

Book Review: Europe in the New Middle East: Opportunity or Exclusion? by Richard Youngs

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*This book aims to examine the European Union's response to the Arab spring, from late 2010 to the beginning of 2014. Through 12 chapters, **Richard Youngs** seeks to assess how far the EU changed its policies towards countries like Tunisia and Syria in the aftermath of the Arab spring. **Inez von Weitershausen** finds the book empirically rich, but recommends it only to well-read students and researchers due to its advanced framework.*

Europe in the New Middle East: Opportunity or Exclusion? Richard Youngs.
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The results of [Tunisia's parliamentary elections](#) in October 2014 suggest a mixed outcome, both with regard to the distribution of seats in the Majlis Al-Nuwaab as well as the degree of enthusiasm expressed by the electorate. After all, participation rates were mediocre (around 60%) and media coverage suggested that a considerable number of Tunisians were [disillusioned](#) about the options and candidates they were presented with four years after the "Arab Spring" so famously began in the country and subsequently spread across vast parts of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

But domestic actors and interests were not the only ones battling over power in Tunisia and other countries in the region since people first took to the streets of Tunis, Cairo, Tripoli and Damascus. Numerous foreign powers also sought to exercise their influence, either to ensure stability along their own borders or in order to affirm their regional leadership. Much attention has thus been paid to activities of the Gulf states, Lebanon and Turkey. Yet not all powers trying to shape politics of and within the MENA region are Arab countries. Rather, the uprisings have re-opened the doors to increased engagement by some powers whose influence many had perceived to be minimal since the end of colonial rule. As Arabs took to the streets and picked up banners and occasionally guns in order to express their will to break with the existing political situation, European powers, too, become active once again.

It is this action and the constraints by which it was limited which [Richard Youngs](#), Professor at Warwick University and Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, analyses in his new and not uncritical book *Europe in the New Middle East*. Unimpressed by accounts which suggest otherwise, he finds that in 2011 "the EU's enthusiasm for change in the Middle East was bounded" (p.218). He provides numerous examples for why "even the most charitable observer must conclude that European governments failed to rise fully to the scale of challenge that a fundamentally redrawn Middle East presented" (p. 229).

Youngs thus draws a more nuanced and critical picture of the European response than some policy makers in Brussels or member states' capitals might appreciate. The same goes for some of his bold statements such as that "the Arab Spring combined with the Eurozone crisis weakened European influence in the MENA region and boosted the profile of competing powers" (p.22) or that "the Arab awakening did not open the door to entirely harmonious cooperation and community-building across the Mediterranean" (p.222).

Unlike other accounts which have suggested that European countries were highly engaged in triggering the uprisings in the first place, Youngs starting point is that the European Union "played little direct part in stimulating the Arab world's social uprising". Instead, he finds that Europe "had to delineate new strategies for responding to the ongoing processes of reform" and that "after 2011 European policy became more reformist" and that "many EU policies were upgraded in both quantitative and qualitative terms" (p.5). The commendable effort and potential benefit which can be derived from uncovering the many different aspects and components of the European

response is however offset by Young's idiosyncratic "eclectic analytical framework". Hoping to "capture the evolution of EU policy in and towards the region" in its entirety (p.9), he brings together five governance models with the aim to "shed light on a range of analytical issues: the explanations that lie behind EU decisions; the contrasting types of foreign policy instruments deployed; the impact of the new Middle East on the qualitative forms of governance that infuse relations across the Mediterranean Sea; the degree of variation between policies in different parts of the region; and the EU's degree of influence over events in the Arab world" (p. 10). Yet it is precisely this enormous scope – taking in a vast number of approaches, explanandums, and research questions – which is likely to confuse the reader and make them wonder what the actual objective and "message" of the book is.

The combination of concepts such as "Euro-Mediterranean Governance", "Exported Governance", "Cosmopolitan Governance", "Power Politics" and "De-Europeanized Governance", might hence be a way to adequately capture European policies in the MENA since 2010, but it is clearly not the most straight-forward approach and raises the question of whether a more parsimonious framework might have been more helpful for the analysis of Europe's role in the New Middle East – even if it might have resulted in a less detailed or complete account of the events.

At the same time, however, many of the chapters are empirically rich and thus contain relevant information in order to better understand the developments in the MENA region since the uprisings. Two chapters in particular deserve to be mentioned in this regard: Chapter 3, "The Contours of a New Middle East", provides an account of differences between the MENA countries in terms of categories such as regime type, political cleavages, and resistance to and degree of reform. It furthermore interprets the revolutionary events against the background of Middle Eastern geopolitics and regional power balances and describes the particular situation against which "European interest and the potential for EU influence" must be assessed (p. 47).

Another particularly relevant chapter is Chapter 7, which asks if we are to observe a "Fading Spectre of Radicalism?". Here, Youngs concludes that following the Arab Spring "European governments did not see the MENA region quite so pre-eminently through the prism of radicalism and counter-terrorism" and rather "inched towards a long-overdue normalisation of relations with mainstream Islamist parties (p.145). Given that Islamism and radicalism have remained dominant features in the European discourse about the MENA region, it is however doubtful whether Young's assessment is first and foremost a reflection of reality or whether it depicts mostly a state of wishful thinking.

Inez von Weitershausen is a PhD student and member of staff at the LSE's International Relations Department. Her doctoral research concentrates on European foreign policy with a special focus on crisis response and the Southern Neighborhood. She holds degrees from Bucerius Law School Hamburg and University of Bonn, Germany. [Read more reviews by Inez.](#)

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