JOINT

A joined-up Union, a stronger Europe

Regional Fragmentation and EU Foreign and Security Policy

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Abstract

There is broad academic consensus on the fact that the fragmentation of regions presents a significant challenge for the EU. Fragmentation undermines the authority of central states, the EU's most natural counterparts, and distributes it amongst a great number of actors – including non-state armed groups. To address fragmentation, the EU should increase coordination between actors (EU institutions and member states), integrate actions across different policy areas (security and non-security, external and internal) and engage with external players (multilateral organisations, global powers, regional and local actors).

Introduction

Over the past few years, scholars of International Relations have been increasingly studying states that lack certain elements of sovereignty, such as "failed states", "weak states", "collapsed states", states affected by "limited statehood" or "contested statehood", and "unrecognised states".[1] Over the past few years, the number of countries that fall into one of these categories of states has increased – especially in areas surrounding the European Union (EU) (east and south). This literature review provide a better understanding of the phenomenon of regional fragmentation and its impact on EU foreign and security policy. Specifically, it answers the following question: according to the existing literature, how does increasing regional fragmentation affect the ability of the EU and its member states to develop, articulate and implement common action on crises and conflicts?

This work establishes a conceptual background, highlighting the connection between the fragmentation of regions and the (in)ability of the EU and its member states to formulate and implement common (or at least coordinated) actions. The review starts by providing a brief definition of regional fragmentation. This is followed by a discussion of the multiple levels at which it takes place. The next section focuses on the drivers and the actors of fragmentation. Lastly, the paper considers the impact of fragmentation on the EU's ability to address crises and conflict. The final section concludes with the main findings of the literature on regional fragmentation and its impact on the EU.

1. The concept of regional fragmentation

Fragmentation has been conceptualised in different academic disciplines, and many definitions of the concept have emerged as a result. In the fields of Geography

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[1] Thomas Risse, "Governance Configurations in Areas of Limited Statehood. Actors, Modes, Institutions, and Resources", in *SFB-Governance Working Papers*, No. 32 (April 2012), https://www.sfb-governance.de/en/publikationen/sfb-700-working_papers/wp32/index.html; Thomas Risse, "Governance under Limited Sovereignty", in Martha Finnemore and Judith Goldstein (eds), *Back to Basics. State Power in a Contemporary World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 78-104; Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *When States Fail. Causes and Consequences*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004; Rosa Ehrenreich Brooks, "Failed States, or the State as Failure?", in *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (Fall 2005), p. 1159-1196, https://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/facpub/1108.

and Economics, for instance, fragmentation has been conceived as the weakening of the elements forming a system: the discontinuity, rupture, and isolation of spaces. This definition is also valid in Political Science and Sociology, insofar as the spaces subjected to discontinuity, rupture and isolation are understood as political spaces, namely spaces the control of which is putatively in the hands of the state. While valid, this definition is insufficient, as it does not take account of the process by which institutions systems erode. Fragmentation relates to the phenomenon of a multiplication of actors, affecting goals, modalities, and instruments of governance.[2] Consequently, some scholars have attempted a more comprehensive conceptualisation of fragmentation by the identification of three dimensions: "the number of organizations in a movement; the degree of institutionalization across these organizations and the distribution of power among them".[3]

For the purpose of this literature review, in which we focus on regions affected by crises and conflict, we understand fragmentation as the process by which state authority (the state holding the legitimate monopoly over the means of violence and the ability to set and enforce rules) and regional rules of engagement are eroding or collapsing altogether. Fragmentation is a multifaceted and multi-level phenomenon that occurs not only at the state level, but also within regions and communities, multiplying the number of actors involved in the process. Following an exploration of the key factors of regional fragmentation – whether political, social, economic, ethnic, religious, or ideological, the review highlights the diversity of actors contributing to and resulting from this process.

2. Levels of fragmentation

The phenomenon of fragmentation takes place at various levels: states, regions and communities. States in fragmented regions increasingly get in competition with other centres of powers, including non-state actors, in their mission of

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[2]   Stephan Klingebiel, Timo Mahn and Mario Negre, "Fragmentation: A Key Concept for Development Cooperation", in Stephan Klingebiel, Timo Mahn and Mario Negre (eds), *The Fragmentation of Aid. Concepts, Measurements and Implications for Development Cooperation*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 1-18.

[3]   Kristin M. Bakke, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham and Lee J.M. Seymour, "A Plague of Initials: Fragmentation, Cohesion, and Infighting in Civil Wars", in *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (June 2012), p. 265.

maintaining order.[4] Fragmentation also occurs at the regional level, in that states in a geographical area no longer have the ability, either because they are unable or because they are unwilling, to generate collaborative patterns of control over issue areas or geographical spaces of shared interests (such as trade or border management, to mention just a few examples). A third layer where fragmentation takes place is within communities, where a regrouping around socially constructed identities involving cultural, national, ethnic or religious dimensions takes place. Fragmentation taking place at one level is likely to have an impact on the others.

At the *state level*, fragmentation is due to the difficulty of maintaining order within a state's borders. The state enters competes with other centres of power, including rival state authorities (for instance, subnational authorities seeking independence or autonomy) or nonstate actors such as terrorist organisations (e.g., the Islamic State) armed militias (like the Popular Mobilisation Forces in Iraq), political parties controlling their own militias (like Lebanon's Hezbollah) or illicit trafficking networks.[5] States affected by this fragmenting dynamics attract competitive outside intervention and serve as targets to opportunistic aggressors.[6] Fabrice Balanche considers that state fragmentation has a common process in the Middle East, despite some national specificities: the segmentation of society on confessional, ethnic and national (as in Palestine) or local (as in Jordan) divisions and the loss of state legitimacy due to the failure of capacity to generate and distribute general welfare. Behind this, there is a geostrategic logic of powers seeking to increase their influence over the state in question.[7]

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[4] Stéphane Rosière, "La fragmentation de l'espace étatique mondial", in *L'espace politique*, No. 11 (2010), https://doi.org/10.4000/espacepolitique.1608.

[5] Wenceslas Monzala, *Réflexions sur le concept d'états défaillants en droit international*, Master Thesis, Université de Strasbourg, 2012, https://www.memoireonline.com/10/13/7604/m_Reflexions-sur-le-concept-detats-defaillants-en-droit-international1.html; Sharon Lecocq, "EU Foreign Policy and Hybrid Actors in the Middle East: Ready for Geopolitical Contestation?", in *Global Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 4-5 (2020), p. 363-380, https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2021.1872401.

[6] Yannis A. Stivachtis, "Political (In)Security in the Middle East", in Bettina Koch and Yannis A. Stivachtis (eds), *Regional Security in the Middle East. Sectors, Variables and Issues*, Bristol, E-International Relations Publishing, 2019, p. 40, https://www.e-ir.info/?p=78695.

[7] Fabrice Balanche, "L'Etat au Proche-Orient arabe entre communautarisme, clientélisme, mondialisation et projet de Grand Moyen Orient", in *L'espace politique*, No. 11 (2010), https://doi.org/10.4000/espacepolitique.1619; Raymond Hinnebusch and Jasmine K. Gani (eds), *The Routledge Handbook to the Middle East and North African State and States System*, London, Routledge, 2020.

According to Raymond Hinnebusch, "competition between a state and a to-be-state, both counting on interventions by regional powers", is explained by the problematic export of the Westphalian system to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with Syria as the main case in point.[8] Looking at the "double failure" of the Syrian state to keep control over the territory and stop the spread of sectarian narratives,[9] Hinnebusch argues that the Westphalian order has given "way to heterarchic zones of limited statehood in which the sovereignty of states [is] contested by both international (supra-state) penetration and sub-state fragmentation".[10] The process has actually gone so far that fragmented and overlapping governance, permeable and collapsing borders and the loss of sovereignty to transnational movements have now become the "competitive regime-building" rationale of the Assad regime. The latter has reconfigured itself to fight insurgents in the civil war, jihadist warlords, and the "competitive interventionism" of global and regional powers active in Syria.[11]

Fragmentation at the state level also likely impacts *regions* – and regional fragmentation can in turn destabilise states. Examples include developments in North-Eastearn Syria that have implications for Turkey and the instability in Somalia that is affecting Ethiopia as well as Kenya. The Horn of Africa (HoA) is actually an interesting case, as it increasingly shows the elements that characterise fragmented regions. First is the absence of a hegemon or an anchor state able to stabilise the region to some extent. Second is the ease with which internal conflicts in individual states spill over into neighbouring states, as is the case with Somalia. Third is the ubiquity of secessionist thrusts throughout the region. In addition to hosting some of the most protracted crises on the continent, great power rivalries are often played out in the Horn.[12]

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[8]   Abel Polese and Ruth Hanau Santini, "Limited Statehood and its Security Implications on the Fragmentation Political Order in the Middle East and North Africa", in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2018), p. 385, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2018.1456815.

[9]   Raymond Hinnebusch means by double state failure the loss of monopoly of violence and territorial control to non-state armed movements and the spread of sectarian narratives.

[10]   Raymond Hinnebusch, "From Westphalian Failure to Heterarchic Governance in MENA: The Case of Syria", in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2018), p. 391-413.

[11]   Abel Polese and Ruth Hanau Santini, "Limited Statehood and its Security Implications…", cit., p. 385-386.

[12]   Noel Twagiramungu et al., "Re-Describing Transnational Conflict in Africa", in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (September 2019), p. 377-391, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X19000107.

Finally, fragmentation affects *communities*. The world is increasingly interconnected thanks to information technologies, commercial exchanges and the movement of people and capital. Paradoxically, greater interconnection has entailed growing fragmentation of peoples and within countries. Divisions within societies are one of the key emerging dynamics identified in reports focusing on large-scale societal trends, with terms such as "fragmentation", "imbalance" and "contestation" increasingly flagged out.[13] This fragmentation leads to a regrouping around basic values such as culture, nationality, ethnicity or religion. The case of Lebanon is particularly relevant. There, all political parties are based on community or confessional allegiances and privileges are allocated on the basic of ethnic or religious groups.[14] Civil wars in Libya, Yemen and Syria contribute to a trend towards family and clan communities.

Fragmentation occurs at all levels within society, from the state to subnational communities. Besides, fragmentation on one level impacts other levels. Indeed, areas in which state authority is weak often experience increased local conflicts, and this instability can spill over into neighbouring states, thereby destabilising and potentially fragmenting whole regions.

3. Drivers of fragmentation

Fragmentation at the various levels outlined above is driven by a number of factors. A first set of factors lie with the domestic structure, weak institution, and lack of legitimacy of state actors.[15] Romanet Perroux pointed in the case of Libya to *domestic factors* as one of the reasons for the fragmentation exposed during and after the 2011 revolution, when armed groups were formed around tribes, clans or neighbourhoods.[16] The political transition is currently still at a standstill, and the

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[13] US National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2040. A More Contested World*, March 2021, https://www.dni.gov/index.php/gt2040-home.

[14] Raffaella A. Del Sarto, "Contentious Borders in the Middle East and North Africa: Context and Concepts", in *International Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (July 2017), p. 767-787, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix070.

[15] Stephen Krasner and Thomas Risse, "External Actors, State-Building, and Service Provision in Areas of Limited Statehood: Introduction", in *Governance*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (October 2014), p. 545-567.

[16] Jean-Louis Romanet Perroux, "The Deep Roots of Libya's Security Fragmentation", in *Middle*

country is riddled with a fragmented political and security landscape. The lack of a sense of national identity and weak central institutions are at the centre of Libya's problems. The *weakness of institutions and poor governance* is also addressed by Alexander Rondos when researching the HoA.[17] According to Rondos, factions act in their interest when the impact of economic difficulties and the lack of effective and cohesive state and social institutions kick in. Romanet Perroux describes the situation as an "insecurity dilemma", whereby the scarce ability of the central government to provide governance stimulates peripheral centres of power to provide governance themselves, which in turn further diminishes the central state's capacity for governance. Perroux notes how this situation of insecurity dilemma emerges and consolidated where process of state-building based on plurality and democratisation are missing. Moreover, as evidenced in the MENA region, the lack of efficient institutions has resulted in weak regionalism.[18]

The literature also points to the *lack of state legitimacy* as a key driver of fragmentation. Krasner and Risse argue that without legitimacy, state failure is all but guaranteed, although they also argue that legitimacy is not sufficient for effective governance.[19] Zartman also "raises the question of legitimacy of players as well as their capabilities".[20] This point is important with regards to conflict management efforts.

Furthermore, the literature discusses the effect of *external intervention* on fragmentation of a region. Rondos states that in the HoA external intervention is one of the combustible ingredients – along with domestic factors – in a region always hovering on the edges of insecurity.[21] Instead, the region must try to set off a

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Eastern Studies, Vol. 55, No. 2 (2019), p. 200-224.

[17]   Alexander Rondos, "The Horn of Africa: Its Strategic Importance for Europe, the Gulf States and Beyond", in *Horizons*, No. 6 (Winter 2016), p. 150-160, https://www.cirsd.org/en/horizons/horizons-winter-2016--issue-no-6/the-horn-of-africa---its-strategic-importance-for-europe-the-gulf-states-and-beyond.

[18]   Morten Valbjørn, "North Africa and the Middle East", in Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 249-270.

[19]   Stephen Krasner and Thomas Risse, "External Actors, State-Building, and Service Provision in Areas of Limited Statehood: Introduction", cit., p. 563.

[20]   I. William Zartman, "Fragmented Conflict: Handling the Current World Disorder", in *Global Policy*, Vol. 10, No. S2 (June 2019), p. 8, https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12679.

[21]   Alexander Rondos, "The Horn of Africa", cit.

virtuous cycle. This would include elements such as greater societal participation in politics and government, regional economic integration, and as a result institutions that can negotiate on the region's behalf with the outside world.

Conflicts are another main cause of fragmentation. Scholars agree on the highly destabilising potential of conflicts insofar as they pose a threat to the dynamics of regional integration by way of contagion.[22] The inability of a state to retain the monopoly of legitimate violence and effective control over its entire territory is the most central aspect of this contagion dynamic. Even when the conflict ends, fragmentation can persist in several ways, for instance in contested participation in peace processes (which can thus become themselves drivers of fragmentation).[23]

Tewodros Woldearegay proposes a general discussion on the conflict situation in the Horn of Africa. He states that the HoA is one of the most conflict-prone parts of the African continent, in addition to being one of the poorest regions in the world.[24] The Somalia crisis as well as the unsettled peace process in Sudan and South Sudan remain sources of instability. At the same time, the strategic importance of the region has attracted the interest of others, in turn affecting the outcome of any attempt at peace in the region. Importantly, Woldearegay shows the *interdependence between key factors*. According to him, the most common sources of conflicts in the HoA are: Islamic radicalism and the lack of an effective central state in Somalia; piracy; the crisis in South Sudan; domestic challenges; and external intervention and the manipulation of multilateral instruments by the region's states. Indeed, interstate rivalry has hindered peace and stability in the region for decades.[25]

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[22] Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, "A Litmus Test for European Integration Theories: Explaining Crises and Comparing Regionalisms", in *KFG Working Papers*, No. 85, (May 2018), https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-57753-6.

[23] Lee J.M. Seymour, Kristin M. Bakke and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "E Pluribus Unum, ex Uno Plures: Competition, Violence and Fragmentation in Ethnopolitical Movements", in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (January 2016), p. 3-18.

[24] Tewodros Woldearegay, "Major Sources of Conflict in the Horn of Africa and its Possible Remedies", in *Political Science and Public Administration Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January-June 2018), p. 28-43, https://www.academia.edu/45146174.

[25] Anne L. Clunan and Harold A. Trinkunas (eds), *Ungoverned Spaces. Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010.

4. Actors of fragmentation

As outlined above, fragmentation results in the multiplication of actors with competing claims to territory control or provision of governance, which may well become drivers of conflicts. In turn, this proliferation of actors further contributes to fragmentation. When *states* are unable to implement central rules and to provide collective goods and services, this inevitably leads to a blurring between the public and private spheres, with a "distribution" of roles between heterogeneous actors. Therefore, in regions where order is contested, the weakness of state institutions gives way to a fragmentation of redistribution and the maintenance of clientelist networks.[26]

In the MENA region, as illustrated by Galip Dalay, *international powers* have also been agents of disruption. In the case of Syria, Dalay considers that both Russia and the United States have challenged the sovereignty of the country.[27] Raffaella A. Del Sarto, by contrast, has pointed out that while borders had been put under pressure in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the state model has remained relevant. Nevertheless, she highlights "a further fragmentation within and along state borders" allowing for an easier circulation of migrants and armed fighters as well as various kinds of trafficking.[28]

The EU-funded MENARA project (Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture: Mapping Geopolitical Shifts, Regional Order, and Domestic Transformation),[29] which outlined the main dynamics as well as the factors of uncertainty and destabilisation in the region with a focus on popular uprisings,

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[26]   Abel Polese and Ruth Hanau Santini, "Limited Statehood and its Security Implications…", cit.; Anna Grzymala-Busse, "Beyond Clientelism: Incumbent State Capture and State Formation", in *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 4-5 (April 2008), p. 638-673; Derick W. Brinkerhoff and Arthur A. Goldsmith, *Clientelism, Patrimonialism and Democratic Governance: An Overview and Framework for Assessment and Programming*, report to the United States Agency of International Development (USAID), 2002, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnacr426.pdf.

[27]   Galip Dalay, "Break-up of the Middle East: Will We See a New Regional Order?", in *Middle East Eye*, 14 September 2017, https://www.middleeasteye.net/node/65572.

[28]   Raffaella A. Del Sarto, "Contentious Borders in the Middle East and North Africa", cit., p. 780.

[29]   MENARA ("The Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture: Mapping Geopolitical Shifts, Regional Order, and Domestic Transformation") is a project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under grant agreement No 693244. See the archived website: http://menara.iai.it/menara-project.

found the most prominent factor to be state erosion.[30] The emergence of the uprisings not only highlighted a rejection of authoritarian regimes, but also revealed a challenge to the central state and its borders by non-state actors (ISIS being the most striking example), which precipitated the region's territorial fragmentation.

Academics thus point to the rise of *non-state and proto-state actors* as another contributor to fragmentation.[31] With the collapse of the state in Iraq, Somalia or Mali, those non-state actors encourage return to tribal, religious or community allegiances. A key question is how to encourage non-state, proto-state, or rebel actors to negotiate or at least to bring them to a negotiation. Indeed, these actors do not feel obliged to respond to international attempts to control or resolve conflicts.[32] Nevertheless, cases such as the February 2020 Doha deal between the United States and the Taliban shows the possibility of holding negotiations and reaching an agreement between a non-state armed actor and a state. Hybrid actors, most often armed, are working either in concert with the state or in competition with it.[33] They are prominent in certain regions immediately adjacent to the EU, particularly in the MENA region since the Arab uprisings.[34] Some have become "proxy militias",[35] such as Hamas in the Gaza Strip or Hezbollah in Lebanon, forcing international actors (including the EU) to take these actors into account in their choices and calculations.[36] Other works have expanded the debate to include multiple religious and ideologically-driven groups. These works analyse how non-state armed actors engage in "state-making practices driven by local interests".[37]

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[30] MENARA project, "Transformations of State and Society in the MENA Region", in *European Policy Briefs*, March 2019, https://www.iai.it/en/node/10398.

[31] Thanassis Cambanis et al., *Hybrid Actors. Armed Groups and State Fragmentation in the Middle East*, New York, The Century Foundation Press, 2019, https://tcf.org/?p=34101; Abel Polese and Ruth Hanau Santini, "Limited Statehood and its Security Implications…", cit.; Olivier Walther, Christian Leuprecht and David B. Skillcorn, "Political Fragmentation and Alliances among Armed Non-state Actors in North and Western Africa (1997-2014)", in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2020), p. 167-186.

[32] I. William Zartman, "Fragmented Conflict: Handling the Current World Disorder", cit.

[33] Thanassis Cambanis et al., *Hybrid Actors*, cit.

[34] Hassanein Ali, "Post-Arab Spring: The Arab World Between the Dilemma of the Nation-State and the Rise of Violent Non-state Actors (VNSAs)", in *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2020), p. 68-83.

[35] Ofira Seliktar and Farhad Rezaei (eds), *Iran, Revolution, and Proxy Wars*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

[36] Sharon Lecocq, "EU Foreign Policy and Hybrid Actors in the Middle East", cit.

[37] Andrea Carboni and James Moody, "Between the Cracks: Actor Fragmentation and Local

Some have also extensively discussed the distinction between who carries out fragmentation and who (or what) generates conflict. According to Carboni and Moody, data suggests that fragmentation is insufficient to foretell violence patterns in Libya.[38] The political situation in Libya is characterised by a multiplicity of factors: the roles and capacity of the state, the lack of coherence in the security sector, and geographical factors. These three types of factors largely explain the activities and the success of the armed groups involved in the Libyan crisis.[39] Specifically, non-state armed groups have been able to consolidate what is left of the instruments of the Libyan state to engage various dimensions of resources, privilege and power distribution.

Rondos has found that external actors are playing proxy politics within the region, basing their actions on the existing diversity of geography, history, population, politics, and culture.[40] The major challenges to the region relate to the way states manage to win over the population to a national project, the task of regional integration and external intervention. Regarding the role of external players in Libya like Russia and Turkey, Kali Robinson contends that they contribute to continuing violence and instability.[41]

Given the multiple levels, drivers and actors involved in fragmentation dynamics that have been examined so far, it is natural that fragmentation has multiple systemic effects. These will be explored in the following section.

5. Effects of fragmentation

Fragmentation is a consequence of weak states unable to deal with insecurity at the internal and regional levels. These states attract competitive foreign interventions

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Conflict Systems in the Libyan Civil War", in *Small War & Insurgencies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2018), p. p. 456.

[38]   Ibid.

[39]   Ibid; Jean-Louis Romanet Perroux, "The Deep Roots of Libya's Security Fragmentation", cit.

[40]   Alexander Rondos, "The Horn of Africa", cit.

[41]   Kali Robinson, "Who's Who in Libya's War", in *CFR In Briefs*, 18 June 2020, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/whos-who-libyas-war; see also: Wolfram Lacher, *Libya's Fragmentation. Structure and Process in Violent Conflict*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2020.

and serve as targets to opportunistic aggressors.[42] The weakening of the central state contributes to the fragmentation process by weakening state legitimacy. The Arab uprisings and the response governments have given to them (with a special focus on Libya, Syria and Yemen) have resulted in severe insecurity in the region, with an increased influence of armed actors on the political process, with or without regime change.[43] This has led to a logic of fragmentation that serves local actors and increases their real power.

Regional fragmentation is directly related to the issue of *limited statehood* because of the inability of a country's central authority to implement and enforce rules and decisions and/or lacks the legitimate monopoly over the means of violence.[44] Krasner and Risse consider that "a small percentage of states in the contemporary international system can be characterized as having consolidated statehood, that is, fully effective domestic sovereignty".[45] Statehood is also linked to the challenge emanating from an idea of sovereignty that is changing. In the MENA region, central governments are no longer the sole contenders for sovereignty. Contestation fuelled by non-state actors affects vital state interests and the *raison d'être* of the state itself.[46]

The argument that fragmentation often leads to *fostering subnational identities* is demonstrated by Christopher Phillips and Morten Valbjørn's comparative analysis of the interactions between selected fighting groups in Syria, which emphasises different kinds of identities and their respective connections with outside actors.[47] Attempts by state and non-state actors to identify with a sub-unit of a state are met with a mix of reluctance (by foreign powers who foster a national unity idea)

[42]   Yannis A. Stivachtis, "Political (In)Security in the Middle East", cit.

[43]   Thanassis Cambanis et al., *Hybrid Actors*, cit; Bülent Aras and Emirhan Yorulmazlar, "State, Region and Order: Geopolitics of the Arab Spring", in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 12 (2016), p. 2259-2273.

[44]   Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, *Effective Governance Under Anarchy. Institutions, Legitimacy, and Social Trust in Areas of Limited Statehood*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

[45]   Stephen Krasner and Thomas Risse, "External Actors, State-Building, and Service Provision in Areas of Limited Statehood: Introduction", cit., p. 549.

[46]   Wendy Pearlman and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Nonstate Actors, Fragmentation, and Conflict Processes", in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (February 2012), p. 3-15.

[47]   Christopher Phillips and Morten Valbjørn, "What Is in a Name? The Role of (Different) Identities in the Multiple Proxy Wars in Syria", in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2018), p. 414-433.

and enthusiasm (by foreign non-state actors who attempt to use them to pursue their own goals).

Fragmentation reinforces *conflicts, crises and existing traffics*. It is widely accepted that fragmentation influences conflict processes in a profound way.[48] Multi-party conflicts with several fronts are notoriously hard to resolve. In addition, fragmentation allows transnational actors to move across borders to join conflict zones with relative ease.[49] However, there is no easily-computable measure to approximate conflict fragmentation. Experts agree on the highly destabilising potential of such conflicts insofar as they create a threat to regional cooperation by way of contagion.[50] The inability of a state to retain the monopoly of legitimate violence and effective control over its entire territory is the most central aspect of this contagion logic.[51] The territories beyond borders can be irrigated with economic, social, and political imbalances through the dynamic of spill over with an immediate impact for the state system and further implications for global politics.

Another point, highlighted by Bertrand Badie, is the risk of an "end of the territories".[52] This is where the territorialised state gradually fades in favour of ethnic and economic networks.

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[48]   Barış Arı and Theodora-Ismene Gizelis, "Conflict Fragmentation Index", in *Peace Economics, Peace Science, and Public Policy*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (December 2017), Article 20170029.

[49]   Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Understanding Fragmentation in Conflict and its Impact on Prospects for Peace", in *Oslo Forum Papers*, No. 6 (December 2016), https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Understanding-fragmentation-in-conflict.pdf.

[50]   Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, "A Litmus Test for European Integration Theories", cit.

[51]   Andreas Anter, "The Modern State and its Monopoly on Violence", in Edith Hanke, Lawrence Scaff and Sam Whimster (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Max Weber*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 225-236.

[52]   Bertrand Badie, *La fin des territoires. Essai sur le désordre international et l'utilité sociale du respect*, Paris, Fayard, 1995.

6. Effects of fragmentation on the EU's ability to address crises and conflict

6.1 Challenges posed by fragmentation to EU foreign and security policy

This section outlines the consequences of fragmentation for the EU's foreign and security policy (EUFSP). According to the MENARA project, which provides an analysis of the main regional and local dynamics in the MENA region with a projection in the medium (2025) and long (2050) term, the trends of limited statehood, contestation of order and regional fragmentation reveal and fuel a diversity of challenges, from conflict management and humanitarian efforts to the fight against illicit trafficking and terrorism.[53] This affects EU policy in the fields of humanitarian affairs, conflict resolution and diplomacy.

The eruption of violent conflicts can have immediate repercussions, through geographical proximity, for European security, for example fuelling radicalisation in Europe.[54] The geographic proximity of areas of diffused conflicts to the EU, pose a key challenge to conflict management and peacebuilding efforts, making the EU's aspiration to integrate crisis and conflict-affected communities more complex.[55]

The EU-LISTCO project reflected on evolving regional neighbourhoods security dynamics that represent potential threats to the EU.[56] It identified the constraining factors and conditions under which those areas deteriorate and constitute a threat to the EU, posing further challenges to EU external action and to the implementation of a common policy. Those conditions are violent conflicts, global, diffuse, and regional threats, multiple violent non-state actors fighting with state

[53]   Eduard Soler i Lecha, et al., "The MENARA Fact-Finding Missions: Main Results", in *MENARA Working Documents*, No. 3 (April 2019), http://menara.iai.it/?p=1752.

[54]   See the website of "Global Governance and the European Union: Future Trends and Scenarios" (GLOBE), a project from the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme: https://www.globe-project.eu/en/about-globe_541.

[55]   Ana E. Juncos and Steven Blockmans, "The EU's Role in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Four Key Challenges", in *Global Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 2-3 (2018), p. 131-140, https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2018.1502619.

[56]   EU-LISTCO project recieved fund from the EU's Horizon 2020 programme. For more information, check EU-LISTCO website: *About the Project*, https://www.eu-listco.net/the-project.

actors or among themselves, actors not providing public goods and services, and failed statehood.

The fragmentation of actors also hampers the EU's efforts and ability to act in the face of crises due to the difficulty of being able to clearly identify the different groups within a political entity. The EUNPACK project (A conflict sensitive unpacking of the EU comprehensive approach to conflict and crisis mechanism) analysed both the EU's institutional infrastructure for crisis management in relation to the local dynamics of certain states (Mali, Afghanistan, Kosovo, amongst others).[57] Tensions exist between local actors and various groups (ethnic, religious, etc.) through the pluralisation of collective identities and the overlapping character of official and local political legitimacies. In the absence of leadership, as in Mali, these tensions are accentuated by colonial strategies that consist of supporting certain groups against others, which has the long-term effect of reinforcing mistrust between groups and, ultimately, of leading to the deepening of fault lines. This type of fragmentation is in addition to factors inherent to the region, such as geographic disparities and conflicts over resource management, which generate difficulties in dealing with the different communities and groups within a political space. Facing this complicated situation, EUNPACK "identified two potential gaps in EU crisis response [which is] between intentions and implementations, and between the implementation of EU policies and the local reception/perception of this engagement".[58]

As EU external action is already faced with internal contestation and discrepancies among members, fragmentation leads to ever more divided visions within the EU, and to a more constrained EUFSP. Due to this, the EU is unable to play a significant role in regions such as the MENA.[59]

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[57] Siddarth Tripathi and Enver Ferhatovic, "The European Union's Crisis Response in the Extended Neighbourhood: The EU's Output Effectiveness in the Case of Afghanistan", in *EUNPACK Papers*, WP7 Deliverable 7.1 (21 August 2017), http://www.eunpack.eu/node/114; Rabea Heinemann, "The European Union's Crisis Response in the Extended Neighbourhood: The EU's Output Effectiveness in the Case of Mali", in *EUNPACK Papers*, WP7 Deliverable 7.1 (21 August 2017), http://www.eunpack.eu/node/113.

[58] Morten Bøås and Pernille Rieker, "EUNPACK Executive Summary of the Final Report & Select Policy Recommendations" in *EUNPACK Publications*, March 2019, p. 6, http://www.eunpack.eu/node/133.

[59] Eduard Soler i Lecha, et al., "The MENARA Fact-Finding Missions: Main Results", cit.

6.2 Addressing fragmentation in EU foreign and security policy

In response to these challenges, the EUFSP has adopted a pragmatic and defensive policy.[60] Characterised by a securitised and technocratic approach, it appears however to have been unable to address the multiple challenges posed by fragmentation, lacking coordination and efficiency.[61] Besides, the EU's approach to regional fragmentation has been criticised by actors in the MENA region. Turkish scholars, for instance, note that the EU appears unable to sustainably address the problems of fragmented regions, especially the following dimensions:

·   Religion: the EU is not interested in robust and lasting aid to Muslim-majority regions or groups;[62]

·   Policy confusion: the EU is not fully sure about what to do with fragmented regions or countries, or whether doing something about them will have tangible benefits for the EU CFSP as a whole;[63]

·   Migration: the EU is mostly interested in such reducing regional fragmentation to the degree that it prevents mass migration into Europe.[64]

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[60]   Ibid.

[61]   Münevver Cebeci, *MEDRESET WP1: EU Construction of the Mediterranean. D1.2 Final Report and Policy Brief*, May 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/documents/downloadPublic?documentIds=080166e5b7c188e6&appId=PPGMS.

[62]   Ahmet Murat Köseoğlu and Gökhan Çevikel, "Yumuşak Güç: İnsani Yardım Operasyonları ve Türkiye Deki Suriyeli Mülteciler" (Soft Power: Humanitarian Operations and Syrian Refugees in Turkey), in *Akademik Bakış*, No. 43 (June 2014), https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/abuhsbd/issue/32934/365887; Özen Handan and Cem Cerit, "Savaş Nedeniyle Türkiye'ye Göç Ederek Insani Yardım Kuruluşunda Çalışan Suriyeli Mültecilerde Travma Sonrası Stres Bozukluğu Ve Ilişkili Etmenler" (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Related Factors in Post-War Syrian Refugees Who Migrated to Turkey and Worked in Humanitarian Aid Organizations), in *Kocaeli Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Dergisi*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (September 2018), p. 70-73, https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/kusbed/issue/39194/431796; Ramazan Kaynak and Mahmut Erel, "Türkiye'de Faaliyet Gösteren İnsani Yardim Örgütlerinin Kurumsal Yetenek, Afet Odaklilik Ve Afet Yönetim Performansi Üzerine Bir Araştirma" (A Research on the Institutional Capability, Disaster Orientation and Disaster Management Performance of Humanitarian Aid Organizations in Turkey), in *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Vizyoner Dergisi*, Vol. 7, No. 15 (July 2016), p. 1-19, https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/vizyoner/issue/23672/252103.

[63]   Nazlıcan Dindarik and Yahya Fidan, "Türkiye'de Mültecilerin Yaşadıkları Bölgelere Yönelik İnsani Yardım Lojistiği: Kızılay Örneği" (Humanitarian Aid Logistics for Refugees Area Living Turkey: Red Crescent Example), in *Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (June 2020), p. 135-154, https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/cbayarsos/issue/55172/591835; Fatma Gümrükçüoğlu, *İnsani Yardım Bağlamında Türkiye'nin Afrika'daki Sağlık Hizmetleri: Gönüllüler Hareketi Örneği (2005-2016)* (Health Services of Turkey in the Context of Humanitarian Aid: The Example of Volunteers Movement (2005-2016)), PhD Thesis, Istanbul Medeniyet University, 2019, http://hdl.handle.net/123456789/380.

[64]   Ahmet İçduygu and Damla B. Aksel, *Irregular Migration in Turkey*, Ankara, IOM Turkey, September 2012, https://mirekoc.ku.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2017/01/Irregular-Migration-in-Turkey.

From Turkey's point of view, the EU's foreign policy is also acutely fragmented, both policy-wise and in ground reality. In Syria, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea, Libya and on NATO's eastern front, Turkey views itself as dealing with at least two EUs: one that aligns with Turkey's interpretation of the changing balance of power at the regional level and another that opposes this view. This reinforces Ankara's belief that the EU's inability to form consensus over important foreign policy contestation areas with Russia, China and Iran makes it an acutely fragmented entity that cannot be dealt with as a union, but as a constellation of nations that need to be partnered separately, depending on the issue at hand.

To respond to the challenges caused by fragmentation, a change in discourse and an abandonment of the securitised and technocratic approach of the EU and shift instead towards policies integrating local actors, opposition or non-cooperating groups (non-governmental organisations for example) have been identified as paramount by the literature.[65] This would include promoting civil society as a stakeholder in the decision-making process for instance, as well as democratic values, good governance, institutional mechanisms; and the economy through development assistance. Regional fragmentation implies a case-by-case basis approach, which should start with an analysis of the loci, actors and drivers at stake, as well as ongoing political developments. Internally and to support this change of approach, the EU should put forward a series of instruments to strengthen its resilience, including in the economic and political domains – from strategic partnerships to diplomatic negotiations to address conflicts and crises.[66]

pdf; Cansu Güleç, "Avrupa Birliği'nin Göç Politikaları ve Türkiye'ye Yansımaları" (Immigration Policy of the European Union and Its Reflections to Turkey), in *TESAM Akademi Dergisi*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (July 2015), p. 81-100, https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/tesamakademi/issue/12946/156436.

[65] Münevver Cebeci, *MEDRESET WP1: EU Construction of the Mediterranean*, cit.

[66] Pol Bargués et al. "Resilience and the EU's External Action Instruments: Towards Multiple, Sustained, and Indirect Actions", in *EU-LISTCO Working Papers*, No. 7 (November 2020), https://www.eu-listco.net/publications/resilience-and-the-eus-external-action-instruments.

Conclusion

This literature review has highlighted the complexity of the concept of regional fragmentation. Regional fragmentation, understood as the process by which state authority and regional rules of engagement are eroding or collapsing altogether, weighs heavily on EU conflict management efforts.

Indeed, fragmentation is a multifaceted and multi-level phenomenon that occurs not only at the state level, but also within regions and communities, multiplying the number of actors involved. Following an exploration of the key factors of regional fragmentation – whether political, social, economic, ethnic, religious or ideological, the review has pointed to the diversity of actors contributing to and emerging from this process. These – whether they are state or non-state actors – have their own agenda and strategies. This renders the process of negotiations over ways to reduce fragmentation or compose conflicts much more complicated for the EU in terms of whom to negotiate with and for what result. Different works warn against the negative effects of fragmentation, which can be a source of weakness, leading to disunity and the inability of states to guarantee basic rights, devise common strategies or maintain stable and functioning economies. For the EU, fragmentation has an impact on its (in)ability – and that of its member states – to formulate and implement coordinated action on crises and conflicts, all the more so that fragmentation is taking place in the EU's neighbourhood and affects its security.

While regional specificities persist, and the degree of fragmentation varies depending on each specific case, this review provides a starting point to orientate research on regional fragmentation in conflicts, and thereby to elaborate and implement a more effective EUFSP taking into account the different aspects of fragmentation at all levels of the political system. The EU has to deal with an increasing number of actors – including non-state armed groups, and faces further insecurity potentially leading to crises and conflict. To address fragmentation, the EU should increase coordination between actors (EU institutions and member states), policies (security and non-security, external and internal) and with external players (multilateral organisations, global powers, regional and local actors). This would improve its capacity – and that of EU member states – to set common

foreign and security policy objectives, and last but not least to act in a coordinated manner when engaging with external players to deal with crises and conflicts affecting the security interests of the EU and its member states.

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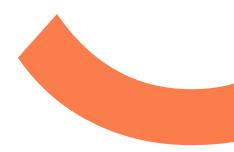
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