

## THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION

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### NORTHERN DIMENSION

Arctic security and cooperation are in flux, so is the region's energy situation and future perspective. Here comes the European Union (EU), a complicated geopolitical creature, constantly in the process of defining what kind of geopolitical actor it wants to be (or is allowed to be by its Member States)<sup>1</sup>. The special nature of the EU in the international context as well as the complicated division of competences between the EU and its Member States make the EU a unique global/Arctic actor, and its relationship with the region intricately complex<sup>2</sup>. Ever since 2007–2008, the EU's main institutions have developed a dedicated set of Arctic-related documents, defined and re-defined their own positions and overall expressed the EU's very own 'Arcticness'—from the Union's geographical and functional Arctic presence to a monetarised (funding for regional development and research) and ecological (the EU's Arctic footprint) presence, to highlight a few<sup>3</sup>. And although the EU has competences in many policies pertaining to the Arctic – either exclusive, shared or complementary with the Member States – foreign and security policy remains a policy domain very much dominated by the 27 Member States. From an EU-Arctic perspective this set-up becomes even more complex as Arctic-related concerns reside in Brussels within the realm of a soft (security) policy – not written into the Treaties, with no distinct budget line and no set rule book on how to contribute to Arctic security<sup>4</sup>. While both the establishment of the

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<sup>1</sup> A. Raspotnik, *The European Union and the Geopolitics of the Arctic*, Cheltenham & Northampton, Edward Elgar, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> A. Raspotnik, A. Stepień, "The European Union and the Arctic: A Decade into Finding Its Arcticness", in J. Weber (ed.), *Handbook on Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: The High North Between Cooperation and Confrontation*, Cham, Springer, 2020, pp. 131-146.

<sup>3</sup> Idem.

<sup>4</sup> A. Raspotnik, "A quantum of possibilities: The strategic spectrum of the EU's Arctic policy", Centre for European Policy Studies, 17 December 2020, <https://www.ceps.eu/a-quantum-of-possibilities/>.

Barents Euro–Arctic Council back in 1993 and the introduction of the Northern Dimension in 1999 (and 2006, respectively) were aimed at fostering relations with Russia to mutually tackle a broad range of security challenges in the European Arctic, the circumpolar North has hardly been part of any discussions concerning a strategic outlook, lack of capabilities or means for crisis management over the past two decades. As a matter of fact, the EU has rather timidly covered Arctic hard security matters, and has only lightly touched the region in the 2022 Strategic Compass – to name one example<sup>5</sup>. For good reasons and a lack of (legal/institutional) competence, the EU itself has only discussed security in a general, implicit way: the strengthening of low-level regional and multilateral cooperation, allegiance to international legal order and the vision of a cooperative Arctic that is not affected by any spillover effects<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, the EU’s Arctic geography – three EU Member States being Arctic states (Denmark, in relation to Greenland, Finland and Sweden), as well as the Union’s close relationships with Iceland and Norway – has never translated into a clear EU Arctic *Strategy* that would take account of the security concerns of these countries, including how to manage their Arctic security relations with Russia and increasingly with China. A small but significant step in the EU involvement in the Arctic has been made with the inauguration of the “EU Office” in Nuuk, Greenland, in the width of March 2024. As stated by the President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, this initiative “...marks the beginning of a new era of the EU-Greenland partnership, with Europe’s concrete presence in Greenland and in the wider Arctic region”<sup>7</sup>.

But what does that mean for an *Arctic security situation that is currently in flux*?

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<sup>5</sup> Council of the European Union, A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence - For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security, Brussels 21 March 2022.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission e High Representative, A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic (JOIN(2021) 27 final), Brussels, 13.10.2021.

<sup>7</sup> “President von der Leyen inaugurates the EU Office in Nuuk and signs cooperation agreements to strengthen the EU-Greenland Partnership”, EU Commission Press Release, 15 March 2024, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_24\\_1425](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_24_1425). Accessed 17 April 2024.

Over the past decade, the EU has felt a need to adapt its posture on the increasingly conflicted world stage, whether because of the emerging great power rivalry, changing transatlantic relationship, more assertive China, or its continuous clashes with Russia. In a post-2014-Crimean Europe, EU-Russia relations have shifted from fostering interdependence to managing vulnerabilities, particularly given the new energy crisis that is forming. In a post-24/2/2022 world, managing these relations are increasingly harder to imagine. As such, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and its multifaceted issues arising thereof, is only one constituent of multiple intertwined and reinforcing global crises the EU is currently facing – from global climate change to the loss of biodiversity, from energy to food and water security and from social injustice to the ever-increasing global inequality<sup>8</sup>.

Given Russia's invasion of Ukraine, fears about conflict in the Arctic are also particularly prescient across Europe, particularly regarding a possible spill-over in tensions from Ukraine, further degrading EU-Russia relationship to the Arctic, where both entities play an important policy role. Parts of the region, especially the European Arctic, is already experiencing an increase in tensions from heightened concerns about submarine cable warfare, disinformation campaigns, as well as military exercises and posturing by Russia – which partly is what led to the applications of Finland and Sweden to NATO. However, while the Arctic remains one of the places with some – maybe also increasing – tension between Russia and the West, when considering relations in Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states, the Black Sea and the Middle East, the Circumpolar North is the calmest.

From an energy perspective, it can be generally said that the EU has strong economic ties with all Arctic states. For Norway and (before February 2022) Russia, these trade ties also have (had) a pronounced Arctic dimension, particularly with regard to energy aspects, including offshore hydrocarbons extraction and renewables<sup>9</sup>. In 2006 (and 2009), when Russian supplies to EU Member States were interrupted as a consequence of disputes over gas trade with Ukraine, the question of security of supply became one of the key

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<sup>8</sup> S. Žižek, “From Cold War to Hot Peace”, Project Syndicate, 25 March 2022, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/hot-peace-putins-war-as-clash-of-civilization-by-slavoj-zizek-2022-03>.

<sup>9</sup> T. Koivurova, A. F. Hoel, M. Humpert, S. Kirchner, A. Raspotnik, M. Smieszek e A. Stepień, “Overview of EU actions in the Arctic and their impact (Final Report - June 2021)”.

themes in the EU’s energy policy<sup>10</sup>. In 2014, the EU (and other countries) imposed sanctions on Russia, targeting the financial, energy and defence sectors. The sanctions prohibit the sale, supply, transfer, export, and financing of equipment for oil exploration and production in Arctic offshore, deep water and shale formations. However, they did not affect Russian gas exports. In the light of taking stock of the EU’s Arctic footprint, the EU’s Arctic policy update from 2021 established that the effects of its policies on the demand for Arctic resources constitute an important component of the EU’s Arctic engagement<sup>11</sup>. As such, the proposal for banning new Arctic hydrocarbon projects has quickly become the most discussed aspect of the new policy<sup>12</sup>. It called for keeping as much oil, coal and gas in the ground as possible and making a commitment – both in the EU and possibly multilaterally – to agree on not purchasing new Arctic hydrocarbons. In 2022, however, and after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, several sanction rounds were imposed, which led to significant changes in the share of the main energy partners because of the sanctions directly and indirectly affecting the imports of energy products. Russia had been the largest supplier of petroleum oils to the EU in 2021 with a share of 24.8 % (third quarter of 2021). With regard to petroleum oils, the EU ban on seaborne imports of Russian crude oil entered into force on 5 December 2022, followed by the embargo on refined oil products as of 5 February 2023. In the third quarter of 2022, although Russia was still the largest provider of petroleum oils, its share had already dropped to 14.4 %, which - a year later - further dropped to 3.9 %<sup>13</sup>. The situation is rather similar with regard to natural gas where Russia had been the largest supplier to the EU in the third quarter of 2021 with a share of 48.0 %. It was essentially Norway that took the pole position from 2022 onwards with a share of 45,1 % in 2022 and 48,6 % in 2023<sup>14</sup>. From an Arctic perspective, the devil, however, is in the details as the EU has thus far not placed any sanctions on the import of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG). As a

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<sup>10</sup> A. Airoidi, “Security aspects in EU Arctic policy”, in G. Hoogensen Gjørv, M. Lanteigne e H. Sam-Aggrey (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*, Abingdon, Routledge, pp. 337-347.

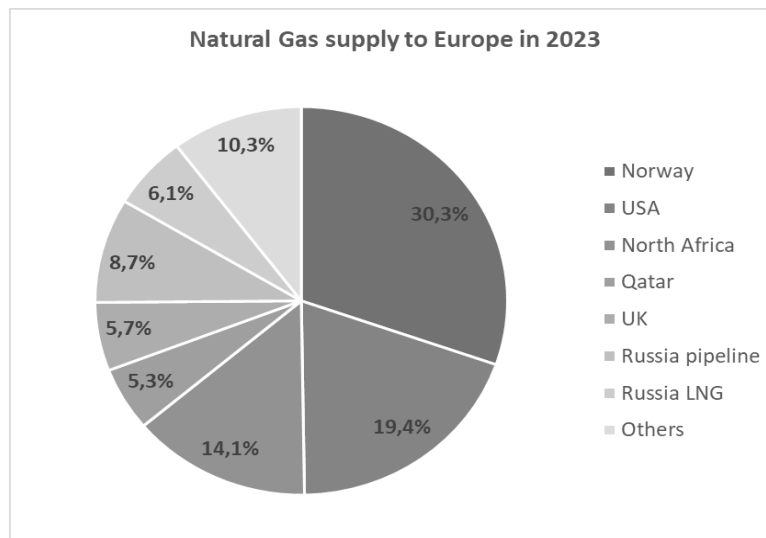
<sup>11</sup> European Commission & High Representative, *A stronger...*, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> A. Stepień, A. Raspotnik, “Continuity with Great Confidence: The European Union’s 2021 Arctic Policy Update”, 28 October 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Eurostat, “EU imports of energy products - latest developments”, Data extracted in December 2023. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=564016#Main\\_suppliers\\_of\\_petroleum\\_oils.2C\\_natural\\_gas\\_and\\_coal\\_to\\_the\\_EU](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=564016#Main_suppliers_of_petroleum_oils.2C_natural_gas_and_coal_to_the_EU).

<sup>14</sup> Idem.

result, the EU remains a destination for 50 % of Russia's LNG exports, sending in excess of 1 billion USD each month to the Russian Federation. While up to 12 EU Member States have received Russian LNG since February 2022, the key importers remained Belgium, France and Spain<sup>15</sup>. As reported, the European ports also facilitate the transshipment of Russian LNG to buyers outside the continent. More than 20 % of Yamal LNG passes through terminals in Europe where it is reloaded from specialized ice-capable carriers to conventional LNG tankers for onward transport<sup>16</sup>. In June 2023 it was indicated that EU Member States received 300 shipments of LNG from Russia since the beginning of the Ukraine War, representing approximately 20 billion USD in revenue for the Russian Federation<sup>17</sup>.



Source: European Commission based on ENTSO-G and Refinitiv<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> M. Humpert, "EU Countries Continue to Import \$1bn of Russian Arctic LNG Every Month", High North News, 7 December 2023. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/eu-countries-continue-import-1bn-russian-arctic-lng-every-month>.

<sup>16</sup> A. Hancock, "EU ports help sell on over 20% of LNG imports from Russia", Financial Times, 29 November 2023. <https://www.ft.com/content/aff34dec-9fbb-4158-9af8-7a7761b25893>. M. Humpert, EU Countries..., op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> M. Humpert, "EU Received 300 Shipments of LNG from Russia Since Beginning of Ukraine War", High North News, 22 June 2023. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/eu-received-300-shipments-lng-russia-beginning-ukraine-war>.

<sup>18</sup> "Infographic - Where does the EU's gas come from?", European Council, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/eu-gas-supply/>. Accessed February 15, 2024.

## SOUTHERN DIMENSION

*Energy developments*

The southern borders of the EU represent a fundamental dimension for the Union to navigate its quadruple energy crisis, including the recently-onset energy inflation, new supply risks arising from the diversification of energy providers post-Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, dilution of incentives for the green transition due to short-term investment in transitional fossil fuels, and potential lack of solidarity among Member States<sup>19</sup>. As part of the Union’s long-term energy ambitions, the Mediterranean partners are today increasingly perceived as prospective energy partners whilst internal solidarity and internal collectivity have been repeatedly identified as strategic objectives to solidify the Union’s energetic autonomy amid geopolitical turmoil and urgently-needed decarbonization processes. First, the European strategic autonomy defined in terms of security of energy supply chiefly depends on its external energy relations (especially with its Southern partners), considering its 40% overall dependency on energy imports<sup>20</sup> and that, in 2023, one-third of natural gas imports, indeed, came from the Middle East and the southern Mediterranean<sup>21</sup>. As the Union strives to diversify its gas imports pursuant to its ‘Fit for 55’ (FF55) objectives, the geographical proximity, abundance of natural resources, and existing energy infrastructure of countries in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean are beyond attractive<sup>22</sup>, while the price premium that an EU in energetic crisis proposes makes it in turn a good prospective buyer for gas from Northern Africa countries like Libya and Algeria<sup>23</sup>, as well from Israel and Egypt. Further, green hydrogen – an energy source included in the European Commission’s 2020 New Industrial

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<sup>19</sup> M. Damen, “Four challenges of the energy crisis for the EU’s strategic autonomy”, *European Parliamentary Research Service*, 2023, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> M. Damen, *Four challenges...*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> The Economist, “Can the Mediterranean become Europe’s energy powerhouse?”, 13 November 2023, [www.economist.com/business/2023/11/13/can-the-mediterranean-become-europes-energy-powerhouse](http://www.economist.com/business/2023/11/13/can-the-mediterranean-become-europes-energy-powerhouse).

<sup>22</sup> V. Ertl, Y. Zegzouti, “Securing Energy, Reshaping Decarbonisation: Reconciling Mediterranean Energy Transitions with Energy Security and Regional Stability”, Policy Center for the New South, 2023, <https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/securing-energy-reshaping-decarbonisation-reconciling-mediterranean-energy-transitions>.

<sup>23</sup> V. Ertl, Y. Zegzouti, *Securing Energy...*, op.cit.

Strategy<sup>24</sup> and New Agenda for the Mediterranean<sup>25</sup> – has quickly become an increasingly popular arena of energy cooperation with the Middle East and North Africa and prospects of future supply of this energy source are increasingly material. At the same time, the expansion of RES-sourced energy production has been identified as strategic to fulfill not only the regional needs for clean energy as per the updated Renewable Energies Directive but also to stabilize the power grids and reach the ambitious climate targets of the FF55 package<sup>26</sup>. In this direction are aimed the initiatives seeking to connect power grids across the Mediterranean. The memoranda of understanding on the EuroAsia Interconnector and EuroAfrica Interconnector, both of which aim to stabilize regional power supply by transferring excess power and balancing energy provision during bottlenecks while preventing power outages, as well as the Elmed Interconnector and Italy-Montenegro-Serbia-Bosnia and Herzegovina Interconnection project are clear-cut examples of this diversification and decarbonization strategy<sup>27,28</sup>. Albeit interconnection remains in its infancy in Euro-Mediterranean energy systems, specific funding instruments, like Connecting Europe Facility, are being deployed to improve power connectivity also with Eastern Mediterranean partners and equip EU energy systems with both resilience and security in a period characterized by unique energetic fragility<sup>29</sup>.

Second, novel energy relations with its southern partners follow the rationale of supply diversification and have become a distinctive trait of EU energy strategy in recent years. Following the second revision of the ‘REPowerEU’ policy package, EU Member States have established or intensified their energy trade with countries such as Algeria for natural gas<sup>30</sup> and Israel and Egypt for liquified natural gas (LNG)<sup>31</sup>, and prospectively evaluated long-term ‘clean power’

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<sup>24</sup> B. Moreno-Dodson, C. Tsakas, S.P. David, “The Clean Energy Challenges: Sustainability, Decarbonization and Security of Supply in the Euro-Mediterranean Region”, *IEMed: Mediterranean Yearbook 2022*, 2022, p. 62-68.

<sup>25</sup> I. Vardakastanis, M.H. De Felipe Lehtonen, “Energy policies and strategies in the Euro-Mediterranean region”, *European Economic and Social Committee*, 23 February 2022.

<sup>26</sup> The Economist, *Can the Mediterranean...*, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> I. Vardakastanis, M.H. De Felipe Lehtonen, *Energy policies*, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> The Economist, *Can the Mediterranean...*, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> I. Vardakastanis, M.H. De Felipe Lehtonen, *Energy policies*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> EURACTIV, “EU energy chief praises Algeria ‘partnership’”, 12 October 2022, [www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/eu-energy-chief-praises-algeria-partnership](http://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/eu-energy-chief-praises-algeria-partnership).

<sup>31</sup> E. Gormus. “Navigating Energy Inflation in the Southern Mediterranean: Challenges and Opportunities for Producing and Importing Countries”, *IEMED Mediterranean Yearbook*

exporters like Morocco and Egypt to secure power supply beyond short-term diversification. While the former is particularly well-placed to become a primary RES exporter due to both its geographical proximity and its renewable energy potential (as seen in its 400-megawatt program *Noor PV II*, launched just before the pandemic)<sup>32,33</sup>, the latter is positioning its assets to solidify its energy relations with the Union through a dual strategy of continued hydrocarbon exports and strategic investments in RES and green hydrogen<sup>34</sup>. Particularly active in the Euro-Mediterranean energy trade following the discontinuation of Russian imports in late 2022, Germany epitomizes the EU’s approach to its southern borders vis-à-vis supply diversification and energy decarbonization. The country has, in fact, on the one hand meaningfully increased the volume of imports from leading Mediterranean players like Algeria<sup>35</sup> while, on the other, engaging in “hydrogen diplomacy” with southern Mediterranean and African partners, which might prove fundamental in decarbonizing the country’s heavy industries<sup>36</sup>. It is, however, important to stress how such a European strategy towards its Southern neighbors might also carry novel, untested security-of-supply risks<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, Southern and South-eastern European partners might be severely affected by the carbon border adjustment mechanism included in the EU’s FF55 package<sup>38</sup>. In particular, based on 2022 figures for carbon intensity of exports to the EU, Libya, Algeria, Turkey, and Egypt – two of which should be key strategic partners, as mentioned above – would be among the most affected in the region. Going forward, regional electricity market integration could particularly assist in the scale-up of renewable energy by improving flexibility in the power system and optimizing investments<sup>39</sup>. Extending regional grid integration to Southern and South-Eastern partners in the Euro-Mediterranean region could significantly lower prices of decarbonizing electricity and decrease logistical challenges

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2023, 2023. <https://www.iemed.org/publication/navigating-energy-inflation-in-the-southern-mediterranean-challenges-and-opportunities-for-producing-and-importing-countries/>

<sup>32</sup> V. Ertl, Y. Zegzouti, *Securing Energy...*, op.cit.

<sup>33</sup> B. Moreno-Dodson, C. Tsakas, S.P. David, *The Clean Energy...*, op. cit, p. 62-68.

<sup>34</sup> V. Ertl, Y. Zegzouti, *Securing Energy...*, op.cit.

<sup>35</sup> N. Blechner, “Woher Deutschland nun sein Gas bekommt”, *Tagesschau*, 23 August 2022, [www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/gaslieferungen-deutschland-101.html](http://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/gaslieferungen-deutschland-101.html).

<sup>36</sup> *The Economist*, *Can the Mediterranean...*, op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> M. Damen, *Four challenges...*, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> B. Moreno-Dodson, C. Tsakas, S.P. David, *The Clean Energy...*, op. cit, p. 62-68.

<sup>39</sup> B. Moreno-Dodson, C. Tsakas, S.P. David, *The Clean Energy...*, op. cit, p. 62-68.



in scaling up capacity<sup>40</sup>, ultimately facilitating energy exchange beyond short-term, post-2022 supply diversification and towards the FF55 objectives.

Last, internal solidarity and improved regional connectivity have represented a pillar of the EU's approach to Euro-Mediterranean energy policy. Prominent examples thereof are the first hydrogen-only pipeline across the Mediterranean, *H2Med*, launched by France, Spain, and Portugal with EU funding as a replacement for the project initially designed to transport hydrogen through the Pyrenées (known as the 'MidCat gas pipeline')<sup>41,42</sup> as well as the new LNG terminal in Northern Greece, aimed at increasing gas transmission capacity under the REPowerEU objectives<sup>43</sup>. In addition to being a co-sponsor of the *H2Med*, France has further stepped into the EastMed Pipeline project following the step back from the United States<sup>44</sup>, positioning itself in an advantageous position for both Euro-Mediterranean LNG and hydrogen procurement. On the other hand, the United Kingdom – the involvement of which in EastMed Pipeline project was expected in Cyprus considering British history of political and economic involvement through a presence in the island — features a notable absence in the Euro-Mediterranean clean and low-carbon energy market, having invested instead in offshore licensing and drilling in northern Europe<sup>45</sup>. On the other hand, as a country featuring a carbon-heavy energy mix looking for further diversification of supply, Poland has been at the center of the establishment of novel interconnectors to rely more on gas and generate corridors with the eastern Mediterranean Sea thanks to the new Poland-Slovakia interconnector – part of a larger North-South gas infrastructure corridor<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> B. Moreno-Dodson, C. Tsakas, S.P. David, *The Clean Energy...*, op. cit., p. 62-68.

<sup>41</sup> P. Sánchez Molina.

<sup>42</sup> M. Damen, *Four challenges...*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> M. Damen, *Four challenges...*, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> S.I. Balci, "The UK's Position in the Eastern Mediterranean: Relations with the GASC", *Ankara Center for Crisis and Policy Studies*, 2 February 2023, [www.ankasam.org/the-uks-position-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-relations-with-the-gasc](http://www.ankasam.org/the-uks-position-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-relations-with-the-gasc).

<sup>45</sup> S.I. Balci, *The UK's Position*, op.cit.

<sup>46</sup> Directorate-General for Energy of the European Commission, "Inauguration of the gas interconnector between Poland and Slovakia", 26 August 2022, [https://commission.europa.eu/news/inauguration-gas-interconnector-between-poland-and-slovakia-2022-08-26\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/news/inauguration-gas-interconnector-between-poland-and-slovakia-2022-08-26_en).

*Security and Defence key factors*

The EU plays an important role in upholding security within the Mediterranean region. While NATO ensures freedom of navigation and stability in the region through its maritime security initiating operations based on a more structured and responsive organization with advanced military capabilities, the EU is a different security actor, therefore focusing more on humanitarian angles and political-economic stability<sup>47</sup>.

The year 2023 was marked by a fundamental shift in geopolitical realities. The EU struggled with defining its role in the face of rising tensions between major powers. The continued Russian invasion of Ukraine and the recent Israel-Hamas conflict underscored the need for a unified European members' response, prompting a reevaluation of security postures. This geopolitical turmoil – involving also the Mediterranean region – has triggered a reaction among EU Member States, who have acknowledged the importance of pooling resources and expertise to collectively enhance defense capabilities effectively and practically. In October 2023, the EU Rapid Deployment Corps (RDC) conducted its first-ever live exercise, the EU Crisis Management Military Exercise 2023 (MILEX-23), in Spain, involving 2800 military personnel from various EU Member States. These exercises aim to enhance the interoperability and interchangeability of European armed forces<sup>48</sup>.

For the Mediterranean Sea, the EU has endeavored to implement a coordinated strategy to regulate migratory flux and to halt human trafficking. The European Commission has devised two distinct strategies, one for the Western Mediterranean route and the other for the Eastern route. A common aspect in both approaches is the significance of cooperation with partner states, including Libya, Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco, to help stem migration<sup>49</sup>. Other crucial measures to address this challenge involve strengthening operational

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<sup>47</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization “Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation”, NATO website, 10 January 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_210549.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_210549.htm).

<sup>48</sup> E. Jacob “European Security and Defence from 2023 to 2024”, European Organisation of Military Associations and Trade Unions (EUROMIL), 2023. <https://euromil.org/european-security-and-defence-from-2023-to-2024/>

<sup>49</sup> E. Campelli & G. Gomel “The enlarged Mediterranean, a region in transition: conflicts, challenges, future perspectives” Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI), 2022 <https://www.cespi.it/en/eventi-attualita/dibattiti/il-mediterraneo-allargato-una-regione-transizione-conflitti-sfide-2>

procedures for search and rescue, preventing irregular departures, combating migrant trafficking, and establishing legal migration routes. Additionally, the EU Commission emphasizes the need for improving reception and asylum systems within member states<sup>50</sup>.

Recent substantial Chinese investments in key European ports have raised concerns about potential future security threats within EU Member States, particularly those in the Mediterranean region. The European Parliament addressed this issue in January 2024, adopting a resolution titled “Building a Comprehensive European Port Strategy”, advocating for restricting and managing foreign investments, with a specific focus on Chinese strategies within the Mediterranean Sea. To emphasize the significance of this last EU address, despite the EU primarily being an economic power - which would suggest welcoming such investments - the growing security concerns of the last years have transformed these Chinese investments into a security concern rather than an economic opportunity<sup>51</sup>.

In addition to the numerous surface challenges for the EU, on the horizon there are numerous challenges that affect the seabed. Approximately 250 cable systems connect the EU to the global internet, with two-thirds being submarine cables laid in the surrounding seas, namely the Atlantic, Mediterranean, North Sea, and Baltic Sea<sup>52</sup>. Through the Mediterranean seabed pass the connections from the EU to Eastern and Southern Asia, and from the EU to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)<sup>53</sup>. Actually under construction and to be completed between 2024 and 2025, the Medusa submarine cable system will become the longest in the Mediterranean Sea (With a length of

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<sup>50</sup> European Commission “Migration routes: Commission presents new Action Plan for the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic routes”, EU Commission Press Office, 6 June 2023

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_3056](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_3056).

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Commission “Migration routes: Commission presents EU Action Plan for the Eastern Mediterranean route”, EU Commission Press Office, 18 October 2023

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_4994](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_4994).

<sup>51</sup> European Parliament, “European Parliament resolution of 17 January 2024 on building a comprehensive European port strategy”, January 19, 2024

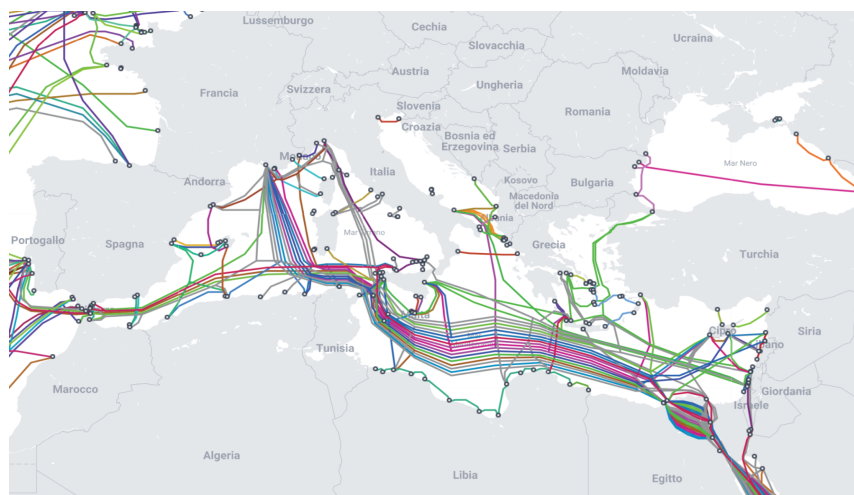
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0025\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0025_EN.html).

<sup>52</sup> M. Moreno Minuto “La competizione strategica per il dominio delle infrastrutture critiche underwater: controllo e tutela delle dorsali dati” in *Le sfide multidimensionali ed emergenti del Mediterraneo allargato: quale ruolo dell'Italia*” Rivista Trimestrale della Società Italiana per l'Organizzazione Internazionale, Q. 26, 2023 p. 15-16

<sup>53</sup> Overall, 27 active cable connections between the EU Member States and the MENA region are installed, Idem.

7,100 km) and will connect eleven countries in North Africa and Southern Europe<sup>54</sup>.

### Submarine cable system in the Mediterranean



Source: Telegeography<sup>55</sup>

Four crucial natural gas pipelines, vital for the EU's energy supply—particularly in the aftermath of measures taken to reduce dependence on Russian supplies—also traverse beneath the Mediterranean Sea. Trans-Mediterranean Pipeline from Algeria through Tunisia to Italy (Sicily), Megdaz from Algeria to Spain, Greenstream Pipeline from Libya to Italy, Trans-Adriatic Pipeline from Azerbaijan at the Caspian Sea to Europe from Greece through Albania and the Adriatic Sea to Italy. The sabotage of these critical undersea infrastructures, both submarine cables and pipelines, would have severe consequences, impacting the European economy and its connections and destabilizing the Member States. For their strategic relevance, the EU has carried out new strategies to prevent espionage and or terroristic attacks on these critical infrastructures. In June 2022, the European Parliament released a report on “Security threats to undersea

<sup>54</sup> Accessed 12 February 2024. <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/2022-11-24%20-%20Factsheet%20for%20Media%20-%20Medusa.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Submarine Cable Map, Telegeography, Transport Networks Research Service. Accessed 12 February 2024. <https://www.submarinecablemap.com/>.

communications and infrastructure – consequences for EU”<sup>56</sup>. It emphasizes the need for enhanced surveillance, coordination, and cooperation among Member States’ coastal guards to protect critical infrastructures. The report also advocates for data sharing and suggests integrating submarine critical infrastructures into marine protected areas and no-fishing zones to prevent accidents related to fishing activities. Finally, it is also to be remembered that, together with classical security and defence issues, also climate change related factors are considered to be a sensitive threat to the Mediterranean basin and for the European Union interests in that area.

The EU heavily depends on maritime trade routes for the projection of power and economic prosperity. Currently, about 75% of goods entering Europe are transported via sea, and European maritime enterprises rely on free navigation<sup>57</sup>.

EU and NATO have established complementary initiatives aimed at enhancing maritime risk awareness to improve the security of the shipping community operating in high-risk areas. Both organizations have successfully engaged in operational cooperation at sea, notably in the Mediterranean, including the Aegean, and Horn of Africa-Red Sea theaters. The strategic partnership between the EU and NATO is currently manifested at the tactical and operational level in the existing cooperation and coordination between the European Union Naval Force in the South-Central Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) Operation Sophia (ENFM) and Operation Sea Guardian in the Central Mediterranean. EU and NATO are continuing to cooperate in counter-piracy operations and coordination possibilities for escorting merchant ships through the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor, i.e. EUNAVFOR Operation ATALANTA, and NATO Ocean Shield insisting on the Gulf of Aden to protect the eastern Mediterranean access. In addition, since 2016, NATO, in cooperation with the Greek and Turkish coastguards and through the establishment of direct links with Frontex, has been assisting in cutting the lines of illegal trafficking within the Aegean Sea while providing maritime situational awareness<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> European Parliament “Security threats to undersea communications cables and infrastructure – consequences for the EU” 1 June 2022

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EXPO\\_IDA\(2022\)702557](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EXPO_IDA(2022)702557).

<sup>57</sup> M. Bressan “Le sfide multidimensionali...”, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> S.Hill & B.Bastomski “Legal Dialogue on Human Rights Obligations: NATO’s Aegean Sea Activity as a Case Study” Harvard Law School National Security Journal (Online Ed.), 28 October 2020.

The EU is also closely monitoring the increasing presence of Russian ships and submarines in the Mediterranean. It expresses full confidence in the capabilities of national navies and emphasizes cooperation with NATO in case of military escalation<sup>59</sup>. In addition to actively collaborating with NATO on security initiatives, the EU also plays a significant role in facilitating diplomatic dialogue to address international security issues. It's important to note that the EU, compared to NATO, operates as a soft/normative power, employing diplomatic and norm-setting approaches to address security challenges proactively.

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<https://harvardnsj.org/2020/10/28/legal-dialogue-on-human-rights-obligations/>.

<sup>59</sup> B.Faucon "Russia Seeks to Expand Naval Presence in the Mediterranean" Wall Street Journal (Online Ed.), 15 September 2023.

<https://www.wsj.com/world/africa/russia-seeks-to-expand-naval-presence-in-the-mediterranean-b8da4db>.