

BOOK REVIEW

Adel Abdel Ghafar. *The European Union and North Africa: Prospects and Challenges*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2019. ix + 201 pp. Index. \$49.99. Paper. ISBN: 9780815736950.

The relationship between the European Union and the countries of North Africa has been examined in countless books, articles, and reports. The consensual view of this accumulated scholarship is that the objectives of the Barcelona Process—established in 1995—have not been met in any meaningful way. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was set up to bring democracy and economic development to the countries of the southern bank of the Mediterranean through a number of financial, technical, and political instruments created by the EU in accord with partner countries. The literature has over time discussed the reasons why the EU failed in its attempts to export democracy and human rights and was unable to affect economic development positively.

Central to this failure, scholars argue, is the fact that the objectives of the Partnership were fundamentally contradictory, and that when it came time for the EU to make hard choices, it always privileged security and economic gains over human rights and democracy. Adel Abdel Ghafar examines this relationship in a new light in *The European Union and North Africa: Prospects and Challenges*. The innovative contribution of this volume is that it avoids rehashing such facile explanations. Although the book acknowledges these reasons to be accurate, it moves away from going over old ground, preferring instead to focus on offering new policy recommendations. It is in this respect that the book is at its strongest, particularly because the chapters are dedicated to individual North African countries, which allows readers to understand the specificities of each case and therefore better appreciate the recommendations that are offered.

Although each chapter is dedicated to the relationship between the EU and a specific North African state, there are a number of themes running through the book which highlight the main issues of concern for the EU. Unsurprisingly, migration and security figure prominently in the relationship, together with trade. The contributors to the book highlight the benefits of the EU having a more realistic relationship with North Africa,

which means that the promotion of democratization and human rights have been sidelined in favor of greater engagement with more concrete issues upon which a genuine partnership can be built because it does not presuppose a change in the political system. The emphasis of the authors on this more realistic approach leads them to offer policy recommendations to the EU that also seem more realistic, insofar as the normative aspects of the relationship are marginalized. For example, the EU is encouraged to help Algeria move away from oil and gas and toward economic differentiation rather than focusing on its authoritarian political system or its human rights abuses. When it comes to Morocco, again the suggestion is to ensure that migration from the country is better regulated.

There is nothing wrong with many of the policy recommendations and with the assumption that the European Union should not be “preachy” when it comes to political structures and individual freedoms. However, there is an important point worth making in all of this. Many of the ills that the European Union is supposed to help with in North Africa are the by-products of the absence of genuine political pluralism and the popular legitimacy that states need to be strong and able to deliver, particularly on the economic front. While advocating “democracy first” is unrealistic, it should be emphasized that if the EU is serious about contributing to the development of the region, focusing only on technical issues in the realms of security, migration, and trade might not work. As the case of post-2011 Tunisia demonstrates, democracy is not the panacea that will make relations with the EU better and more fruitful for both actors, but it is still an important aspect that EU policy-makers should still genuinely promote. For too long, realist objectives have been privileged over normative ones without this actually leading to greater regional stability and increased security for the EU. A change of direction might therefore not be as “unrealistic” as many contend, as long as appropriate policy instruments are employed.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

Dedieu, Jean-Philippe. 2018. “The Rise of the Migration-Development Nexus in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, 1960–2010.” *African Studies Review* 61 (1): 83–108. doi: 10.1017/asr.2017.95.

Whitaker, Beth Elise. 2017. “Migration within Africa and Beyond.” *African Studies Review* 60 (2): 209–20. doi:10.1017/asr.2017.49.