

PERCEPTIONS OF MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION: THE CASE OF LIBYA

Akdeniz Ülkelerinin Avrupa Birliği'ne Yönelik Algıları: Libya Örneği

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Abstract

This article sought to answer the research question of “how is the European Union (EU) perceived in the outside world as a supranational organization?” Considering this research question, the study aimed to investigate the perceptions of the EU in the Mediterranean countries, which are its closest geographical neighbours. In this context, the study aimed to examine the perceptions of the EU in the Mediterranean region through the example of Libya as a case study. Libya entered a civil war process with the Arab Spring that started in late 2010, and the country became a place known for economic and political instability. The article evaluated the EU's policies regarding developments in the region from the perspective of the Libyan public and elites, starting from the early periods of the Arab Spring. To reach data on public and elite perceptions, the article used survey data conducted by research companies. The findings that emerged because of the survey data showed that Libyans did not have a homogeneous perception of the EU. The Libyan public evaluated the EU based on economic and humanitarian priorities, while the elites evaluated the EU more based on political issues in their countries and regions. In conclusion, the argument of the article is as follows: The normative actor role that the EU has tried to build on the concepts of the rule of law, democracy and human rights has not found a clear response in Libya. In a country with political and economic problems, both the public and the elites have prioritized their interests.

Keywords: European Union, Mediterranean, Libya, Perceptions

Öz

Bu makale, “supranasyonel bir örgüt olarak Avrupa Birliği'nin (AB) dış dünyada nasıl algılandığı” araştırma sorusuna yanıt aramıştır. Çalışma, bu araştırma sorusunun ışığında AB'nin coğrafi olarak en yakın komşusu olan Akdeniz ülkelerindeki algılarını araştırmayı amaçlamıştır. Bu kapsamda çalışma, bir vaka incelemesi olarak AB'nin Akdeniz bölgesindeki algılarını Libya örneği üzerinden incelemeyi hedeflemiştir. Libya, 2010 yılının sonlarında başlayan Arap Baharı'yla birlikte iç savaş sürecinin içerisine girmiş, ülke ekonomik ve siyasi istikrarsızlıklarla anılan bir yer haline gelmiştir. Makale, Arap Baharı'nın ilk dönemlerinden başlayarak AB'nin bölgede yaşanan gelişmelere dair politikalarını Libya kamuoyu ve elitlerinin gözünden değerlendirmiştir. Kamuoyu ve elit algılarına ilişkin verilere ulaşmak için makale, araştırma şirketlerinin yapmış oldukları anket verilerinden yararlanmıştır. Anket verilerinin sonucunda ortaya çıkan bulgular, Libyalıların AB'ye karşı homojen bir algıya sahip olmadıklarını göstermiştir. Libya kamuoyu, ekonomik ve insani öncelikler üzerinden elitler ise daha çok ülkelerindeki ve bölgelerindeki siyasi konular üzerinden bir AB değerlendirmesi yapmışlardır. Sonuç olarak makalenin argümanı şudur: AB'nin hukukun üstünlüğü, demokrasi ve insan hakları kavramları üzerinden inşa etmeye çalıştığı normatif aktör rolü Libya'da net bir karşılık bulamamıştır. Siyasi ve ekonomik sorunların yaşandığı bir ülkede hem kamuoyu hem de elitler çıkarlarını ön planda tutmuşlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, Akdeniz, Libya, Algılar

Introduction

The EU has sui generis characteristics as a supranational organization established after World War II to create an area of peace, security, and welfare on the European continent. The most important of these

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characteristics is that member states voluntarily transfer some of their national powers to the EU. Member states avoid transferring their powers such as foreign policy, defence and security to the EU and see these policy areas as their own interests (Günuğur, 2018). Secondly, what distinguishes the EU from other international organizations is that it defines itself through normative values. EU norms, which are shaped around fundamental values such as the rule of law, democracy, respect for human rights and minority rights, have also become accession criteria for candidate countries wishing to become members of the Union (European Union, 2025). For this reason, publications defining the EU as a "normative power" or "normative actor" have taken a wide place in the literature (Manners, 2002; Sjursen, 2006; Forsberg, 2011; Birchfield, 2013; Skolimowska, 2015; Jenichen, 2022).

The EU's definition of itself or the researchers' definition of the EU has provided data on the Union's place in the international system. However, with the end of the Cold War, the democratization processes in the globalizing world and the diversification of communication channels with the development of technology have made individuals, pressure, and interest groups more visible. The views of these classes, which can be divided into two categories as public opinion and elites, have become a critical area within the discipline of international relations. The Arab Spring, which began in 2010, has spread widely, affecting not only states but also societies (Lynch, 2016). In this sense, there has also been a significant increase in publications on how the EU is perceived by other actors. Fioramonti (2009) questioned the perspective of the EU in the African continent, Lucarelli and Fioramonti (2010) measured the external perception of the EU as a global actor, Lucarelli (2014) focused on the image of the EU in the outside world, Keuleers (2015) examined the perceptions of the EU in Africa, and Görgülü and Dark Kahyaoğlu (2019) investigated the local counterparts of the EU's vision in the Middle East and North African countries. All these studies aimed to explain how the EU was seen in non-Eurocentric, non-Western regions since the mid-2000s. The publications mentioned helped to evaluate the EU's policies from a "third eye". This external view created the opportunity for a more objective evaluation by revealing the identity and value of the EU.

When focusing on how the EU is perceived from the outside, it may be an easy method to start from the geographies closest to the Union. Because feedback on EU policies can be received more quickly from the Union's neighbours than from other geographies. The Mediterranean region is a neighbouring geography where countries that are within the geographical borders of the EU but are not members of the Union are located. The establishment of an institutional-based relationship between the EU and the Mediterranean countries was achieved in 1995 with the Barcelona Process. The EU and the Foreign Ministers of 12 Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries² signed a declaration to launch the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Process (The European People's Party Group, 2025). According to the declaration, the parties aimed to create a dialogue framework for peace, stability, security and shared socio-economic progress among the peoples of the Mediterranean region (Union for the Mediterranean, 2025). The EU's greatest expansion, which took place in 2004 with the membership of 10 Central and Eastern European countries. In the same year, to strengthen its prosperity, security and stability with its new neighbours, the EU announced the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and included 16 countries³ in this initiative (Council of Europe, 2025). The inclusion of Mediterranean countries in the ENP has brought about two results: First, the Barcelona Process has continued to be advanced by the EU. Second, the EU has taken a determined stance in maintaining its will to develop its relations with the countries in the region. The value that the EU attaches to cooperation with Mediterranean countries has become even more important with the Union for the Mediterranean initiative launched in 2008. The Union for the Mediterranean has been operational as an intergovernmental organization aiming to ensure regional cooperation, dialogue, and harmony between EU member states and 16 Mediterranean countries⁴ (Union for the Mediterranean, 2023). Thus, the EU-Mediterranean partnership has continued to be developed through a fully institutional mechanism. However, political instability and developments such as civil war that occurred in most of the member countries of the Union for the Mediterranean along with the Arab Spring have led the EU to reconsider its policies regarding the region. In this context, in 2021, the EU launched a new process titled "Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood: A new Agenda for the Mediterranean" to update its vision for the Mediterranean region. With this process, the EU aimed to bring dynamism to its partnership with the countries in the region that have undergone changes due to the developments (European Commission, 2021).

² Algeria, Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestinian Authorities, Syria, Tunisia, Türkiye.

³ Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Palestine Authorities, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

⁴ Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Palestine, Syria (currently suspended), Tunisia and Türkiye. Libya has an observer status.

The EU's long-term relationship with the Mediterranean region has created a sufficient period for perceptions to form about it. It can be said that the partnership steps examined chronologically above have created an important catalyst for the close contact of Mediterranean countries outside the EU with the Union's politics. Görgülü and Dark Kahyaoğlu (2019) examined the perceptions of the EU in some selected Mediterranean countries. However, this examination was limited to the views of the elites in the countries about the EU. Elites have indeed helped to shape a country's domestic and foreign policy with the advantages of socializing with external actors and have influenced the country's decision-makers and institutions thanks to their extensive information networks (Simmons et al., 2006). In addition, due to the high social status of the elites, their ideas are more visible. Finally, the elites are composed of people who have expertise in a certain subject (those who have worked/actively work in state institutions, academics, media professionals, etc.) and therefore have more knowledge about the policies of their country. However, learning only the perceptions of the elites is not enough to learn the views of the whole society. Therefore, learning about the views of the public opinion in addition to the elites will help to obtain healthy data to learn the thoughts of the whole society.

In line with all these explanations, the article aims to analyze the perceptions of both elites and public opinion in Mediterranean countries regarding the EU. The article uses survey studies as a quantitative data analysis method. In the public opinion section, there was no limitation in accessing survey studies. However, a sufficient survey sample could not be found, especially in the elite section. For this limitation, Friedrichs (2019) also stated that publications containing the perceptions and approaches of elites can be used in cases where surveys cannot be accessed. Based on this, an analysis was attempted in the article based on publications that included the opinions of elites instead of survey research for the perceptions of elites.

The article is based on Libya as a case study due to the existence of many Mediterranean countries and the possible limitations created by the perceptions of these countries one by one. It is necessary to explain why Libya was chosen among the Mediterranean countries within the scope of the article: First, Libya was one of the countries that felt the effects of the Arab Spring the most in the Mediterranean region. The country was dragged into civil war after the overthrow of the Muammar Gaddafi regime, which had been in power for many years. This civil war process caused Libya to enter a difficult period in terms of politics, economy, and humanity. In particular, the sanctions imposed on the country by the United Nations Security Council were one of the biggest factors that made it difficult for Libya to return to its old days (United Nations Security Council, 2014; United Nations Security Council, 2020). Second, in the period after the Arab Spring, the EU and its member states also supported the development aid initiated under the leadership of international organizations for Libya to return to its old days (European Commission, 2025). The EU's development aid provides an opportunity for feedback on the EU's Mediterranean policy, what it means to the Libyan public and elites. Thirdly, it can be predicted that in a country where extraordinary developments are taking place that may affect both the public and elites' views, EU perceptions will be evaluated by considering the historical background. It has been thought that the historical roles of EU member states in the region may also form an idea for their current policies. Considering all these reasons, the article has presented as an argument that Libyan perceptions may represent a certain aspect of the region's view of the EU.

1. A Brief History of EU-Libya Relations

The beginning of EU-Libya relations was shaped around the Cold War dynamics within the new international order that emerged after World War II. Libya, led by Muammar Gaddafi, who took over the country after the military coup in 1969, pursued an independent foreign policy during the Cold War without being involved in either pole (Fernández-Molina, 2017). For this reason, it was not possible for EU-Libya relations to gain an institutional perspective during the Cold War. After the Cold War, Libya was also included in initiatives such as the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Mediterranean Union by the EU. Through these partnership mechanisms, the EU aimed to maintain the stability of the region by providing a framework based on normative values to its neighbours (Del Sarto, 2016). Libya was also one of the most important actors in the EU's Mediterranean policy with its geopolitical and geostrategic location.

Since the early 2000s, North Africa has become the most used route for migrants trying to reach the European continent by sea (Hamood, 2006). Italy and Malta, due to their geographical location among EU members, have become the target countries that North African migrants want to reach on the continent (Garcia Andrade et al., 2015). During this period, relations between Libya and the EU were maintained through a security perspective. According to Kruashvili (2020), the fact that the EU has enlarged its borders since 2004 and aimed to meet the migration flow that may come from North Africa in third countries has strengthened the analyses related to security parameters. Thus, the EU tried to create the capacity to manage migration by taking control of its external borders. However, based on the view that unilateral steps

would not be beneficial, the EU initiated a “special dialogue” mechanism with Libya on migration in June 2005 (European Commission, 2005). Within the scope of the dialogue, Italy, one of the member states, provided training and equipment support for Libya’s border control and surveillance activities and began implementing deportation procedures by not allowing migrants to enter its territory (Kruashvili, 2020).

However, the Arab Spring process brought Libya-EU relations to a standstill (Palm, 2017). Political instability, economic problems, and humanitarian crises caused by the civil war have ended state authority in Libya. As a result, the country has become an area of “proxy war” between major powers.

2. Public Opinions

This chapter used two sources to examine Libyan public opinion on the EU: Arab Barometer⁵ and the Arab Opinion Index.⁶ Both surveys collected data at regular intervals and with large sample sizes. The surveys aimed to ask the societies of the participating countries questions on a variety of topics. Another survey among others concerning the perceptions of the Libyan people about the EU after the Arab Spring is the 2014 Arab Opinion Index (Arab Center Washington DC, 2014). The survey participants in 13 countries including Libya were asked “How do they view the foreign policies of the USA, China, Iran, Russia and Türkiye, along with France, which is an EU member?” Among the participants whose foreign policy was seen as “positive or somewhat positive,” France ranked third with 47%, following Türkiye (57%) and China (52%) (Arab Center Washington DC, 2014). In the same survey, another question was asked to the participants, “which country would they be more inclined to strengthen their relations with?” Among those who responded to this question, France (51%) came in third place behind China (58%) and Türkiye (58%) (Arab Center Washington DC, 2014). Like those who expressed positive views on Türkiye, China and France in the previous question, the same result emerged here. It can be said that France, an EU member, has a good perception in the region compared to regional and global powers such as Iran, the US and Russia.

Another study that can measure the Libyan public’s perception of the EU is the survey conducted by the Arab Barometer in 2018-2019. In this context, survey participants were asked to answer the question “which foreign power would they prefer to provide development assistance to their country?” 35% of Libyan society wanted the EU to provide development assistance to their country (Robbins, 2020). With this data, Libya showed the lowest level of acceptance of the EU’s development assistance activities among the countries participating in the survey. The survey data also raised the question of why Libyans do not accept the EU’s humanitarian aid activities. When survey participants were asked why this was the case, 47% said that the EU was trying to gain influence in the region by providing them with assistance (Robbins, 2020). Other reasons are economic development (18%), internal stability (12%), improving people’s lives (12%) and strengthening civil society organizations (8%) (Robbins, 2020). Almost half of Libyans believed that the EU acted in their interests, not to help them.

The last survey to examine the EU’s perception of Libyan public opinion was conducted by Arab Barometer in 2020-2021. This survey was conducted at a time when the political, economic, and humanitarian effects of the pandemic that started in March 2020 were evident. This survey included outputs regarding the perceptions of Libyans of Germany and France, the EU’s two largest member states. The fact that these two member states are the determining forces of EU policies can help the implications of Libyan perceptions for the Union. First, participants were asked “how they evaluate Germany’s foreign policy.” 67% of Libyans described Germany’s policies as “positive or somewhat positive” (Robbins, 2021). Germany’s role as a donor country in Libya, which entered a civil war process after the Arab Spring, has a positive contribution to this through its aid programs (Furness, 2020). Likewise, participants who were asked secondly about France’s foreign policy made the exact opposite inference to Germany. Only 43% of Libyans stated that they viewed France’s foreign policy positively (Robbins, 2021). Especially during the pandemic period, China’s humanitarian aid activities, especially the distribution of vaccines to the region, together with Germany, can be interpreted as a development that reduces France’s acceptance in the country. It can also be thought that France’s colonial past in Libya triggers Libyan memories.

The fact that Germany and France have different positions in the Libyans’ perspectives was clearly seen in another question of the survey. In this question, participants were asked to learn the counterparts of the political attitudes of the German and French leaders among the Libyan people. The rate of Libyans who liked the political rhetoric of the then German Chancellor Angela Merkel was 64% (Robbins, 2021). This result proved that Germany’s foreign policy and the executive head are on a similar basis in Libyan

⁵ Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that provides information on the social, political, and economic attitudes and values of people in the Arab world. It has conducted public opinion surveys in the Middle East and North Africa since 2006.

⁶ The Arab Opinion Index has been produced by the Arab Center Washington DC, an authoritative research center on the Arab world, since 2011. The organization is a non-profit, independent and non-partisan research center.

perceptions. On behalf of France, Libyans questioned the foreign policy behaviour of the current President, Emmanuel Macron. Accordingly, 38% of Libyans found Macron's policies positive (Robbins, 2021). This data showed that France's foreign policy and Macron's rhetoric received extremely low acceptance from Libyans. Barnes-Darcey (2021) stated that Macron's perception in the region was very weak, and that his efforts to develop relations with the Gulf countries, especially during his term in office, led to a negative reaction in Mediterranean countries. This situation may have created the impression that the Libyans, especially the Mediterranean region, have been relegated to a secondary role in France's foreign policy compared to the Gulf region. The differences in the perception of Germany and France in Libya, when viewed from another perspective, were a sign that the EU's foreign and security policy was not common among member states. Member states could not act together on foreign and security policy, which they saw as their national authority, and shared common interests throughout the EU. This led to the EU and its member states being exposed to different approaches in the international arena. The studies examining three separate public opinions also supported the fact that interests, as in the case of Libya, were of decisive importance instead of the normative values attributed to the EU.

3. Elite Opinions

Following the public opinion polls investigating the perceptions of the EU in Libya, it was the turn of the elites to approach the issue. The most important issue that Libyan elites expressed their views on the EU's foreign policy was the wave of migration from the country to the European continent after the Arab Spring. With the threat of refugees from the regions where civil wars were experienced at the EU borders in 2014, the problem first became regional and then global in later periods. Refugees started to come to Central Europe, especially to Greece, via Türkiye, and to Southern Europe, especially to Italy, via the Mediterranean route from North Africa (Harchaoui, 2021). The wave of migration following the Greek route was limited by the agreement reached with Türkiye by the EU in 2016 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Directorate for EU Affairs, 2016). However, no solution could be found for the Central Mediterranean route, namely migrants coming from Libya (United Nations Support Mission in Libya, 2018).

The EU and its member states have cooperated with Libya to control the migration threat. The first partnership was established by the EU in May 2013 to help secure Libya's borders (EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM) (The European External Action Service, 2021). The second was the Operation Sophia⁷ launched in May 2015 to prevent human trafficking in the Mediterranean (European Parliament, 2025). The third was a memorandum of understanding signed between Italy and the Libyan Government of National Accord⁸ in February 2017 to prevent illegal migration (EU Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy, 2017). Thanks to the agreement, the number of migrants reaching EU member states from the Mediterranean in the summer of 2017 decreased compared to the previous year (Scazzieri & Springford, 2017). Because the tightening of controls under the agreement, the movement of migrants has limited their capabilities.

The agreement between the EU and Libya aimed to prevent the flow of refugees to the European continent, but it was criticized by the elites in numerous ways. Micallef and Reitano (2017) objected to the way the agreement was implemented, even though the EU's security threat had decreased. The fact that the migrants sent back to Libya with the agreement fell into the hands of human traffickers created a negative perception about the EU. Migrants were subjected to negative situations such as sexual abuse and torture in repatriation centers (Amnesty International, 2017). Koenig (2017) stated that the inadequacy of vertical consistency between the EU and its member states and the fact that Libya was treated with a colonialist logic were criticized by the elites. The understanding that the EU and its member states prioritized their interests by setting aside normative values, which was seen in Libya in previous years, has become evident again.

In addition, a Libyan who holds a high-level position in an international organization working on migration issues explained the EU's policy during this period as follows: "Most of the people held in migration centers were caught at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard in exchange for preventing refugees and migrants from reaching European shores. The Europeans' money was used to increase the capacity to prevent people trying to escape from Libya and to detain them illegally" (Bilgic, 2022). This statement revealed how the steps taken by the parties to secure migration contradict normative values. It also revealed that the EU and its member states can abandon their own principles for security interests.

⁷ Operation Sophia was transformed into Operation Irini on March 31, 2020, to monitor the United Nations Security Council's arms embargo on Libya.

⁸ According to the Libyan Political Agreement signed on December 17, 2015, under the leadership of the United Nations, it is the body that holds the executive power of the country.

Libyan elites have stated that their country's advantages such as oil reserves and proximity to the Mediterranean make it strategically important for EU member states. In this regard, the following words of a former Libyan diplomat have been an important observation: "The fact that the country has rich oil reserves is proof of why it has experienced civil war and external intervention" (International Peace Institute, 2019). However, according to them, despite their energy and security needs, the EU and its member states are divided rather than acting together (Colombo & Dessi, 2020). Among EU member states in Libya, Italy and France came to the fore, followed by Germany. According to the Libyan diplomat, there are unspoken prejudices between Italy and France (Akamo et al., 2023). Indeed, these two member states supported separate groups⁹ in Libya (Eljarh, 2020). Again, in the words of a Libyan diplomat, the Libya impasse between Italy and France has negatively affected the country's view of the EU and its member states (Akamo et al., 2023). In addition to the differences of opinion between Italy and France, the EU's failure to force its member states to develop a common Libya policy has led to a negative perception of the elites towards the Union.

The EU and its member states were only able to develop a common policy to resolve their disputes over Libya in 2020. Elites emphasized that the failure of the EU and its member states to speak with a single voice reduced their influence in Libya. According to them, the two Berlin Conferences in January 2020 and June 2021 and the Paris Conference in November 2021 were organized so that the EU and its member states would not lose their interests in Libya (Fishman & El Gomati, 2021). However, these efforts by the elites were not enough to ensure that the EU and its member states could be defined as dependable actors in Libya (The Libya Observer, 2021). The EU and its member states had difficulty convincing local actors in Libya about their policies.

Conclusion

This article sought an answer to the research question "how is the European Union (EU) perceived in the outside world as a supranational organization?" The study aimed to measure the perceptions of Mediterranean countries that are within the geographical borders of the EU but are not members of the Union. As a sample case study, it aimed to reach data on the perceptions of the Libyan public and elites towards the EU and to make an analysis in the light of this data. As a result of the evaluation of the public opinion surveys and publications examining the elite views, some outputs were reached in the study.

Firstly, the Libyan public and the elites have different perceptions of what the EU means. In the survey studies in which the Libyan public's views were learned, the EU was not seen as a monolithic structure. To put it more clearly, the Libyan people evaluated the policies of member states such as Germany and France instead of the EU. It is obvious that the fact that these two countries are considered as the "motor of the EU" in the literature has a concrete response in the Libyan public. It is possible to describe such an inference as the result of the guidance of the research organizations conducting the survey. However, it is also possible that the Libyan public considers Germany and France as great powers instead of the Union as a single EU. This has created a picture in which the EU's presence in the Mediterranean is evaluated not as a single institutional structure but as individual member states. Libyans or the organizations conducting the survey measured the EU perception through Germany and France. Such a preference should be seen as normal since the EU is one of the two largest countries. When we look at the Libyan elite's perception of the EU, we see that they tend to make a general EU assessment. This may have been caused by the elites positioning the EU based on political issues in the region. They considered the EU's policies in the post-Arab Spring period.

Secondly, Libyans compared the EU's perception in their country with the presence of other major powers in the region. Accordingly, the EU has a positive perspective in Libya when compared to the US and Russia, and a more negative perspective when compared to China.

Thirdly, instead of a monolithic EU, the Libyan public considered the strategies of Germany and France regarding their countries and the region. Accordingly, ordinary Libyan citizens viewed Germany more positively than France, and Merkel more positively than Macron. The reasons for this result may include the negative memories of France's colonial past in the region and the potential created by Germany's active policy in development aid in recent years.

Fourthly, Libyan elites have drawn a more general EU perspective. According to the elites, the EU's Mediterranean, and Middle East policies, particularly in Libya, have been far from following a consistent line since 2011. The EU has seen the influx of refugees as a problem to protect its borders rather than its

⁹ France supported Haftar and the Libyan National Army in eastern Libya, while Italy supported central government forces in the cities of Misrata and Tripoli.

own normative values, especially on the issue of migration. This perspective among the elites has strengthened the impression that the EU prioritizes its interests rather than values. Such a determination has also brought about a negative image of the EU in the eyes of Libyan elites.

Fifthly, the complicated situation for Libyan elites is that it is unclear who to address when the EU is mentioned. Due to the existence of EU institutions on one side and member states on the other, the elites have thought that they are in relations with two different actors. The failure of the EU and member states to demonstrate a common policy will, especially on foreign policy and security issues, has created a perception that portrays the Union as negative in the eyes of Libyan elites. For this reason, elites have been more willing to establish relations with member states on political issues than EU institutions.

Considering the above outcomes, the following can be stated as a result: The EU has been subject to different evaluations by the Libyan public and the elite. Ordinary Libyan citizens are more likely to categorize the EU according to the balance of benefits and harms it provides to their country. For the Libyan public, the EU's efforts to integrate normative values into their country have been described as a more concrete contribution by providing development assistance. The Libyan people have valued the EU's positive role in meeting their basic needs that will enable them to survive after the civil war. It has been determined that the elites focus on the EU's stance on political issues related to their country and region. The security concerns created by the refugee crisis reaching Europe via Libya and the involvement of EU member states in the civil war environment in their countries were among the topics that the elites were most interested in. In both issues, the elites touched on the complexity created by the different foreign policy positions between the EU and its member states. This complex environment has been defined by the elites as the strongest indicator that the EU cannot function as a holistic actor.

All these explanations have revealed that the EU does not have a positive perception in the Mediterranean, which is its neighbouring geography. While the EU has a strong motivation in the field of economy, it has a perception of Libya as being stuck in the lack of coordination of member states in political matters, having difficulty in acting quickly and effectively, and being able to organize interests better than values. These perceptions do not lead to reductionism such as generalizing the EU's Mediterranean vision. Nevertheless, it has revealed in which areas the EU is deficient and needs a new Mediterranean strategy. It would not be unreasonable to think that this research will take a more meaningful place in the literature by measuring the perceptions of the EU in other regions.

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