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The European Union and the Arab Region

A Realistic Portrait of Challenge**

الاتحاد الأوروبي والمنطقة العربية
القضايا الإشكالية من منظور واقعي

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Introduction

In Arabic literature, few scholarly works offer deep insight into the European Union's policy and position on the Arab region. The subject of this review, *The European Union and the Arab Region: A Realistic Portrait of Challenge*, by Ahmed Qasem Hussein, is an exceptional study in this field due to the rich contribution it offers to this topic.

The book consists of two separate but interconnected parts that, while complementary, can also be read independently. The first part traces the EU's historical and political trajectory, guiding the reader through European decision-making mechanisms, while the second traces Europe's interaction with and policy towards specific Arab issues. The book is distinguished by its unique analysis of the reverberations of EU policy in the Arab region, making it worthwhile reading for academics, experts, researchers, or any interested party. As a historical, political, and cultural contribution in the Arabic language, it is also significant to those who wish to delve deeper into history and politics of the EU.

In his interpretation of the EU's interaction with four main Arab issues, the author adopts the approach laid out by the realist school of thought in international relations (IR). While realism has been subject to valid criticism within the discipline, it serves as a useful lens through which to examine the EU's treatment of these issues. The theory offers particularly prudent explanations for the establishment and post-World War II and Cold War development of the EU, in addition to offering clear interpretations for the development of the EU's stance on the Arab issues selected for discussion.

Book Chapters and Contents

The European Union and the Arab Region is essential reading for anyone concerned with the EU, EU relations, and Arab affairs within the political science and IR disciplines. The first section includes three chapters in which the researcher traces the EU's establishment and development since 1951, pausing at significant milestones. The first chapter provides a detailed historical review of European unification under the shadow of the Soviet Union as an international and communist power. It examines the role of urgent economic factors in this process, honing in on the critical need to eradicate geographical divisions rooted in nationalism that were forestalling economic growth and capitalist expansion. In this chapter, the book highlights the role of the United States in pushing for European unity, especially through the aid provided within the provisions of the Marshall Plan.

In the second chapter, the author discusses the steps taken since 1963 towards European unification as a political and economic fait accompli. He reviews the main pillars of the Maastricht Treaty (1992) that established the EU; the Economic and Monetary Union, which began to be implemented in 1988 at the Hanover Summit, and the political union described by the German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, at the end of 1989. The author also explores developments such as the Dublin Summit (1990) that served as a preparatory step to the establishment of a political union, the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) that took effect in 1999¹ as an amendment of the Maastricht Treaty, the Treaty of Nice that was signed in 2001 and implemented in 2003, the unratified Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in Rome (2004), and, lastly, the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) intended to reform EU institutions.

In chapter 3, the author situates the topic within the IR theory of realism, presenting the primary realist arguments to explain the EU's success as an integrative and cooperative experiment. The author sets out to conduct a realist analysis of the European integration process during two distinct phases: the post-World

¹ John Pinder, *The European Union: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 35.

War II phase, and the post-Cold War phase. He concludes that the structure of the international order has been the most decisive and effective factor in the success of European integration, which truly began after World War II.

The second part of the book includes four chapters. The author discusses the interactions of the EU, as a prominent actor, with specific issues selected for their regional significance. In Chapter 4, the author examines the question of democracy in the Arab region and the conditionality of European support, by alluding to two contradictory facts about the EU's approach towards Arab democracy. First, he argues that the EU's projects intended to support Arab democracy are merely a response to the challenges of the post-Cold War era. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the EU searched for a global and influential role in the international politics, carving out a space for itself in a system controlled by US hegemony. This coincided with the rise of global powers that were working to increase their influence such as China and Japan. Moreover, being a source of major strategic significance European policy planning in the Arab region was dominated by issues such as terrorism, security, irregular migration, and energy security. This led to a shift in priorities and the abandonment of normativity as a prerequisite for supporting Arab political reform in favour of security, which came to be considered a more pressing matter than democracy.

Chapter 5 contextualises the EU's position on Palestine and the fluctuations in Europe's foreign and security policy. This position hangs on multiple issues, most notably the competition between Mediterranean and Atlantic priorities, in addition to international factors such as the structure of the international system. Any unified EU position is also vulnerable to member states' domestic troubles such as Greece's financial crisis and the re-emergence of right-wing populism in Italy and across much of Europe. Chapter 6 addresses the EU's response to the Gulf crisis and its efforts to find a solution to the discord on the grounds that any threat to the stability of the Gulf region, by extension, represents a threat to European economies and their global performance. The author argues that the EU's Gulf policy and its intervention in regional crises are not indicative of any EU ambition to compete with the US, which enjoys rooted historical influence and almost absolute dominance in the Gulf. The EU rather seeks to establish its own specific Gulf policy, especially with regard to Arab Gulf security, which is not so much to do with individual countries as it is about the oil reserves associated with the economic security of the rest of the world, particularly the EU and China.

In the concluding 7th chapter, the author provides a detailed analysis of irregular migration as one of the major drivers of EU policy in the MENA region. He points out that the EU's approach to the issue is influenced by two factors. The first is the demographic factor, that is the continent's ageing population and shrinking youth demographic, and the increased need for immigrants with practical experience and university degrees. There is now a pressing need in Europe to enact some kind of population revival, as the current demographic trend is undoubtedly an existential threat to the future of Europe. In contrast, the second factor involves mitigating the challenges posed by irregular migration's security, economic, and social repercussions. Many European countries have come to realise that, in order to gain benefit from the positive returns of irregular immigration, they must bear the negative repercussions too.

The legal and legislative challenge posed by dealing with migration and its consequences compelled the EU to develop laws and legislation commensurate with the conditions of the new phase. And so a set of laws, agreements, and treaties designed to form a unified front to face these challenges emerged in the shape of the Schengen Agreement (1985), which entered into force in 1995. In this context, the author highlights Libya as a model for how the EU dealt with this issue. Libya has turned – due to the civil war – from being a stable destination country to a transit country for migrants. The author points out that the solution to this challenge lies in supporting a strong Libyan government capable of establishing a stable

environment and a central authority, and building civil as well as military state institutions. The migration crisis in Libya is a reflection of the collapse of state institutions and the chaos of armed conflict.

The EU: Historical and Political Conditions

The EU defines itself as “a unique economic and political union between 27 European countries”. Its goal is a unified European citizenship to allow freedom of movement, transport, and civil and political rights and it works to support and consolidate a unified European foreign, trade, and security policy.

The concept of a union between the European countries that collapsed at the end of World War II was an urgent political, economic, and security necessity. Politically, the union was intended to act as a tool to restore Europe’s deteriorating international role and to offset the dominant global powers, namely, the communist Soviet Union and the capitalist US. The European Union sought to transcend political, geographical, and national boundaries and divisions through free trade-based economic unity and the elimination customs barriers. At the security level, the enormous destruction that Europe incurred in the war triggered a desire to establish a political and economic entity that contributes to the prevention of internal wars, conflicts, and disputes. The union would also be a means of defending Europe against foreign threats.

Nonetheless, European will to join a unified political-economic entity did not prevent individual countries adopting strategies to impose a unilateral vision of how the union should manifest. The author here refers to, *inter alia*, Charles de Gaulle’s project “Union of European States”, through which the French President wanted to impose his vision of Europe’s political configuration and future, and to use the European Economic Community (EEC) as a means of boosting France’s power and leadership.² The French leader assumed that his good relationship with the German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, might lead to the creation of a strong agreement between Germany and France that would steer the EEC’s foreign policy, putting pressure on other small European forced to submit to Paris and Bonn. Neorealists have explained this position by indicating that the EEC and, subsequently, the EU, have not been able to bring about radical changes in the relations between the member states. And, as a result, these states continue to primarily pursue their national interests and seek to maximise their power both within and outside the union.³

However, the French President had other goals. De Gaulle worked to frustrate Britain’s application to join the EEC as a strong rival to France that could serve as an obstacle to his own ambitions. It is noteworthy that history has repeated itself in the EU’s treatment of Turkey; whose application to join the EU has been consistently rejected by France. Moreover, the French rejection of the British application was backed by Germany because it would affect the status of the two countries in the EU. However, the continued French rejection of Britain’s accession, and the replacement of Adenauer with Ludwig Earhard, resulted in a disagreement between Germany and France regarding EEC policy. The new German chancellor was Atlantic and US-oriented, and sought to strengthen his country’s relations with Washington while opposing the French President’s policies on Europe.

The EU’s expansion correlated with a decline in its ambitions. Although the EU seeks to be a central player parallel to the US, it is still subject to the rules of conditionality and normativity, vulnerable to internal divisions and a lack of consensus among its member states, particularly the more influential members that enjoy significant economic and political power. Thus, the EU enjoys international power that is nonetheless reined in by its own expansion and magnitude.⁴

² Ibid., p. 24.

³ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴ Rosemary Hollis, “Europe and the Middle East: Had the EU Missed its Moment of Opportunity?” *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, vol. 2, no. 2 (January 2011), p. 35.

The EU from a Realist Perspective

In IR, theory helps to filter and organise information and to understand, explain, and interpret political phenomena in the relationships between the actors of the international system. Theory represents an intellectual map to better understand the formation of an international actor and the formulation of ideas. Nonetheless, realism is not one homogeneous theory, but six different approaches that concentrate on the concept of power, while neglecting other factors that are particularly socially effective.⁵

Thus, realism may not offer a comprehensive interpretation of European integration, but some realist literature is useful in studying two main phases of European integration; the first in the aftermath of World War II and the second between the end of the Cold War and the present day. The author indicates that the structure of the international system and the distribution of power within it have played a major role in advancing European integration and in shaping the course of Europe's foreign policy in the Arab region. In this regard, the author outlines Kenneth Waltz's assertion that one of the most significant advantages of the bipolar international system is that it facilitates international cooperation more than unipolar or multipolar international systems. He further provides the example of when Europe still fell under the structure of a multipolar international system, which can partially explain the constant stream of wars and conflicts. However, the conditions that accompanied the bipolar order prompted European states to consider the common European interest, particularly among the major European powers: France, Germany, and Britain. The author therefore argues that he cannot offer an accurate picture of the European integration process without studying and understanding the events and changes that the structure of the international system has undergone.

The collapse of the Soviet Union posed a challenge for realist interpretations of the new international system with the loss of explanatory factors such as the balance of power and bipolarity. The rise of a new international power in the EU, considered a normative force for good, contradicted many realist assumptions. Undoubtedly, viewing the EU as one candidate to balance power in the international system forces neorealism to reconsider its main assumption when interpreting the European integration in terms of both internal administration and foreign policy. This calls for new hypotheses that could help offer a deep understanding of European security integration and defence and its regional and international impact.

Another stream of thought, offensive realism, assumes that anarchy in the international system has its own repercussions. If the security dilemma is the primary driver for states to pursue power of their own, then the quest to maximise the power does not stop at achieving security. It goes beyond that to seek hegemony and control over other states that — from an offensive realist perspective — represent an opportunity for greater sovereignty. However, a new realist approach has emerged that goes beyond the essentially military-centric security dimension to include broader non-military social and cultural concepts, as well as the challenges posed by post-Cold War globalisation. The neorealist approach represented by Barry Buzan assumes that the EU seeks its own security umbrella not subject to or under the auspices of another power, as well as to consolidate its role as an international actor on a global level, against a hegemonic and unilateral global power (the US) and a rising global force that harbours hegemonic ambitions (China). As such, a challenge is represented in the space that the EU must occupy in the international landscape and in the role it must play in facing global problems or issues that arise as a result of the nature of relations between states and the existing international system. The answer, however, remains contingent on the nature of the EU's potential response to new security challenges, or responses that the international system can muster in its existing form.

⁵ Khaled al-Masry, *Nazariyyāt al- 'Ilāqāt al-Dawliyya* (Damascus: Syrian International Academy for Training and Development, 2018).

Eduard Soler, a researcher at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB) and Silvia Colombo, head of the Mediterranean and Middle East Programme at the International Affairs Institute (IAI) in Rome, notes that assessing what kind of global player Europe can and wants to be in the Arab region requires rethinking EU strategies, policies, and tools. It is undoubtedly a long journey, interspersed with difficult steps. It can thus be said that the EU, due to geopolitical fluctuations and regional and international policy changes, will need more than a realist re-examination and evaluation of all the policies and strategies it has adopted to which it must adhere.⁶

In conclusion, the author conducts an important analysis of the shortcomings and limitations of the realist approach. The European experience was assumed to be successful because it was particularly dependent on the international composition of the bipolar system, meaning that any change in the international system was a potential threat. However, the opposite proved true. The change in the structure of the international system did not lead to the collapse and decline of the experiment but rather accelerated the European integration process, contradicting realist assumptions. This has raised questions about whether the end of the Cold War undermined realist theory and assumptions, or at least contributed to diminishing their power and relevance.

The EU and Arab Democracy: Between Normativity and Strategy

The author focuses on conditionality as a cornerstone of European interaction with the Arab region, and asks: What lies behind this conditionality? What is its purpose? Is it an effective means for the EU to bolster genuine democratic transition that guarantees stability and security in the region, safeguarding the interests of the EU and its member states? Or is it merely a response to the changes taking place on the international level? Is it in reality a way to reposition the EU and enhance its presence as an international acting power? The book notes that although the EU is a normative actor in international policy that uses conditionality to deliver certain concepts and values, the weakness in the democratic transition process in the Arab region is clear and a result of internal factors. This is in addition to the difference between what the EU demands and the environment necessary for those demands to materialise. This is at a time when many — according to the book — point out that the EU's normativity is, in fact, only a means of achieving its strategic interests, and therefore EU policy is rational and realistic, not normative.

The crises (and revolutions) that have overwhelmed the Arab region have changed the course of democratic transition. Despite a history of reliance on internal factors to pursue democratic transition from the inside, revolutions erupted to reveal the importance of regional and international factors and their role in changing governance systems. Moreover, external interference in the objectives of the governance systems was inconsistent with the goals of intervention to support the democratic transition process. This interference changed the trajectory and objectives of the Arab uprisings, and it would not have occurred without those states' agendas and supposed interests. The "Arab uprisings" regenerated the role of small regional states and the intervention of other regional actors who found an opportunity to achieve global and regional goals, while at the same time reviving the historic ambitions of the EU and states such as China and Russia.

Undoubtedly, the events that have unfolded in the Arab region since early 2011 have influenced the EU's strategy in the Arab region. The EU's interest in implementing and expanding democratic transition and working towards cooperation between both shores of the Mediterranean was eclipsed by Europe's

⁶ Silvia Colombo & Eduard Soler, "Europe and the 'New' Middle East, Geopolitical shifts and strategic choices," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2021), pp. 417-418.

“security first” principle through a series of actions to address cross-border threats, in particular those posed by irregular migration and the asylum process.

Conditionality of the EU and the Palestinian Question

The EEC first interacted the Palestinian issue when French Foreign Minister, Maurice Schumann, submitted the Schumann Document in 1971 for European Political Co-operation. Although the document was formulated internally, it stipulated how the EEC would formulate a collective position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. The European position evolved over the course of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War when the EEC called on the UN to implement Security Council Resolution 242 on the Palestinian issue.

The impotence of European solutions, projects, and proposals was tied up with the US position on the one hand, and internal divisions on the other. But the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War served as an opportunity for the EU to exercise an active role independent of the US. In this regard, the EU launched a series of initiatives concerning the Palestinian issue, most notably the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1998), also known as the Barcelona Process. The Partnership was launched to advance the peace process in the region through areas that, from the European point of view, support its development. These include economic and financial areas, as well as the integration of Israel and Palestine into multilateral regional action mechanisms, the most important of which is the regional Economic Development Action Group. The Partnership also provides financial support through funding vital infrastructural projects in Palestine, such as those in the Gaza Strip.

The book categorises the EU's relations with the Palestinian cause since the beginning of the 21st century according to three historical phases. During the first phase (2000-2006) European aid focused on reforming the security sector in Palestine. Once the EU had taken on the role of an economic supporter and a financier for Palestine, it assisted the establishment and reform of Palestinian security institutions, with two goals in mind. The first was to control security and effect stability in the areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority, and the second was to protect Israel's security and stability.

In the second phase (2007-2011), the EU encountered a democratic threat in the shape of the 2006 Hamas victory in the Palestinian legislative elections, in addition to the moral dilemma that surfaced with Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip following the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, on 25 June 2006. In this regard, the EU threatened to freeze aid to the Palestinians if the new Palestinian government did not meet the conditions set by the Middle East Quartet at its first meeting following Hamas' victory.

Although acutely aware that the integration of Hamas into any Palestinian government remains unlikely, the EU sets that as a condition for any revision of its policy towards the movement's military wing. This is why the gap between the EU advocacy of the two-state solution as a political objective and its practice on the ground raises questions about the EU's credibility.

In the third phase (2011-2017), which followed the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the EU found itself compelled to seek new mechanisms and strategies to deal with the Arab region. The crises that emerged in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings have pushed the Arab issues that once held huge significance for the EU right down on its list of priorities. Reforms, democracy, the Palestinian cause, and the course of the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations were all shelved to make way for the emerging issues of security, terrorism, human trafficking, and irregular migration.

Concluding his discussion of the European position on the Palestinian issue, the author notes that there is a huge gap between the strategic principles in the EU's dealings with the two parties of the conflict. While many Europeans call on Israel to freeze settlements and for the identification of Israeli goods,

champion the right of Palestinians to establish their independent state based on international resolutions, and criticise Israeli measures that threaten a two-state solution, the EU remains unable to effect a decisive policy to resist Israel's settler-colonial policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and stand up against the systematic discrimination of Palestinians.

The EU leaders are naïve in their belief that using a carrot and stick policy in economic and financial aid could contribute to maintaining the status quo at a time when the EU has failed drastically to prevent Israelis from expanding settlements. Furthermore, the EU has also failed to stand with Palestinian attempts demanding that the political reality of the Palestinians is altered.

In his book *Europe and the Arab World*, published in 2016, researcher Bichara Khader notes that despite the absence of a common and coherent European policy towards the Palestinians, EU policy contributed to Palestinian legitimacy and played a significant role in increasing international recognition of Palestinians' rights. However, he also notes that the EU continues to be a peripheral partner in the peace process, playing a complementary role to that of the US. The author explains that the reason for this is that the EU has failed to curb Israeli violence while limiting its own role in supporting Palestinians to providing financial aid and not finding a permanent solution to their cause.⁷

A strong and rich EU can deal with a turbulent Middle East but its voice is inaudible and its power depends not so much on the power of its member states but on their agreement and concerted efforts. The EU's position is only as strong as the unity of the position held by its many member states who are able to put their own agendas and interests aside.

The EU and the Gulf Crisis: A Multilateral Approach

The book alludes here to Bichara Khader's discussion of the factors driving the Gulf's significance to the EU. The region is of huge economic importance, in addition to being an essential source of energy for many countries globally. Further, it is an indispensable trading partner for the EU and fertile ground for European investments. The Gulf's consensus with the EU is of significant value on several regional issues, such as Yemen and the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, the GCC member states view the EU as an important global partner that, like China, provides them the opportunity to expand and diversify their global allies. Nonetheless, relations between the two parties remain limited, despite the GCC's status and are of less significance compared to the diverse interests and significant financial investments of the EU in the Arab region.⁸

Since the 1990s, there have been no significant transformations in the EU's policy towards GCC states. Just as the EU's interaction with Middle Eastern countries has been bound by conditionality, it has also become too invested in the GCC states emulation of Europe's internal market and standards and establishing a trade agreement based on European terms. This demonstrates Europe's failure to acknowledge the changes in the strategic interests of the Gulf states, whose interest in EU policy and agreements has slowed in recent years. Meanwhile, the Gulf countries seek to consolidate a network of ties and relations with East and Southeast Asian countries, larger and more important than ever before.⁹

The outbreak of the 2017 Gulf crisis proved a major opportunity for the EU to break away from the US and define an independent approach to the region, particularly with regard to the Gulf's security and

⁷ Khader Bishara, *Urūbā wa-l-ālam al-'Arabī: Ru'ya Naqdiyya lil-Siyāsāt al-Urūbiyya min 1957 Ilā 2014*, Akram Ali Hamdan (trans.) (Doha: Aljazeera Centre for Studies, 2016).

⁸ Ibid., pp. 291-292.

⁹ Hollis, p. 53.

stability. This approach differed somewhat from the EU's responses to more significant issues such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which created a major European internal divide. In fact, the EU's position on the US occupation of Iraq was marked by division. While Britain, Italy, Poland, and Spain supported the intervention, France and Germany strongly opposed it.¹⁰

Without straying too far into the history of European-Gulf relations, the book endeavoured to deconstruct the EU's stance as one of the leading powers in the Gulf crisis. The EU policy adopted a fence sitting approach, reflected in its impartiality, in an attempt to maintain EU relations with all GCC states and ensure communication with all parties to the crisis. The EU did not back the Arab Quartet's call to boycott Qatar, nor provide it with any special support. From this, could it be concluded that the EU sought to establish an independent European position and policy under the influence of its core states, France, Germany, and Britain?

The EU's response to the Gulf crisis was the product of the interdependence of Gulf-European relations. Any breach of the Gulf's security, as an essential source of energy, would subsequently impact the region's position, with a knock on effect for the EU member economies. Consequently, Brussels worked on a strategy of interdependence, developed in line with the various agreements between the two parties, in order to push for and develop three goals: a friendly Iran, a secure and stable Arab Gulf, and durable and stable energy security.

The EU and the Challenges of Irregular Migration

The MENA region, particularly the countries that have undergone crises since 2011, is the principal source of migrants and refugees for the EU, which has long been considered the target destination for those seeking a fresh start. But migration represents a major source of public debate in Europe, bringing two major issues to the fore, and huge pressure on governments. The first issue is the threat migration poses to internal security and stability through the spread of issues like unorganised crime, terrorism, extremism, and so on. The second issue is the increased pressure on governments applied by far-right groups and opposition parties who have capitalised on fears around "illegal" migration and its repercussions for European economic and social programmes. Migration has thus become the scapegoat for populists who frame it as the source of all their country's woes and as a threat to domestic security.

Despite conflicting opinions among European politicians, the EU recognises the benefits of migration for economic development and demographic growth, albeit implicitly. Brussels has historically worked on developing laws and policies to address the mounting challenges of migration, including the Single European Act (1 July 1987), the Maastricht Treaty (7 February 1992), the Vienna Action Plan (3 December 1998), and the European Council meeting in Finland (15 and 16 October 1999). The latter was the fundamental pillar for establishing a common European migration policy, leading to the adoption of an integrated and comprehensive approach among EU states to deal with migration and establish a common asylum system. It would also adopt mechanisms and measures relating to the legal treatment of citizens of non-EU states, most notably to combat racism, xenophobia, and cooperation in the management of refugee and migrant flows, as well as the development of a common policy on visas and forged documents.

Subsequently, uprisings in some Arab states have been a catalyst for EU member states to review and reassess their migration policies, under pressure from migrant flows. Most notably, the Communication on Migration of May 2011 and the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility framework (GAMM) of 8 November 2011, which aims to boost EU solidarity in the areas of migration and asylum.

¹⁰ Pinder, p. 114.

The author concludes that despite the EU acknowledging the importance of establishing the necessary legislation to face the phenomenon of illegal migration, the current legislation still reflects the contradictory interests of its member states.

Conclusion

On Wednesday, 23 February 2022, the ACRPS organised a symposium¹¹ to discuss the book. Hassan Nafaa¹² noted that the author was selective in the issues he discussed, and wished if he could have addressed the Brexit issue and its repercussions on other European countries. Moreover, he preferred the use of “Arab world” rather than “Arab region” in the title of the book, which Nafaa deemed problematic, because the “Arab world” better reflects the presence of common features and culture among the various regions. In his commentary, Bishara Khader wondered why the book did not raise the issue of the Balkans’ and Turkey’s wish to join the EU. He also pointed out that the second section of the book should include an introduction to Arab-European relations to serve as an introductory for their history and path. However, Khader commended the book’s note on the EU’s leniency with certain Arab regimes on the issues of freedom, democracy, and human rights, while it followed a stringent political discourse with other states and regimes, thus putting into question the issue of conditionality on which the EU deals with Arab states.

Aforementioned criticism notwithstanding, *The European Union and the Arab Region: A Realistic Portrait of Challenge* constitutes a broad and well-researched overview of one of the world largest and most prominent integration experiences, offering in-depth insight into the EU’s interaction with the most significant Arab issues, deconstructing the mechanism by which decisions are taken on those issues and unpacking their veiled objectives.

The author’s interpretation of the European integration process and its stance on Arab issues was rooted in his academic background in IR, especially his use of the assumptions and approaches of realism, which are often criticised for being intellectually restrictive.¹³ Furthermore, History, from another side, can provide a deeper and more comprehensive explanation of the EU’s integration process and the development of its positions towards the Arab issues discussed in the book. History also has an important function in interpreting the role of internal and external factors and their impact on the EU’s establishment, decision-making, and the development of its stances. History can further explain, in depth, how the end of World War II and US aid (the Marshall Plan) contributed to the establishment of the EU. History also allows for a clear and sequential explanation for Germany’s role in the EU’s development, with deeper insight into the German experience and fears about the re-militarisation of Germany, in Paris especially.

In addition to the academic value the book adds to the Arabic library, it is an accurately documented study that offers broad prospects for researchers, academics, and postgraduate students seeking to understand the many problems discussed.

¹¹ See: “Nadwa Niqāshīyya fī Kitāb ‘al-Ittiḥād al-Urūbī wa-l-Mantiqa al-‘Arabiyya: al-Qaḍāyā al-Ishkāliyya min Manzūr Wāqī’ī,” *Youtube*, 23/2/2022, accessed on 30/4/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3dT9X1Z>

¹² See his book on the EU: Hassan Nafaa, *al-Ittiḥād al-Urūbī wa-l-Durūs al-Mustafāda ‘Arabiyyan* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2004).

¹³ I believe that David Mitrany’s functionalism theory offers theoretical grounds that help understand European integration and development.

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