

Challenges for EU in the Middle East: Use of Soft Power

What is Soft Power?

Analyzing the ways that a country influences the others in the direction that it wants, there are three important points need to be mentioned: 1) The capacity of the country itself; 2) How dependent is the targeted country to the other one; 3) How open is the targeted country to the effects that come from the other one. Besides, a country can use two types of power to obtain outcomes in another country: hard power and soft power. So, what is soft power? “It is the ability to affect others to obtain outcomes one wants through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payments. Whereas hard power the ability to coerce grows out of a country’s military or economic might, soft power arises from the attractiveness of its culture, political ideals/values, and policies”.¹ All the elements which are out of hard power and cannot be measured with capacities, such as ideology, culture, values, history etc. can be evaluated mostly as soft power. “Hard power is coercive force. Soft power can be just about anything else”.² “Hard power and soft power are related because they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one’s purpose by affecting the behavior of others. The distinction between them is one of degree, both in the nature of the behavior and in the tangibility of the resources”.³

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¹ J. Nye, *Soft Power: the means to success in world politics*, United States Public Affairs, 2004.

² R. Cooper, *Hard Power, Soft Power and the Goals of Diplomacy*, in: *American Power in the 21st Century*, D. Held, M. Koenig-Archibugi (eds.), Cambridge, Malden 2004, p. 168.

³ J. Nye, op.cit., p. 7.

It can be asked whether the economic means belong to hard power or soft power. The answer of this question is crucial in the context of our subject. Some academics and researchers think that economic means are more related to hard power despite some other think the opposite. The vital spot in this discussion is the characteristic of the economic means. If it can be evaluated more for rewarding the targeting country, it is much closer to soft power side. For example supplying external aid or financial credit... In this way the country wants to attract the other country by using the affecting and rewarding means of power. Mediterranean Partnership of the EU is an example for this. But if it is using for punishing the country, then it is seen much more as a hard power instrument such as embargo or blockade. If we consider power as a straight scale which begins with hard power at one side and ends with soft power at the other side, we can say that economic instruments are in the middle. And the transition from hard power to soft power is not so strict because this scale includes some gray areas.

Differences between EU and USA in the Context of Soft Power Use

Joseph Nye as the best known authority on the subject mentions in his famous book *Soft Power*, “winning the peace is harder than winning a war and soft power is essential to winning the peace”.⁴ From this point of Nye, the differences between perspectives of US and EU for using power – especially in the Middle East – need to be mentioned. EU prefers to use soft power instruments more than US.⁵ It can be said that, the implications of US represent hard power as EU’s are more related to soft power. “Europe has been seen a model of soft power. The EU has no army although this is one of the areas where unity would bring obvious increase in efficiency and influence. It relies on law, negotiation and multilateral organization”.⁶ The EU’s lack of military instruments is often mentioned in the description of the EU as a ‘normative’, ‘civilian’ or ‘civilizing’ power. “In recent years Europeans have also been more comfortable with and adept at using multilateral institutions than Americans”.⁷ US also have been using soft power but the main difference between US and EU in this content is the order of their preference. EU’s first choice in the Middle East is using soft

⁴ Ibidem, p. xii.

⁵ This is valid especially for George W. Bush Administration. In Obama’s presidential term, we have been witnessing some changes not only in the general framework and implications of US foreign policy, but also in terms of using power.

⁶ R. Cooper, op.cit., p. 168.

⁷ J. Nye, op.cit., p. 81.

power as US's is hard power. US have been trying to reshape Middle East in the context of Greater Middle East Project after September 11. By the way EU has been shaping its new policy for democratization of the region. EU prefers to apply membership perspective or neighbourhood perspective to the countries in the region and uses Europeanization for being a center of attraction, increasing its convincing ability and affecting the countries which are in its periphery.

These differences between the approaches of EU and US have been also result from their strategic culture. Roman Kuźniar discusses in his presentation in the European Parliament on 23 February 2006 the fundamental, structural differences between European and American strategic culture. According to him these are:⁸ 1) the past (historical experience concerning war); European experience is traumatic, self-destructive, for bad reasons. But American is for freedom, idealistic and no serious pain involved. 2) Military capability/potential/strength; European is limited, need to be modest, indirect, etc. as American is without limit – strategy of overwhelming force (no matter how big casualties and victims inflicted tradition of a non-discriminatory use of force. 3) Structure of actor; EU is collective (without any clear leader), use of force negotiated (slow). The US is single, consolidated, similar in NATO (strong leader) 4) Present and future ambitions; EU stands out with crisis management, post-conflict stabilization as the US's ambitions are more hegemonic, global, hence call for 'expeditionary culture' in NATO.

Furthermore, "it is an obvious statement to make today that the EU (the member states and the European institutions) does not have a shared soft power application strategy in the American sense, primarily because of the lack of political consensus on the EU's overall objectives and interests".⁹ The member states have different views and perspectives about the type of power can be used in the Middle East. That is why it has been really difficult to build and apply a common strategy. It can be said that the longer standing members, I mean the first fifteen of them are more closer to the idea of using soft power instruments in Middle East while the rest twelve countries who became EU member after 2004, are more closer to

⁸ R. Kuźniar, *Marching in step? EU, NATO and their respective attitudes to the use of force. Public Hearing: The EU and The Use of Force: Criteria for Intervention*, European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Security and Defense, 23 February 2006, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/hearings/20060223/sede/kuzniar_en.pdf (last visited 4.02.2012).

⁹ A. Michalski, *The EU as a Soft Power: the Force of Persuasion*, in: *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, J. Melissen (ed.), New York 2005, p. 141.

US strategy and perspective. It is known that some Central and Eastern European countries have supported Bush administration in Iraq War. For example Poland, behaved completely with US and England and contributed to the war with its military as one of the occupying powers. At the same time, Germany and France were criticizing US about its strategy in Iraq. "The intra-European row that broke out in the build-up to the war in Iraq brought home the fragility of the European foreign policy regime. Existing and future member states publicly demonstrated their diverging positions regarding the appropriate stance to take in relation to the US. For outside observers, this seemed to prove the futility of seeking to establish a common foreign and security policy among the member states of the EU, which continue placing national priorities before shared European objectives".¹⁰ In general, EU did not approve US for using military instruments in Iraq. It highlighted the position and policies of United Nations in Iraq issue and mentioned that the issue should be solved within the context of UN. However as EU members have discussed about the Iraq policy, they couldn't agree on a common attitude and effective alternative politics to US strategies in Iraq. They only agreed on being against using military force. The EU members who supported Bush's policies in Middle East are more in favor of using hard power instead of soft power. Their historical experiences and geopolitical positions – I mean, being more close to Russia for example- are some of the reasons of their attitude. Another reason can be mentioned is, their desire to strengthen their position in the new international system after Cold War ended.

We can say that there is no consensus between the EU members about the strategy and/or method can be used. If the countries would agree on the strategy we could talk about the means and results of this soft power use more in detail. Why there is disagreement and inconsistency between the EU countries about these issues? This is because the countries are still keeping their national interests in the forefront than the EU interests in common. Besides, they have different perspectives and perceptions on the issues in world politics and also regional problems like the ones in Middle East. This can be based on the historical roles they used to play in the region for instance or, their national interests such as strategic aims or energy needs and so on... It is hard to manage to use hard power in the region. But it is also hard to use soft power efficiently. Why is EU skeptical about using hard power, despite the fact that its members have noteworthy military capacities and hardware? One of the main reasons can be that, EU does not want to spend too much money for security. Besides,

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 124.

the power capacities and position for soft power implications of the EU member states are different than each other. This factor is making it difficult for them to meet at a common point.

If we look at the EU Security Strategy of December 2003, we can see that new security threats to Europe are mentioned in it. These new threats are terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure and organized crime.¹¹ Using military force and hard power instruments are not considered as the first options for the EU in the strategy. But soft power is especially stressed because these new threats cannot be coping with military force. Economic, cultural, ideological and political means are becoming more important for the big powers not only for reaching their goals but also dealing with the new threats in international area. Ensuring stability in EU's borders is also highlighted in the EU Security Strategy. Financial aids and assistance programs are mentioned as important tools in this sense. Besides, strengthening UN for the solutions of international issues is stressed in EU documents. This reflects also the differences between EU and US perspectives in terms of using power. EU is underlying the importance of UN taking role in international conflicts as a common international organization.

Which Instruments Does the EU Use in the Middle East for Strengthening its Position in Terms of Soft Power?

The Middle Eastern and South-East Mediterranean countries are geographically closed to the Europe and also economically very important for EU. In every year immigration from these regions to Europe is increasing and EU is facing with integration problems of the immigrant nations in the European societies. These factors have been also forcing the EU to interest in the problems in the region. In addition, some of the European powers played imperial role in the region in history. This heritage is also becoming important now for some of these powers because they do not want to lose prestige and want to maintain their primary position there. Furthermore, EU is importing energy from Middle Eastern countries and these countries are important trade partners of the EU. Because of these reasons the possible instabilities in the region are really a big threat for EU. In these respects, we can say that EU tries to support democracy and stability in the region also for its benefits and interests. Furthermore, EU wants to solve international and regional problems with dialog. Because

¹¹ *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, Brussels, December 12, 2003, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf> (last visited 4.02.2012).

of this, EU developed some policies and regional strategies which are also the means of soft power of EU in the Middle East. These are: European Neighbourhood Policy, The Union for The Mediterranean and its predecessor The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, The Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean.

EU tries to keep the Middle Eastern countries in its periphery with European Neighbourhood Policy which is put into practice in 2004. The purpose of the policy is to prevent disunity between the member states and EU neighbours and strengthen welfare, stability and security in the region. According to EU, it offers its neighbours privileged relations mainly related to common values like democracy, human rights, governance, market economy, sustainable development etc. It is also claimed that this policy aims to deepen the relations between the countries and help them for integration. The countries which are parts of the European Neighbourhood Policy are: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.¹²

Secondly, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership needs to be mentioned. It focuses on three key aspects: 1) the political and security aspect aims to establish a common area of peace and stability; 2) the economic and financial aspect hopes to allow the creation of an area of shared prosperity; 3) the social, cultural and human aspect aims to develop human resources and promote understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies. The essential aim of the partnership is to develop the standard of life, cultural level, respect to human rights and democracy in Mediterranean countries with cultural and educational programs. In this context, preventing immigration from Mediterranean or at least decreasing the problems that are caused by the immigrants is also intended. The Union for Mediterranean as the successor program of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership includes EU members and Mediterranean Partner countries.

The Effects of Arab Spring

EU did not supported regime changes by force in the Middle East like US has done with some of its European partners in Iraq. If we talk about regime changes without big power's use of hard power, then we should mention internal developments and the effects of soft power instruments like we wit-

¹² See: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/index_en.htm for the Action Plans, Country Reports and other reference documents of the Neighbourhood Policy.

nessed in recent movements in the Middle East which is called Arab Spring.

People were coming together in the squares and demonstrating for their demands on democracy and trying to reach their goals from the squares. This is a European style of popular movement and this interaction is very significant for the developments in the region. The movements in each country are not the same and they show a heterogeneous characteristic. Secular people, religious people, the ones who are not satisfied with their governments etc. came together in opposition movements because of their demands that are related Western democracies and values. Their common character is people's demands on more political participation. Maybe the participation we talk about is not the same as in France or Britain but for sure it is also not like the previous ones like in Egypt. Political participation which can be correlated with EU's soft power is a must for democracy but it is not enough for describing a country as a fully democratic country. But it can be mentioned that Arab communities showed their demands for change and democracy with these 'popular movements' or 'revolutions'. There have already been political and economic instabilities in the region and these recent developments made them more visible.

EU's Approach to Arab Spring

"The EU's handling of the Arab Spring has been widely criticized. Having traditionally prized regional stability over political freedom in the Arab world, the EU has been both cautious about the consequences of the uprisings and late in formulating a common response. Internal divisions and national rivalries for a strategic stake in the post-revolutionary regional order have prevented the EU from adopting a more coherent approach".¹³ "During the Tunisian uprising the EU displayed an image of a rather fragmented and heterogeneous spectator. While the majority of EU governments opted for a wait-and-see approach in order not to offend the Tunisian regime in the event that the uprising turned out to be unsuccessful, France even offered the Tunisian security forces material support and expertise on crowd control. A similar pattern emerged with the dynamics in Egypt, during which the EU's position was characterized by hesitation and occasional and rather weak demands for an end to the violence. Only when, in early February 2011, British Prime Minister Cameron criticized the Egyptian regime and called attention to state-sponsored violence did the EU slightly change

¹³ T. Behr, *Europe's flawed Arab Spring: Is the EU really willing to support Arab democracy?*, "FIIA Comment", No. 5/2011, <http://www.upi-fiaa.fi/en/publication/178/>.

its tone. As far as the EU's position towards the Libyan regime is concerned, member states' governments, following a German-British initiative, agreed rather quickly and without any major disagreements that the EU and its member states will not work or cooperate with Gaddafi and that he has to step aside to allow for a true democratic transformation of the country. EU failed to respond in a more determined, outspoken and speedy fashion to the bloody crackdown on demonstrators that is occurring across Syria since March 2011".¹⁴

"Aware that it has been losing attraction and credibility as a result of its lingering response, the EU is attempting to brush up its image and attune its position to the shifting regional climate. The European Commission has proposed the establishment of a new 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity' with the region. Endorsed by the extraordinary European Council meeting of 11 March 2011, this new partnership is promising a fresh start that places the promotion of democracy and human rights at the center of its regional approach. According to the plans of the European Commission, this new partnership will be centered on three elements: 1) supporting democratic transition processes and institution-building 2) a stronger civil society engagement 3) encouraging sustainable and inclusive growth. At the basis of this approach will be the principle of 'more-for-more': more EU assistance and support for more democratic and economic reforms".¹⁵

Arab Spring has showed us that there is a need for political and social reforms that EU should consider as its priorities in the region. Besides, it is not difficult to say that EU is aware of the need to offer more economical benefits to the neighbour countries (also for the efficiency of the Neighbourhood Policy). In this respect, financial aids and credits are precisely important for supporting economic and also social developments of these countries. Therefore EU's response to the Arab Spring should be evaluated within the context of the socio-economic challenges and needs of the regional countries.

"The SPRING Program (Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth), adopted the 27th September 2011, and directly responds to the events of the Arab Spring. Support provided through the SPRING program will be tailored to the needs of each country, based on an assessment of the country's progress in building democracy and applying the 'more for more' principle. 'More for more' means that the more a country

¹⁴ T. Schumacher, *The EU and the Arab Spring: Between Spectatorship and Actorness*, "Insight Turkey", Vol. 13, No. 3/2011, pp. 109, 115–116.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

progresses in its democratic reforms and institutional building, the more support it can expect from the SPRING program”.¹⁶ With ‘more for more’ approach, EU wants to show that it is ready to offer more benefits, in consideration of more reform in neighbours and aims to support these countries in their transition processes to more democratic regimes.

“The EU has sent many rather mixed messages to various regimes, ranging from praise and support to outright condemnation of the different regimes’ responses to growing public demands for greater political, economic and social rights. The reactions of both the EU and EU governments throughout the first six months of the Arab Spring have confirmed the endurance of the strained relationship between individual and common interests that has characterized EU foreign policy”.¹⁷ EU wants to take role in restructuring process of the region but it is difficult to say that EU gets ahead of its aim. EU could not apply soft power policies during the Arab Spring movements immediately and with determination. The lack of consensus and differences of using foreign policy instruments between EU members are important factors for this. And the future developments will show how the strategies can be integrated to regional and global policies.

Conclusion: Can EU Use Soft Power Effectively in the Middle East?

In conclusion it should be mentioned that there is no conscious guidance of EU in the Middle East for political and democratic development. But the presence of EU itself plays a representative role as a model for the opposition movements in the region. This can be observed in Arab Spring. EU aims to transform the Middle Eastern countries within the context of founding values of the Union with its regional policies like Mediterranean Partnership, Neighbourhood Policy and Union for the Mediterranean. However, it is hard to say that EU achieved its purpose about this because EU seems to be effective on institutional, discursive and theoretical basis but not successful enough on practical level.

It is not difficult to say that EU’s soft power is not at the grade that EU can lead and influence the Middle Eastern countries in the direction it wants. This is because EU has no clear position and common view about

¹⁶ “EU response to the Arab Spring: The SPRING Programme”, *European Commission Development and Cooperation – Europe Aid*, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-636_en.htm (last visited: 4.2.2015).

¹⁷ T. Schumacher, op.cit., pp. 114–115.

which instruments of soft power can be used in the region and its policies can't be evaluated effective enough.

The purpose of the EU at the establishment process was to prevent a possible world war. According to this, we can say that if there is an international or regional issue that requires only hard power use, EU prefers participating peace keeping missions which are supported by the UN. Otherwise the choice of EU as an organization is nearly always for soft power means. This is actually reasonable because EU is geographically close to the Middle East and South Africa and wants to create stability and peace in its borders. The immigration from the Middle East and also radical movements in the region effects EU directly. This is why supporting democratic values, human rights, stability and sustainable growth in Middle Eastern and Southern Mediterranean countries in transition is a priority for EU.

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Key words: Soft Power, European Union, Middle East, Arab Spring

Abstract

In this paper, I will attempt to analyze the policies and strategies of the EU towards the Middle East in the context of using soft power. Two main issues need to be questioned in this framework: 1) Can EU use soft power instruments effectively in the Middle East? 2) Is EU's choice to conduct soft power policy in the Middle East, able to make the EU a leading actor in world politics in terms of struggling with new threats in 21st Century? First of all, I will try to discuss "soft power", as a concept very briefly. Afterwards, I will focus on the differences between the perspectives and approaches of the United States and the EU on the solutions of the problems in the Middle East. While analyzing EU's use of soft power in the Middle East, I will not refer the general policies of the EU towards the region. Instead of this, I will focus on the Arab Spring and the significance of the recent movements in the region within the context of our subject.

EU aims at creating peace and stability at its borders and prefers political and economic methods instead of military methods and hard power instruments. This paper examines how the EU uses this soft power instruments and what their consequences mean for the main issues in the Middle East. Besides, can this policy of the EU contribute to the solutions of the problems, stability and peace in the region? The answers of these questions are very significant within the context of EU's approach to the Middle East, because of several reasons such as; course of the developments in the region, future success of European foreign and security policy and the role that EU is aiming for: ensuring its position as a global actor in world politics.