

Niklas Bremberg, *Diplomacy and Security Community-Building: EU Crisis Management in the Western Mediterranean*, Routledge: Abingdon/New York, 2016, ISBN 978-1138925731.

Twenty years ago, constructivist International Relations (IR) scholars fell in love with the brand-new Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), fascinated by this initiative's prometheic and arguably 'constructivist' ambition to invent a somewhat counter-intuitive region merging together the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea. One of their central arguments was that the EMP was meant to be a bold experiment of security community-building beyond the EU's borders (Adler et al., 2006) – expanding the European Union (EU)'s distinctive home-grown security community so as to blur the lines between insiders and outsiders, and make war unimaginable *also* with the latter. Was this a far-fetched illusion? Niklas Bremberg's book aims to give a fresh answer to the academically and politically ever-pressing question of 'whether the EU can promote security beyond its borders and in its neighbourhood' (pp. 1-2) by looking first and foremost at the 'how'. Interestingly, besides being in tune with the practice turn in social sciences and constructivist IR, the analytical focus on 'what practitioners actually do' provides a little more room for optimism than approaches focusing exclusively on collective identities, which often assume that some commonality of values is a necessary condition for a security community to emerge. Bremberg's contention is that this is not always the case and is backed by an array of empirical evidence which demonstrates the development and consolidation of cooperative security practices between insider Spain and outsider Morocco, irrespective of identity and value discrepancies, as well as the essential role played by the EU's multilateral umbrella in enabling such security community-building process over the last three decades.

Diplomacy and Security Community-Building makes a similarly valuable contribution to the literature at both theoretical and empirical levels. As regards theory, it builds on a fine-tuned understanding of the praxeological foundations of security community-building which advances this cutting-edge research agenda in various subfields – from security studies to EU foreign policy. These theoretical foundations are discussed in a very instructive fashion and operationalised in an analytical framework that distinguishes between three practical mechanisms of security community-building, i.e. institutionalisation of multilateral venues, expansion of transgovernmental networks and cooperation in crisis management. At the empirical level, Bremberg goes for a 'tough case' (p. 21). From all the troubled couples of neighbours straddling the EU's borders – involving an EU and a non-EU state – the one formed by Spain and Morocco ironically stands out in terms of both cooperation and conflict. On the one hand, the wide-ranging bilateral interdependence that the two countries' authorities endeavoured to promote in a top-down fashion from the early 1990s onwards has actually reached a never-imagined extent and depth, especially in economic and security areas, being also crucially favoured by parallel processes of Europeanisation. According to the author, the adding of a new EU/multilateral layer has significantly contributed to 'broadening the repertoire of practices' in Moroccan-Spanish relations, 'embedding them in a larger cooperative framework which ultimately draws upon practices that constitute security communities' (p. 136). On the other hand, deep-rooted tensions of historical and territorial origin are far from having disappeared and bilateral cooperation cannot be taken for granted. As the Perejil islet crisis farcically yet critically reminded in 2002, the two neighbours can quite easily resort to the use of force and become on the brink of war with the EU standing as a powerless onlooker. If a security community is effectively taking root across the strait of Gibraltar under the EU aegis, this would certainly set a promising precedent.

The single case study offered by Bremberg is generous in empirical detail, analytical depth and inductive theoretical implications. It draws on more than 70 interviews in Brussels, Madrid and Rabat, with some insights and quotes from officials from the European Commission, the

General Secretariat of the Council and the Spanish ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence being simply priceless – the Moroccan sources feature less prominently in the book, but the effort to go beyond usual Eurocentric accounts of Euro-Mediterranean relations is still noticeable. The empirical findings are presented in three chapters that subsequently trace the emergence of cooperative practices in the area of trade and the related process of institutionalisation of EU-Morocco relations – from the EMP Association Agreement to the so-called Advanced Status enabled by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) –, in crisis management operations within the Common Security and defence Policy (CSDP) – especially Morocco’s pioneering participation in the EUFOR Althea operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina – and in EU and Euro-Mediterranean civil protection. These are all success stories in EU-Morocco relations which have specifically and *practically* contributed to reinforcing Spanish-Moroccan cooperation in line with the author’s argument. At the same time, the budding security community has not dispelled long-lasting bilateral practices of balance of power and the widespread ‘notion that things can always “go wrong”’ (p. 55) between the two countries. Accurately capturing the inherent duality of Spanish-Moroccan relations, Bremberg claims that this somewhat pessimistic assumption has resulted in Spanish and Moroccan diplomats developing ‘an embryonic version of the practice of self-restraint’ to prevent the escalation of cyclical crises (p. 55).

The conclusion that security community-building beyond the EU’s borders is possible in the absence of shared identity or values does not prevent the author from acknowledging some of the problematic unintended consequences of the depoliticisation and technocratisation of EU-Morocco relations (p. 136), especially on normative issues such as human rights and democratisation which have become a matter of greater concern in the aftermath of the Arab Spring (p. 143). Another related problem that would be worth exploring further from the perspective of practices is the dark side of the superficial socialisation of southern authoritarian elites who routinely and competently interact with EU actors, have ‘learnt to speak’ the language (p. 90) of EU bureaucrats but resist any deeper change in their political values. Also, as a way of comparison, the analytical framework of this book is certainly crying aloud to be applied to other EU member/non-member dyadic couples such as Greece-Turkey, which share with Spain-Morocco a troublesome historical/colonial background and utter geographical contiguity. In any case, this does nothing but confirm the significance of a ground-breaking monograph that does unusually well on both theory and empirics, and will be useful for a broad range of readers.

References

Adler, E., F. Bicchieri, B. Crawford and R.A. del Sarto (eds.) (2006) *The Convergence of Civilizations: Constructing a Mediterranean Region* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).