principle. The importance of the foreign Delegations and their potentially positive impact on the Union’s external relations and decision making needs to be highlighted in discussions with those – usually larger – member states which observe the European diplomats with skepticism and fear the decreasing importance of their national external services. Furthermore, and to ensure proper planning and coordination the EEAS’ role between Commission and Council needs to be clarified. The Council should be strengthened to allow political steering and avoid a technocratization of EU politics. As representation of the member states, eventually the Council could assign particular missions to EU diplomats to the expense of individual member state delegations.

**3) Money – making financial support more flexible:** The long-term programming of EU funds is often restricting the Union’s ability to respond quickly to changes and challenges in the neighbourhood. An increase in its flexibility allows for speedier and more strategic support. A substantial percentage of the ENPI funds, exceeding

the current *SPRING* funds, should be available on shorter notice enabling the EU Delegations to react swiftly to new political developments in their countries. Concerning Lebanon, the EU played a positive role so far, but could do more to pressure its member states into substantial commitments to help the Lebanese government with the Syrian refugee crisis, as promised by an International Support Group for Lebanon, established in New York in September 2013. So far, not much of the promised grants materialized on the ground in Lebanon and the EU should remind the member states of potential costs of an ‘exploding’ refugee situation in Lebanon.

**4) Markets – re-focusing the principle of convergence:** The EU needs to clarify the conditions of access to the Union’s internal market. To help Lebanon’s agricultural sector, Brussels allowed for the import of Lebanese potatoes in short time. The main obstacle for offering partial shares in the EU’s internal market and accomplishing free trade agreements are different trade regulations (e.g. sanitary standards). Harmonization of trade regulations should be focal point of future *Action Plans* over a vague democratization agenda. Clear benchmarks need to be introduced and substantial EU funds and projects should aim at improving sanitary conditions to meet European standards. Concerning Lebanon specifically, the economic grievances, further fuelled by the Syrian war, in the North (Tripoli and Akkar) and the Bekaa are most acute and call for short-term measures. Since poverty and hopelessness play a central role in causing Sunni frustration and radicalization, Brussels should focus development projects on these areas; weakening the appeal of destabilising non-state actors.<sup>79</sup>

**5) Mobility – sincerely addressing visa facilitation:** the EU needs to attract high-skilled young people from the MENA-region. More opportunities, in terms of student exchanges and vocational trainings, need to be offered. The neglect of existing initiatives (e.g. *Blue Card*)

<sup>79</sup> Cp. Julien Barnes-Dacey (2012) *Lebanon: Containing Spillover from Syria*, ECFR/61, September, 9.

by the member states is intolerable and leads to a tremendous disadvantage for the EU in competition with the migration regimes of other states (e.g. USA, Canada), where policies are much more welcoming and easier. To this end, Brussels should consider to lower the hurdles for the *Blue Card* (especially the 1.5 average annual salary), introduce recruitment agencies based on an awareness campaign among European companies and provide more transparent information on the migration process.

**4) Beyond “three M” – security:** To avoid all spillovers of the Syrian war into neighboring countries, the EU should maintain its close and steady relations with all major forces in Lebanon. This would include getting Hezbollah back to the negotiation table of the National Dialogue, which the party left in protest against the first cabinet statement of the Salam government in February 2014. Furthermore, the Delegation needs to convince all Lebanese actors of the importance of presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014. The fate of the presidential elections still remains cloudy. Without a legitimate successor to president Michel Sleiman, it will be extremely difficult to reach consensus on the complex issue of electoral reform and have parliamentary elections in November 2014.

Since 2011 the EU is moving towards a greater assertiveness and displays a new self-confidence in international politics. This paper argues for embracing the geopolitical component of the EU’s ambiguous imperial politics, to adopt a normatively less ambitious and conventionally more determined ENP. This includes the importance of values and norms as essential guideline for external behavior as genuine values – and not merely as a technocratic end in itself.