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Commentary

## Energy Relations between the European Union and North Africa?

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## Abstract

This article discusses European Union (EU)-North Africa energy relations with a special focus on renewables in North Africa, arguing that the research so far has not taken due account of North African perceptions of EU external energy policy. It is argued that current research on EU-North African relations has not taken sufficient note of the multidimensionality of energy or addressed the inconsistent nature of EU policy making. However, addressing these issues is vital in approaching EU-North Africa energy relations and EU policy towards North Africa in general. The study of perceptions is introduced as one way to develop research further, to give further impetus on understanding how EU-North African energy relations develop and to understand energy relations in their complexity.

## Keywords

EU-North Africa relations; energy; EU external energy policy

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The commentary begins with a brief overview of the EU's general energy policy, with a special focus on renewables. It moreover introduces EU energy policy targeted at North Africa with a focus on issues such as renewables and the aim of increasing the percentage of renewables in the energy mix, energy security and dependence, grid development and sustainability. The second section of the article introduces research on North African energy relations and also the EU's energy relations with the countries of North Africa. This includes key topics covered in the literature, such as resources and their availability, the role of renewables as well as import/export relationships. It also focuses on research into possible future scenarios for energy development in the North African countries, covering the literature analysing country specific renewable energy development plans. Here, the emphasis is on renewable energy development options, but the possibility of introducing nuclear energy and the energy-water nexus as important aspects of developing and implementing new approaches to energy policy in the North African countries are also contemplated. The third part introduces the main argument, that perceptions of North African countries have not so far been taken seriously in the literature. It is argued that insight into these would be able to shed light on several vital issues which the EU, and also initiatives like Desertec aimed at producing renewable energy in North Africa for export to the EU, are either dealing with or need to address if they are to establish a sustainable and equal relationship with the North African countries. This part also briefly considers methodological aspects in the study of EU-North African energy relations and the role external views play in this context, concluding that new methodological approaches are also needed to further the academic debate on EU-North Africa energy relations and their development.

## EU POLICY TOWARDS NORTH AFRICA

The EU has long aimed at establishing a coherent set of foreign policies towards North African countries introducing several initiatives such as the Barcelona Process, the EU – Mediterranean Partnership, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Mediterranean Union, covering a broad spectrum of topics such as the effects of colonialism (Joffe 2009), energy (Martinez 2008), democratization (Bicchi 2009; Pace et al. 2009, Youngs 2001), political Islam (Emerson and Youngs 2007), radicalization as well as security and migration (Martinez 2008; Bicchi 2007). After 9/11 particularly, an increase in studies on a securitisation and depoliticisation of relations was observable (Panebianco 2010: 7; Kausch and Youngs 2009; Balta 2000). At the same time, relations between these

countries and the EU are characterised by historical connections especially on the part of Southern EU Member States. Here particularly the experience of colonialism is a factor that is deemed to exert an important influence on the shape and development of relations. A plethora of policy initiatives has been created with varying aims and geographical scope. The countries that are the focus of this paper (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt), regarding their external relations with the European Union, are either grouped together with the other southern Mediterranean countries or taken together with the Middle Eastern countries, forming MENA (Middle East and North Africa); thus the geographical scope of policies can vary. The development of relations with the North African countries as a whole has been repeatedly criticised for the EU's seeming inability to develop a consistent approach (Bicchi 2007), let alone a coherent framework. While establishing a set of foreign policies towards the Mediterranean countries as well as the MENA countries has been a policy goal for several decades, the picture so far lacks consistency.

European policy towards the MENA countries is generally characterised by a succession of different policy initiatives. Bicchi (2007) observes long periods of inactivity on the part of the EU interrupted by only two phases of heightened activity. This first phase of activity for a more coherent approach to the Mediterranean was initiated through the Global Mediterranean Policy (1972), addressing the Mediterranean countries as a relatively homogenous region and aiming at the creation of a framework to develop EU-Mediterranean relations. Policies aimed at the Mediterranean countries were initially formulated on a bilateral basis through several agreements, mainly focusing on trade. These separate agreements were neither coordinated across countries nor policy fields, nor were there core principles guiding the content and establishment of relations. The Euro-Arab Dialogue that followed is seen as complementing the framework in the form of an initiative towards the Arab countries. However, little tangible progress resulted from these agreements and the subsequent phase is seen as another period of inactivity in relations (Bicchi 2007).

The next steps were only taken in 1991 after the end of the Cold War. The creation of the Renewed Mediterranean Policy (RMP) was followed by the European Mediterranean Policy (EMP) before policies with reference to the Mediterranean countries were included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). In 2008 the EMP was relaunched as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) (Panebianco 2010). None of these initiatives was characterised as a success, however, and often the picture emerges that initiatives aimed at resolving problems in earlier agreements did not succeed, and moreover failed to address new issues in the relations between the EU and the Mediterranean (see for example Johansson-Nogués 2011; Schlumberger 2011; Khakee et al. 2008; Bicchi 2007).

Academic attention has not only been paid to the creation and content of these EU policies, but also to their implementation and the results achieved – or the lack thereof (see for example IPAMED 2010; Kagiannas et al. 2003). It is argued that problems in implementing the succession of EU initiatives and policies do not only stem from a lack of resources or a lack of effort invested in the external policy towards the MENA countries. Additionally, and also more importantly, the general premises on which the EU bases its policies are neither seen to reflect the EU's self-proclaimed goals as a foreign policy actor in general and towards the region nor are these policies seen to be consonant with the main interests of North African and European citizens (Kausch and Youngs 2009). Each side identifies different problems and different approaches to solving these issues, which results in almost parallel policies instead of focusing on creating a policy framework that focuses on cooperation. Further criticism has been levelled at the perceived de-politicisation of the initiatives. Schlumberger argues that the Union for the Mediterranean is a depoliticised endeavour that caters well to the goals of authoritarian regimes and casts doubts on a possible role for the EU as a norm entrepreneur (Schlumberger 2011). Simultaneously, the increased securitization of policies and

initiatives, such as an increased focus on border security, has been observed (Panebianco 2010; Kausch and Youngs 2009; Balta 2000).

The wave of protests that started in the spring of 2011 was taken as a new point from which to improve relations. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security issued a joint communication on March 8, 2011 entitled 'A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity in the Southern Mediterranean' describing the current upheavals as a starting point for a qualitative step forward. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the UfM did not achieve the intended results (Commission 2011b: 2). This overhaul of Union policies - that is the acknowledgement of shortcomings in the Union's own policy frameworks and proposals - in the face of the latest protests is also visible in the academic debate (de Vasconcelos 2011).

However, the question remains whether the EU will be able to formulate a coherent set of policies towards the Mediterranean as an improvement on earlier policy initiatives while emphasising the notion of partnership so often stressed in its documents but not yet translated into practical initiatives by the EU. Research should thus focus on investigating the development of relations from a wider angle, including not only the initiatives as such but also the reception and perception of these proposals in the Mediterranean countries in order to be able to address the performance of the EU in North Africa.

## **THE EU ENERGY SITUATION AND EXTERNAL ENERGY POLICY TOWARDS NORTH AFRICA**

The European Union is a major energy consumer and the world's largest importer of energy with more than 80 per cent of oil consumed and 60 per cent of gas consumed being imported. The majority of this energy supply comes from countries in the neighbourhood of the EU, with Russia, Norway and Algeria supplying 85 per cent of natural gas and about 50 per cent of crude oil imports (European Commission 2011c). The importance of strengthening the external energy dimension of the EU's energy policy is inextricably linked to the further development of the internal market as well as partnerships, improved access to sustainable energy for developing countries and the enhanced promotion of EU policies beyond its borders. Here, the Mediterranean region is of importance not only for the supply of fossil fuels but also for its potential to deliver electricity from renewable sources, which the EU sees as a starting point for more active engagement in the development of the energy infrastructure. Thus a strengthening of relationships is also among the main goals of the EU's external energy policy (European Commission 2011a). The Commission also acknowledges the strategic importance of the Southern Mediterranean regarding both energy supply and energy transit through the region, while at the same time acknowledging the rising energy demand in the region and the EU's ambition to contribute to market reform. Pronounced policy goals include an 'EU-Southern Mediterranean Energy Partnership' and the promotion of renewable energies in the region through the 'Mediterranean Solar Plan' (European Commission 2011a; European Commission 2011b).

As suggested above, there is an apparent consensus that the EU's overall policies aimed at the North African countries are lacking in substance and understanding (see for example Schlumberger 2011; Bicchi 2007), with Ghilès (2010) pointing out that what the EU is addressing as part of its external energy policy towards the region does not necessarily in any way reflect the real problems and issues within the region. Simultaneously, and referring to energy relations, he asserts:

For the development of a serious regional energy strategy the partners have to be of equal rank, have a clear idea about the future role of their country and trust

each other (ibid: 4).<sup>1</sup>

This, according to Ghilès, has not been achieved by previous policy initiatives and depends not only on the creation of transparent systems but also on the solution of border conflicts, in the present case the Western Sahara conflict. The role and possible influence of the Western Sahara conflict between Morocco and Tunisia is evaluated in different ways, pointing to a need to solve this prior to extending energy cooperation. Some assess Western Sahara as a topic impacting negatively on the development of intraregional cooperation (Mason and Kumetat 2011: 4408); while Lacher and Kumetat, in assessing the possibility of inter-state conflict threatening security of supply, refer to it as a 'stalemate rather than growing tensions' not threatening the security of possible common projects (Lacher and Kumetat 2011: 4470).

Here further research is needed to evaluate better whether the Western Sahara conflict has an impact on the future development of energy policy in the North African countries, and, if so, to what extent. Further research is also needed to ascertain how the conditions set out by Ghilès can be met and included in any new agreement between the European Union and the North African countries regarding energy policy. This makes it necessary to scrutinise more carefully how the current energy policy and the rank it assigns to each party concerned is perceived in North Africa. In the context of the EU's ambition to promote its own policies through the implementation of an external energy policy, a more thorough investigation of the partners' perceptions of their own roles and standing within this policy framework is needed.

Growing energy consumption due to population growth and rising consumption levels in North Africa is one of the main topics addressed when dealing with EU–North Africa energy relations (Trieb and Müller-Steinhagen 2007). Furthermore, Cherigui et al. (2009) identify a favourable combination for the promotion of a renewable energy partnership based on the North's know-how but also need for clean energy and the South's clean energy resources and their need to develop know-how. Yet the question remains whether the situation is really so clear cut. An exchange of know-how and a partnership beneficial to all sides would of course be welcome, but given the EU's track record of unsuccessful policy initiatives toward the region it is necessary to ask how to avoid being caught in old patterns and whether any efforts at all have been made to re-work these 'common policies'. However, the aim of creating a coherent foreign policy and the related internal struggle regarding the scope and organisation as well as the influence of other players and the content as well as the success of the EU's Mediterranean policy have been constantly questioned (Bindi 2010). Given the central role of Algeria especially in the EU's energy supply (Fiott 2012), this comes as no surprise. The region's possible role in supplying renewable energy to the EU also increases its importance to the EU's energy future. This makes it necessary to delve deeper into EU North Africa energy relations and the bottlenecks that have to be dealt with in order to actually move forward in cooperation in a manner that would be profitable in the widest sense for all parties.

## ENERGY RESOURCES IN NORTH AFRICA

The North African countries represent different starting situations regarding the availability of energy sources and their energy relations with the European Union. This distinction is reflected, for example, in the availability of conventional energy sources such as oil and natural gas. At the same time, important similarities are discernible. These cover the role of the state in the national energy markets, the need for reforms in

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<sup>1</sup> 'Pour le développement d'une stratégie énergétique régionale sérieuse, les partenaires doivent être de rang égal, avoir une idée claire du rôle future de leur pays et se faire confiance.' (translated by author)

the energy sector, the availability and possible usage of renewable energy sources (here wind and sun especially) but also societal and developmental pressures making an updating of North African energy policy in the face of rising demand and consumption essential.

Algeria, Libya and Egypt are usually grouped together as major oil and gas producers in the region, with exports of oil and gas forming a main source of income for all three. In 2011, the proven oil reserves in Algeria were 12,200 TMB (thousand million barrels), in Libya 47,100 TMB and in Egypt 4,300 TMB (BP 2012). Regarding natural gas, Algerian reserves are estimated at 4,504 TCM (trillion cubic metres), Libyan reserves at 1,495 TCM and Egyptian reserves at 2,190 TCM (BP 2012). Algeria as a net exporter of oil and gas is the European Union's third largest gas supplier. This relationship, however, is highly interconnected as the majority of Algerian energy exports go to the European Union while Algerian oil and gas revenues make up 40 per cent of its GDP (Lacher and Kumetat 2011: 4468; Stambouli 2011: 4508). Egypt's oil production is declining, and according to some sources it is already a net importer of oil, while its production of natural gas is on the rise, making Egypt a net exporter of natural gas (Ibrahim 2011:218). Egypt as well as Libya could both play a more prominent role in the EU's energy supply with Libya being important for both gas and oil and Egypt for gas. At the same time, extended cooperation with both Egypt and Libya is seen as one possible way to mitigate the EU's dependence on oil and gas imports from Russia. Bahgat frames energy cooperation with North African states strongly around the issue of security of supply (Bahgat 2010).

Tunisia and Morocco are in a different situation regarding conventional energy sources. Tunisia is identified in the literature as in balance with regard to its energy needs, based on its small gas and oil reserves and its need to import about 25% of its energy (Ahmed 2011: 740; Marktanner and Salman 2011: 4480). Tunisian oil reserves amounted to 425 TMB in 2011 (BP 2012). Thus, given its limited reserves and the need to import energy, it does not seem to be of interest for the EU in the context of fossil fuels. Morocco as an energy deficient country imports 95 per cent of the energy it needs and has no notable reserves in oil or gas (Marktanner and Salman 2011: 4480). Morocco does have 15 per cent of the world reserves of oil shales, however, for economic reasons these have not been explored (Boubaker 2012: 365). Again, the lack of substantial reserves prevents Morocco from emerging as a possible supplier of conventional energy to the EU.

All the countries mentioned have national plans to develop renewable energy; however, there are differences in the frameworks used, options chosen and time-frames proposed. For Algeria, with 86 per cent of its area covered by the Sahara, solar energy is seen as one possible way to implement its target of supplying 40 per cent of domestic electricity consumption through renewable energy sources by 2030, according to the national plan drawn up by the Ministry of Energy and Mining. The target is to install 22,000 MW of renewable capacity for power generation by 2030 with 10,000 MW intended for export. The national plan also notes the potential for wind, biomass, geothermal and hydropower energy and the aim to develop these sources as well. However it is made clear that solar energy is the dominating renewable energy source. The programme started with a phase (2011-2013) devoted to pilot projects followed by the implementation of the programme in two phases (2014-2015 and 2016-2020), the latter being devoted to large-scale implementation. It is stressed repeatedly that Algeria does not merely aim at using the solar potential available but also at developing a genuine national solar industry using local know-how and generating jobs (MEM 2011).

Tunisia is one of the windiest Mediterranean countries and also has capabilities for the production of solar energy. Solar energy was included in the 'Tunisian Solar Plan' of 1999. This plan aims at installing 1000 MW of renewable capacity by 2016 and 4,700 MW by 2030, which would make up 40 per cent of the total capacity installed. The majority of this installed capacity is to be based on wind, followed by solar and other renewable energy sources spread over a variety of different projects. It is stressed that

the installation of capacities for renewable energies also reflects Tunisia's aim to strengthen its industrial and energy production and its position as an exporter of solar energy (STEG 2012a; STEG 2010). However, Boubaker identifies a lack of reform to liberalise the market and open up the renewable sector to competition – as opposed to Algeria, where private installation companies are involved in the field of solar energy – as inhibiting progress (2012: 364). Here, the creation of STEG Renewable Energies, a subsidiary of STEG, in 2010 might be significant as it specifically states the development of public-private partnerships as an objective (STEG 2012b).

Morocco has identified the multiplication of solar and wind plants as goals in developing renewable energy. It also has a 'Moroccan Solar Plan' to be implemented by the Moroccan Agency for Solar Energy concentrating mainly on CSP (concentrated solar power) and on smaller programmes for PV (photovoltaics). This Moroccan Solar Plan was presented in 2009 and aims at creating 2,000 MW capacity by 2020, representing 14 per cent of electric power production in 2020. Reduced reliance on energy imports and the creation of a national solar industry, the support of R&D and the creation of local know-how, alongside environmental benefits have been stressed (MASEN 2009).

In Egypt, the main sources of renewable energy are also in wind and solar power. Hydropower is of importance, too, and has been the focus of government attention. However the growth potential is deemed to be limited as most sources of hydropower have already been developed (Ibrahim 2011). Egypt's energy strategy of 2007 aims to increase the percentage of renewables to 20 per cent by 2020, with 12 per cent coming from wind power, 5.8 per cent coming from hydropower and 2.2 per cent coming from other renewable sources, notably solar energy (MOEE 2012).

Libya is characterised by favourable conditions for the production of both solar and wind energy. The Renewable Energy Authority of Libya (REAO), created in 2007, established a target of 25 per cent of renewables by 2025, with steps of 6 per cent by 2015 and 10 per cent by 2020. These targets are to be met by solar and wind projects and are also to encourage the local manufacturing industry. However, despite approval by the Cabinet, these targets seem not to be widely agreed upon and are not based on a comprehensive analytical framework (RCREEE 2010). Furthermore, the recent violent conflicts in Libya will have a decisive impact on these plans as well as their implementation, the scale of which is currently difficult to estimate.

Thus, the starting points regarding energy supply and the type of energy relationship with the EU differ. On the one hand Algeria, Libya and, to a certain extent, Egypt, have the conventional energy resources, specifically oil and gas, that enable them to export energy to the European Union. On the other hand, Tunisia and Morocco lack this capacity in the field of conventional energy resources but do have potential to develop renewable energy resources. However, as stated earlier, similarities among the countries can be found that can also form the basis for a common approach. One resemblance regularly pointed out as being of great importance for both the future development of energy policies in these countries and their energy relationship with the European Union is the growing energy demand caused by population growth and economic development (Trieb and Müller-Steinhagen 2007). For the North African countries specifically, energy needs connected to desalination, energy security concerns – especially for Morocco and Tunisia as importers of conventional energy (Jewell 2011) – as well as the need to implement projects for rural electrification (Kagiannas et al. 2003) are a main concern calling for cooperation and knowledge exchange. Another common point is the availability of renewables and, so far, the low level of development of renewable energy. Here the focus is often put on the lack of investment and the substantial interest of the political elites in the power sector combined with a nationalised gas and oil industry (Brand and Zingerle 2011). Kost et al. (2011: 7137) identify factors including heavily subsidised fuels, increasing demand leading to selection of the option that is cheaper in the short term, a lack of information and limited trading possibilities due to lack of interconnections among the North African countries. The need for a reform of national

energy sectors towards a basis on a market economy and competition is also seen as a common challenge (Patlitzianas et al. 2006: 1914). Another issue of importance in the literature is the topic of interconnectivity among the Maghreb states and connectivity to the European Union (Kagiannas et al 2003: 2680) that also limit the trading possibilities as already introduced above.

## RESEARCH ON RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES

Given the EU's aim to increase the percentage of renewables in its energy portfolio, the North African countries are often presented as the go-to-countries for relatively easily obtainable renewable energy. However, tied to this should be the question to what extent the energy plans of the Maghreb countries and their plans for future energy development are taken into account. The literature on the possible role of renewables in the energy future of the North African countries is centred on several main topics.

One focal area is the countries' plans to develop a capacity concerning renewable energy and evaluation of the likelihood of these plans reaching implementation (Brand and Zingerle 2011; Kost et al. 2011; Mason and Kumetat 2011; Trieb and Müller-Steinhagen 2007). These evaluations focus mainly on the political situation, the need for reforms in the energy sector (such as grid development) and the financing of these national projects. However, focusing solely on these issues is not enough to cover the whole spectrum of topics connected to energy and energy policy. Secondly, there is the question of whether renewable options are preferable to nuclear options. Here, Marktanner and Salman (2011: 4480) focus on the economic and geopolitical implications of each option. The general problem areas identified are the geo-regional element, i.e. the lack of intra-African cooperation as an impediment to exploiting the full potential of renewables, the interests of different lobby groups and national sentiment. However, the main points made refer to geopolitical and economic arguments thus sidelining national sentiment to a mention of the possibility of understanding initiatives such as Desertec as 'European solar colonialism' using North Africa as a testing ground for renewable technologies (Marktanner and Salman 2011: 4484). The analysis of the possibility of nuclear energy in North Africa also encompasses capability analyses centred on financial, institutional and political stability (Jewell 2011). Thirdly, an analysis of the risks to energy infrastructure in North Africa and questions pertaining to the security of supply are recurring themes in the literature (Komendantova et al. 2012; Komendantova et al. 2011; Lacher and Kumetat 2011). This debate mainly takes into account technical and financial issues.

Another key topic reflecting the multitude of sectors involved is the question of water scarcity and its influence on the water-energy nexus (Siddiqi and Anadon 2011), such as the study by Damerau et al. (2011) focusing on the water needs of CSP and the influence this has on the possible development of CSP capacity. This potential of renewable capacities is of importance for the development of energy partnership of any kind. Decisions on the type of renewables to be used influence factors such as capacity and cost, but also the sustainable production of renewable energies.

As this overview shows, the debate on the development of renewable energy in North Africa is framed mainly around technical and financial feasibility issues, which are obviously important but should not dominate the assessment of possible renewable infrastructure development in North Africa. Further aspects should be part of the analysis, such as environmental concerns, but this potential multitude is not actually covered by the research on the development of renewable energy in North Africa. Framing the issue around too few sectors and neglecting to address the picture in its full complexity will not sufficiently further our understanding of the difficulties inherent in the development of cooperation schemes between North Africa and the EU. Therefore, a widening of the sectors of analysis will also help to address under-researched issues



such as the perception of EU external energy policy in North Africa and the potential influence of this on the development of relations.

### **ADDRESSING THE LACK OF NORTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES**

The lack of North African perspectives in research on EU-North Africa energy relations is evident when assessing the research so far. Much of the literature focuses solely on the political and economic features of the countries covered and their influence on the development of energy policy. However, energy policy is multi-dimensional and as such also includes other factors such as the perception of EU policies in these countries. Thus the scope of topics for investigation has to be widened if new sets of questions are to be dealt with. The failure to focus on external perceptions applies to both the region of North Africa and the study of energy in general. The study of the perception of the EU or its external image in differing parts of the world has so far tended to focus mainly on Asia (Portela 2010; Chaban et al. 2009;) or multilateral international negotiations (Elgström 2006). The inclusion of other regions and countries has progressed (Lucarelli 2007). Emerson and Youngs (2007) and also Johansson-Nogués (2011) address the need to include external perceptions of Europe, and more specifically European foreign policy, in the study of the Mediterranean. Bayoumi (2007) also takes Egypt as a case study when contemplating the external image of the European Union. However, little attention has been paid to the North African countries. An exception to this is the study on Moroccan perceptions of Western democracy promotion (Khakee et al. 2008). Thematically there is likewise no wide array of topics covered, as most studies focus, for example, on the exemplary function EU integration can have either for other regional groupings, such as ASEAN (Portela 2010), or specific countries such as Japan or South Korea (Chaban et al. 2009). Other focal areas include the fight against poverty, solidarity, conflict prevention, the promotion of democracy and human rights as well as trade (Lucarelli 2007). Thus, the issue of perceptions is not only in need of more systematic research but also demands a widening of policy areas and regions covered.

There are calls in the literature to focus on creating a joint framework which sees all partners involved in the creation of energy cooperation as equal (IPEMED 2010), but a large part of the literature focuses on technical or financial issues, which are important if any partnership is to be created, but which should not be the sole factors to be taken into account. Of course, the main debates in the literature introduced in the preceding sections raise the question of whether it is even possible to speak of an equal partnership or whether the focus on this term is merely a rhetorical tool distracting from much more pressing issues. Also, a reframing of the understanding of energy relations can be of assistance in opening new ways into a discussion that otherwise might only revolve around itself.

Connected to the inclusion of perceptions and a widening of the methodological approaches used to study EU-North Africa energy relations is the question of methods. A more diverse methodological approach to energy studies is needed if the questions raised here are to be studied. Repeating the same set of methods will do little to shed light on new ways of studying energy policy, nor will it do much to approach topics from different angles. However, this change of perspective is needed to introduce new ideas and input to the study of energy. Methodologically, the inclusion of expert views has already been applied in many studies. However, this is mainly achieved through the use of interviews in different forms, such as unstructured and telephone interviews (Komendantova et al. 2011). Quantitative research is likewise widely represented, especially in the modelling of future scenarios pertaining to a possible exploitation of new energy sources and in feasibility studies focusing on technical and financial issues. In these indicators such as conversion cost, transport loss ratios and investment needed are used. However, an analysis focusing on subjective articulations of views from North Africa on the EU's external energy policy is not part of the current research debate. Yet

this would have the capacity to shed light on issues such as mistrust between partners or issues that must be addressed on the part of the EU if successful cooperation is to be initiated.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this commentary was to give an overview of the literature on EU-North Africa relations in the field of energy and show that there are topics that have to be addressed to account for the multidimensionality of energy. The main argument that emerged from this review is that so far the literature does not take sufficient account of North African perspectives. This article first introduced EU policy initiatives towards North Africa suggesting that a plethora of initiatives has not so far resulted in a coherent approach to the region. The EU's energy situation, with special reference to its position as the world's largest importer of energy, its aim to increase the share of renewables in its energy mix and its energy interdependence with its neighbourhood was also introduced. Special attention was paid to the possible role of the Mediterranean as a supplier of renewable energy to the EU. Following from this, the energy situations of the North African countries were introduced, with two groups distinguished. On the one hand, Algeria, Egypt and Libya have reserves of conventional energy sources (oil and/or natural gas) making them attractive to the EU due to their ability to supply energy immediately. On the other hand, Morocco and Tunisia lack exportable hydrocarbons and are compelled to satisfy their energy needs to varying extents through imports. Thus their energy relations with the European Union in the field of hydrocarbons are bound to be less developed. All the countries considered here have national renewable energy targets, mainly based on solar, wind and hydropower in differing configurations. They are also part of plans for developing renewables in North Africa and then exporting electricity to the EU. Initiatives for this on the part of the EU include, for example, the Mediterranean Solar Plan aimed at creating a framework for the development and usage of solar energy between the EU and the Mediterranean countries.

Energy in the past decade has been a topic with a consistently high profile in EU policymaking, both in its internal dimension and its external dimension. However, discussions on external energy policy often focus on the same topics that fail to take adequate account of the multidimensional nature of energy policy. It is indeed necessary to step beyond merely dealing with technical, financial, feasibility or security issues. These are undeniably vital and important to any discussion of energy, but focusing exclusively on these bypasses many other issues in the field of energy, such as environmental and social issues, or the influence of energy policy on the perception of the other party and hence on the prospects for further cooperation or partnership development.

At the same time, the EU's interest in the Mediterranean region/North Africa/MENA has not been an area of consistent policymaking. Instead, policy choices as well as instruments and levels of activity have alternated between intensity and benign neglect. Additionally, it has to be said that even the phases of intensive discussions and development of policy programmes aimed at the region have achieved few or no results at all in transforming complex relations between the parties concerned into a partnership, let alone an equal one. The uprisings in many MENA countries have been used by the EU as a point from which to argue for a new impetus in the development of relations, including not only monetary support but also support for the development of democratic structures and the development (or redevelopment?) of a true partnership between the regional blocs.

More attention has been paid to the North African countries since the Arab Spring, but the question remains whether it is again only one phase of paying more intense attention to the region without actually challenging established patterns of interaction that have

not achieved the type of relations so often stated as a goal in EU communications. In light of this overview of energy policy in the EU and in North Africa, with special reference to the development and role of renewables in EU-North Africa relations, it was shown that a focus on only a few sectors and exclusion of North African perspectives has failed to take into account the whole complexity of energy relations. It was argued that this can be resolved by widening the scope of topics to include perceptions of the EU among the North African countries, a topic that in itself is in need of more extensive research. This would help to shed light on issues such as possible mistrust between the parties concerned that may be one reason for a slow implementation or even hinder the development of new cooperation initiatives. A focus on perceptions could also help to shed light on how the creation of these policies is viewed and how this, in turn, can influence the willingness of partners to participate actively.

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