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PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2019.1557912>

PUBLISHER

Taylor & Francis (Routledge) © Istituto Affari Internazionali

VERSION

AM (Accepted Manuscript)

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in The International Spectator on 01 Mar 2019, available online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2019.1557912>

LICENCE

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Kourtelis, Christos. 2019. "The Unintended Consequences of the Eu's Rural Development Programme in the Arab Countryside". figshare. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/36880>.

The Unintended Consequences of the EU's Rural Development Programme in the Arab Countryside

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Abstract

After the Arab revolts, the EU designed a new regional rural development programme to address the various political and economic threats in the Arab Mediterranean countryside. Although the programme is based on a new cognitive framework, it has generated unintended consequences that undermine its effectiveness. These consequences were predictable. They are a product of path dependency and the inability of policymakers to draw lessons from previous EU initiatives with similar aims and to contextualise the relationship between small farmers and political elites in the Arab countryside.

Keywords: ENP, ENPARD, rural development, North Africa, unintended consequences

The Arab revolts challenged many of the assumptions upon which European Union (EU) policies towards the region were based. Besides the well-cited security-stability nexus (Roccu and Voltolini 2018), one of the most important tenets of EU foreign policy towards the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was the belief that by pursuing economic liberalisation, the Arab Mediterranean countries would enact political reforms that would enable larger parts of their societies to participate in decision-making processes. Thus the fruits of these economic policies would have a trickle-down effect.

After the uprisings revealed the limits of these assumptions, the EU revised its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The renewed ENP introduced a new normative framework, whose priorities are inclusive growth and support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (European Commission 2011; 2012a). As Dandashly and Noutcheva argue in this Special Issue, the external shock of the Arab uprisings entailed changes in the long-term policies and EU-led programmes in MENA countries. Policymakers in the EU argued that the new framework would produce a qualitative change in the EU's engagement with ENP partners, as the EU programmes would be more effective and target more precisely the people in need of EU funds.

This article analyses the EU's efforts to support the development of the agricultural sector in MENA countries after 2011. Agriculture has always been one of the most important areas of Euro-Mediterranean relations since the Barcelona Process, as the sector employed more than thirty percent of the total workforce in most countries of the region before the Arab revolts (OECD 2011). In order to promote the modernisation of the agricultural sector after the revolts, the EU emphasised the significance of integrated rural development. To that end, it designed a new regional programme aimed at including smaller farmers in the decision-making process and supporting small rural producers and SMEs. The European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) is the latest EU attempt to introduce a new management system that will help smaller Arab producers in the Mediterranean countryside.

This contribution argues that, despite the positive changes in the EU's normative framework, the new programme still creates unfavourable conditions for small producers. However, these unfavourable conditions do not result from a deviation from the stated objectives of the programme, but are generated as unintended consequences of the successful operationalisation of ENPARD. In light of this, the study identifies the unintended

consequences of the EU's rural development aid and why they occur. The claim made here is that the consequences are twofold: political and economic. As ENPARD is an ongoing programme, which entered its second phase in 2015, the EU has not yet addressed the unintended consequences that result from its operation in the Arab Mediterranean countries. Therefore, this contribution does not engage with the 'how' dimension of the EU's management of unintended consequences identified in the Introduction to this Special Issue.

The argument put forward in this article is that in both areas, political and economic, the impact of ENPARD could have been anticipated. Policymakers could have avoided unintended consequences if they had examined more closely similar programmes that had been implemented in Europe and contextualised the relationship between small farmers and political elites in Arab Mediterranean countries.

Another important issue that should be mentioned here is that, in spite of a growing interest in the ENP's performance towards both the EU's eastern and southern neighbours, hardly any systematic research has been done on the role of EU aid in the rural development of its neighbouring countries. This is because Euro-Mediterranean analysts (ranging from international relations experts to agricultural economists) focus on the impact of the food trade and the Association Agreements (e.g. actors involved, power dynamics and costs of quotas and tariffs), while the literature on the ENP mainly concentrates on the (absence of) regulatory effects of the policy rather than on the EU-funded rural development programmes.

This article attempts to fill the gap in the existing literature on the ENP. In addition, it offers useful insights for analysts who focus not only on the role of unintended consequences in international relations, but also on their impact on EU development policy and the implementation of the EU's foreign assistance.

Given the absence of relevant articles on this topic, the methodology adopted is based on analysis of official documents published by the EU institutions and agencies that coordinate ENPARD as well as several informal interviews with officials dealing with the programme in EU and partner countries. Studies on *Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale* (LEADER¹) (which, as shown in the next section, was the template for ENPARD) and others offer further insights into the approach and components of ENPARD and the unintended consequences that they have generated. As LEADER operates in a different context than ENPARD, these studies and the aforementioned primary sources of the EU institutions have been collated with ENP Progress Reports to juxtapose and compare the EU's efforts with regard to the rural development of the Arab Mediterranean countries before and after the uprisings.

The article is structured as follows. Following a short note which introduces the main characteristics of ENPARD, the first section classifies the concept of unintended consequences and positions the idea of integrated rural development in this classification. The article then discusses the operationalisation of the program and its political and economic consequences for small farmers. The conclusion summarises the findings of this work.

What is ENPARD?

ENPARD is a policy initiative of the EU that was launched in 2012 to support the rural development of ENP partners (CIHEAM-IAMM, n.d.-a). Contrary to the activities of the ENP Action Plans, which attempted to address rural poverty indirectly and mainly through the macroeconomic stability of the partner countries, ENPARD's main goal is to improve living conditions in the Arab Mediterranean countryside by supporting small farmers' cooperatives

¹ LEADER is an EU initiative that was initiated in 1991. It engages local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, decision-making and resource allocation for the development of their rural areas.

as a model for increasing their productivity and access to markets. In addition, ENPARD attempts to improve the capacity of local state and non-state actors to manage rural development projects and to provide more opportunities in rural areas, particularly for women and youth.

The programme follows the geographical distinction of the ENP and has two branches: ENPARD South and ENPARD East.² The initial participants of ENPARD South were Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, but at the time of writing, most Southern ENP countries participate in the programme.³ The aims of the new programme should not be confused with the agricultural trade component of the Association Agreements, which focuses mainly on setting tariffs and quotas for food products. As stated above, ENPARD's main objective is to provide assistance to small farmers of the participant countries. According to the former Commissioner for Enlargement and the ENP, Štefan Füle:

ENPARD will not only contribute to more employment but it will also help to improve the quality of life of people in rural areas. Moreover support to agriculture and rural development is also a key element of the EU's commitment to inclusive growth in the Neighbourhood (European Commission 2012b).

What is important here is that the EU's financial assistance through ENPARD is part of a new approach to the rural development of ENP partners. To support rural SMEs and inclusive growth in the Arab countryside after the Arab revolts, ENPARD introduced the concept of integrated rural development.

Although the logic of integrated rural development appeared after the Arab revolts as a new concept for the development of the ENP partners, its origins can be found almost three

² In the article, ENPARD is used to describe the work of the program in the Southern rim of the ENP.

³ The Southern ENP partners that participate in ENPARD are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia.

decades ago in the reappraisal of Europe's strategy for the development of member states' agricultural sectors. Until the mid-1980s most member states generated policies which advocated scale-enlargement, intensification, specialisation and a strong trend towards industrialisation in some food sectors (Van Der Ploeg *et al.* 2000). Yet, the restructuring of the European (and global) economy led to substantial changes in the ways the welfare state supported agriculture. Large (state) investments in crop research and production were gradually abandoned; the food companies replaced economies of scale and vertical integration of farms into their systems with more flexible patterns of organisation (Jones 2000; OECD 2006; Ward and McNicholas 1998). As a result, regional disparities in the EU increased and there was little improvement in the productivity and income of the majority of small farmers, especially those with pocket-size holdings fragmented in several plots. In addition, rising environmental awareness created tensions between farming and environmental protection.

These changes indicated that emphasis only on the technology of crop production, when the majority of farmers had other objectives (such as equitable access to resources, improvements in income distribution, sustainable use of resources and production) was not an adequate solution for rural development. The concept of integrated rural development suggested a new agricultural development model. In this new blueprint, specific attention was given to synergies. Synergies between farmers and non-agricultural structures (such as NGOs, local authorities and the private sector) became a crucial element of rural development, especially for the neglected small producers (Van Der Ploeg *et al.* 2000). Contrary to the previous modernisation model which encouraged specialisation and the distinction of agricultural from other rural activities, the logic of integrated rural development advocated more coordination among different actors in addressing the challenges encountered by farmers in rural areas.

Three elements were deemed important for the success of the new model: coordination, planning and decentralisation. The emphasis on coordination suggested that the administrative

integration of different inputs would improve the procedures of service delivery (especially to small farmers). The concept of integrated rural development did not prescribe a specific way to improve the coordination among the different actors, but what was essential was the active participation of local farmers (Ray 2001). Through the creation of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and cooperative schemes, local farmers were able to identify and implement a local development strategy, take decisions about the allocation of financial resources and manage them. This type of involvement in the decision-making process provided context-sensitive solutions that helped improve the quality of life of all those who had a stake in the rural areas. To this end, local farmers were encouraged to seek partnerships with the state, the private and the third sectors.

The establishment of new partnerships brought to the fore the role that planning plays in integrated rural development. In this case, planning had to be multisectoral. Contrary to the sectoral programmes of the past that were organised by the central authorities, planning in integrated rural development involved a wide range of issues and policy areas that became parts of a master plan that had to be coordinated at the local level.

The loss of confidence in central planning and the important role that local authorities could play in integrated rural development suggested the need for decentralisation. The main result of decentralisation would be to increase the executive and administrative functions of local administrators and their ability for closer local coordination and control (Shucksmith 2000). This type of involvement by local authorities would give small rural cities the opportunity to become rural growth centres and hubs for the agro-industrial development of the wider region.

In 1988, reform of the EU's structural policy gave the European Commission the power to adapt the principles of integrated rural development to fragile rural economies and, in 1991,

the first LEADER programmes introduced pilot interventions in disadvantaged rural areas of the EU. Farmers were encouraged to create business plans “of proposed development actions based on the valorisation of indigenous resources” (Ray 2000, 164) and seek synergies with the public, voluntary and business sectors. As of 1991, there were three generations of LEADER: LEADER I (1991–93), LEADER II (1994–99) and LEADER+ (2000–06). In 2007, LEADER was integrated in the overall EU rural development policy and LEADER funds became available to the new member states (NMS) and candidate countries.

Thirty years of LEADER established the logic of integrated rural development in the EU. As a result, it offered EU policymakers a toolbox on which to base ENPARD in order to assist development in the Arab Mediterranean countryside after 2011 and deliver on the promise of inclusive growth and support to SMEs (of the revised ENP). As the former Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Dacian Cioloş stated, “ENPARD programmes are not merely about funding, but also about working methods, which have been shown to be effective, in particular during the accession of the new EU Member States” (European Commission 2012b). In the same vein, the Centre International de Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Méditerranéennes de Montpellier (CIHEAM-IAMM) acknowledged the significance of the LEADER model for ENPARD as the former is associated with local empowerment through local strategy development and resource allocation. According to CIHEAM-IAMM

Thanks to this partnership offer, the EU wishes to build on its experience in assisting countries in the formulation and implementation of long-term balanced agricultural and rural policies, in particular generated through the CAP and the LEADER program (CIHEAM-IAMM 2016a).

Overall, the previous paragraphs highlight that, after the Arab revolts, the EU followed a Eurocentric approach in trying to improve the quality of life in the rural areas of ENP partners. Based on its own experience, the EU intended to promote a participatory approach to rural development in the Arab Mediterranean countries, which involved civil society organisations and local stakeholders.

Reflecting the principles of LEADER, ENPARD's objectives in the south are to improve the living conditions in rural areas, increase agricultural productivity and strengthen the overall governance of agricultural and rural issues through the consolidation of the capacity of professional organisations and institutions (CIHEAM-IAMM n.d.-c). Contrary to the pre-2011 approach of the ENP Action Plans, which addressed the problematic living conditions of people in the Arab Mediterranean countryside indirectly through activities negotiated by the European External Action Service and the national authorities of the ENP countries; the South dimension of ENPARD is clearly aimed at assisting small farmers and is run and coordinated by the *Centre International de Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Mediterraneennes de Montpellier* (CIHEAM-IAMM).

Despite the previous successes of the integrated rural development model in Europe, the LEADER method that has been applied through ENPARD in the ENP countries has generated unintended consequences in the Arab Mediterranean countryside. The next section presents a classification of the EU's unintended consequences in the South Mediterranean countries.

Conceptualising the unintended consequences of the EU's involvement in the rural development of the Arab Mediterranean countries

The conceptualisation of the EU as an international actor with enough material resources and normative power to shape the trajectory of the countries in its periphery has led many scholars

to examine the consequences of EU's foreign policy in its neighbourhood. However, the relevant studies are heavily influenced by the rationalist-normative divide (Del Sarto 2016). From a rationalist point of view, consequences are perceived as a result of (strategic) miscalculations of decision-makers. On the other hand, the constructivist emphasis on norms perceives consequences of the EU's activity in the region as the outcome of problematic communication between partners or as a failure to shape endogenous interests. Yet, through both rationalist and constructivist lenses the concept of consequences is hardly elaborated or categorised. Consequences are generally seen as a negative product of EU's activities in the region. Depending on the particularities of different policy areas (e.g security, trade) these consequences can have an (asymmetrical) impact on both the EU and the ENP partners.

As a result, unintended consequences remain a vague concept. As stated in the Introduction to this Special Issue, a more comprehensive understanding of the unintended results of the EU's foreign policy has to go beyond dichotomies and generalisations that the implementation of the EU's foreign policy generates unwelcome outcomes. The following paragraphs will explain the different causes of unintended consequences, allowing us to understand better the EU's attempts at supporting the rural development of the Arab Mediterranean countries.

The point of departure is Burlyuk's classification of unintended consequences. Based on Merton's categories, Burlyuk argues that five factors generate unintended consequences in the EU's foreign policy: ignorance, error, imperious immediacy of interest, basic values and self-defeating predictions (Burlyuk 2017, 3). Ignorance suggests that policymakers often act on the basis of opinion rather than on knowledge and facts. Not all relevant information is readily available to policymakers, especially in times of sudden crises, such as the ones that the Arab uprisings created in the Southern ENP partners. In this case, it is logical to assume that EU foreign policy was restricted by information costs, which hampered the implementation of its programmes. Nevertheless, with regard to EU rural development programmes after the Arab

revolts, the EU cannot be accused of ignorance. Since 2004, the European Commission (in collaboration with ENP partners) has produced very detailed country reports and annual reports identifying the progress each ENP country has made and the threats to rural development in the Arab countryside. These have allowed the EU to have a very clear picture of the various risks for local farmers (Kourtellis 2018), both political and economic, covering areas such as food security, rural poverty, unemployment, lack of cooperation between rural areas, social exclusion of vulnerable groups and environmental degradation.

The second factor that may lead to unintended consequences – error – is more relevant in the case of EU rural development programmes. Errors in EU external policies appear when policymakers fail to recognise the contextual differences between Arab Mediterranean countries and other settings from which the EU draws lessons for the development of the Southern ENP partners. In the case of ENPARD, these errors have occurred for different reasons. The first is path dependency and the second is related to the application of EU values. The following sections show that the continuation of previous policies and belief in the benefits of the free market for small farmers (presented in this case as a larger stake in the EU market) have undermined the effectiveness of ENPARD in the Arab countryside.

At this point it must be mentioned that errors of this type are not unknown to those who plan EU actions. Unintended consequences can be anticipated but not expected by policymakers, even if they have negative effects. As stated in the introduction, the unfavourable conditions that ENPARD has generated for small farmers are an outcome of its successful implementation, not of the asymmetries between stated objectives and operationalisation. By acknowledging this key factor, this study differs from the standardised narratives of policy failure, which focus primarily on the differences between objectives and implementation without taking into consideration the various analytical categories that inform results. The causal links between unintended consequences and the results of ENPARD also deviate from

claims that the failure of EU actions in the MENA region are the result of the prioritisation of the stability-security nexus and the promotion of EU (material) interests.

The last point brings the discussion to other factors that may lead to unintended consequences – the imperious immediacy of interest and self-defeating predictions. In the case of the EU's rural development programmes, there is no evidence that these are reasons for ENPARD's problems. The imperious immediacy of interest suggests that the EU chooses to ignore certain weaknesses of its actions because it seeks to advance specific interests (of particular groups or member states). Dandashly and Noutcheva in this Special Issue claim that these are significant elements in explaining the unintended consequences of the EU's foreign policy and its support for democracy promotion in the ENP countries. Rightfully, they highlight the insistence of the EU member states to prioritise material gains and relations with Russia over democracy promotion in the eastern borderlands of the EU, and the EU's preference for stability (in other words support to authoritarian leaders) over democracy in the MENA region. In a similar vein, this is the main criticism levelled at the agricultural part of Association Agreements between the EU and Arab Mediterranean countries, as they protect southern European farmers who produce similar products to Arab Mediterranean food producers (Gillespie 1997; Joffé 1998; Tovias 1997). However, ENPARD is about the modernisation of Arab farming methods not about quotas and trade between the EU and ENP partners.

Similarly, the EU cannot be accused of pursuing self-fulfilling prophecies, in the sense that it applies solutions before problems occur; ENPARD is a reaction to the Arab revolts, which brought the aforementioned threats in the Arab countryside to the fore. According to the European Commission

ENPARD is a new policy initiative, part of the EU's commitment to inclusive growth and stability in its Neighbourhood, which recognises the potential

importance of agriculture in terms of food security, sustainable production and rural employment (European Commission 2012b).

Overall, the unintended consequences of the EU's initiatives for the rural development of ENP partners are mainly the result of errors in assessing the risks inherent in the Arab countryside after the revolts. These unintended consequences are both political and economic, and are analysed in the next sections.

The unintended political consequences of the new programme

Despite the fact that ENPARD was constructed as a tool to support deep democracy and inclusive growth, its operation has led to several unintended political consequences. These are related to the emergence of a new Eurocentric hierarchical structure, with the repetition of narratives that alienate small farmers, the piecemeal inclusion of vulnerable groups and cooperatives and the problematic decentralisation process that the programme supports.

The LEADER model that ENPARD is attempting to introduce in Arab Mediterranean countries has opened the decision-making process to new actors, especially to civil society organisations and epistemic communities. As stated above, these organisations were neglected in the implementation of the pre-2011 ENP Action Plans, which focused mainly on the modernisation of the central state apparatus. However, in addition to the Eurocentric tone of the rural development model, the new hierarchical structure still has a European institution at its core, as CIHEAM-IAM in Montpellier was contracted by the European Commission to implement ENPARD in December 2011 (CIHEAM-IAMM 2016b).

Even though CIHEAM-IAMM has organised frequent meetings with local stakeholders (representatives of rural communities, municipal authorities, government and CSOs) from ENP countries (CIHEAM-IAMM 2014), ENPARD continues to reproduce narratives that were constructed before the Arab revolts. A key idea behind the pre-2011 (and, now, post-

2011) narrative is that many of the problems of the Arab Mediterranean countryside are related to the poor managerial skills of small farmers. Before the Arab revolts, the EU highlighted the lack of managerial skills of smallholders as the reason for environmental degradation and low food production (Kourtellis 2015). Both were considered factors leading to food (in)security that could be resolved by creating economies of scale. Thus, the ENP supported schemes that deregulated the land market in ENP countries. Yet, while the process of land market deregulation was different in the various Arab Mediterranean countries, in all cases rent increased, local tensions between producers rose, and the main beneficiaries of these reforms were the big food producers.

The consequences of these actions were mentioned not only in the academic literature before the Arab revolts (Bush 2004, 2007; Desrues 2005), but also in reports produced by EU institutions after the revolts (Narro and Moreno 2014; Rinaldi 2012). Indicative are the opinions of the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) regarding the effects of the EU's approach to the food sector. The former asked the new EU programmes to change direction so that the logic of the new farming initiatives would be "in support of smallholders, producers and cooperatives" (Rinaldi 2012, 1). The case of Morocco was highlighted by the EESC, which criticised the older EU initiatives for being "currently totally imbalanced in favour of export farming, which very largely excludes the majority of Moroccan producers. The next 'ENPARD' pilot projects in Morocco could also open up new opportunities for them" (Narro and Moreno 2014).

Indeed, ENPARD was designed to offer help to small producers, but the cognitive framework of the programme follows the same logic of the rhetoric of the previous ENP Action Plans. In ENPARD reports, small farmers are perceived as responsible for "poor management of solid and agricultural waste" (European Commission 2013, 4) while their "lack of technical/managerial skills" (European Commission 2013, 4) does not allow them to escape

the poverty trap. So, despite the positive role that ENPARD seeks to play in the region, the new programme recycles an attitude that attributes the role of teacher to EU organisations (this time to CIHEAM-IAMM). In this case, CIHEAM-IAMM is leading the “process of analysis, capitalisation and counselling that meets the policy-makers’ needs and expectations” (“ENPARD South support programme phase II” n.d.).

As a result of this approach, the participation of local stakeholders is once again undermined; key areas of ENPARD programmes are determined without offering local stakeholders the possibility to voice their concerns. For example, ENPARD simply follows the work of the ENP Action Plans (APs) in the region and encourages the establishment of good agricultural practices (GAPs) (EU Neighbourhood Info Centre 2015, 2016) and food quality assurance systems that are established by consortiums of European retail food chains (such as EurepGAP). In Tunisia and Egypt, ENPARD clearly suggests that farmers must cultivate specific crops destined for the European markets if they want to apply for EU funding (European Commission 2013). These guidelines were developed before the creation of LAGs, which are supposed to be a central node in the ENPARD decision-making process.

Thus, ENPARD is used as an instrument for regulation of the supply chain by standardising local production and product requirements according to EU standards. As ENPARD is in its initial stages and targets only small farmers, it is unclear if these unintended consequences were expected by policymakers but, given that the new initiative follows older mandates, the effects of this behaviour should have been anticipated. In fact, the design of the programme generates consequences that could have been avoided if the Eurocentric approach of the European Commission had been replaced (or complemented) by lessons from rural development initiatives in other countries, which increased the participation of local producers.

A couple of examples from rural development schemes in other developing countries can highlight alternative forms of engagement with rural populations which increased public participation in a more meaningful way. Pilot programs in villages in India allowed citizens to participate more actively in the decision-making process by utilising local traditions (Leach and Scoones, 2006). Citizens' juries were selected to bring together marginalised, often unorganised interest groups to cross examine experts' advice. In certain cases, experts' advice and national plans (which suggested the production of specific crops as in the case of ENPARD) were rejected in favour of other options that placed greater weight on local crop varieties and less industrialised forms of farming and marketing that could remain more under local control. In a similar vein and contrary to the ENPARD experience where smallholders are 'taught' how to implement specific guidelines, in sub-Saharan Africa small farmers were asked to choose between different scenarios and design their own basic principles for controlling food and farming. Such exercises built on the importance of indigenous knowledge and were more effective tools for desired change (Leach and Scoones, 2006).

However, such lessons from other rural development projects are not included in the training schemes of ENPARD. This is evident when one analyses the structure of the events organised at the beginning of the programme. During the start-up phase of ENPARD, conferences held in Brussels to inform the stakeholders reproduced only best practices from the LEADER experience (CIHEAM-IAMM 2016b). Discussions with participants revealed their limited knowledge of rural development projects other than those in the EU (Personal interviews October 2014).⁴

⁴ Unstructured interviews were held during the author's participation in a seminar in Brussels in October 2014 on communication of ENPARD's objectives and rationale with stakeholders from both the EU and partners from the Arab Mediterranean countries. The three interviewees

Besides the engagement of local farmers in the decision-making process, another principle of ENPARD is related to the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as women and youth. ENPARD is more specific about this than the previous ENP APs, which vaguely included actions for marginalised groups in the Arab countryside. It has more specific benchmarks and, for example in Morocco, a minimum number of women are included among the agricultural advisors for small farmers in the pilot areas of the program (Fes Boulemane, Meknes-Tafilalet, Oriental and Souss-Mass-Draa).

At the time of writing, further information about the training workshops for women in rural areas are not available, but the outcomes of similar programs in the Arab Mediterranean countries illustrate that participation in practice is a social event, which involves power dynamics. Therefore the planning and design of such workshops is of paramount importance for the success of ENPARD. For example, the UN Qued Sbahiya project, which aimed to identify methods and techniques for the promotion and consolidation of peoples' participation in the conservation and development of rural areas, generated both processes of inclusion and exclusion (Gana 2012). The social groups that benefited from the program were not the most vulnerable, and the off-farming skills that women and youth acquired (to help them diversify their income) did not help them find a sustainable way out of poverty. Many of them either ended with high debts or were forced to move to bigger cities to find other work opportunities (Gana, 2012).

In addition to offering support to vulnerable groups, another central concept of ENPARD is related to the idea of decentralisation. As stated in the previous section, the main point of integrated rural development is that the empowerment of local authorities can become a

(two civil servants from the European Commission and a senior civil servant from a pilot area in one of the ENP countries) prefer to keep their anonymity.

trigger for innovation tailored to the specific needs of the local societies. However, by itself, decentralisation does not necessarily provide a genuinely new response to rural development, as the endogenous approach that it puts forward can continue to depend on exogenous factors and policy frames rather than replacing them. One aspect of this problem is highlighted above: GAPs are introduced as an essential element of ENPARD by epistemic communities, not local actors. Another aspect of it is related to the more reflexive and strategic role of local authorities in the program. In this sense, decentralisation can become a force for communal regrouping that can allow for more coherent territorial structures whose competencies can focus upon economic investment, development planning and service organisation.

In this, ENPARD deviates from the previous ENP APs and seeks to reinforce local cooperative structures. This is the first time since the beginning of the ENP that local cooperatives have been mentioned as drivers of rural development, as such initiatives were condemned in the past as terrain for corruption or vehicles for the production of cheap food products to urban dwellers. In the context of ENPARD, cooperatives are being used as a model not only for increasing production, but also for giving voice to small farmers and local authorities in devising rural development plans. In return, these plans increase the capacity of rural territories and actors to act as viable social development foci and reduce the power of centralised authorities.

However, such results should not be taken for granted. The experience of LEADER shows that state bureaucracies remain strong actors in integrated rural development programs, especially when they are implemented in countries with strong centralised structures and when the programs are not funded adequately. In addition, monitoring has virtually no effect when a strong rural civil society is absent. Case studies from different EU member states (especially NMS and candidate countries) illustrate that under such conditions the governments have the capacity to choose the actors they want to work with at the local level

(Kováč 2000; Osti 2000). In these countries, the political decentralisation that LEADER attempted often had complex and contradictory impacts and in some domains LEADER led to the reinforcement of the state's role (Buller 2000).

All these elements (weak rural NGOs, strong central authorities, rural elites that have clientelistic ties with state authorities) are mentioned in several studies as factors that hinder the development of the Arab Mediterranean countryside (Bergh, 2010; Bush, 2004, 2007).

Existing research in the region shows that the contribution of small farmers to the construction of rural development plans is minimal and that similar decentralisation schemes and programs that aimed to reinforce rural civil society organisations did not contribute to capacity building at the local level (Bergh, 2010).

These experiences demonstrate that the failure to proceed with reforms that empower local actors (thus adding to the opening up of the decision-making process to wider segments of society) is not always a consequence of the prioritisation of the hard interests of the EU member states. A closer focus on specific cases in rural development programmes in the MENA region proves that, without careful management, the checkboxes of ENPARD get ticked, but the objectives of the programme are hijacked by well-established policy communities. These communities promote their own preferences at the local level (as in the case of NMS and candidate countries) in spite of the absence of any hard interests of EU states or other international actors derailing the programme.

The unintended economic consequences of the new programme

The economic consequences of ENPARD are related to low funding, the inclusion of certain food standards and the conditional character of the EU's aid to small farmers. Low funding is one of the main sources of criticism from experts and practitioners of aid programmes.

ENPARD is no exception to this rule, as the funds that have been allocated are minimal. For

the first part of the programme (2012-14), which involved meetings and conferences for promoting political dialogue among the participant countries, the EU allocated €2.8m. For the same tasks, another €4m were committed for the second phase of ENPARD (2014-20) (EU Neighbourhood Info Centre, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

Regarding the funds allocated to each country, the EU offered Tunisia €25m and Egypt €36m, whereas the funds for Morocco were added to the technical assistance (€70m) that the EU provides to the Green Morocco Plan (*Plan Maroc Vert*). Algeria and Lebanon, which joined one year later (2013) received €10m and less than €6.4m respectively. At the time of writing, the Palestinian authorities have held only preliminary meetings with other stakeholders.

The ENP partners can decide on the pilot areas for implementing the programme: in Tunisia, the pilot areas are Ain Draham, Bargou, Kerkennah, Kébili Nord, Médenine and Jendouba (CIHEAM-IAMM, n.d.-b); in Egypt they are Matrouh, Minia and Fayoum (European Commission 2013), Jordan, Ajloun and Tafilah (European Commission 2013); and in Algeria, Ain-Témouchent, Laghouat Setif and Tlemcen (European Commission 2013). Morocco has decided to follow a non-territorial approach and, as stated above, adds the funds to the Green Morocco Plan. As Lebanon has made less progress, the initial ENPARD funds were given to the Ministry of Agriculture for capacity building.

In all cases, the selected pilot areas are among the poorest in the countries. In this sense, ENPARD has managed to bring the issue of rural poverty back onto the agenda (Pellissier and Gargano 2015). More specifically, the first component of the programme focuses on the diversification of economic activities in the pilot areas and on the creation of cooperatives. The first group of ENP countries has already established advisory services and registered new agricultural cooperatives through ENPARD. These structures have increased awareness in the rural areas and increased cooperation among small farmers (CIHEAM-IAMM, n.d.-d).

However, the other main component of the programme, which focuses on increasing the productivity of small farmers and connecting them to the EU market has not been very successful. The way in which it has been pursued contradicts the efforts of the EU to lift small farmers out of poverty. For meeting the core principle of the ENP – giving small farmers a larger stake in the EU market – ENPARD supports producers who cultivate commercial crops. In Tunisia, such crops had already been identified (e.g. figs and olives) without clear evidence of wide consultation with local producers through LAGs (CIHEAM-IAMM n.d.-b). Besides the political consequences of exclusion mentioned in the previous section, the economic consequence is that the majority of subsistence farmers, who are the ones in need of assistance, are not supported as they do not qualify for the ENPARD projects.

The other unintended economic consequences concern the introduction of safety and quality standards for small producers. As highlighted in the previous section, in this area the discourse follows the pre-2011 narratives of the ENP APs. The economic costs of the rigorous implementation of GAPs in developing countries, related to hygiene practices, variable inputs such as pesticides, grading sheds, disposal units and periodical accreditation costs, have been analysed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and agricultural economists (Amekawa 2009; FAO 2008, 200; Graffham, Karehu, and MacGregor 2007). They show that, without continuous support, it is very unlikely that small farmers can bear these costs.

Studies in North Africa show that the EUREPGAP certificate costs about \$1200 per farm, meaning that for certain products, such as vegetables, a farmer has to have more than a hundred hectares of land. To export citrus fruits, a farmer needs more than four hundred hectares of land (Aloui and Lahcen 2004; Cadot *et al.* 2012). In addition to this cost, there are the expenses for buildings and infrastructure to deal with various issues (such as environmental hazards, workers' health, water and pesticides storage and management) in order to meet EU standards. For example, for only the first year, a Moroccan farmer would

have needed more than \$70,000 to implement the EUREPGAP standards on a ten hectare tomato farm (Aloui and Lahcen 2004).

In this case, the EU's error is not related to any sort of imperious immediacy of interests that favours big farmers (as was the case before 2011), as ENPARD is designed only for small land owners. However, it is clear that the funds allocated for ENPARD cannot cover such costs in the long run, at least for the majority of small producers. The consequences of low funding on the majority of the rural population in the Arab Mediterranean countries are well known to EU policymakers; what the European Commission seems to be unaware of is that the standardisation process does not allow LAGs to elude the EU mechanisms and set up alternative procedures for allocating local resources in order to create a local-scale corporate model that can lead to inclusive growth. As a result, even if ENPARD expands the export base of the ENP partners, a large number of small producers cannot get access to the EU market.

In addition to the limited access to the EU market for small producers, the more-for-more approach that the EU follows in the region hinders regional cooperation among farmers. CIHEAM-IAMM does a very good job in bringing various stakeholders together through the organisation of conferences that allow local authorities and representatives of civil society and LAGs to exchange ideas and best practices. Yet due to the lack of funds, to date there have been no signs of any increase in regional food trade through ENPARD activities. At this point, the similarities of the first phase of ENPARD with the first stages of the LEADER experience reveal the effects of conditional aid when this is accompanied by limited funding for regional cooperation. For LEADER I, the EU allocated only 1.7 percent of its budget for rural development making it “a very modern programme... virtually without money” (Von Meyer 1997). As a result, the rivalry between LAGs for the limited funds was fierce and undermined regional cooperation.

Conclusion

This study moves beyond the rational/constructivist division in explaining the role of the EU as an international actor. The framework presented here encourages studies to look for the unintended consequences of the revised ENP and, more specifically, of EU initiatives for rural development of the southern ENP partners after the Arab revolts. In line with Dandashly and Noutcheva, this article argues that the creation of ENPARD was triggered by an external shock; the Arab revolts. The uprisings forced the EU institutions to react to popular demands for more democracy and more inclusive growth in the MENA countries. After 2011, the EU institutions assessed the ENP and several documents show that even policymakers in the EU institutions became more critical of the delivery of EU aid addressing threats in the Arab countryside.

However, the new EU initiative for mitigating the threats in the rural areas of ENP partners has had unintended consequences, especially for smaller farmers. It is crucial to mention that these consequences are not a product of geopolitical concerns or of an actor who is making a (neo-colonial) effort to establish its power in the region. Nor are they the outcome of unsuccessful implementation and deviance from stated objectives. Moving beyond ENP studies and based on Burlyuk's categorisation, the findings of this article suggest that it is the EU's Eurocentric approach and the pattern of continuity between mandates of the ENP APs and ENPARD objectives that do not allow the EU to tackle the side effects of ENPARD. In addition, the failure of the EU to learn from LEADER's shortcomings and to contextualise the LEADER lessons on the particularities of the Arab Mediterranean countryside generated errors in the design of ENPARD. Sequentially, these errors have resulted in both political and economic unintended consequences, even if the programme appears to meet its objectives successfully.

The political consequences are twofold. Although ENPARD aims to empower small producers and vulnerable groups in the Arab rural areas (in order to realise inclusive growth and support SMEs), the new emerging hierarchical structure and the standardisation process undermine the EU's efforts to assist small farmers. Institutions based in Europe lead the decision-making process; local knowledge is neglected and LAGs (still at an embryonic stage) are unable to influence strategic areas of the programme.

The second area of concern is related to the decentralisation efforts of ENPARD, a core principle of integrated rural development. Although local actors are asked to participate in ENPARD, the central authorities' dominance over civil society is not challenged by the new initiative and the limited funds that the EU allocates to the partner countries do not allow LAGs to reduce the pervasiveness of central institutions. Evidence from similar initiatives in the region underline the threat that well established rural communities can pose to the goals of ENPARD.

The rigid standardisation process and the limited funds that ENPARD delivers to small producers have also had economic consequences which were not foreseen by policymakers in the EU. The application of costly EU standards and the cultivation of specific crops under ENPARD projects do not allow the majority of small farmers (especially subsistence farmers) to compete for EU funds. In addition, the more-for-more approach of the EU becomes a barrier to regional trade and cooperation among LAGs. These factors reduce ENPARD's effectiveness and the positive role that the EU seeks to play in the Arab Mediterranean countryside.

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