

Eternal Potential? Temporality, complexity and the incoherent power of the European Union

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Introduction

The European Union remains an important but somewhat nebulous actor in international relations. Hopes for it to be a global power have not been fulfilled; indeed at times of crisis it often seems quiescent (Koenig, 2014). Yet its importance in many spheres of politics and economics is appreciated by both allies, and rivals such as Russia (which went to extraordinary lengths to prevent Ukraine integrating with the EU in 2013). Clearly, the acutely fragmented nature of the EU is responsible for the confusion as to its role and potential (Hill, 1993; Bretherton and Vogler, 2006; Keukeleire and Delreux, 2014). This article argues that a focus on temporality –in particular the different timescapes of its institutions and the social, economic and political changes it implements on various scales – helps us to explain the particular irregularities of the EU’s role. Timescape was a term developed by Goetz, and Meyer-Sahling to describe the different institutional cycles of the EU system (2009). It is a felicitous concept for EU studies in as it captures the complexity, asynchrony and differentiation of this entity. The term is expanded on here to go beyond institutional timescapes and address the different causal timescapes in international relations: in critical realist terms the different causal complexes and generative structures of international relations (Patomaki, 2002: 99-122). This expanded concept of timescape offers a lens within which to trace the complexity and stratification of the EU’s institutions, policies and action. More specifically the focus on temporality allows us to delineate the particular imagined timescape of EU external action as a liberal teleological vision, and to critique this with an analysis informed by more historicist and complexity-sensitive understandings of international change. The research rests on a critical realist ontology as this historicist and stratified ontology is highly congruent with the timescape concept.

As the EU's salient characteristic is its effort to lead change through social and economic interventions, various forms of critical political economy and historical sociology are drawn upon for the analysis. The empirical case study is of Euro-Mediterranean relations. This is a region which has been the subject of extensive multilevel structural diplomacy (Keukeleire, Thiers and Justaert, 2009) on the part of the EU. As the EU is the dominant economic pole in the region it is an apt case study of the EU's efforts to lead change through social and economic interventions. However it is also a region which exemplifies the dissonance between the EU's institutional and structural approach and the other 'realities' which obtain. This article offers a holistic analysis and critique of the EU's efforts project. The first section introduces the concept of timescape and elaborates on the critical realist and historicist foundations of this approach. The following section elaborates a more specific framework for understanding the EU's external relations timescapes, including its institutional timescapes and the causal assumptions (causal timescapes) behind its project. Then the analytical and conceptual framework for critiquing the EU's approach – its liberal structural foreign policy – is outlined. Subsequently the analysis turns to the detail of the EU's reform and integration project in the Mediterranean and the impact of the differentiated timescapes and powers of the EU on its role in this region. The disconnects between the EU's method of incremental development and legalisation and the reality of crisis, conflict and revolution came into sharp relief in 2011. The article seeks to contribute to the existing literature on the EU by using the timescape concept to elucidate precisely how and why the differentiated nature of the EU impacts on its actorness and power. It offers a temporal conceptualisation and critique of the EU's structural foreign policy and the assumptions underlying. It also explains its relative passivity in times of crisis and in so doing contributes to the literature on the EU's crisis management (Boin, Ekengreen, Rhinard, 2013). More generally it is also hoped that this article can offer an exemplar of how a more explicit understanding of the different timescapes of institutional, socio-economic and political change can help us understand contemporary international relations/world politics.

Critical realism and the timescape concept

Goetz and Meyer-Sahling et al. used the concept of 'timescape' to analyse the multifaceted (internal) political dynamics of the European Union. Timescape is defined as 'how time is institutionalised in a political system', including the institutional processes, the decision-making or political dimension and the implementation of policy (Goetz and Meyer-Sahling, 2009). This research agenda involves the study of the different temporal frameworks involved and how they interrelate. They argue that this temporal dimension is particularly relevant to the EU due to the complexity (the compounded nature) of its institutions. In another contribution to the same issue Bulmer conceives of timescape in a much broader sense, as 'macro-social development' and a way to consider the various 'causal chains' in the process of European Integration (Bulmer, 2009: 310), going beyond institutional rules and processes to include the timescapes of power and causation in the social world. This is how the term is used here. While this is a significant expansion from Speyer-Meyling and Goetz's original definition, the term timescape is still apposite as a broad signification of how temporality interacts with other dimensions of reality. The aim is to analyse the actual and imagined causal timescapes as well as the institutional timescapes of the EU. This assumes a critical realist ontological position that accepts the existence of reality and causation (Archer et al, 1998). This realism is (in the traditional philosophical sense) a belief in the causal impact of social (historical) structures, emphasising that these exist independently of our individual consciousness (Joseph, 2007: 345-359). There is a danger that this can lead to a determinist approach but its open systems approach accepts that, given the fluidity and interconnectedness of social systems, the outcomes are not determined and individual agents can still have a causal impact (Patomaki: 117-120; Kurki, 2007: 361-378). Contrary to more relativist schools, critical realism does not accept that there is no reality or truth which can be perceived, even if it cannot be entirely apprehended. However, it is also to be distinguished from any positivism as it accepts the reflective nature of social knowledge (it recognises that we need to interpret and explain) and it looks for causation occurring beyond the level of the individual and the

formally provable. It is thus highly congruent with the philosophy of historical sociology more generally (Lawson, 2007: 357-358).

Critical realism's open, historicist and stratified approach is recognised as fruitful for the field of International Relations (Patomaki, 2002; Wight and Patomaki, 2000: 213-237), and it lays the conceptual underpinning for the following analysis of EU timescapes. Historicism refers to the rejection of the belief that there are universal laws in history, arguing for 'the time and space dependence of causal mechanisms...which cannot be reduced to universal regularities,' (Steinmetz, 2010: 234). As such historicism allows us to delineate macro-timescapes (patterns of causation related to different periods of history). In the field of IR the historicist turn emerged in response to the a-historical, neo-realist vision of international relations, developed by Waltz, which posited core causal factors and laws (namely anarchy and its consequences) as determining features of the international system (Lawson, 2007; Waltz, 1979). For example, Robert Cox emphasised the distinction between synchronic and diachronic reasoning: synchronic focusing on problem solving at a given point in time and diachronic taking a longer view (incorporating changing structures) (Cox, 1983). On a more focused level the different forms of historical institutionalism (Pierson, 2004) also embody historicist principles.

Apart from the general principle of historicism, the related concepts of stratification and emergent properties, offer a framework for understanding the complexity of contemporary causal patterns. The notion of 'emergent properties', originating in evolutionary science (Hodgson, 2005: 899-914), refers to the fact that over time an entity can emerge with its own structures, causal mechanisms, and dynamics, which are not reducible to the sum of its parts. Stratification implies that our complex social reality includes different levels of causation (due to the phenomenon of emergent properties over time). On a more applied level, this historicist recognition of complexity and stratification is also relevant to our understanding of power, the fundamental concept of international relations and

politics. As there is no homogenous immanent logic across time and space power does not have one monolithic source or form (be it military or economic). This provides the basis for a more 'multi-factorial' conception of power (Mann, 1986: 1-33; Lawson, 2006: 481-482). For example Mann's study of the operation and evolution of power in human societies divines four primary sources of power: political, military, ideological and economic, and these networks of power are 'overlapping and intersecting' in distinct forms in specific historical epochs (Mann, 1986: 1-33). This understanding of society as stratified, including different levels of causation and power, allows us to conceive of it in terms of different causal timescapes operating at different levels.

Bates presents a framework for understanding the temporal complexity of causation, going beyond the dualist tendencies of social scientists to reduce it to the agency-structure dichotomy or a linear-cyclical dichotomy (Bates, 2006: 143-161). For a richer understanding Bates advocates a 'circadian' conception of time, in which multiple temporalities coexist. This is based on the example of nature in which biological entities' internal biological rhythms and linear life time are linked to macro time-cycles, namely the earth's rotation around the sun. This model of a multitude of interconnected temporalities is clearly relevant to the social world also, although the naturalistic methodology could be misleading (as the harmonious and self-supporting dimension of the natural temporal processes may not apply). Here Bates's conceptualisation chimes with Hutchings arguments as to the heterotemporality of world politics (Hutchings, 2008). These different temporalities can also be understood, in the socio-political world in terms of different causal timescapes at play. Causal timescapes may also be understood in terms of Patomaki's 'causal complexes', the set of components (including agents and structures) which cause various outcomes (Patomaki, 2002), although this particular framework is not applied here. In brief, critical realism offers a meta-theoretical underpinning for an approach that incorporates explanation and interpretation; and provides the ontological basis for a much fuller application of the timescape concept developed by Goetz and Meyer-Sahling. In particular its principles of complexity and stratification, allows for an

ontology that understands and explains the social world in terms of various causal timescapes. The rest of this article will apply this to how the complex and differentiated external actions of the EU.

Timescapes of the European Union's structural foreign policy

The institutional timescapes relevant to EU foreign policy and external relations, include the various internal political and institutional cycles discussed above, but also the EU's institutionalisation of time in the policies it forms with other countries/regions. The broader, causal, timescapes (the temporal frameworks of the changes it seeks to inspire), are understood in terms of the EU's liberal structural foreign policy (Keukeleire and Delreux, 2014; Holden, 2009). Let us start with the institutional timescapes of the European Union, as outlined by Goetz (2009). At the most basic level for example, we have the permanent bureaucracy and legal system, the 5 year cycle of the leadership of the Commission and the Parliament, the 2 ½ year cycle of the President of European Council and the High Representative, an average 4-5 year cycle for national political leadership, a 7-year budgetary framework and so on. Goetz and Meyer-Sahling argue that this temporal dimension is particularly relevant to the EU due to the complexity of its institutions and that these timescapes may be a reflection (an effect of power relations) or a cause in themselves in certain instances (2009: 327–328). A starting point for their discussion is the assumption that the EU institutions (legal framework and the Commission, Council bureaucracy) operate on linear time, whereas the political time of states is cyclical (Goetz, 2009: 206–208). Goetz and Meyer-Sahling's work builds on the path-breaking work of Ekengren who argues for the cyclical character of EU time (Ekengren 2002: 143). They argue that EU time (as a whole) has a stronger linear character (Goetz 2009: 218) and in any case transcend the simple linear-cyclical dichotomy (in line with Bate's ontology).

EU external policy making includes all of the various timescapes involved in EU politics and policy-making in general. It involves 'real-time' instruments (demarches, diplomacy, sanctions, security interventions) as well as the embedding of structural changes. In terms of the timescapes of its

institutionalised relationships they are again 'linear' in terms of permanent legal structures and a direction of ever greater interdependence/closer cooperation which is supposed to be insulated from contemporary political pressures, and cyclical in their operations (joint-institutions meeting at regular intervals). The EU's outside interlocutors, have to consider an intricate array of timescapes which may affect their economic and political relations:

European Parliamentary elections and Commission leadership appointments.

Appointments of the High Representative and President of the European Council.

Elections in member states and the short-term political logic of national decision-makers in general (Ekengreen, 2002: 147-148).

The linear legal and institutionalised structures should, in theory, provide direction and consistency to the relationship, in the face of all of these multileveled changes. While critical of the EU, outside powers do appreciate its consistent, long-term role in global public policy issues (Morini, Peruzzi and Poletti: 37-38; Fioramonti and Olivier, 2010: 110). On the other hand, the EU's challenges in dealing with immediate crises have been comprehensively diagnosed (Boin, Ekengreen, Rhinard, 2013; Pohl, 2014).

Let us now turn to the deeper question of causal timescapes, beginning with the EU's conception of these. The EU form of foreign policy or external relations has been mostly focused on legal, social, and economic change. As such it has often been conceptualised in terms of civilian power and normative power (Maull, 2005; Manners, 2006). EU enlargement for example, a process of gradually integrating neighbouring states, has been described as its greatest foreign policy success (Solana, 2007). The EU focus on deep legal, economic and social structures (now accompanied by more traditional diplomatic/security instruments) was labelled structural foreign policy/ structural diplomacy (Keukeleire, Thiers and Justaert, 2009). These terms capture the sense which the EU'S foreign policy objectives are dependent on long-term structural change (although the means of achieving this are not always clear). The EU is seeking to effect social-economic, geo-economic,

geopolitical and ideational change. It is attempting to shape the legal/regulatory structures of the collective economy and the terms of exchange (trade law), broader social and economic structures, as well as political and geopolitical structures. Substantially, this is a foreign policy supporting liberal globalisation (Holden, 2015), albeit one skewed by European values and interests (Wade and Meunier, 2010). Economically this involves supporting free trade, investor rights and the private sector in general.

The core features of the EU's foreign or global policies here are its support for legalisation (Kahler, 2000) in the international sphere. For example, the EU has been consistent in its support for legally binding international agreements on climate change. In forming the WTO the EU insisted on a stronger more permanent dispute settle mechanism than had been the case. Legalisation is both a repudiation of traditional realist world views and, potentially, an exercise of deep structural power, as laws are effectively a society's genetic code which shapes how it evolves in the future. A related feature of EU policy is the institutionalisation of political and economic relations, primarily an investment in the future. 'Developing' countries are the focus of the EU's structural foreign policy. In many ways the concept of development (itself replete with teleological undertones) encapsulates the EU's attitude. Development in contemporary parlance implies a peaceful process of change, quite different from the historical 'development' of European and North American states. The EU presents itself as a major partner in this process (Olivier and Fioramonti, 2010; Holden, 2015: 10-12).

The causal timescapes implied in the EU's structural foreign policy are not always explicit. What is proposed are a complex series of economic, institutional, social and political changes on a set of different geographical scales and time-scales. As outlined in the following section on Euro-Mediterranean integration there is an implicit chain of cause and effect (although the sequence is not always clear) in which reform supports development which leads to political change and greater interdependence. It should be noted that the macro-causal timescape is based on a liberal (and to

an extent teleological world view): institutions, legal agreements and EU-supported reforms create a framework for better relations and strengthened market forces, in which market forces lead to prosperity, together with other reforms they support civil society, liberal plural societies. There are also wider macro-level assumptions that globalisation, in terms of the acceleration, expansion and intensification of transnational economic interactions, will continue, thus helping to supersede local politico-economic power blocs.

A critical framework for analysing the timescapes of EU foreign policy

Thus the EU has been trying to lead a transnational process of change but the impediments to its success are many. Challenges include the various disconnects within its own institutional timescapes, between these timescapes and those of its partners, difficulties in acting coherently at key moments of change, as well as more fundamental challenges to its vision. In regard to the first two impediments or challenges, the institutional timescapes and the interaction with outsiders, a relatively simple empirical analysis will suffice to investigate these. The third challenge is essentially a question of crisis management and will be explored in the analysis of the EU reaction to the Arab Spring. Exploring the last, most fundamental, 'challenge', which refers to the differences between its imagined timescapes of change and the timescapes of reality, requires a stronger theoretical context as it requires a counter-theory of how causation occurs in global politics. The argument, as already implied, is that the EU's imagined timescapes are based on a liberal historical worldview. The specific causal assumptions relate to the impact of trade and free markets on economic growth and the impact of economic growth on broader social and political phenomena.

One stark counter-position is provided by the historical materialist thesis that the internal contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, would eventually lead to a 'crisis of accumulation'. Marxist thought has often been in dialogue with the (non-Marxist) Kondratieff who, writing in the 1920s, postulated regular cyclical phases (of approximately 50 years) in global

capitalism: an upswing – a wave of accelerated investment/profitability/growth – followed by a downswing with reduced investment, rate of profit etc. (Day, 1976: 68). The concept of ‘cycles’, with its implication of relatively regular changes has been controversial (Mandel, 1975: 126-135). Trotsky argued that change was much more ‘spasmodic’ (Day, 1976). Mandel combined Kondratieff’s concepts with Marxist and historical analysis to delineate the 1970s as the beginning of a period of ‘late capitalism’ in which the capitalist system could no longer contain its contradictions (1975). David Harvey also argues that capitalism having reached its geographic limits, and the limits of financial engineering, is reaching its final limits (Harvey, 2014). The implications of this framework for the EU’s structural foreign policy are clear: its trade and integration policies will not lead to sufficient growth. Rooted in Marxist thought, and dealing more explicitly with temporality in geopolitics as well as geoeconomic, is the World Systems Analysis/WSA approach. This focuses in particular on the ‘the rise and fall of large polities and pulsations in the spatial extent and intensity of trade networks’ (Chase-Dunn and Hall, 2015: 190). Central to its analysis is an acceptance of the Kondratieff theory and the rise and fall of great powers. WSA’s primary exponent, Wallerstein, takes a relatively Marxian view of capitalist globalisation, arguing that a systemic crisis is imminent (Wallerstein, 1995: 25-46). Again the implications for the EU’s project are dire.

If historical materialism offers temporally conscious theoretical frameworks its ideological tenets mean that the failure of the EU is over-determined. The analysis here will draw on historical materialist concepts but the major analytical framework is based on the looser more heterodox theories of Susan Strange. She offers an implicitly historicist understanding of the structures of the global political economy, which she subdivides into finance, production, security and knowledge (bringing in the element of reflexivity). An over-riding theme was the role of public power (states) vis a vis markets (different elements of the private sector). Strange was a critique of the concept of globalisation, because the contemporary increase in the power of transnational capital was initiated

by one state, the US, and transnational capital still had a strong geographical power base (Strange, 1986). Thus she understood the increased structural power of transnational capitalism as a specific historical moment rather than a 'natural' evolution (as a liberal or Marxist would, in different senses). Strange did not follow the historical materialist thesis of the inevitable implosion of capitalism. Rather her arguments can be understood as a Polanyi-esque critique of pure free market capitalism (Polanyi, 2001), with a particular critique of the financialisation of the global economy (Strange, 1986). A major emphasis was on how the hyper time of the financial markets has overwhelmed the regular production and exchange economy. Strange's ideas offer a more open template for analysing the EU's structural foreign policy. Her outline of the different structures of the global economy (not limited to the four major structures cited) offers a pluralistic framework for analysing the causal timescapes (which can be understood as the unfolding of direct and structural power in the world). Strange does not presuppose any regularity either in terms of teleological or cyclical development, but can help us analyse how changes in the global economy with the power of agents, to shape change in the world. Of particular note here is the EU's considerable structural power over production and exchange within its own orbit compared to its power over financial and security developments.

When it comes to the specific question of domestic social and political change, historical sociology approaches offer an alternative to the liberal modernisation theory inherent in many Western policies. Historical sociologists take a long-term approach to studying how state and societies interrelate, including the impact of transnational economic and social factors (Halliday, 2005; Hinnebusch 2014). They emphasise the role of path dependency, the continued relevance of pre-established institutional dynamics and economic patterns. As such they offer a lens for understanding how change occurs beyond the linear political liberalisation/democratisation continuum. As outlined in the following sections this is particularly relevant to the case of the Mediterranean/Middle East.

The EU's structural foreign policy: a case study of the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean has been defined as a particular geopolitical and economic region (as opposed to a purely geographical one) by the EU since the 1970s. As such, due its obvious geopolitical significance for the EU (which has expanded to include most of the Northern shore) it has been a major focus for the EU's foreign policy (Bicchi, 2007). In the post-1989 era, EU policy-makers became increasingly concerned with a wide range of threats (Ibid: 131-148). The non-EU controlled Mediterranean shore was a region riven by conflict and replete with other forms of instability. There are numerous causes of this instability (for example the post-colonial legacy is evident in the Israeli-Arab and the Western Sahara conflicts). One factor (seized upon by the EU) is the problematic process of economic and social modernisation in the Arab states in question. Lack of economic development, and partial economic reforms, had left an array of states suffering from a formidable range of social problems including unemployment, poor habitation, low educational standards and high levels of poverty (European Commission, 1994: 427). The wave of democratisation begun in the 1970s had not reached these countries. They formed part of a greater Middle East region characterised by Fukuyama as one of the 'empires of resentment' on the margins of the inexorably expanding liberal international community (Fukuyama, 1992: 235-236). Thus the Mediterranean Partner Countries/MPCs were challenged in terms of political as well as economic legitimacy.

The EU's proposed solution to this was a classic case of structural foreign policy: integrate the states in question into the liberal international community by leading a new modernisation and liberalisation process (Youngs, 2002). Since the 1970s it had established trade and cooperation agreements with the states, this was revitalised in the Renovated Mediterranean Policy of 1990 and a much more ambitious Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was agreed in 1995 to develop the relations in the economic, political and cultural spheres. Table one outlines the policies, institutions and the participating states). Given the powerful economic gravitational pull of the EU in this era,

aspirations towards a leadership role on the EU's part were not entirely unrealistic (White, 2001). The economic sphere was to be the driving force, this was where most resources would be allocated (new aid programmes to help reforms) and where the most ambitious, specific and legally binding agreements would be applied (Marino, 2011). As a part of the EMP the EU signed Association Agreements with each of the states. These provided for free trade (on a staged 14-year period) and future economic integration. The broader aim was a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area, in line with the development of the global multilateral trade system. The agreements also provided for 'the development of democracy and the rule of law within the political systems' of the partners (Barcelona Declaration, 1995) in line with the EU's gradualist approach. Institutions were established to monitor the process of change and develop it further. Allowances were made for standard diplomatic cooperation, and aid of different forms was provided, but the major force for transition was the long-term impact legal frameworks providing for economic and social interaction and hence modernisation. Introduced in 2003, the European Neighbourhood Policy built on these pre-existing policies and relationships. It provided a more explicit path for integration with the EU (if not full membership) laying methods and processes for the adoption of EU laws and regulations. These frameworks were supplemented by the Union for the Mediterranean in 2009, which was more of a joint institution (Gillespie and Bicchi, 2011). In short, the overarching logic behind the EU approach – which can be fairly gleaned from the framework documents (Holden, 2009: 50–55) – was that reform coinciding with and inspired by integration with the EU, would promote economic liberalisation and development, gradual political liberalisation and more stable, friendly, states in the Mediterranean region.

The institutional timescape for Euro-Mediterranean relations conforms to the general model outlined above. The legal agreements provided a linear, if incremental, track of long-term reform and integration. Institutional cooperation to manage this process would take place on a cyclical basis (regular meetings of the various bilateral and multilateral institutions). This, mostly low-level

cooperation, was intended to be insulated from the ebb and flow of international relations. It would be led on the EU side by the EU's permanent bureaucracy in the Commission and the Council Secretariat. Generally, although the Commission would lead the implementation of policies (and its rotating leadership would not alter its basic posture), the resources available to the Commission would be determined by intergovernmental processes (the 7-year budgetary framework for example) and in the final instances the political support of the member states would be needed for the various carrots and sticks to work.

Table 1 The Euro-Mediterranean institutions

	Membership	Institutions	Primary focus
Euro-Mediterranean Partnership/EMP (1995)	Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, The Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey.	Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Meetings. The Euro-Mediterranean Committee of officials. Association Council Association Committee Sub-committees and working groups.	Economic and political reform; integration and cooperation.
European Neighbourhood Policy (2004)	The EMP partners (excluding Turkey) plus Eastern European and Eurasian states.	The bilateral EMP institutions.	Economic and political reform; integration and cooperation.
Union for the Mediterranean (2008)	The EMP partners plus Mauritania and the non-EU Balkan states	A permanent Secretariat and Co-Presidency plus the multilateral Euro-Mediterranean institutions.	Development, energy and broader 'cooperation'.

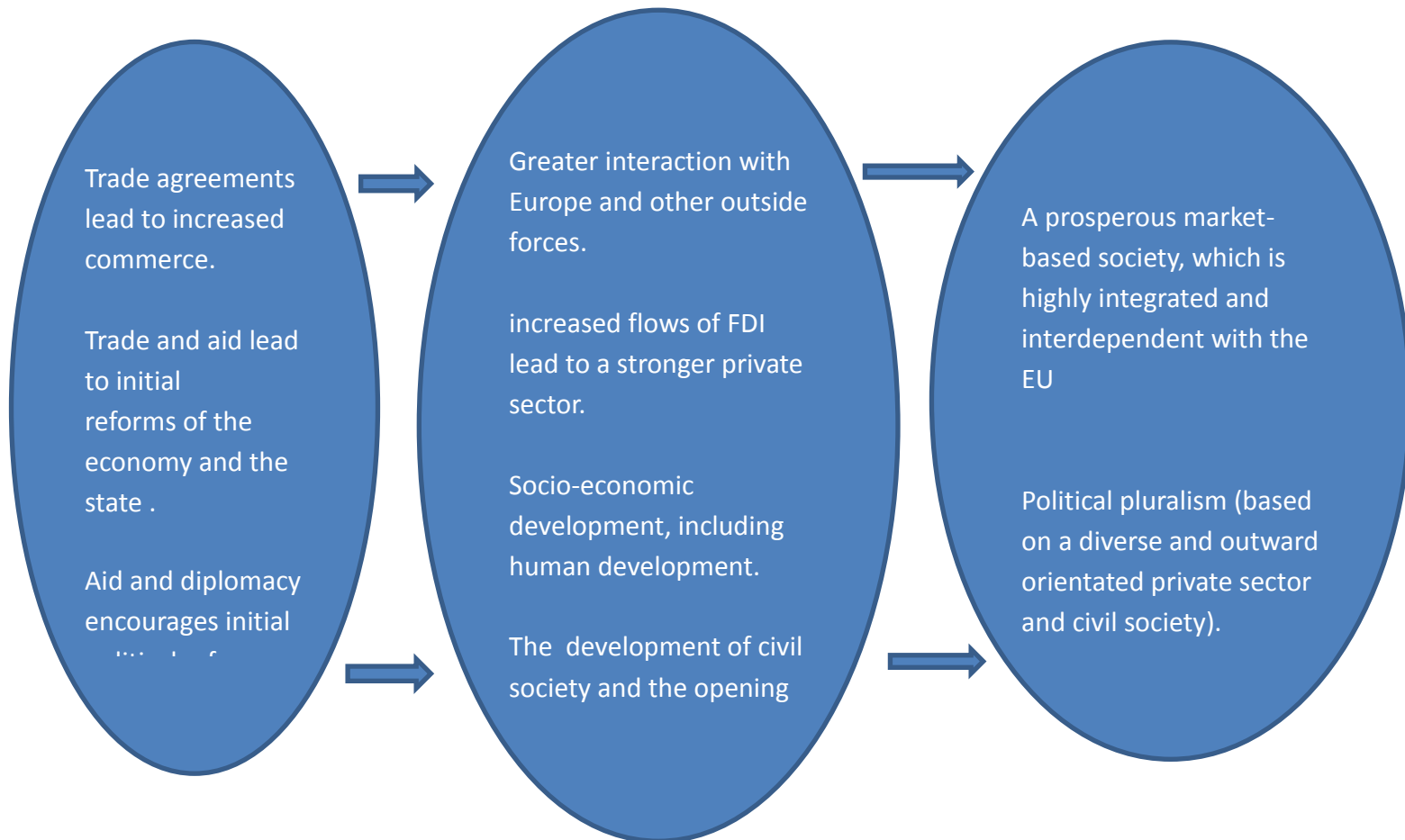
The basic causal timescapes involved in this liberalisation/modernization and integration vision are clear. In practice the causal chains between the various desiderata: economic reform, trade opening, structural economic change, economic and social development, social and political pluralism are less clear. Figure 1 reconstructs the causal timescapes based on the EU's 'logic of intervention' (a phrase which comes from aid evaluation discourse). The trade agreements should lead to immediate (or at least very short term) reforms of the economy and the state in certain respects as should the aid projects funded by the EU. Other activities would begin a gradual process of explicitly political reform, where practical (low scale forms of political aid should support civil society groups and modest reforms with willing governments). In the medium term the economic reforms, and the pressures of increased trade should lead to a stronger private sector. Combined with increased flows of FDI (due to its access to the EU market) this should lead to socio-economic development, including social and human development more generally (better job prospects, environmental quality, education, living standards and so forth). In turn this will support greater interaction, interdependence with Europe and other outside societies. Parallel to this will be broader processes of social cultural change including a change in state culture (greater transparency in how it operates) and business culture (less reliance on patronage). In the longer term this should lead to a fully market-based society with political pluralism. This would emerge due to the gradual dismantlement of the patrimonial or rentier state (Schwartz, 2008), in favour of market forces, and the rise of a more autonomous and diverse private sector which would support diverse political interests.

Figure 1 The EU's logic of intervention in MPCs

Short term

Medium term (5-10 years)

Longer term (15-30 years)



The obstacles to the success of the EU's vision were manifold and cautionary notes do not have to rely on hindsight. Let us isolate three logical challenges. Firstly, even if the 'neoliberal' assumptions about unbundling authoritarian blocs are – in the long-term – valid, will the EU's set of institutional timescapes be adequate to implement this in the face of different geopolitical forces and agents? Secondly, how will the different timescapes, on different scalar planes, reinforce each other as planned? (In particular will global forces reinforce the EU's regional drive). Thirdly, and more fundamentally, the liberal/neoliberal assumptions about economic, social and political change can be, and were, challenged.

The timescapes of Euro-Mediterranean relations in practice: 1995 to 2011

The EU agreed legal and institutional arrangements with nearly all of its proposed partners. Association Agreements were signed, which provided for free trade in goods (after a transition period) and regular institutional contact at different levels (see table 1), including meetings between permanent officials and political leadership. These provided the institutional support for the kind of developmental process envisaged by the EU. On the European side the Commission provided a strong degree of continuity. The EU's structural policies in tandem with global forces had a real impact, with a significant increase in trade and in investment flows. Reforms of legislative and administrative frameworks did take place, often focused on the external dimension of the state (reforms of customs procedures for example). Syria, the last country to agree, initialled an Association Agreement in 2008 (this was later derailed by events). Progress towards the broader Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area also continued. The rules of origin provisions in the bilateral trade agreements were expanded to promote greater intra-Arab trade. Relatively high levels of economic growth were recorded in most of the Mediterranean partners, and those that were most enthusiastic also received foreign direct investment boosts.

The institutions and long-term processes engendered by the EU did offer a degree of insulation from the headwinds of regional and global geopolitics. EU relations were able to proceed, for example, with Morocco – which implemented its trade agreement and signed numerous further agreements, seeking its advanced status – throughout a period of very difficult relations with the Spanish government, including an incident in 2002 when the two countries came close to armed conflict over Persil/Leila Island (Holden, 2009: 78-81). The variegated political timescape of the EU led to more of a challenge and gave policy a more staccato nature than would have been ideal. It was Spain's own Presidency of the EU that gave a kick-start to the initial Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Bicchi, 2007: 164–167). Other political and geopolitical cycles gave rise to the European Neighbourhood Policy, which was never a political success (Ibid : 175–178)). Developments within French politics gave rise to the Union for the Mediterranean Project, which in its initial conception would have been a major challenge to the Euro-Med process (Gillespie, 2011). However the Commission and other member states were able to reign in the original ideas.

It could not of course remain completely insulated from real-time geopolitics. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular spilled over to contaminate regional relations. This need not have been disastrous, as there was also scope for sub-regional and bilateral cooperation. Other events would impinge more sharply on the EU's vision. The attacks of 9.11 resulted in a new geopolitical dispensation which saw direct American relational power brought to bear on the region. This had unhelpful consequences for the EU's gradualist approach and the invasion and subsequent civil wars in Iraq greatly damaged stability. The War on Terror more generally led to the EU member states focusing much more on immediate security concerns (terrorism) than the long-term security approach implicit in the EU framework. This need for strong short-term security relations took the wind out of the sails of the transformation agenda. These political and geopolitical cycles meant that the EU institutions never fully embodied the weight and political force of the EU's constituent parts in their implementation of the reformist/integration project.

More generally, the EU's approach neglected historical sociological insights regarding the social and political history of the state or the agency of existing political elites within the MPCs. Essentially the EU institutions managing the Euro-Mediterranean relationship took an apolitical approach to structural change, while the regimes in question retained their capacity for agency. Said regimes had accumulated enormous political, economic and social power in the decades before the EU launched the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. While they made discursive commitments to liberal economic reform, as well as human rights and democracy (within the Barcelona Declaration and the various bilateral legal agreements), they retained all of their instruments and freedoms to interfere in the integration and reform process which, the EU had announced, was calculated to gradually unravel the roots of their own hegemony. It was obvious that the political regimes in question would not wish to do this (Schlumberger, 2008: 634-635). It had been well documented that there are numerous means for governments to distort or take advantage of liberal reforms (Ibid; Dillman, 2001; Hellman, 1998: 203-234). The most obvious example of this is when privatisations are manipulated in favour of regime allies, thus maintaining the politicised neo-patrimonial economic structure in different forms. In essence the EU acted as if it were dealing with a 'blank slate' and failed to consider the role of pre-established political dynamics, and the historical interaction between political and socio-economic change. This failure to take the specific domestic internal structures into account, and to fully marshal its own political leverage, rendered its long-term vision insipid.

The interpellation of geopolitics and the diffusion of EU interventions in complex endogenous institutions were not in itself fatal to the long-term reform project. However, to accentuate these problems the macro-timescape had not unfolded according to the EU's vision. It is true that the EU's push for trade liberalisation and reform was supported/reinforced by the US, the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO etc. All of which encouraged the shrinking of the state and the

liberalisation of the economic and society. However, other global economic cycles in the 21st century were not in sync with the neoliberal project. A dramatic spike in commodity prices, including oil and gas, partly fuelled by the development of the Chinese economy, gave some governments, notably Algeria, new resources to resist liberalisation. The so-called global rebalancing, in which various Southern countries grew substantially, also made new economic partners and sources of funding available to MPCs (Woods, 2008). Generally, while globalisation (broadly understood) proceeded, the western-led global regulatory project went askew. The WTO failed to agree a new round of liberalisation in Doha, while the continued success of China championed a new form of illiberal developmental state, which practiced capitalism and traded widely without embracing liberal institutions in any sense. Lastly the volatility of global markets would impinge on the gradualist process hoped for. The spike in global food prices of 2008 led to very dramatic socio-economic crisis in many states (Bush, 2009). The global financial crisis also affected MPCs through reduced demand for their products and reduced investment exacerbating unemployment problems.

Furthermore, European integration and the EU's capacity for action would be gravely undercut by the vicissitudes of global capitalism, which was increasingly more 'spasmodic' than 'cyclical'. Generally, the EU had never shaped the rhythms of private financial institutions in the same way that it shaped European production and trade. The speed and intensity of financial transactions was one of the motors of globalisation and it dragged the EU along in its wake (Strange, 1988: 106-110). The financial crash in the United States in 2008, morphed into a sovereign debt crisis in Europe in 2010 as various Eurozone states came close to bankruptcy due to the scale of public sector or private sector debt. These crises rose in intensity and took on a systemic level due to the widely perceived deficiencies in the Eurozone system. The roots of this crisis can also be understood in terms of the EU's asynchronous political and economic timescapes and its teleological view of time. It has become a truism that the problem with the Euro was that currencies were integrated but economic and fiscal policy was not. While it may have been assumed that the required integration would come

in practice the task of catching-up and creating the collective common resources and institutions required has been enormous, as the historical institutionalists implied sequence can be determinative (Bulmer, 2009: 309-310). Thus the 'moment' of the Arab Spring was met by a European Union depleted in terms of economic capital and political energy.

At the most fundamental level the logic of the EU's model of development was shown to be awry. The notion that free trade and liberal reforms would result in both a stronger private sector and positive socio-economic changes was not borne out by reality. The economic changes it led had not in most cases spilled over to significant political liberalisation, neither had the broader social and institutional changes occurred. Indeed the form of development promoted by the EU increased inequality and little progress was made with the core socio-economic conditions of the population. The major features of the socio-economic cycle were the youth bulge (combined with a growth in unemployment (youth and graduate unemployment in particular) and urbanisation (UNDP, 2002: 36-37). While the EU's economic policies may have helped economic growth, this was entirely inadequate to deal with these challenges. In Egypt, for example, despite impressive GDP growth, poverty rates had increased (Amin, 2014: 393). In justification of the EU's approach it has been pointed out that Tunisia, the country which led the process of change within the region was the state which had integrated the most with the EU. Accordingly, the events can be seen as a verification of the EU's structural modernisation policies (Zank, 2011). However the nature of the 'Arab Spring' was far from the gradual modernisation and liberalisation sought by the EU, and what happened afterwards gave confirmation that the region was not headed on a liberal trajectory. It is clear that while the EU had some impact it could not shape to a sufficient degree the ongoing socio-economic and socio-political cycles in the partner countries. Even for businesses, the core stakeholder in this policy arena, studies have shown that the business cycle of Mediterranean enterprises was not affected by the evolution of trade and financial cooperation (Canova and Schlaepfer, 2014). In summary it is clear that whatever the institutional achievements of the EU, its

vision was out of sync with the timescapes of change in the region and it lacked the structural power to shape global politico-economic cycles, domestic political institutions or the rhythm and form of development.

The moment

The 'Arab Spring' was not the kind of controlled transition that emerged in Latin America, or even the messy but (mostly) peaceful popular upheavals that occurred in Eastern Europe. The Arab Spring uprisings were bloody, uncertain in their outcome and soon led to civil wars and geopolitical conflict. The timing of the actual revolts took everyone by surprise. For the previous three decades policy-makers and academics had outlined the threats facing economically stagnant regimes of dubious legitimacy (Zoubir, 1999; European Commission, 1994). Yet the authoritarian regimes of the region had demonstrated substantial durability. While the ingredients of revolt were there, social science has little capacity to predict when the critical mass of revolution will ignite. Globally the recent wave of democratization appeared to be on the turn, with resurgent authoritarianism in Eastern Europe and the developing world. The EU seemed to be losing its interest in democratization (Cavatorta and Pace, 2010) as did the US under Obama. The events of the Arab Spring transpired rapidly: a form of spontaneous spillover which offered an evocative contrast with the EU's legalistic presence. During the dramatic events in Tunisia and Egypt the EU was quiescent. Its representatives did rhetorically support the rights of the protestors, without taking any action to support them. Effectively, it was a bystander (Viilup, 2011), although this was the case for other international actors also. In regard to Libya (a different kind of revolution), and Syria, the EU remained a minor player, while the traditional military powers came to the fore.

The relative inactivity of the EU in the moment of revolution was unsurprising but once, in Tunisia and Egypt at least, significant change had taken place; there was an opportunity for the EU to increase its role. The EU had important leverage given the extreme economic vulnerability of the

states concerned (Springborg, 2011: 427-423). The EU did assume an immediate role in coordinating a European and international response ((Boin, Ekengreen, Rhinard, 2013: 1). Nevertheless its reaction lacked initiative and purposefulness. Concerning economic and social relations, it was political figures from EU member states who led with initiatives (Viilup, 2011: 1). The major initial collective reaction the EU as a bloc could muster was a defensive move in relation to migration. Greater financial support was indicated later in the year, The Commission provided 700 billion in extra-funding for the ENPI (European Commission, 2013; 3), together with a modest set of proposals to upgrade the EU's policies (European Commission, 2011: 303). The EU's standard way of thinking reasserted itself and its strategic response was embedded in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The logic to this approach was that these were countries in 'transition', a state for which the ENP, and implicitly the EU's general approach towards accession countries, would prove relevant (High Representative and EC, 2012). The 2012 document elaborated on the transition challenge, noting the need for differentiation between states and discussed the various (non-aid) forms of partnership and knowledge-sharing that could be undergone. Some political acumen was shown in the recognition that 'The sequencing of reforms is highly context-dependent and a balance has to be sought between "quick-win" reforms that serve to maintain the political and social momentum and to retain popular support for the entire process and for longer-term reforms' (ibid). However, the general framework of transitology did not bode well, with its teleological assumptions and unwarranted optimism (Heydemann, 2014: 311-313). Furthermore the ENP itself is an unrealistic template in which all futures lead to Brussels, or at least an alignment with Brussels. It mimics the enlargement model without offering accession (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009: 797). The unreality of the EU's approach was thrown into sharp relief as many of the transitional societies were marked by increasing geopolitical turmoil.

This tendency towards long-termist liberal policies (that side-step inconvenient 'real-time' problems) is most evident in its approach to economic relations. Here the major initiative announced was to

initiate Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (which followed on logically from the ENP). The DCFTAs were to achieve regulatory convergence in 'sanitary and phytosanitary rules (SPS), animal welfare, customs and border procedures, competition and public procurement'. (High Representative and European Commission/EC 2011b: 8-9). Apart from Morocco, there has been a lack of enthusiasm to commit or even discuss such regulatory harmonisation (European Commission, 2014: 15). This form of integration is out of kilter with global politics, where developing countries have increasingly resisted regulatory harmonisation (in the WTO). Even assuming that the assumptions about the beneficial effects are correct they could not possibly materialise in the short to medium term and would take a long time to agree (Witney and Dworkin, 2012: 64). That this is the major vector of the EU's economic relations at a time of such political and geopolitical turbulence is illustrative of how its long-term structural template leads to unrealistic approaches. In reviewing the EU's reaction to the Arab uprisings, it should be noted that a range of other actors (the US, international organisations and so forth) failed to have a significant positive impact on developments. However, the EU is the dominant economic pole in the region and could have been expected to play a larger role. Also there was much more at stake for it than more distant actors.

Conclusion

The EU's self-image as a global power is based on its economic weight and structural relationships; and its future potential more generally. The Mediterranean is a classic example of the EU's long-term approach and its ultimate weakness as a force for change. It constructed an elaborate reform and integration relationship with (most) states of the region; a long-term structural policy which was overlaid with other policies and relationships. Such structural policies were challenged by the agency of entrenched authoritarian regimes and sometimes undermined by various elements within the EU. Meanwhile the structural policy's assumptions about broader socio-economic developments at different scales proved inaccurate. As it stands the EU was engrossed in relatively superficial legal/institutional processes as volatility in the region grew. The EU was quiescent during the

eruption of popular uprisings in 2011 and its primary economic reaction to the new dispensation has been legalistic, long-termist and unrealistic. The EU's failure is a failure of power in different senses. Its reaction to the crisis showed a limited capability – limited power as an agent – to influence events. However, it also signifies the failure of its deeper structural foreign policy. The vision of development, both domestic and global, implicit in the EU's strategy has been shown to be out of sync with other domestic and global causal timescapes while the EU lacked the structural power needed to shape the economic, financial and social dynamics.

The explanation here is quite specific, as it focuses on one particular region. However, the insights – in particular the incongruence between the complex patterns of real causation and the EU's teleological discursive timescapes – are relevant to other areas. Eastern Europe has witnessed the very real result of the EU's structural diplomacy interacting with volatile contemporary realities. Of course the fact that reality unfolds differently to an entity's plans is hardly newsworthy. However, the EU is especially problematic (relative to a state), because of the complexity and dissonance of its timescapes and the structures they seek to marshal; while its particular sequence of internal development creates additional pressure. In the EU's case there is a particularly stark dissonance both between its differentiated institutional timescapes and between its liberal causal timescapes and the reality of economic and geopolitical cycles of change. This explains the nebulous nature of the EU as an international actor. Those looking to the European Union as either a great power or a force for progressive change are likely to remain disappointed. To paraphrase De Gaulle's famous put-down of Brazil in the 1960s: 'the European Union has great potential, and it always will'. Beyond the case of the EU, there is room for much more in-depth research on timescapes at several levels of international relations and world politics. This research agenda could include more rigorous analysis (including quantitative data) of the different institutional timescapes of given actors and their interaction with productive, commercial, financial and geopolitical cycles. More generally a critical

realist informed focus on temporalities offers a framework for combining congruent work in different social science disciplines to explore the multiple causalities of the international system.

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