



A German perspective

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German foreign policy and security policy priorities in the MED

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For a long time, the Mediterranean region had been a rather neglected area in Germany's foreign policy. The region was accorded lesser priority and followed no real defined interests. Unlike France, for example, Germany does not have a colonial past in northern Africa and its engagements have been largely patchy. Germany left this region mostly to France, Italy and Spain. If anything, Germany's interest had merely centered on the region's stability, and this interest had been pursued indirectly through the European Union.

This trend remains visible to this day. However, there has been a shift and Germany has a clearer and better defined interest in the Mediterranean region which it is also willing to pursue. After neglecting the region for a long time, two factors prompted the country's change of approach. The first was the founding of the Union for the Mediterranean ten years ago. France, with President Nicolas Sarkozy, was a driving force in this project and Germany was made to develop a position. The second factor was that Germany generally underwent a shift in its self-chosen role in the international system. After exercising restraint in many fields for a long while, it came to realize that a more self-confident and leading role is expected and reasonable.

So what are the foreign policy and security interests that Germany pursues in the region? The main interest can still be defined as stability; this has not changed. Especially in the Maghreb, after the Arab spring, the relevant states are still in the process of transitioning from authoritarian regimes to more liberal ones, and maybe in the future even democratic systems. Germany wants to play an active role in supporting Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt to build strong and stable state structures. Development cooperation depending on good governance is a key strategic element in this process. The goals differ from country to country of course and the steps that can be taken are small, but overall the goals are generally similar. Enabling the states to exercise their sovereign rights especially domestically with their own military and police forces is part of the broader policy objective. The goals further include making the basic necessary public goods available, like health care, education, transportation infrastructure, and last but not least helping to create a functioning economy with jobs and affordable goods. Economically speaking, in the longer term, Germany's interest is to achieve a greater balance in wealth-distribution between northern African and European countries, to be able to ease the demographic pressure that is a driving force for migration towards Europe. If Germany were to help to implement value chains, a small step would already be taken.



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This would go hand in hand with another clearly defined interest which relates to Germany's economic involvement in the region. Surely, Germany already exports a wide variety of goods like power plants or agricultural goods to northern African states but the level of economic exchange is still on a very low level. Maybe someday in the future northern African regions could also play a key role in energy production through solar power which could then be exported to Europe. More stability and prosperity would be a long term goal also in this respect.

A more short term interest would be to manage and reduce current migration rates from northern African coast shores towards EU territory. This phenomena is not new – it has been plaguing the European Union, including Germany for a long time. It however assumed a higher dimension when large numbers of migrants arrived in Germany, demonstrating that the issue was not just for the southern European states alone. For too long, Germany and other northern European countries ignored the problems that countries like Italy and Greece had been facing for a long time.

Germany has changed its approach and is now contributing to face the migration issue coming from northern Africa. The driving interest are multilayered: distress rescue on the sea is the first and foremost important step. German Navy Forces have been involved in the EUNAVFOR MED operation Sophia since June 2015. Working together with multiple partners, this operation has helped to save thousands of lives. The main defined aim of the mission is the neutralizing of established refugee smuggling routes in the Mediterranean. So far, the mission has been successful, as per its defined aims; the migration pressure is reduced in comparison to the peak in 2015 but the general problem has yet to disappear and will probably remain. Better management of the issue may not in itself make it disappear. The problem of insecurity on land is massive which directly leads to another German strategic interest in the region - the fight against terrorism.

The increase in terrorist networks has become a large scale problem in much of northern Africa. This potentially undermines the building of functioning state structures and occasionally threatens German domestic security directly when terroristic threats are brought to Germany.

Broadening the scope of German interest in the Mediterranean, one of Germany's core interests is the security of Israel. Due to its past, Germany has always had a special relationship with Israel ever since the founding of the state in 1948. After the first period of forging a relationship with all its difficulties, Germany has become a major strategic ally of Israel. The security of the state of Israel is a cornerstone of Germany's identity. Nowadays, there is a strong social and economic ties between the two countries. Germany exports and imports a large variety of goods from and to Israel. The German and the Israeli government hold regular government consultations together, and Chancellor Angela Merkel has declared the security of Israel a reason of state for Germany (Staatsräson).

What follows from this? Germany has always been one of the major weapons and military technology source for the Israeli military forces. Alongside the USA and France, Germany is one of the top three arms exporting countries to Israel. Surely, from a strict economic standpoint, those exports are beneficial to the German economy; in security terms, however, Germany has been involved in the conflicts that Israel has with its neighbors in the region.

Since the year 2006, Germany has been involved in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) mission at the Lebanese coast to help the Lebanese government secure the sea borders and to fight the smuggling of weapons. The mission was a consequence of the second Lebanon war in 2006 between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Germany's interest is, of course, peace and stability in the region, but most of all the security and support is directed towards Israel. The engagement in the UNIFIL mission is a direct consequence of these motives.

For the future, it will be interesting to observe how Germany perceives its interest in the Mediterranean, as it is still undergoing a process of transformation towards a power following more actively and openly its interests. Although the Mediterranean will hardly ever become a region of core interest to Germany in comparison to its relations to France, the Central and Eastern European countries and the transatlantic ties, due to many factors, the interests in the south are likely to grow and with this growth a redefinition of the German role will be unavoidable.

*In order to encourage debates on recent political issues in Germany, the foreign office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Italy launched the seminar and publication series “**A German Perspective**” promoting the dialogue between German and Italian experts and politicians. The key objective of this initiative is to strengthen the bilateral dialogue between Germany and Italy by exchanging information, knowledge and point of views of both countries.*

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