

Europe and the Gulf States

Developing a Common European Political, Economic and Security Vision towards the Gulf States

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The Arab/Persian Gulf region is significantly important for the world's economy. It produces 27 per cent of the world's need of oil and possesses huge reserves of oil and gas with relatively low production costs. It also controls one of the main maritime straits in the world, the Strait of Hormuz, where about a fifth of the world's oil passes through it every day.

Politically and in particular, following the 2011 Arab Uprisings, the Gulf States became important actors in the conflicts within the Arab countries. In Yemen and Libya, they are militarily involved directly. In Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Tunisia, they are trying to influence the outcomes of the political struggle within these countries. In fact, the Gulf States' political influence has reached countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia. In short, through their financial resources, the Gulf States are trying to fill the political void that the Arab protests have created and trying to shape the future of the Arab countries.

For the European Union (EU), the Gulf States represent a dilemma. On the one hand, they are important regional trade partner. In 2018, for example, the EU was the first trading partner for the Gulf States accounting for 14,6% of their total trade, followed by China (12.2%), Japan (8.5%) and India (8.4%). On the other hand, they pose several political, economic and security challenges to the EU:

First, the EU is interested in supporting long term stability in the Arab countries based on political and economic reforms that include good governance, political plurality, freedom of speech, peaceful alternation of power, and respect for human rights, but some Gulf States are more inclined to support similar outlook regimes of their owns. Second, the EU prioritizes ending the humanitarian crisis and launching an inclusive peace process in Yemen to end the civil war, but some Gulf States are more interested in their strategic political gains in Yemen.

Third, the EU supports the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, but some Gulf States would like either to exert maximum economic pressure on Iran or at least to include other elements to the JCPOA that are not currently existing in it such as Iran's ballistic missile's program and its interference in several Arab countries. For a number of Gulf States, Iran poses a security threat that requires from the international community to address, but for Europe and the Biden's administration of the United States, the priority is Iran's nuclear program. Fourth, while the EU is interested in signing a free trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Gulf States seem to be hesitant and do not consider it in their best interests.

These challenges for the EU in dealing with the Gulf States are exacerbated by other indigenous and exogenous factors. On the first level, the European countries are not united on how to deal with the Gulf States. For example, we see clear differences between some of the major European countries when it comes to the intervention of some Gulf States in the conflicts of Yemen, Libya, and other Arab countries. More importantly, while the EU would like to see a stable, secure, and prosperous Gulf region, it does not offer or have a ready-made plan to ensure the security of the Gulf States.

On the second level, there are three important factors that complicate the challenges for the European countries furthermore:

First, the Gulf States are not a unitary actor; they are engaged in rivalries with one another, and some countries are closer to the EU's positions on several political issues than others.

Second, there are no regional institutions where the Gulf States, Iran, and Iraq can cooperate, coordinate, and address their differences.

Third, the current security architecture in the Gulf/Persian region is increasingly becoming obsolete. The main guarantor of the Gulf States' security, i.e., the United States, is in the process of disengaging from the Middle East, or at least in the process of lessening its military presence in the region. This will eventually force the Gulf States to diversify their security. While currently no great power possesses the military infrastructure in the Gulf region to undertake the role of the United States, the countries that rely on importing oil from the Gulf States including China, India, South Korea, and Japan might seek to establish a military presence in the Gulf region to protect their interests. Further, without a new security architecture for the Gulf region that replaces the old one, Iran might emerge as the main regional power forcing the small Gulf States to act according to its main interests.

Taking into consideration the European's interests in the Gulf region and the importance of the region for the world's economy, the EU has a vital interest in proposing and advancing a plan for the Gulf region's security.

But what kind of security arrangement can preserve peace in the Gulf region, advance its countries' prosperity, and maintain at the same time Europe's interests?

Theories of International Relations offer various answers to this questions that vary from making straight forward alliances with the Gulf States to hold Iran in check to a more inclusive security framework based on the concept of "security community" where all states, including Iran, can enjoy the same degree of security.

An alliance, on one extreme end of the security continuum, is formal association of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership. It is designed for defensive or offensive military collaboration. It is an exclusive institution, usually formed against a specified foe, and predicated upon the existence of an external threat. This form of security arrangement is costly for the EU; it requires establishing military infrastructure in the Gulf region and commitment to engage in wars against the Gulf States' adversaries if that is required.

The security community can be considered the other extreme end of the security continuum. It refers to the creation of a peaceful comity of states through gradual confidence building and integration. It is a multilateral organisation that provides collective security to its members and mutual expectations of support in their future interactions. In this multilateral organization, the states align together to eliminate the use of violence as a recourse of action within their designated political space. This choice is not costly for the EU and requires from them more diplomatic resources and incentives to bring the Gulf States and Iran together. However, its success or failure depends on the will of the Gulf States and Iran.

Between alliance and security community, there are other forms of security arrangements including quasi-alliance, strategic partnership, concert, entente, non-aggression pact, and many others.

Concept Note

Regional Programme Gulf States

Against this backdrop, the Regional Program Gulf States at Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is holding a three-day workshop in Cadenabbia, Italy, to discuss the relations between the European countries and the Gulf States with the intention to advance a common understanding on how to approach the Gulf States on the political and security questions posed in this concept note. Page 3/3

The conference will host a number of European scholars who are working on and interested in the Gulf region. Their main task will be to arrive to a set of recommendations that can guide the European policymakers in their work in the Gulf region. In order to inform the European scholars about the Gulf States' policies and concerns, a number of scholars from the Gulf region will be invited to participate in the conference.