

**BOOK REVIEW:****Deconstructing “Ideal Power Europe”: The EU and the Arab Change****Author**

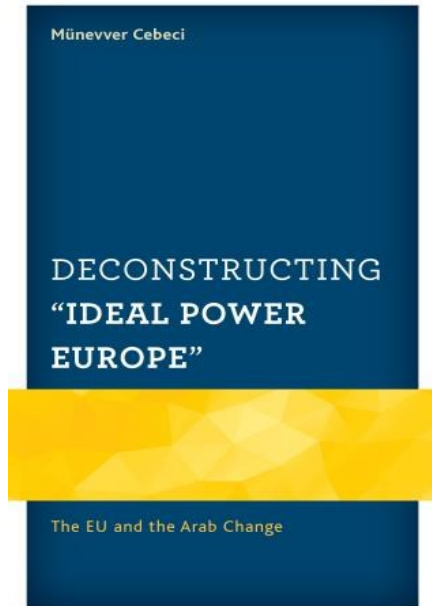
Münevver Cebeci

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In this monograph, Münevver Cebeci aims to further the arguments that she put forward in an article that she wrote in 2012: “European Foreign Policy Research Reconsidered: Constructing an ‘Ideal Power’ Europe through Theory?” The monograph is about how European foreign policy research contributes to the construction of the EU as an “ideal power” and how it reinforces the discourse of EU practitioners and helps legitimize the latter’s actions. The book adopts a post-structuralist approach in its analysis and the specific case through which the construction of “ideal power Europe” is scrutinized is the Arab Change – the so-called “Arab Spring”; a wording, the usage of which the book avoids due to its theoretical approach, in order not to contribute to the construction of the change in Arab countries in a specific way.

Although there are many studies on the EU which portray it as a specific type of power – such as “normative power”, “civilising power”, etc. – they only produce and reproduce certain knowledge about the Union and its “foreign policy” without offering a novel critical paradigm. Those few studies which criticize the Union’s “foreign policy”, on the other hand, do it on rather realist or liberal intergovernmentalist lines and some of them offer ways for the EU to overcome its ineffectiveness. They take what the EU does in the world as a given and rather look at the outcome than analysing the processes in which the

EU and its “foreign policy” are constructed and get legitimized. On the other hand, post-structuralist analyses of European foreign policy are also very rare. Therefore, this book fills an important gap in the European Studies literature. The increasing importance the EU attaches to the Southern Mediterranean – mainly due to the mass flow of refugees from and energy interests in the region – makes it timely to scrutinize European policy on the Middle East and North Africa and how these regions have been portrayed by European researchers and foreign policy makers. This is crucial for understanding the “dominative dimension of European foreign policy” (Merlingen, 2007: 438) and how it is reflected in its policies concerning the recent wave of change in Arab countries.

The monograph deconstructs the “ideal power Europe” meta-narrative produced by European foreign policy researchers and policy-makers through a second reading of their texts on European foreign policy, in general, and, on EU policy on the Middle East and North Africa, in particular. The book pursues a set of arguments: The first argument is that European Foreign Policy researchers engage in the construction of an “ideal power Europe” meta-narrative through first, assuming that the EU is post-sovereign/post-modern; second, naming the EU as a model/virtuous example; and, finally, conceptualizing the Union as a normative power. Secondly, the book (p.2) argues that these three depictions of the EU refer to the representation of a *regulatory ideal* (used in the Kantian and Foucauldian senses of the term), which inevitably leads to hegemonic practices; reflecting *the dominative dimension of European foreign policy* (as used by Merlingen, 2007: 438). This argument is especially critical as it brings in the concept of “regulatory ideal” to the study of European foreign policy, elaborating on it in a detailed way. The final argument of the book (p.2) is that the “ideal power Europe” meta-narrative becomes manifest in the EU’s approach to the Southern Mediterranean mainly through the rhetoric of “responsibility” and “universality” in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. To prove its arguments, the book reveals the tensions, silences and exclusions in European foreign policy discourse employed by EU-European practitioners and researchers, both, and, points to the inconsistencies involved in European policy on the Southern Mediterranean through analysing the EU’s and some of its member states’ discourses and practices on the region. It looks into how they contribute to a positive construction of the European self as an “ideal power” vis-a-vis its Arab other and how European foreign policy is constructed as a means to legitimize both the EU’s and the European powers’ acts or disguise their failure by using such concepts.

Cebeci deliberately avoids using a solid methodological framework due to her poststructuralist approach and adopts a research strategy instead, which, she pursued in the selection of the resources. The book is composed of five chapters, the first one of which provides a poststructuralist overview of the

links among foreign policy, identity construction, sovereignty, and foreign policy research, setting the theoretical basis of the monograph. The chapter refers to “foreign policy” and “sovereignty” as the major practices which produce/reproduce the self vis-a-vis the other and looks at the discursive agency of foreign policy researchers in the construction of identities. The second chapter provides a detailed account of how researchers frame European foreign policy in a specific way that represents “the EU as a *positive force* in world politics” (Diez, 2005: 613). It provides an analysis of the three major discursive practices with which European Foreign Policy is portrayed: the discourse on “post-sovereign/postmodern EU”, the “EU-as-a-model/virtuous example” discourse and the “normative power Europe” discourse. In this chapter Cebeci aims to reveal how these discourses feed into the construction of the EU as an “ideal power”, even if its practices do not usually match this “ideal” representation. The chapter pursues the argument that these discourses legitimize the EU’s governmentality in the world and empower its Member States at the same time. Chapter 3 provides an explanation of how European foreign policy research in general and the normative/civilian/civilising power Europe discourse, in particular, create an ideal power Europe meta-narrative. In this chapter, Cebeci argues that the EU is constructed as an “ideal power” even if its acts do not match its “ideal” constructions, and, this is mainly because its past self, which is represented as successful in achieving peaceful regional integration, and, its future self, based on the discourse of normative aspirations, still suffice to consider it as “ideal”. She further displaces the EU’s representation an “exemplar”, also deconstructing the claim to “universality of the values that Europeans possess”. She reveals how these representations add up to the construction of a *regulatory ideal*, the practice of which pertains to hegemony, reflecting “the dominative dimension of European foreign policy” (Merlingen, 2007: 438). In this chapter, the workings of the “ideal power Europe” meta-narrative are also problematized, especially through an analysis of the EU’s governmentality in the world, which is mainly pursued through a securitized, depoliticizing and technocratic approach.

The fourth chapter looks into the EU policies and discourse on the Southern Mediterranean before 2011. It reveals how the “ideal” identity of the EU was produced and reproduced in a specific way vis-a-vis its Arab other. It pursues the argument that the three major representations of the EU (as postmodern/post-sovereign, as a model and as a normative power) help the reproduction of European identity as peaceful and superior to its Arab other, which is depicted as imperfect and conflictual, thus, inferior. It further claims that such representations have legitimized the EU’s governmentality in the Southern Mediterranean, which has been pursued through neo-liberal, markets oriented, technocratic, depoliticizing and securitizing policies such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership/Union for the Mediterranean and the European

Neighbourhood Policy. The chapter concludes that although the EU prioritized stability over democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the region through these policies before 2011, it was still considered as an “ideal power”.

Chapter 5 displaces “the ideal power Europe” meta-narrative through providing a second reading of the texts on/of EU policy on the Southern Mediterranean during and after the Arab uprisings, which depict EU-Europe as an “ideal power” vis-à-vis its Arab other. It argues that that despite some slight change in its rhetoric, the EU’s major discourses on the Arab countries/societies have remained the same and it has so far maintained its neoliberal governmentality in the region. The chapter is pursues the argument that the “ideal power Europe” meta-narrative has been reproduced through two significant discourses after the Arab uprisings: the discourse of “universality of the norms and values that the EU represents and promotes” and the discourse of “responsibility”. In this regard it gives an in-depth analysis of how these discourses have put the EU in a superior position vis-à-vis its Arab others and how this can be read through the lines of “the dominative dimension of European foreign policy”; as a hegemonic exercise, based on the construction of a *regulatory ideal*. The chapter’s analysis of the 2015 ENP Review and the Global Strategy, which also provides a detailed discussion of the discourse of “the resilience of the neighbors” as well as the discourse of “principled pragmatism”, is a significant contribution to the literature; especially because it shows how these discourses are legitimized by Union officials with reference the reluctance of Arab partners to pursue political reform. This chapter is also significant for its criticism of the EU’s interest-driven approach towards the Southern Mediterranean as it argues that the prefix “principled” is employed to disguise the interest-based connotation of the term “pragmatism”. As the chapter in which the main findings of the study are outlined, Chapter 5 finally reveals how EU governmentality is practiced and gets legitimized through these new discourses and how the EU’s technocratic, depoliticizing and securitizing approach towards the region still continues after the Arab uprisings.

A striking point in the book’s Conclusion is that it does not offer any remedies with an emancipatory connotation (p. 121). To the contrary, Cebeci concludes that she only sought to represent a challenge to the dominant discourse in European Studies and offer a new way of researching European foreign policy. This is understandable because the book is based on a poststructuralist approach. Nonetheless, it would also provide significant contribution to the literature if we could read Cebeci’s views on what might be the possible ways of overcoming the EU’s neoliberal governmentality in this regard. On the other hand, the literature still has a void with regard to how the EU is perceived in the Arab countries; whether they buy into parts of the EU’s discourse and policies; and, if they do so, whether they do it out of a logic of

appropriateness or a logic of consequences. This surely goes beyond the scope of Cebeci's book, but one of the possible pathways for future research is (and should be) looking at how the EU is perceived in the Southern Mediterranean.

**References:**

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