

Unintended Consequences of EU External Action

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ABSTRACT

The European Union's (EU) impact on the political governance of the European neighbourhood is varied and sometimes opposite to the declared objectives of its democracy support policies. The democracy promotion literature has to a large extent neglected the unintended consequences of EU democracy support in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and North Africa. The EU has left multiple imprints on the political trajectories of the countries in the neighbourhood and yet the dominant explanation, highlighting the EU's security and economic interests in the two regions, cannot fully account for the unintended consequences of its policies. The literature on the 'pathologies' of international organisations offers an explanation, emphasizing the failures of the EU bureaucracy to anticipate, prevent or reverse the undesired effects of its democracy support in the neighbourhood.

In the last two decades, democratisation trends in the European neighbourhood received momentous boosts on two occasions. First, the 'colour revolutions' in Eastern Europe in the 2000s pledged to change radically the political governance of the former Soviet space. Second, the Arab uprisings in 2011 similarly promised to bring democratic change to the Arab world, previously seen as immune to democratic governance. Despite the hopes raised by these events, a more sobering reality exists, marked by some democratic advances alongside the continued persistence of authoritarian rule in both Eastern Europe and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Interestingly, these events and their outcomes caught unaware democracy promoters and democracy preventers alike.

The literature on international democracy promotion has predominantly focused on explaining successful cases of democratisation, zooming in and crediting the Western policies of democracy support (Levitsky and Way 2010; Magen and Morlino 2008; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Vachudova 2005; Whitehead 2001). The unsuccessful cases of democratisation or the cases of authoritarian resilience have mostly featured in the literature on comparative authoritarianism, examining the longevity of authoritarian rule mainly through a domestic lens (Brownlee 2007; Gandhi 2010; Magaloni 2008; Svoboda 2012). While significant research has gone into teasing out the mechanisms of external democracy promotion and the domestic conditions for its impact, the debate has been limited to categorising the external efforts as either

succeeding or failing to achieve declared objectives, neglecting the multiple unintended consequences of external action in this field (*inter alia* Dandashly 2018; Freyburg *et al.* 2009; Grimm and Leininger 2012; Hassan 2015; Pace 2009; Pace *et al.* 2009; Sasse 2013; Tolstrup 2009; Way and Levitsky 2007; Youngs 2009).

In parallel, the literature on the unintended consequences of EU external action is limited and very few scholars have explicitly studied the phenomenon (Burlyuk 2017). Scholars of the EU neighbourhood have accounted for isolated instances of unintended effects of EU policy in specific cases (Börzel and Pamuk 2012; Khakee 2017) but a systematic examination of the unintended consequences of EU democratisation policies is lacking (Börzel 2015; Börzel and Risse 2012).

This article sets out to examine the unintended consequences of EU's democracy support in the European neighbourhood (east and south). It documents two major types of unintended consequences of EU democratisation policies in Eastern Europe and MENA depending on whether the impact is domestic or external (Burlyuk and Noutcheva in this Special Issue). The domestic unintended consequences concern the countries on the receiving end of EU policy and involve (a) empowering illiberal reform coalitions (unanticipated and unexpected); and (b) strengthening the current authoritarian regimes through the socio-economic support/security cooperation thus prolonging their survival (anticipated and expected). The external unintended consequences concern the reaction of other regional actors and are mainly manifested through antagonising/provoking counteractions by these regional players (anticipated but unexpected).

The unintended consequences identified show important variations in terms of the mode of knowledgeability (see Burlyuk and Noutcheva in this Special Issue) as two of them were anticipated by the EU and in principle allowed to occur by official policy, even though one of the two was deemed unlikely. Only one of the unintended consequences that occurred was truly a surprise in the sense that it was neither anticipated nor expected. Given these occurrences, and contrary to the mainstream literature on the EU's impact on democratisation, the effects of EU democracy support policy cannot be reduced to the achievement or non-achievement of stated goals. To understand the effects of the EU's policy, it is necessary to unpack the 'intent' behind EU action/inaction and examine the objectives unmentioned in the public domain, as well as the multiple effects of EU policy beyond success or failure. Paradoxically, the EU does have impact, but counterintuitively this impact is quite different from its official narrative, that is from its publicly announced objectives (see Burlyuk 2017).

The article argues that the reasons for the unintended consequences of EU democracy support policy cannot be narrowed down to the dominant explanation in the literature which focuses on EU security and economic interests in the two regions. To explain all three types of unintended consequences of EU democracy support, we draw on the literature examining the 'pathologies' of international organisations (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; 1999; in addition to Bach and Wegrich 2018; Benz *et al.* 2016; Cerny 2010; Eckhard and Ege 2016; Tallberg *et al.* 2016) and develop an argument about the failures of the Brussels bureaucracy to anticipate, prevent or reverse the undesired effects of its policies in the two regions. The article contends that the EU is rather reactive in acknowledging and responding to the unintended consequences of its democracy support once they manifest themselves and become a fact of political life.

Its management tactics are largely reactive as they are influenced by crisis events in the two regions rather than by self-evaluation and self-correction of policies.

Following this introduction, the next section maps the unintended consequences of EU democracy support in the European neighbourhood (the what). It then presents the explanations of these unintended consequences (the why). It further explores the modes of management of the unintended consequences documented (the how). The final section concludes with the major findings. The analysis is based on primary EU documents and secondary literature, and inspired by interviews with EU officials working on the eastern and southern dimensions of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and various elites in both regions conducted by the authors in the period 2004-18.

Mapping the unintended consequences of EU democracy support in the European neighbourhood

Democracy support policies rarely produce the results they aim for owing to a very complex interplay between external stimuli for democratic reform and domestic factors conditioning political change. The policy practice therefore abounds with situations where the outcomes of certain actions differ from the foreseen ones or the planned goals (Merton 1940). The EU's democracy support in the neighbourhood is no exception. One of the explicit aims of the ENP since its inception has been the promotion of democracy and good governance in the ENP countries. Official pronouncements notwithstanding, observers have always doubted the EU's genuine commitment to democracy in both the eastern and the southern neighbourhoods. At the same time, the empirical record indicates a plural reality where the outcomes have differed substantially from the initially formulated objectives. Not all surprise outcomes of EU policies have been negative in nature, yet the vast majority of unintended consequences that have occurred in the neighbourhood have added to the negative results of the EU record in both regions. In the following, we elaborate on the unintended consequences for the countries concerned (domestic) as well as those resulting from the reactions of other international/regional players (external) in both regions.

a) Domestic unintended consequences

Empowering illiberal reform coalitions (unanticipated and unexpected)

One of the better documented types of domestic unintended consequences of EU democracy promotion is the empowerment of illiberal reform coalitions rather than liberal reform-oriented political groups (Börzel 2015). Conceptually, the idea borrows insights from the EU enlargement literature which credits the EU's democratising impact on candidate countries with the empowerment of domestic reform-minded political elites and the progressive marginalisation of illiberal political actors (Vachudova 2005).

In the eastern neighbourhood context, the EU has at times ended up weakening the very liberal coalitions that it intended to strengthen and that are, rhetorically, committed to the advancement of democratic reforms in the local settings concerned. This adverse effect takes place via political legitimisation of seemingly liberal actors who however instrumentalise EU support and use it as a cover-up for rent-seeking practices.

Börzel and Pamuk (2012) have found that this has happened in the context of anti-corruption policies in the South Caucasus. EU-supported political incumbents used the EU-supported fight against corruption as a political instrument to discredit political opponents and keep their hold on power. The boost for the seemingly liberal political actors is rather temporary. Siding with corrupt, even if pro-European ruling elites, discredits the EU in the eyes of the liberal-minded voters in the domestic settings concerned. This results in a loss of legitimacy of the EU as a democracy supporter in the neighbourhood societies.

Such unintended effects have occurred in countries that have enjoyed some degree of political opening and where rotation of parties in power has taken place. Most of these countries have experienced regime change through street protests and contestation of rigged election results (Georgia and Ukraine), even though, occasionally, legitimate elections have also brought reform-minded elites to power (Moldova). The EU has been quick to throw its weight behind the newly formed, seemingly reforming governments in all cases. Its unwavering support, however, has been insensitive to the old instincts of power abuse for personal gains and patronage of clientelistic structures of these self-proclaimed liberal elites. The public outrage against such corrupt pro-EU elites has not spared the EU and has opened up space for illiberal political groups to gain popularity and public support by banking on the failure of their EU-backed political opponents.

The case of Moldova stands out here with the spectacular bank fraud scandal of 2014, popularly referred to as “the theft of the century”, seeing no less than \$1 billion (12 percent of the country’s GDP) disappear from the state coffers through murky transactions under the watch of the pro-EU political coalition (Whewell 2015). The aftermath not only brought to power a pro-Russian president (Igor Dodon) who questions the country’s EU-integration course, but also solidified Moldova’s image of a ‘captured state’.

These dynamics play out differently in the southern neighbourhood due to the absence of official liberal coalitions and the dominance of illiberal groups linked to the authoritarian regimes. Western cooperation with the authoritarian regimes over the past decades has however opened the door to other groups (mainly Islamists) who offer an alternative to the authoritarian regimes backed by the West and, more importantly, to the Western model of liberal democracy (i.e. Islamic democracy, with different parties in various MENA countries such as En-Nahda in Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hezbollah in Lebanon, etc). Moreover, the weak state apparatus and the failure of socio-economic policies in the MENA region has resulted in those same groups filling the voids created by the state and taking over important state functions such as provision of healthcare, education, social welfare, job creation, etc. (on Hezbollah, see Kassem 2010). The result has been the legitimization of those groups in the eyes of the people who view them as the solution to their problems. It has boosted the popular legitimacy of these political movements and paved the way for the societal receptiveness of their (illiberal) political ideas.

It is plausible that the EU could not and did not anticipate these adverse effects of its policy. In the eastern cases, it genuinely believed it was advancing democracy by helping the pro-EU coalitions that were in power. In the southern cases, it is likely that it neither anticipated nor expected the popular resurgence of Islamist actors. In fact, it underestimated the important societal role of these actors owing to the repressive policies towards them of the authoritarian regimes themselves.

Strengthening the institutional structures of authoritarian regimes through socio-economic support and security cooperation (anticipated and expected)

Another unintended domestic consequence of the EU's policy of developing and maintaining ties with all neighbours notwithstanding the nature of their polities has been the *de facto* support for authoritarian regimes in the neighbourhood. When the ENP was launched in 2004, the EU pledged to differentiate between neighbours on the basis of their degree of commitment to EU political values. Until the ENP review in 2015, the 'common values' rhetoric was one of the cornerstones of the ENP narrative (unlike ENP practice). In fact, not only did the EU continue to develop relations with most neighbouring countries, but it also rarely applied political conditionality in the way in which this was implied by the official discourse.

The most pronounced unintended effects of the EU's socio-economic support have been observed in the southern neighbourhood. What was intended as democracy promotion in most MENA countries ended up being authoritarian consolidation. The 'best' outcomes so far are "liberalized nondemocratic regimes", "pseudo-democracies", or "hybrid democracies where some democratic institutions coexist with nondemocratic institutions outside the control of the democratic state" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 15) or façade democracy "that is to say an authoritarian government masquerading as a 'people's democracy' embodied in personalist and/or single-party rule" (Leca 1994, 54) – this is what we observe across the southern ENP countries, aside from Libya and Syria, where instability and/or civil war has prevailed.

Prior to the Arab uprisings, the EU poured assistance on seemingly democratising regimes in the MENA *inter alia* strengthening the survival chances of the incumbents who learned how to survive despite the cosmetic pressures by the EU to democratise. Arab autocracies used neoliberal reforms to benefit from the EU's and Western support. However, they also used these policies selectively to strengthen their iron grip on the system through the marriage of economic and political elites (Schlumberger 2008, 634). Moreover, even after the toppling of some authoritarian rulers, "the linkages between neoliberal public policies, neo-patrimonial rule and a crony capitalist economy did not change" (Schmitter and Sika 2017, 449). The outcome in most cases, Tunisia apart, has been reinforced authoritarian rule.

It is inconceivable that the EU did not foresee the effects of its socio-economic support and security cooperation on the institutional structures of the southern authoritarian regimes. In fact, it was an unspoken policy objective to keep these regimes in tact in order to avoid the complications if they imploded, opening the door of political power to Islamist parties deemed unlikely to work for the goal of democracy. The EU was in this sense consciously banking on the lesser evil while securing its paramount interests.

b) External unintended consequences

Antagonising/provoking counteraction by other regional players (anticipated but unexpected)

A third category focuses on the external effects of unintended consequences and has to do with the reactions of other regional players provoked by EU policy. Risse and Babayan (2015) discuss the role of illiberal and Western powers' involvement in political change in third countries. Illiberal powers react to Western democracy promotion efforts if they feel

their geostrategic interests are being threatened. The authors feel that non-democratic regional and international players would not necessarily push for or promote authoritarianism although their policies could result in the strengthening of authoritarian rule in both regions. Furthermore, “in some cases, illiberal regimes even promote democracy if it suits their geostrategic interests” (Risse and Babayan 2015, 383).

Russia’s negative reactions to the EU’s attempts to influence the political trajectories of the countries in the eastern neighbourhood are well known and documented in the literature (Tolstrup 2009). While the EU insists that the ENP and Eastern Partnership were not conceived as projects intended to curb Russia’s influence in the region, Russia has progressively stepped up both its engagement with and pressure on its former satellites to divert their rapprochement with the West more generally and prevent their political liberalisation more specifically. This policy shift has mostly been attributed to Russia’s interests in the region and not so much to an ideological commitment to illiberal regimes, yet Russia’s actions have *de facto* supported authoritarian rule in the eastern neighbourhood (Ambrosio 2009; Vanderhill 2013; Von Soest 2015). This counteraction was certainly not intended. The EU is nevertheless likely to have anticipated some reaction by Russia, but the strength of its reaction has exceeded everyone’s expectations (see also Casier in this Special Issue).

In the southern neighbourhood, “non-democrats – coercive regime remnants and radical charismatic movements – were empowered by the competitive interference of rival powers in uprising states’ (Hinnebusch 2015, 335). Both the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are primarily concerned with their members’ stability at the expense of democracy and human rights. No membership of an Arab League member has ever been revoked due to lack of democracy, use of excessive force against its citizens, or human rights’ violations. When the protests broke out in Tunisia in December 2010, followed by those in Egypt in early 2011, the Arab League held an economic and social summit in Egypt in January 2011 “that studiously ignored the uprisings and made no reference to the explosion of popular demand for the very issues that they were discussing” (Schmitter and Sika 2017, 454). Furthermore, GCC countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates rushed to support the stability of incumbent authoritarian regimes at the expense of democracy promotion through direct military intervention in Bahrain and Yemen and financial support to Egypt (454). On the whole, the involvement of the GCC countries worsened the conditions for democracy in the MENA as they did and still do not share an interest in democracy promotion, but rather feared that their own regime survival might be shaken by the wave of democratic changes in neighbouring countries. The EU certainly anticipated a greater role for other regional players in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, but the blocking effects on democracy support of these actors’ interventions in most domestic contexts occurred despite the EU’s expectations.

Explaining the unintended consequences of EU democracy support in the European neighbourhood

A vast number of democracy promotion studies attribute the main reason for the lack of EU impact on the democratisation trends in the European neighbourhood to the primacy of EU security interests in the respective regions with respect to the secondary role given to value promotion in EU foreign policy in general (Bicchi 2009; Pace 2009;

Youngs 2009; Dandashly 2015). While democratic rhetoric has been a cornerstone of EU policy towards the neighbours since the launch of the ENP, practice has confirmed a more pronounced EU interest in stability and security than in democracy.

With regard to the eastern neighbourhood, the ‘interests trump values’ argument has seen EU democracy support taken hostage by the ‘Russia first’ policy privileged by the majority of EU member states, which favours a policy of non-confrontation with Russia, the other regional player with a stake in the political trajectories of the countries in the region (Popescu 2010). Russia has not only opposed the pro-Western orientation of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) states, but has also tried to cement the non-democratic status quo, fearing a spillover effect of any pro-democracy mobilisation in Eastern Europe on the current Kremlin regime (Finkel and Brudny 2012). The EU, for its part, has cautiously supported pro-democracy advances in willing partners and avoided an all-out confrontation with Russia over the fate of common neighbours.

With respect to the southern neighbourhood, the ‘interests trump values’ argument sees EU cooperation with autocratic leaders in the MENA region as a means to address its main concerns regarding security and stability. The EU’s preoccupation with terrorism, energy security and migration “has raised the importance attributed to its political relations with the incumbent elites in these countries” (Tocci 2008, 24). All these areas of interest require “the assistance of the very regimes that democracy promotion was aimed at (and would have undermined)” (Hanau Santini and Hassan 2012). Faced with this dilemma, the EU has clearly prioritised security over democracy promotion and continues to do so post-Arab uprisings (see Dandashly 2018).

This dominant argument can explain why the EU has not been a forceful democracy promoter in both neighbourhoods, but it cannot explain the various types of unintended consequences outlined earlier. It helps understand the anticipated consequence of strengthening the institutional base of authoritarian regimes in the MENA, but it fails to account for the anticipated but unexpected reactions of Russia in Eastern Europe and of the GCC countries in the MENA or to explain the indirect boost to illiberal reform coalitions in both neighbourhoods. To understand the reasons for the occurrence of the unintended consequences discussed here, we turn to the literature on the dysfunctional behaviour of international organisations and reflect on how it may be useful in explaining the unintended consequences of international action.

The self-defeating behaviour of the EU bureaucracy

An alternative way of explaining the unintended effects of EU democracy support is based on constructivist scholarship on international organisations (IOs), which focuses on the propensity of international bureaucracies for inefficient and self-defeating behaviour (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; 2004). Despite their well-designed structure, “clear mandate, strong support from member states, and efficient set of procedures for carrying out their work”, IOs can perform weakly due to internal and/or external constraints (Gutner and Thompson 2010, 238). Both types of constraints can result from social and/or material factors. External social reasons include competing norms, lack of consensus on problems, etc, whereas the material ones are the outcome of power politics among member states, incoherent mandates or on-the-ground limitations. Likewise, internal social constraints stem from the organisational culture or leadership

deficits, whereas the material ones can be caused by inadequate staffing and resources, bureaucratic/career self-interest, etc (Gutner and Thompson 2010, 238–239).

Barnett and Finnemore (2004) draw particular attention to IOs' susceptibility to error owing to tunnel vision, biases created by expert knowledge and obsession with internal rules and cultures. Merton (1940) also emphasizes 'error' as one of the possible causes of unintended consequences (see also Burlyuk 2017). Although bureaucracies can be effective and influential, they might also become "unresponsive to their environments, obsessed with their own rules at the expense of primary missions, and ultimately lead to inefficient, self-defeating behaviour" (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 700). These 'pathologies' make it difficult for bureaucracies to respond to unique situations and even bear the risk of creating new problems (Barnett and Finnemore 2004).

Drawing on this conceptual paradigm, we identify two major reasons for the dysfunctional behaviour of the Brussels bureaucracy with respect to democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: a) errors and misjudgements stemming from internal rules and procedures; and b) errors and misjudgements resulting from specialisation and division of labour. We then go a step further and link the pathologies observed to the unintended consequences of EU democracy support in the neighbourhood. The EU's instruments for pursuing democratic improvement in the European neighbourhood are all part of the ENP which is a policy designed in Brussels by the EU bureaucracy and managed across the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the different Directorates General (DGs) of the European Commission. We argue that the complex institutional base of EU external actorness in this area both enables and constrains the EU's interventions in support of democracy in the neighbourhood.

a) Unintended consequences stemming from internal bureaucratic rules and procedures

Barnett and Finnemore (2004) have argued that bureaucracies' predisposition to dysfunctional behaviour is rooted in the very characteristics that make bureaucracies legitimate and efficient actors. One such feature is the *modus operandi* of bureaucracies based on internal rules and procedures. Those same rules and procedures may become a powerful source of self-defeating behaviour resulting in a certain bias in reacting to problems and designing solutions. Bureaucracies can thus become inflexible and unable to adapt to complex and changing realities (Bach and Wegrich 2018, 9) This in turn provides fertile ground for unintended consequences.

Following this line of reasoning, the EU's democracy support policy in the neighbourhood can be attributed to the initially high expectations concerning the EU's potential democratising effect on the neighbourhood countries, strongly influenced by the EU's alleged success in steering the democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe. Not only was the EU enlargement policy staff directly involved in designing the ENP policy instruments (Kelley 2006; Magen 2006), but the timing of the ENP conception also coincided with a period of positive thinking in Brussels with regard to what the EU could achieve by offering integration prospects to the countries in the east and south (Leonard 2005).

Retrospectively, one can say that the initial policy ideas were insufficiently geared to the realities in the two very different neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the copy-pasting of enlargement instruments to the ENP context proved inappropriate, given the accession logic of the former and the lack of membership prospects of the latter. Hence, the

inflated expectations about the ENP's democratising impact, combined with the absence of a tailor-made policy toolkit, damaged the chances of a more modest yet meaningful impact on democratisation in the two regions.

In addition, the ENP can be said to have rested on the wrong assumption that the ruling elites in all countries concerned would be interested in close integration with the EU, as were the accession candidates from Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Kelley 2006; Magen 2006). The reality in the neighbourhoods has proven quite different with some countries aspiring to develop as close ties with the EU as possible and even demanding accession and others remaining neutral or even outright rejecting the EU's offer of market opening and legal approximation. There are willing and reluctant partners in both neighbourhoods, and the EU's initial assumption that all neighbours would fall into the former category laid the ground for unexpected surprises in the course of the implementation of the initial policy framework. One such example is Armenia's U-turn in 2013 when, after painstakingly negotiating a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) with the EU, the country's leadership decided not to sign the agreement and joined the Eurasian Economic Union instead. Furthermore, Azerbaijan in the east has reacted lukewarmly to most initiatives coming from Brussels, whereas Belarus has been relegated to the second tier of EaP countries owing to the EU sanctions regime against its leadership in place until 2016. In the south, there are neighbours such as Israel, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan that have pushed for closer ties with the EU alongside countries such as Algeria, Syria and Libya that have remained less enthusiastic about European integration initiatives.

What the EU also underestimated were the societal reactions to democratic malpractice in the neighbouring countries. While societies in both neighbourhoods were seen as weak and unable to mobilise for democracy from within, the colour revolutions in Eastern Europe, the Arab uprising and, later, the Euromaidan in Ukraine proved just the opposite. And while the EU has progressively improved its instruments for supporting civil society in the neighbouring states, the majority of its policy tools remain geared towards the institutional structures and governing elites in the countries concerned, replicating its eastern enlargement experience.

The EU bureaucracy thus seems to have committed an error of judgement by relying on a policy toolkit conceived of and developed for the enlargement context and by applying it with marginal adjustments to a new environment that called for a radically different approach. A similar finding is echoed by Kourtelis (in this Special Issue) with respect to EU rural development policies in the MENA. Internal bureaucratic inertia thus led to a policy that has failed to take the new reality into account and counted instead on ready-made solutions designed for different domestic situations.

b) unintended consequences stemming from division of labour and specialization within bureaucracies

Another source of dysfunctional behaviour is the very division of labour within bureaucracies that helps them accumulate know-how and use expertise for advancing social goals. Indeed, the compartmentalization of knowledge within bureaucracies can turn against the broader objectives of the organisation owing to the distinctive cognitive maps and normative biases of the different sub-units (Barnett and Finnemore 1999). Specialization can thus result in a narrow outlook and lead to inadequate reactions to

a complex external environment that requires a broader perspective and out-of-the-box thinking. Furthermore, specialization can lead to “a multiplication of organizational goals through the development of local rationalities” (Bach and Wegrich 2018, 5). This leads to “different types of biased attention and coordination problems, sometimes causing inefficiencies and annoyance, sometimes leading to drastic failures” (Bach and Wegrich 2018, 5).

The Eastern Partnership can be seen as a classic example of a technocratic response to a geopolitical situation that called for a political approach. Not only were the initial years of the ENP full of optimism with regard to the transformative potential of EU policy, but Russia was not considered a rival regional power opposing the EU’s initiatives in the region. Only after Russia used military force in Georgia in 2008 did it become clear that its perception of EU policy was very different from the initial policy design. The clash of perceptions could not have been starker: while the Brussels bureaucracy viewed the ENP as a benign attempt to forge cross-border cooperation and alleviate some of the negative consequences of exclusion of the neighbours from the European integration project, Russia saw it as an encroachment on its ‘privileged sphere of interests’.

With the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the confrontation with Russia reached a point of no return. The EU, subsequently seen as “sleepwalking into a geopolitical conflict with Russia” (Speck 2014) and trapped in its internal institutionalist logic, miscalculated the risks of Russia’s reactions. The ensuing 2015 review of the ENP that put forward the stability of the neighbourhood as a primary objective and watered down the democratisation goals appears to have factored the new risk perception with respect to the eastern neighbourhood into the equation. Overall, the technocratic focus on teasing out the mechanisms of the DCFTAs, and on preparing the ground for visa liberalisation overlooked the broader geopolitical implications of the EU policy in the eastern neighbourhood and brought about unintended consequences for the EU as a whole.

In the MENA region, the EU’s policy responses were dictated by constant fear of terrorism, illegal migration and security problems related to instability in the region. As a result, the EU bureaucracy crafted a vast web of relationships with Arab dictators who succeeded in convincing EU decision-makers that they were the guardians of stability and the main line of defence against the spread of radicalism and terrorism in the region. The examples of Islamic parties winning elections, such as Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections (considered by most observers as free and fair), Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, etc, only added to the fear of similar scenarios spreading to the rest of the region.

The EU’s response was one of continuous engagement with the authoritarian regimes in the various policy domains subsumed under the ENP, rather than pushing for a democratic change with unpredictable results (Powel 2009a; 2009b). As a result, the EU failed to realise the widespread discontent with dictators in the region and was caught by surprise by the subsequent implosion of these regimes during the societal awakening and mobilisation known as the Arab Spring. The broader societal trends were totally overlooked by a technocratic focus on trade liberalisation, development assistance and public-sector support, with an emphasis on engaging the ruling elites rather than the societal forces with popular legitimacy. The stability that the EU

thought it was helping maintain proved illusory as conflict in the region unravelled, breeding further instability and security problems for the EU.

The EU bureaucracy can thus be said to have misread the underlying regional and/or societal trends in the two neighbourhoods. It continued to do what bureaucracies normally do: stick to its sectoral policies and mobilize its institutional machinery to develop relations with the neighbours in the various policy domains making up the ENP. This technical approach, however, was applied to a misdiagnosed external environment and proved to be the wrong intervention toolkit for the problems at hand.

The bureaucracy-based argument developed here is well positioned to account for many of the unintended consequences of EU democracy support observed in the two neighbourhoods. Also in empowering illiberal reform coalitions, the EU enlargement experience proved to be the wrong reference point. Prior to accession, all parties that came to power in Central and Eastern Europe eventually followed the reform script provided by Brussels, and the EU reform agenda was not questioned by ruling elites on either side of the political spectrum (Vachudova 2005). The EU worked successfully with both left and right governments towards the common goal of EU membership. In the neighbourhood context, however, domestic societies and political elites alike were divided with respect to the appropriateness of the reform agenda pursued by Brussels. The strategy of throwing support behind seemingly reform-minded elites, as in the east, or outright authoritarian regimes, as in the south, backfired as society at large easily associated the failures of these elites with the EU, with detrimental consequences for the EU's image and democracy support more generally.

Similarly, the bureaucratic reflex of continuing with business as usual based on a narrow assessment of sectoral dynamics has proven to be an ill adviser for a geopolitically charged environment like the eastern neighbourhood or a domestic context charged with societal tensions inviting regional proxy interventions like the southern neighbourhood. The EU's strength in developing sector-specific policies linked to its external competences has dictated a technocratic response to problems whose political implications have not, however, been factored into the initial policy design.

Finally, the unintended consequences of the EU's support for authoritarian regimes in the MENA both prior to and after the Arab uprisings were anticipated and expected, but the Brussels bureaucracy is risk-averse and slow to change its modus operandi, given its strong internal culture of sectoral cooperation and apolitical engagement with all neighbours. Stability is conducive to sectoral cooperation and sectoral cooperation itself creates incentives for maintaining stability by strengthening interdependencies, so there is not much enthusiasm for policy adaptation and change.

Managing the unintended consequences of EU democracy support in the European neighbourhood

The EU has always been behind the curve when it comes to the hybrid environments in both neighbourhoods. It has not been quick to adjust its policy frames in line with the rapidly changing political context in the two regions, but has eventually shifted its policy expectations in view of the new developments. The new realities triggered reviews of EU/ENP policies (2011, 2014, 2015 and the Global Strategy in 2016), forcing the EU to address the new challenges of rapid and potentially threatening change. Yet, while many EU strategies and policy reviews have been issued, the tools and

instruments have largely remained the same. Given the complicated power-sharing mechanisms in the area of democracy promotion, with shared responsibility between member states and EU institutions and across various institutional structures at the EU level, it is not surprising that the EU has not been able to pursue a more pro-active policy in this domain (Noutcheva 2015).

The EU put democracy in the eastern neighbourhood firmly on the agenda with the launch of the ENP in 2004 and the adoption of a more focused and structured approach to reform with respect to the previous years of low-profile relations. The initial years of the ENP were marked by an ambitious reform agenda with the eastern partners, even though differences in partners' commitment to democracy had already begun to surface (Emerson *et al.* 2007). The EU became fully aware of the unintended impact of its democracy support policies in 2008 when the Russia-Georgia war awoke it to the geopolitical consequences of its policy.

The EU reacted by reinforcing its existing policy, launching the Eastern Partnership in 2009 and pledging more integration prospects and more resources to partners willing to advance along the road to democracy. The revamped eastern dimension of the ENP ran into difficulty again in 2013 with the withdrawal from the DCFTA process of first Armenia and then Ukraine under heavy pressure from Russia. The ensuing Euromaidan and annexation of Crimea marked the second important pause and moment of stock-taking for the EU in light of the unexpected developments. The EU's reaction this time was mitigation of the existing policy course by deprioritizing democracy and putting stability forward as an overarching objective in the neighbourhood. This policy change was subsequently encoded in the ENP review of 2015 (European Commission 2015) and the EU Global Strategy of 2016 (EEAS 2016) (see Table 1).

In the southern neighbourhood, the EU democracy promotion agenda was prioritized with the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in 1995. The lack of significant democratic developments in the region however provoked a rethinking of the multilateral approach. A new window of opportunity with respect to democracy opened with the launch of the ENP in 2004, adding a bilateral component to the existing multilateral framework. The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) established in 2008, however, de-emphasized democracy once again by remaining silent on the subject and by focusing instead on functional cooperation with the southern neighbours (Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean 2008). The Arab uprisings swung the pendulum back by forcing EU leaders to acknowledge the lack of progress in terms of democracy and express the EU's commitment to political transition in the region. The Arab uprisings thus opened another window of opportunity for the EU to reinforce democracy promotion with the launch of 'A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity' on 8 March 2011 (European Commission 2011a) and 'A New EU Response to a Changing Neighbourhood' on 25 May 2011 (European Commission 2011b).

Despite the sporadic emphasis on democracy in the EU documents, scholars have been sceptical regarding the EU's genuine commitment to upholding its values in the region, given the lack of "any serious reflections on lessons learnt from past mistakes" (Pace and Cavatorta 2012, 134). With the increased threat to EU security as a result of terrorism and the refugee crisis in 2013-14, the enthusiasm regarding democracy promotion took the back seat again. The toning down of EU democracy support became official policy with the publication of the 2015 ENP review (European Commission 2015) and the 2016 Global Strategy (EEAS 2016),

Table 1. Modes of management of unintended consequences of EU democracy support

Eastern Neighbours	
2004 ENP	Reinforcement
2008/09 Georgia-Russia	
War & Launch of Eastern Partnership	Reinforcement
2015/16 ENP Review/EUGS	Mitigation
Southern Neighbours	
2004 ENP	Reinforcement
2008 UfM	Mitigation
2011 Arab Spring	Reinforcement
2015/16 ENP Review/EUGS	Mitigation

emphasizing security, economic development and the resilience of the neighbouring countries. With the Global Strategy, the EU set more realistic goals and discontinued the over-estimation of its transformative power (Techau 2016) in the area of democracy promotion. The EU's reaction this time was more one of mitigation of the existing policy course by deprioritizing democracy.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis has demonstrated the many ways in which the EU has left an imprint on the political governance of its neighbouring countries beyond the dichotomous description of intended impact or no impact. By probing beyond the publicly declared goals of the EU's democracy support policies, the article has found that the EU's impact is varied and sometimes opposite to its official rhetoric. Interestingly, some of the unintended consequences were predictable and anticipated by the EU, yet they were allowed to come about, which increases the importance of finding the reasons behind the EU's behaviour.

The existing literature mostly emphasises the EU's security and economic interests in the two regions as explanations for the EU's lack of decisive influence on political governance in the neighbourhood. This article has shown that this view fails to explain all types of unintended consequences of EU democracy support observed in Eastern Europe and the MENA region. Instead, it has proposed an alternative explanation emphasising the pathologies of the EU bureaucracy. The bureaucratic environment in which the ENP was conceived and implemented limits the prospects for policy innovation and, with it, the likelihood of a democratisation policy that is close to the realities on the ground in the two regions. The Brussels institutional establishment thus designed a predictable policy response based on its internal culture, which ultimately led to inadequate policies with little chance of achieving the officially stated objectives of democracy support.

The article has also highlighted the EU's lack of reactivity in recognising and addressing the unintended consequences of its democracy support policies. It waited until external shocks made policy continuation costlier. This behaviour is heavily influenced by the bureaucratic politics in Brussels and the fragmented EU policymaking in the area of democracy promotion. Depending on the policy cycle and the situation on the ground in the two neighbourhoods, the EU's management strategies shifted from policy

reinforcement to minor policy adjustments in crisis situations or complete neglect in stable periods. This reactive management style has emphasised the EU's weak democracy promotion actorness and exposed the gap between the EU's democracy rhetoric and its behaviour in support of democracy in the European neighbourhood.

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