



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

Department of Political Science

STVM01  
Tutor: Rikard Bengtsson

# The EU's interregional relationship with the GCC

-an assessment of the current cooperation

Åsa Trulsson

# Abstract

The emergence of interregionalism has been claimed to be one of the major changes affecting international relations in current times. The following study highlights the concept of interregionalism through the regional cooperation between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council. The objective of this study is to assess the current EU-GCC interregional cooperation through in-depth interviews with EU officials operating in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The study focuses on two of EU's foreign policy objectives, the promotion of regional cooperation and the promotion of democracy and human rights. These policy objectives are of particular importance as the GCC member states are all authoritarian regimes. In order to assess the interregional cooperation the concept of interregionalism, EU's two mentioned foreign policy objectives and the GCC as an organization, are addressed. The analysis, based on the theoretical framework together with the interview results, identifies the main barriers and effects of the EU-GCC cooperation as well as suggests measures that could possibly enhance the collaboration. The findings show that the promotion of the EU foreign policy objective of regionalism can be seen as a tool, and even a prerequisite, for promotion of the foreign policy objective of democracy and human rights.

*Key words:* interregionalism, the European Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council, foreign policy objectives, international relations

# Table of contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Methodology and selection.....</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1	Scientific fundament.....	2
2.2	Method and research outline.....	2
2.3	Limitations.....	3
<b>3</b>	<b>Interregionalism.....</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1	The emergence of interregionalism.....	5
3.1.1	Interregional external foreign relations and the EU.....	6
3.2	Interregionalism - exporting domestic values?.....	6
<b>4</b>	<b>EU's foreign policy objectives.....</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1	Regionalism.....	8
4.2	Democracy, good governance and human rights.....	8
<b>5</b>	<b>The GCC.....</b>	<b>10</b>
5.1	The GCC member states.....	10
5.1.1	The civil liberties situation.....	11
5.1.2	Women in the GCC States.....	11
5.2	The GCC objectives.....	12
<b>6</b>	<b>Analysis.....</b>	<b>14</b>
6.1	The current EU-GCC cooperation.....	14
6.1.1	Democracy and human rights.....	17
6.2	Barriers for enhanced cooperation.....	17
6.2.1	Bilateralism.....	18
6.2.2	Structural and organizational problems.....	18
6.3	Outcomes of the EU-GCC cooperation.....	19
6.3.1	Increased interregional cooperation.....	19
6.3.2	Achievements in democracy and human rights.....	20
6.4	Enhancing the EU-GCC cooperation.....	22
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>References.....</b>	<b>26</b>

# 1 Introduction

The following study will address the concept of interregionalism by examining the current relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The EU has articulated a set of common foreign policy<sup>1</sup> objectives. Among these objectives are the encouragement of regional cooperation and integration and the promotion of democracy, good governance and human rights. This highlights some questions central to the following analysis. Firstly, how do these objectives affect EU's approach to its collaboration with the GCC? Secondly, it raises the question of the compatibility of the objectives in the case of cooperation with authoritarian regimes such as the member states of the GCC. Consequently, opportunities and constraints associated with the cooperation partner arise. Subsequently, the aim is to identify the main dimensions of the collaboration, to highlight the main current challenges, and to outline some steps that might be taken to deepen the cooperation. In order to answer the above, in-depth interviews of EU officials employed at the EU delegation in Riyadh were conducted.

Firstly, the fundamental theory surrounding interregionalism will be presented. The concept of interregionalism will be defined, the emergence of interregionalism will be assessed and ultimately interregionalism as a device to export values and concepts of order to other regions will be discussed. Secondly, the promotion of regionalism as a EU foreign policy objective and moreover, democracy, good governance and human rights as a EU foreign policy objective, will be put forth. Thereafter, the GCC as an organization will be presented. The democracy and good governance situation will be briefly assessed though the current civil liberties and human rights situation followed by a presentation of the main GCC foreign policy objectives. Finally, the EU-GCC relationship will be analyzed, using the results obtained from the interviews, in combination with the above mentioned theoretical framework. The main barriers and effects of the EU-GCC cooperation are identified and measures that could possibly enhance the collaboration are suggested.

---

<sup>1</sup> Foreign policy will be defined widely, and refers to the "activity of developing and managing relationships between [the EU] and other international actors, which promotes the domestic values and interests of the state or actor in question". Smith, Karen, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*. 2008, p. 2

## 2 Methodology and selection

In the following chapter three primary methodological areas are justified and discussed. Firstly, the scientific fundament will be introduced. Secondly, the benefits and limitations of the chosen method, i.e. the in-depth interview form, will be discussed. Finally, the material and general limitation will be mentioned.

### 2.1 Scientific fundament

The study can be said to have been carried out from a constructivist point of view. Thus, the identities and interests of an actor cannot be taken for granted and cannot be assumed to be constant in all situations. One actor can express different interests in different settings, and the interests are changeable over time. Furthermore, both material and social realities affect the relationship between actors.<sup>2</sup> The impact of the EU's external activities strongly reveals EU's significance as an actor in the global political system.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the EU has the ability to exercise influence by shaping the perceptions and expectations of others, which should be seen as a result of internal processes and policies. The relationship between EU's presence, external reaction and its policy response are reflected differently, and to varying degrees, depending on policy area and region<sup>4</sup>.

### 2.2 Method and research outline

The aim of this study was to depict the current EU-GCC interregional cooperation from the perspective of the EU. The method chosen was to conduct a number of in-depth interviews with EU officials as a compliment to a selection of academic research on the area. The material was analyzed by linking the results of the interviews to other scientific research. Hence, the current interregional cooperation between the EU and the GCC has been evaluated through the combination of in-depth interviews with EU officials and the publishing's of academic scholars. This method of research can however be criticized for being

---

<sup>2</sup> Gustavsson, Jakob and Tallberg, Jonas (eds.), *Internationella Relationer*. 2006, p. 88 ff

<sup>3</sup> Bretherton, Charlotte and Vogler, John, *The European Union as a Global Actor*. 2005, p. 1

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 5 f

too subjective, especially in the selection process.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the study is based on both primary and secondary material and variety of sources have been used in order to avoid a unilateral and biased analysis and discussion.

Nonetheless, as the aim of the study is to depict the current EU-GCC interregional cooperation from a EU perspective, interviews were conducted with officials associated with the EU. A total of five interviews were carried out in the spring of 2010. The interview subjects initially approached for the study were EU officials at the EU delegation to the GCC. In addition, political officials formerly affiliated with the EU's Middle Eastern institutions were contacted. The interviews were not recorded and the interview subjects will remain anonymous. This is motivated by the idea that both a recording device and the prospect of being quoted by name would restrict the conversation and thus limit the answers. Consequently, the possibility to confirm the results is restricted. Furthermore, the officials obviously exert a limited degree of independence from the EU itself. While working for the EU gives them a unique insight it also might inhibit criticism of the general EU approach. However, the results from both former and current employees were compatible.

As for the interview as the main tool for collecting material, there is one primary argument advocating its superiority. The in-depth interview enables the gaining of a thorough understanding of the participants' opinions and why they understand themselves and their surroundings in a particular way. It can be claimed that the benefits of the interview method are difficult to surpass if you seek a working method that allows the researcher to get close to the individuals.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the interviewer's influence on the respondents' responses can be regarded as a validity problem since the particular influence of the researcher leading the interview is hard to predict.<sup>7</sup> In this specific study the aim is to assess the current relationship between the EU and the GCC, from a EU point of view. Hence, the gains of the interview, as stated above, compared to, for example, a statistical survey in this case, makes the interview a better option, as there is a possibility to clarify and follow-up.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.3 Limitations

Through a constructivist approach the EU behavior as an actor is also constructed through "the interplay of internal political factors and the perceptions and expectations of outsiders"<sup>9</sup>. In this study particular attention has not been paid to

---

<sup>5</sup> Esaiasson, Peter., Gilljam, Mikael., Oscarsson, Henrik and Wängnerud, Lena, *Metodpraktikan: konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*. 2003, p. 24

<sup>6</sup> Petersson, Bo and Robertson, Alexa, *Identitetsstudier i praktiken*. 2003, p. 39

<sup>7</sup> Esaiasson, Peter *et al.* *Metodpraktikan: konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*. 2003, p. 345

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p. 280

<sup>9</sup> Bretherton, Charlotte and Vogler, John, *The European Union as a Global Actor*. 2005, p. 1

the perceptions and expectations of the GCC as the undertaken interviews were conducted solely with representatives from the EU. In addition, the affects of other structures and actors, such as for example the USA has not been included in the analysis to a great extent. Furthermore, the study is limited to the current collaboration and historical references are limited to a minimum. The somewhat limited selection of interview subjects restricts generalizing conclusions. Nevertheless the result can be said to be productive as it provides some insight in the current nature of the EU-GCC cooperation, provides information about the about the conduct of the EU and more importantly the manner in which expectations and perceptions interact in the construction of shared understandings.

## 3 Interregionalism

Most scientists seem to agree that regionalism<sup>10</sup> is a growing phenomenon. Consequently, interregionalism, defined as “institutionalized relations between world regions”<sup>11</sup>, is now a growing trend in international relations. In fact, the resurgence of international regionalism can be seen as one of the major changes affecting international relations in the past decades<sup>12</sup>. Firstly, the emergence of interregionalism will be presented followed by the identification of interregionalism as a device to export values and concepts of order to other regions.

### 3.1 The emergence of interregionalism

Firstly, it should be pointed out that regions differ according to their function. For example, a regional organization formed for security purposes, and one created for the purpose of economic cooperation, may not be similar in terms of membership, organizational structure building and cooperation principles. The strengthening of the formation of a regional organization is also effected by “external challenges related to economic and security governance”<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, national states respond to both domestic and external impulses, which define and redefine their interest towards regional cooperation. Similarly, Hveem claims that the forces behind the development of regionalism today are multifaceted. Despite this, globalization can be pointed out as one major factor contributing to regionalism<sup>14</sup>, and thus interregionalism, as regional cooperation is seen as a possibility for actors to gain more influence on the global arena. The interregionalism of today can be said to have a great impact on the international system. EU is still the major actor in the expanding network of interregionalism

---

<sup>10</sup> Regionalism can be defined as “the body of ideas that promote an identified geographical or social space as a regional project” or as “a conscious construction of an identity that represents one specific region”. It is, however, usually associated with a policy program and a strategy, and it normally leads to institution building. Hveem, Helge “Explaining the regional phenomenon in an Era of Globalization” in Stubbs, Richard and Underhill, Geoffrey R. D. (eds.), *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*. 2006, p. 296

<sup>11</sup> Hänggi, Heiner *et al.* “Interregionalism – A new phenomenon in international relations” in Hänggi, Heiner *et al.* *Interregionalism and International Relations*. 2006, p. 3

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>14</sup> Rüländ, Jürgen, “Interregionalism – An unfinished agenda” in Hänggi, Heiner *et al.* *Interregionalism and International Relations*. 2006, p. 298



but new international relations are increasing rapidly.<sup>15</sup> There is however several different existing forms of interregional relationships; where the relationship established between the EU and GCC would qualify as a group-to-group dialogue. Subsequently, these regional organizations began developing external foreign relations.

### 3.1.1 Interregional external foreign relations and the EU

Regional organizations exhibit two forms of external relations, relations with a third state and relations with other regional organizations. The EU has developed an impressive amount of interregional relations, and is a major factor in shaping the form of external relations of regional organizations.<sup>16</sup> With regards to the relationship between two regional organizations EU is a leading actor. In quantitative, as well as qualitative, terms the EU is more institutionalized than its counterparts. In addition, EU's external relations "always include a political element such as dialogue on human rights and democracy and are often based on framework cooperation agreements."<sup>17</sup>

## 3.2 Interregionalism - exporting domestic values?

Five major functions of interregionalism are distinguished in the literature; balancing, institution building, rationalization, agenda setting and collective identity building. However, it can also be established that core players, such as the EU, use international relations and thus interregionalism "as a device to export their values and concepts of order to other regions"<sup>18</sup>. Relatedly, Risse *et al.* have shown that the behavior of international actors can in fact lead to changes in domestic state behavior.<sup>19</sup> Their model of human rights change offers an explanation for a state's shift from non-compliance with human rights norms to the internalization of the norms through ratification of treaties and consequently the rule-abiding behavior that results from this internalization.<sup>20</sup> In fact, scholars have pointed out that the international context has often been treated as a secondary factor behind the processes of democratization<sup>21</sup> and Huntington identifies global, rather than national, factors as crucial regarding the third wave

---

<sup>15</sup> Hänggi, Heiner, "Interregionalism as a multifaceted phenomenon – In search of a typology" in Hänggi, Heiner *et al. Interregionalism and International Relations*. 2006, p. 32

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p. 34

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p. 43 f

<sup>18</sup> Rüländ, Jürgen, "Interregionalism – an unfinished agenda" in Hänggi, Heiner *et al. Interregionalism and International Relations*. 2006, p. 302

<sup>19</sup> Risse, T *et al.*, *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*. 1999, p. 2

<sup>20</sup> Solomon, Ty, "Norms and Human Rights in International Relations", *Political Studies Review*. 2006, p. 38 f

<sup>21</sup> Linde, Jonas and Ekman, Joakim, *Demokratiseringsprocesser*. 2006, p. 187

of democratization.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the EU generally propagates European concepts of good governance, rule of law, human rights, liberal democracy and market economy for adoption by their counterparts. Rüländ concludes, that in the interregional dialogues EU is involved in, Europeans expect that the adoption of what they consider as universal values and internationally accepted rules will level the playing field.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the foreign policy objectives promoted by the EU through interregionalism should be attended to more closely.

---

<sup>22</sup> Linde, Jonas and Ekman, Joakim, *Demokratiseringsprocesser*. 2006, p. 187

<sup>23</sup> Rüländ, Jürgen, "Interregionalism – an unfinished agenda" in Hänggi, Heiner *et al.* *Interregionalism and International Relations*. 2006, p. 302

## 4 EU's foreign policy objectives

### 4.1 Regionalism

The promotion of regional cooperation is clearly a EU foreign policy objective that stems directly from its own internal identity. According to some this is an area where the EU's soft power reinforces its pursuit of the objective. Generally speaking the EU tries to persuade a regional grouping, like the GCC, to "proceed with further cooperative and integrative steps"<sup>24</sup>. The promotion of the policy can be seen as mixture of far-sighted strategy and ad hoc responses to external demands and is also an objective shared by all the EU member states and institutions (above all the European Commission).<sup>25</sup> The reasons for the promotion of regional cooperation can be roughly divide into "self-interest" and "altruism". The self-interest reason can in turn be divide into materialist, such as strengthening the EU's power, and idealist, such as building the EU's identity as a global actor.<sup>26</sup> According to the idealist regional cooperation, not only justifies and promotes EU as an actor, but also strengthens other regions, which in turn promotes more region-building and interregionalism. Finally, the more altruistic reasons for encouraging regional cooperation derive from the conviction that regional cooperation provides the basis for peace, economic development and prosperity.<sup>27</sup>

### 4.2 Democracy, good governance and human rights

Since the beginning of the 90s the promotion of democracy and good governance has become a distinctive and prominent foreign policy objective of the EU. It entails helping to build institutions and foster a democratic culture. There is a difficulty in legitimizing this particular objective as there is an absence in agreed definitions of the terms democracy and good governance and furthermore, there are no international treaties protection and promotion the two concepts.<sup>28</sup> In

---

<sup>24</sup> Smith, Karen, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*. 2008, p. 109

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p. 79

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p. 80

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p. 81

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p. 142

addition, promoting democracy is an ambitious objective, as it requires fundamental transformation of government and society.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast, there is a considerable body of international law on human rights, which has been accepted by governments of all types.<sup>30</sup> For this reason, human rights can be considered a separate foreign policy objective and ideally the concepts of democracy, good governance and human rights should be treated separately. However, as the EU often links the concepts together<sup>31</sup>, they will hereafter be addressed together.

That the EU promotes human rights is a significant element of its international image and the internal pressure to pursue an external human rights policy is strong. The EU is not unique in this pursuit, however its way of promoting human rights is. The EU prefers persuasion through dialogue and is reluctant to use negative measures. Moreover, the promotion of human rights is based on legal texts, the human rights clauses in legal agreements and regulations on aid.<sup>32</sup> With regards to democracy and good governance the effectiveness of the EU's pursuit is difficult to determine as the above mentioned lack of international standards and does not provide much solid ground on which to push other countries to implement democratic and good governance reforms.<sup>33</sup> Yet, democracy, good governance and human rights are promoted through both top-down and bottom-up measures, aid for democratization, election observation and assistance, diplomatic instruments and civil missions. In addition, the economic advantages of the EU greatly facilitates the promotion of the Union's foreign policy objectives as the EU can both offer and deny rewards such as market access or privileged dialogue, a powerful magnet for outsiders.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the discussed areas of democracy, good governance and human rights all face the same problems related to the internal-external policy gap and the rhetoric-practice gap. The EU's promotion of the mentioned foreign policy objectives will suffer, as well as the legitimacy and credibility of the Union, as long as these gaps are not closed. In addition, there are also subsequent dilemmas presented above regarding the balance of the Union's self-interest and its encouragement of moral codes.<sup>35</sup> Hence, is there seems to be an inclination to pursue the promotion of one foreign policy objective, regionalism, in favor of another and moreover, are the two mentioned foreign policy objectives even compatible in the case of the EU-GCC cooperation?

---

<sup>29</sup> Smith, Karen, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*. 2008, p. 111

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> See for example EU Commission Communication (I), *Agenda 2000: For a stronger and wider Europe*. 1997, p. 27. Last visited on 2010-07-02 <http://www.ena.lu/commission-communication-agenda-2000-stronger-wider-union-1997-020006131.html>

<sup>32</sup> Smith, Karen, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*. 2008, p. 141

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p. 168

<sup>34</sup> Smith, Michael "The Foreign Policy of the European Union" in Stubbs, Richard and Underhill, Geoffrey R. D. (eds.), *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*. 2006, p. 395

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p. 394

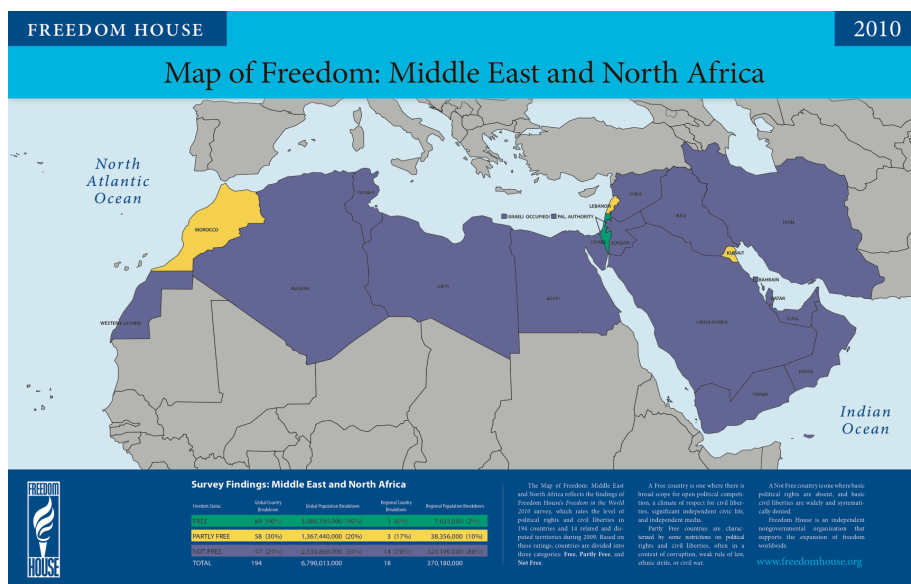
## 5 The GCC

The Gulf Cooperation Council was established in 1981. This political and economic alliance consists of the six Middle Eastern countries; Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. All of the GCC member states are classified as authoritarian regimes. In order to assess the EU-GCC cooperation, and moreover EU's promotion of the above mentioned foreign policy objectives, the key elements of authoritarian rule in the Gulf will be presented. Thereafter, the political and civil liberties situation in the GCC countries will be evaluated. Finally, the GCC objectives will be brought forth.

### 5.1 The GCC member states

As mentioned above, the GCC countries all qualify as authoritarian states. Authoritarian rulers generally seek to maintain their own control, and increase their own wealth, by limiting mass participation.<sup>36</sup> As shown below, Freedom House classifies five of the six Gulf States as “not free” whereas Kuwait is defined as “partly free”<sup>37</sup>.

Figure 1. Map of Freedom 2010



<sup>36</sup> Hague, Rod - Harrop, Martin, *Comparative Government and Politics – An Introduction*. 2007, p. 61

<sup>37</sup> For Freedom House's methodology, see [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).

### 5.1.1 The civil liberties situation

In relation to the above it is of interest to briefly give an overview of the political rights and civil liberties situation in the Gulf States. The GCC member states all have a ruling king from a royal family, with other family members in key political and military posts.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, government takes the form of an elite group rather than a single dominant leader. Civil and human rights are generally poorly respected and constitutional limitations often leads to mistreatment of different groups, such as minority groups, non-nationals, prisoners and women.<sup>39</sup> Formal political parties are generally illegal. For example, Bahrain banned the formation of political associations based on class, profession, or religion in 2005.<sup>40</sup> All GCC states have a law restricting freedom of expression. For instance, United Arab Emirates prohibits the publication of “defamatory material and negative material about presidents, friendly countries, [and] religious issues”<sup>41</sup> and the constitution of Oman states that the person of the Sultan is “inviolable and must be respected and his orders must be obeyed”<sup>42</sup>. As the first state of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Qatar introduce universal suffrage for men and women in 1999, however only about 20% percent of the country’s population are allowed to vote or hold office.<sup>43</sup> Finally, Saudi Arabia is considered to be the most authoritarian state out of the GCC countries and according to Freedom House the country has of late made little progress on political and judicial reform.<sup>44</sup>

### 5.1.2 Women in the GCC States

Freedom House has identified the unequal status of women in the societies of the Middle East as a “particularly formidable obstacle” in the process of social and political change. The Gulf region can be identified as the region in the world where “the gap between the rights of men and those of women has been most clear and substantial”<sup>45</sup>. Generally women are not treated as equal members of society, and many laws discriminate against them. For example, in Saudi Arabia women are forbidden to open a bank account and their use of public facilities is restricted when men are present. By law Saudi women cannot travel outside of the

---

<sup>38</sup> Hague, Rod - Harrop, Martin, *Comparative Government and Politics – An Introduction*. 2007, p. 66

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p. 62 ff

<sup>40</sup> Freedom House World Report 2009, “Bahrain”,

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7562> Last visited 2010-05-16

<sup>41</sup> Freedom House World Report 2009 “United Arab Emirates”

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7727> Last visited 2010-05-15

<sup>42</sup> Hague, Rod - Harrop, Martin, *Comparative Government and Politics – An Introduction*. 2007, p. 77

<sup>43</sup> Freedom House World Report 2009, “Qatar”

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7687> Last visited 2010-05-16

<sup>44</sup> Freedom House World Report 2009 “Saudi Arabia”

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7696> Last visited 2010-05-16

<sup>45</sup> Kelly, Sanja, “Recent Gains and New Opportunities for Women’s Rights” in Freedom House *Women’s rights in the Middle East and North Africa*, Gulf Edition, 2009,

<http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=164&parent=15&report=76> Last visited 2010-05-16

country without a male relative.<sup>46</sup> Kuwaiti women have the right to vote and run as candidates in parliamentary and local elections. Nevertheless, they are required to have a male guardian in order to marry.<sup>47</sup>

However, improvements have been made in various areas. In Bahrain and the UAE, the first women judges were appointed. Moreover, the family laws in both Qatar and the UAE have been codified. In Qatar and Bahrain the laws requiring women to obtain permission from their guardians in order to travel were abolished and in Oman, the government introduced a law in 2008 stipulating that men's and women's court testimony would be considered equal.<sup>48</sup>

## 5.2 The GCC objectives

The highest decision-making entity of the GCC is the Supreme Council, which meets on an annual basis and consists of the member states' heads of state. Decisions of the Supreme Council are adopted by unanimous approval. Organizationally it should be mentioned that the GCC member states have "an institutionalized form of personalized power, a patriarchal or patrimonial power over the rational legal forms of infrastructural power"<sup>49</sup>. Hence, the official political power of the executive might be highly personalized but it is also controlled by the extended ruling family, which in turn, is often supported by the senior member of prominent families and the regional establishment. As a result, decisions on foreign policies issues may emerge slowly due to a long consultative process.<sup>50</sup>

The organization's main purpose is to achieve unity among its members based on their common objectives and their similar political and cultural identities, which are rooted in Islamic beliefs. This is also stated in Article 4 in the GCC charter, which declares that the alliance was formed to strengthen relations among its member countries and to promote cooperation among the countries' citizens. The coordination and cooperation on a common foreign policy has traditionally evolved around three main objectives namely Islamic solidarity, pan-Arabism and security. As a result, the GCC emphasizes the primacy of Islam and strategic alliances with dominant western powers for security.<sup>51</sup> As an entity the GCC has concerned itself with several international issues that affect its member states.

---

<sup>46</sup> Freedom House World Report 2009 "Saudi Arabia"

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7696> Last visited 2010-05-16

<sup>47</sup> Freedom House World Report 2009, "Kuwait",

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7640> Last visited 2010-05-16

<sup>48</sup> Kelly, Sanja, "Recent Gains and New Opportunities for Women's Rights" in Freedom House *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa*, Gulf Edition, 2009,

<http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=164&parent=15&report=76> Last visited 2010-05-16

<sup>49</sup> Alasfoor, Reyadh, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Its Nature and Achievements*. 2007, p. 125

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.* p. 123

However, the organizational ability to influence its external environment is based primarily on its position as an oil supplier and its financial power in the global economy. Much of the GCC's ability to influence derives from the ability of one member state, namely Saudi Arabia. In addition, it is important to keep in mind that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the custodian of Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina, making the protection of the Islamic way of life an important responsibility for the country. This can be said to be a major factor in the shaping of the GCC foreign policy priorities.<sup>52</sup> Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that many Saudi Arabian policies have been adopted directly by the GCC.

Since the beginning of this century the GCC has undergone a transformation. The GCC member states have faced several regional, global and internal challenges and there has been a realization of the importance to revive the GCC regional cooperation, specifically in areas such as economic integration and security defense cooperation.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the Gulf States have come to the conclusion that they need to develop extensive economic, political and social relationships with other regional actors.

The GCC member States agree on the types of challenges that need to be confronted, such as the Iranian nuclear program, the stability of Iraq and Yemen, and a general need for sustainable economic and political development. In addition, from a GCC perspective, Iran is a threat to the regional balance of power. Hence, the GCC can be viewed as a unitary actor and the organization is actively looking for alternatives to resolve the current regional instability.<sup>54</sup> The GCC has realized the need for both strategies and policy tools for dealing with these challenges and has of late implemented measures to strengthen the still relatively weak organization. Yet, some scholars argue that the GCC cannot overcome these challenges without external involvement.<sup>55</sup> However, it is important to remember that five of the six GCC states have experienced colonial rule until as late as the 1960s and 1970s, making the member states sensitive to external meddling.

---

<sup>52</sup> Alasfoor, Reyadh, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Its Nature and Achievements*. 2007, p. 124

<sup>53</sup> Coskun, Bezen Balamir, *The GCC's Soft Security Agenda & the EU's Role in Facilitating Confidence and Security Building in the Persian Gulf: Problems and Prospects*. 2007, p. 5

<sup>54</sup> Bauer, Michael *et al.* *The EU-GCC Partnership: Security and Policy Challenges*. 2010, p. 5 f

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p. 4.



## 6 Analysis

The EU-GCC cooperation can be identified as an interregional relation in a narrower sense, which is also known as “pure interregionalism”<sup>56</sup>. This type of cooperation is characterized by a low level of institutionalization, usually at a ministerial, ambassadorial and senior officials’ level, sometimes supplemented by permanent or ad hoc experts’ working groups. There are no overarching institutions and both sides rely on their own institutional infrastructure.<sup>57</sup> In the following the current EU-GCC cooperation will be presented. Secondly, the main barriers for an enhancement of the cooperation will be identified and the effects of this interregional cooperation will be discussed. Finally, some suggestions will be made as to how the EU-GCC relation might be further enhanced.

### 6.1 The current EU-GCC cooperation

Despite the strategic importance of the Gulf the interregional relationship between the EU and the GCC has developed relatively slowly. The EU has had its focus elsewhere and has also received criticism for its “late awakening” regarding the establishing of a cooperation with the GCC. Thus, even though the relationship between Europe and the Gulf stretches back for nearly two centuries it was not until the mid-2000s that EU and GCC forged closer ties. In fact, the interview subjects expressed some frustration with EU’s previous long-drawn-out approach, and even to some extent, “neglecting attitude” towards the GCC. It should also be noted that it was not until 2004 the first EU delegation in the region was established in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. However, being it due to the terror attacks of 9-11, Iran’s nuclear agenda, the invasion of Iraq or a change in priorities, both the EU and the GCC States have become more interested in developing stronger interregional ties.<sup>58</sup>

In spite of the initial hopes of rapidly expanding the EU-GCC cooperation to include political areas, more specifically those concerning human rights and democratic reforms, the relationship has primarily been characterized as an economic cooperation involving trade issues, above all the finalizing of the Free

---

<sup>56</sup> Rüländ, Jürgen, “Interregionalism – an unfinished agenda” in Hänggi, Heiner *et al.* *Interregionalism and International Relations*. 2006, p. 295 f

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p. 296

<sup>58</sup> Malmvig, Helle, *An unlikely match or a marriage in the making? EU-GCC relations in a changing security environment*. 2006, p. 1

Trade Agreement (FTA). The FTA negotiations began in 1989 and the agreement was at length finalized in the spring of 2010. However, nowadays the interregional cooperation evolves around several regional, economical and political issues. During the interviews it was pointed that the two organizations have been able to reach common ground in several areas. The question of terrorism, the importance of the Middle East as a nuclear free zone and the Middle East Peace Process are just a few examples.<sup>59</sup> It is thus fair to claim that the cooperation has gone from being characterized as an economic partnership to an interregional cooperation in several areas. This can be seen in EU's *Strategic Partnership Initiative with the Mediterranean and the Middle East* (SPI), adopted by the European Council in 2004. The SPI includes the issues of the Middle East Peace Process, Political Dialogue, Human Rights and the Rule of Law, Non-Proliferation, Security Dialogue and Counter-Terrorism, Migration, Economic Reform, Social Development and Cultural dialogue. Hence, the ties run deeper than before when the areas of economy and security dominated.<sup>60</sup>

The interest of the EU in the Middle East in general, and in GCC in particular, can be said to be multidimensional. From a EU point of view a central argument for cooperation with the GCC was the concern for stability in the MENA- region. To achieve stability in a region the common EU-approach is, as mentioned above, to offer support for political reform, respect for human rights and freedom of expression. Moreover, the EU wanted to create of a framework for petroleum import from the Gulf and in addition, the EU hoped that the Gulf States could exert a moderation influence in the Arab-Israel conflict. The early hopes of the GCC, on the other hand, were the possibility of accessing the European market for petrochemicals and the expectation of similar trade concession as those enjoyed by for example Israel. In addition, the GCC hoped that EU could compliment the US policy in the Arab-Israel conflict.<sup>61</sup>

The interview subjects were in consensus regarding the relatively strong position of the EU in the GCC negotiations. Even though the EU is not viewed as a strong security actor but is currently seen as a strong economic and civilian player.<sup>62</sup> The GCC countries geo-strategic position and its relative wealth were however acknowledged. The GCC member states are all affluent states, making EU's financial assistance unnecessary<sup>63</sup>, and moreover they are major suppliers of

---

<sup>59</sup> Malmvig, Helle, *An unlikely match or a marriage in the making? EU-GCC relations in a changing security environment*. 2006, p. 4

<sup>60</sup> Kamal El-Amir, Nilly, *Towards a Security Transregional Relations between the EU and the GCC: Possibilities and Obstacles*. 2007, p. 8

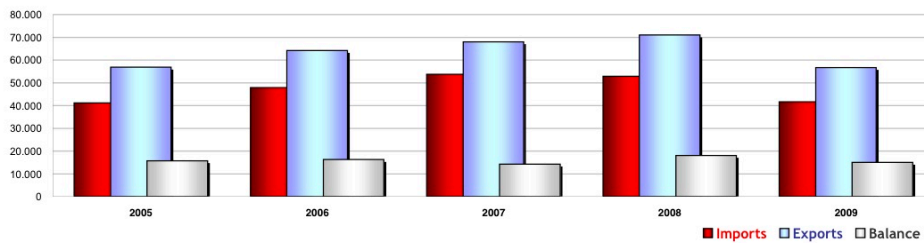
<sup>61</sup> Nonneman, Gerd, "EU-GCC Relations: Dynamics, Perspectives and Political Reform", *Journal of Social Affairs*. 2006, p. 14 f

<sup>62</sup> Coskun, Bezen Balamir, *The GCC's Soft Security Agenda & the EU's Role in Facilitating Confidence and Security Building in the Persian Gulf: Problems and Prospects*. 2007, p. 12 and Malmvig, Helle, *An unlikely match or a marriage in the making? EU-GCC relations in a changing security environment*. 2006, p. 9

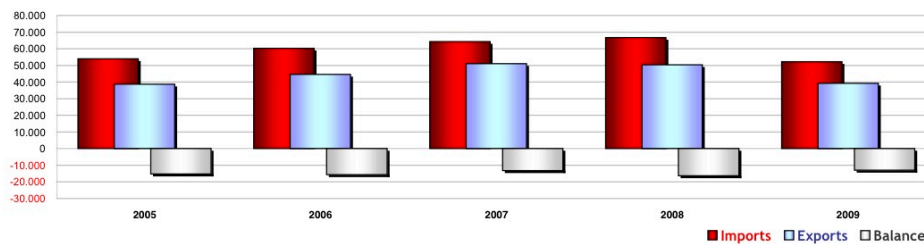
<sup>63</sup> Coskun, Bezen Balamir, *The GCC's Soft Security Agenda & the EU's Role in Facilitating Confidence and Security Building in the Persian Gulf: Problems and Prospects*. 2007, p. 13

oil and gas to the EU.<sup>64</sup> Actually, the GCC countries have over half the world's proven oil (57%) and natural gas (45%) reserves.<sup>65</sup> Despite this, the interview subjects did not agree with the argument that the EU has few real carrots to offer the region. In fact, two of the interviewed officials pointed out that the GCC generally tends to believe that it has more leverage than what is truly the case. In terms of for example the energy imports the EU has the option of turning to Russia. More importantly, the EU is GCC's second largest trade partner at 16,3 %, only surpassed by Japan by 0,2 %. In contrast, the GCC is only EU's seventh largest trade partner, constituting a mere 3,7 % of EU's total trade.<sup>66</sup> The balance of trade, illustrated in the graphs below, shows the more favorable position of the EU. The EU's trade balance with the GCC shows a surplus whereas the GCC's trade balance with the EU shows a substantial deficit.

**Graph 1<sup>67</sup>** EU, Trade Balance with the GCC (Millions of €/year)



**Graph 2** GCC, Trade Balance with the EU (Millions of €/year)



<sup>64</sup> Psarras, John., Flamos, Alexandros and Patlitzianas, Kostas, *Enhancing the EU-GCC Relations within a New Climate Regime: Prospects and Opportunities for Cooperation*. 2009, p. 1

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* p. 5

<sup>66</sup> EUROSTAT, (Comext, Statistical Regime 4). 2009, p. 2.f

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

### 6.1.1 Democracy and human rights

The GCC and the EU both support the commitment of all states, as expressed in the World Conference in Vienna in 1993, that all human rights are universal indivisible, interdependent and inter-related.<sup>68</sup> However, as discussed above, the human rights situation, especially regarding freedom of expression and women's rights, is still unsatisfactory. In fact, *The Arab Human Development Report 2002* identifies the freedom and women's empowerment as two of the key deficits in the region.<sup>69</sup> However, it should be pointed out that despite similarities in the authoritarian rule of the GCC States, the countries are heterogeneous in term of liberalization. Countries such as Qatar and Kuwait are far more liberal than Saudi Arabia. Yet, despite that the above mentioned SPI calls for democratic reforms in the Middle East, there has been continuous critique towards the EU for not pushing the issue of the poor human rights' record of the GCC states more in its negotiations. However, as mentioned in the interviews, one reason for the slow finalizing process of for example the FTA, was the criticism from the European Parliament in this particular area. Moreover, issues of human rights and political reform still remain sensitive areas, and there is a deep suspicion against external actors meddling in any reform process in the Gulf. Nonetheless, the EU's approach of consolation and dialogue has been perceived as less patronizing, and more trustworthy, than that of the US, an argument the interview subjects used in favor of the current approach. The interview subjects also stressed that references to human rights and democracy are a regular part of EU-GCC documents. Yet, these statements are usually followed by explanations on how reform must come from within. Thus, one of EU main strengths can also be turned into its weakness as this reasoning easily can be used as justification for both the EU and the GCC not to move forward in these areas. In fact, the official EU stance emphasizes that democracy should not be imposed from the outside but should be furthered in close dialogue with local partners of the region.<sup>70</sup>

## 6.2 Barriers for enhanced cooperation

Both the EU and the GCC have strong interests, economic, political and strategic ones, for strengthening the current cooperation. However, the divergence of the member states, an underdeveloped common foreign external policy, and organizational restrictions limit both organizations.

---

<sup>68</sup> Kamal El- Amir, Nilly, *Towards a Security Transregional Relations between the EU and the GCC: Possibilities and Obstacles*. 2007, p. 10

<sup>69</sup> UNDP, *The Arab Human Development Report 2002*. 2002, p. 27

<sup>70</sup> Coskun, Bezen Balamir, *The GCC's Soft Security Agenda & the EU's Role in Facilitating Confidence and Security Building in the Persian Gulf: Problems and Prospects*. 2007, p. 17

## 6.2.1 Bilateralism

The EU-GCC cooperation has been criticized for having a prevalence of bilateral state-to-state negotiations rather than a functioning interregional cooperation.<sup>71</sup> The interview subjects pointed out that the GCC countries seldom act as one united block, perhaps partly because they historically have been cautious of one another. Rather than enhancing their own collective institutions and capabilities they have tended to make separate agreements on matters of for example defense and free trade with external powers. For the GCC countries to seek individual Free Trade Agreements only weakens the bargaining power of the GCC as a whole. However, not mentioned by the interview subjects, the EU member states have also had difficulties in this area. Firstly, the dualistic nature of the EU system regarding the foreign policy, with the EC having competence for external economic relations, the CFSP for foreign and security policy, has implication on the organizations external representation, the decision-making procedures and implementation. Perhaps as a result of this, the EU member states have their own bilateral agenda with the Gulf and it can thus be argued that the EU, in the Gulf region, is a housing for different interest rather than a unitary actor. Especially France, United Kingdom and Germany have enjoyed favorable relations with the GCC States, which the GCC states have used advantageously. Even the area of democratic transition is a case of division among the EU members as several member states favor pragmatic security and trade cooperation over long-term goal of reform. Hence, the EU lacks a unitary approach and a county in the forefront of a greater involvement in the Gulf. In fact, it has even been claimed that “the EU-GCC relationship has still not reached priority status within the EU” and that the political will for this is absent.<sup>72</sup> In addition, the EU member states disagree as to how important relations with the GCC states are, in comparison to for example the EU relations with the Mediterranean states.<sup>73</sup> Even though the problem of European bilateralism was not expressed in the interviews, the interview subjects did express a need for the EU to prioritize the EU-GCC cooperation more.

## 6.2.2 Structural and organizational problems

As mentioned with regards to the problem of bilateralism, there are problematic implications of the different EU member states and the institutions not acting as a unitary player. This of course creates difficulties in a number of areas in terms of transparency, predictability and legitimacy.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Malmvig, Helle, *An unlikely match or a marriage in the making? EU-GCC relations in a changing security environment*. 2006, p. 11

<sup>72</sup> Smith, Karen, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*. 2008, p. 89

<sup>73</sup> Malmvig, Helle, *An unlikely match or a marriage in the making? EU-GCC relations in a changing security environment*. 2006, p. 9 f

<sup>74</sup> Nonneman, Gerd, “EU-GCC Relations: Dynamics, Perspectives and Political Reform”, *Journal of Social Affairs*. 2006, p. p. 15 ff

In addition, the difficulties of the current location of the EU delegation to the GCC should be pointed out. Since Saudi Arabia could also be characterized as the core member of the GCC cooperation, the location of the EU delegation is logical. However, as mentioned above, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the custodian of Islam's two holiest cities, making the protection of the Islamic way of life an important responsibility for the country. Given the nature of the strict implementation of wahabism in the country the operational possibilities of the EU delegation become limited to say the least, in fact many of EU's civil society interactions becomes virtually impossible. As an example, the EU delegation and the EU member states' working groups in Riyadh put a lot of effort into enhancing civil and cultural cooperation. To illustrate the limitations it can be mentioned that the EU member states, together with the delegation, arrange a yearly occurring film festival screening European movies to the domestic population. However, sever restrictions are in place for such events taking place in Saudi Arabia. Firstly, unrelated men and women are generally segregated in public facilities, making the organizational tasks of finding a venue and obtaining approval from the Saudi authorities an obstacle in itself. Moreover, many European movies are considered unsuitable for a Saudi audience by the domestic authorities, and all films must be submitted and screened. This is just to illustrate some of the many existing obstacles.

Finally, it can be argued that the GCC demonstrates more limitations than the EU organizationally, as the GCC is in a less developed stage of integration. For example the GCC Secretariat has nowhere near the functional equivalence of the Commission and it has small budgetary means. The organizational problems of the GCC were mentioned in the interviews as a significant hindrance to the enhancement of the interregional cooperation. Mostly due to an unclear hierarchical structure, decision-making and cooperation on several organizational levels is impossible. In addition, the organization has been critiqued for a limited willingness to allow genuine regional decision-making and a general reluctance to delegate.<sup>75</sup> In order for an enhanced EU-GCC cooperation, both the EU and the GCC should develop a better collective diplomacy and prioritize a unitary approach to their external relations.

## 6.3 Outcomes of the EU-GCC cooperation

### 6.3.1 Increased interregional cooperation

In light of the continued increase in areas of cooperation between the EU and the GCC, the EU can be accredited for being successful in the fostering of the

---

<sup>75</sup> Nonneman, Gerd, "EU-GCC Relations: Dynamics, Perspectives and Political Reform", *Journal of Social Affairs*. 2006, p. 22

cooperation. EU is considered a respectable partner in terms of promoting cooperation and mutual dialogue in the region. In addition, EU's efforts for the reconciliation between Israel and Palestine, its contribution in the security sector, the reform in Iraq, and its constructive role in nuclear proliferation negotiations with Iran have all made the EU appear as a trustworthy partner.<sup>76</sup> In addition, the establishment of the GCC custom union, however not yet fully established, is encouraged by the EU. Moreover, the finalizing of the FTA is an achievement. That the GCC states have managed to secure a FTA with the main economic power in the world will not only increase their economic power in the world but also open up to new connections useable in the fight against terrorism. Yet, crucial as the FTA may be, the EU-GCC cooperation now shares many common interest regarding security, education and the environment. Issues that formerly were perceived as harmful by the GCC, such as EU's environmental policies<sup>77</sup>, are now seen as a source of cooperation. Thus, the GCC has realized the necessity of cooperation, not least in areas such as the fight against terrorism but also regarding nuclear safety and public health. Hence, the need to deal successfully with certain issues can override the reluctance of certain nations to cooperate.

### 6.3.2 Achievements in democracy and human rights

There will be no attempt to verify any causality between the EU-GCC cooperation and any actual changes made in the area of democracy and human rights in the Gulf states. However, it is apparent that the EU views political reforms, as essential ingredients in its collaboration with the GCC.

With raging youth unemployment, a booming population and increasing social and political discontent the Gulf monarchies might have realized that some political and economic reform is needed. In addition, there is an increasing domestic pressure for change and a growing dissatisfaction corruption and accountability.<sup>78</sup> Hence, several of the GCC countries have initialized small stage political liberalization. For example, women in the Gulf region have made notable gains in their ability to vote and run for elected offices, hold high-level government positions, and lobby the government for expanded rights.<sup>79</sup> Municipal elections have been held in Saudi Arabia, the elections of the members of the Consultative Council were open for both sexes in Oman and in Qatar human rights organizations have been allowed to establish. Yet, it has also been

---

<sup>76</sup> Coskun, Bezen Balamir, *The GCC's Soft Security Agenda & the EU's Role in Facilitating Confidence and Security Building in the Persian Gulf: Problems and Prospects*. 2007, p. 17

<sup>77</sup> El-Amir Kamal Nilly, *Towards a Security Transregional Relations between the EU and the GCC: Possibilities and Obstacles*. 2007, p. 13

<sup>78</sup> Malmvig, Helle, *An unlikely match or a marriage in the making? EU-GCC relations in a changing security environment*. 2006, p. 7 ff

<sup>79</sup> Kelly, Sanja, "Recent Gains and New Opportunities for Women's Rights" in Freedom House *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa*, Gulf Edition, 2009,

<http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=164&parent=15&report=76> Last visited 2010-05-16

suggested that these hints of liberalization are purely cosmetic and have amounted in very little.<sup>80</sup>

One might criticize the EU for not putting enough pressure on the GCC countries in this area and for not being particularly effective in pressing political reform, but the EU-GCC cooperation has benefitted from the chosen approach. The USA has historically been the dominant external actor in the region, but is now accused, by the GCC, of having a far too “imperial approach”, and the interviews revealed a confidence in the “softer” tactics used by the EU. Moreover, the increase of cooperation areas is a strong indication of the GCC’s awakened commitment to the cooperation. Hence, the interview subjects rejected the statement that the EU’s desire to put human rights and democracy issues on the agenda is an obstacle to a closer EU-GCC relation.<sup>81</sup> Instead the strategy seems to be the achievement of a democratic transition through a strong interregional relationship. Also, the interview subjects pointed out that even though the GCC at times saw EU’s call for good governance and human rights reforms as a diversionary tactic, agreements have been signed.

Nevertheless, it does seem as though EU’s interest in policies on political reform and good governance are stuck between the “EU’s awareness of the importance of these issues and its stated global commitment to foster them and its own limited ability to develop an implement a sustained common policy on the matter”<sup>82</sup>. Thus, it is of importance for the EU to establish a more unitary approach and to continue to pursue both the above mentioned foreign policy objectives.

To sum up, the EU has gained an open window for some dialogue on human rights and good governance. As the GCC has opened up for political dialogue on a regional level the foreign policy objectives of the promotion of regionalism and the promotion of democracy and human rights seems intertwined and interdependent. Obviously the development of the EU-GCC interregional cooperation is a strong indication of the improvement of regionalism, whereas the EU’s achievements in the democracy and human rights area are more difficult to assess. However, it can be concluded that regionalism can be viewed as a successful tool to gain the trust, and respect the sovereignty, of the counterpart. In addition, it can be used as a tool for the promotion of democratization and human rights.

---

<sup>80</sup> Herb, Michael, “Princes, Parliaments and the Prospects of Democracy” in Pripstein Posusney & Penner Angrist, *Authoritarianism in the Middle East – Regimes and Resistance*. 2005, p. 169 f

<sup>81</sup> Smith, Karen, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*. 2008, p. 87

<sup>82</sup> Nonneman, Gerd, “EU-GCC Relations: Dynamics, Perspectives and Political Reform”, *Journal of Social Affairs*. 2006, p. 28



## 6.4 Enhancing the EU-GCC cooperation

Enhancing the EU-GCC relationship should be a top priority for both organizations. The potential of this relationship can be said to have implications in several areas such as regional security, global economic development and the stability of the world's energy markets.<sup>83</sup> It is evident, not only through the interviews, that the EU wishes to play a more active role in the Gulf region. In addition, the GCC members have indicated an interest in the further consolidation of the GCC as an institution, and the EU supports this intention with practical measures.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, in order to reinforce its political role, the EU should increase its visibility in the Gulf. As an example, the EU's representation in Riyadh should be strengthened and additional delegations in other Gulf countries should be established. It was also mentioned in the interviews that the GCC has to become clearer about what it seeks from closer ties with Europe, and thus take a greater ownership of the relationship. As the EU believes that democratic transition should come from within the enhancement of dialogue and civil society interactions on issues of interest should be stressed, as an increased civil and cultural cooperation might result in positive spillover effects in terms of social reform. In addition, it is of importance to keep political reform and human rights issues high on the agenda and assist the existing reform processes. The interview subjects mentioned projects such as the EU delegation's annual human rights prize awarded to the foremost human rights organization in the Gulf region.

Moreover, in the GCC states there is a need for alternative sources of energy as well as increased energy efficiency in order to save their natural resources for export, is an additional example of interregional cooperation. Indeed the EU-GCC Clean Energy Network was launched in 2009.<sup>85</sup> As the GCC region has among the highest energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions per capita in the world, the area larges scale clean energy technology applications, is yet another possibility to enhance the EU-GCC relations with mutual benefits.<sup>86</sup> However, many issues cannot be driven by governments alone. Connections outside official levels can bring new dimensions into the overall debate. Contacts outside the official level could lead to a greater transparency and a broadening of the debate.<sup>87</sup> In areas such as education, there is currently an ambition to strengthen the participation of the GCC countries in the Erasmus Mundus program.

Additionally, more could be done to support the participation of women in the social and political sphere. By increasing the areas of cooperation there will be a

---

<sup>83</sup> Bauer, Michael., Hanelt, Chistian and Koch, Christian, *The EU-GCC Partnership: Security and Policy Challenges*. 2010, p. 10

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.* p. 9

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p. 7

<sup>86</sup> Psarras, John *et al.* *Enhancing the EU-GCC Relations within a New Climate Regime: Prospects and Opportunities for Cooperation*. 2009, p. 6

<sup>87</sup> Bauer, Michael *et al.* *The EU-GCC Partnership: Security and Policy Challenges*. 2010, p. 8

subsequent increase in interregional relations affecting the views and values of the Gulf.

## 7 Conclusion

In the era of globalization the concept of regionalism, and thus interregionalism, has become essential. In examining the current relationship between the EU and the GCC it is clear that both sides have established interests that could be served by fostering the group-to-group cooperation. The assessment of the EU-GCC cooperation is based on a combination of secondary and primary sources. The results are obviously affected by the methodological approach, and in hindsight some theoretical reflections can be made. Firstly, constructivism as a theoretical point of departure might be problematic as the causality generally is difficult to verify. Another theoretical reflection is that the interview subjects tended to approach the EU as a unitary actor, an undisputed machinery with uniform interests and clear goals. However, as pointed out previously, the EU is far from this assumption. In fact, when referring to the EU it might at times be difficult to distinguish if it is the member states, the Parliament, the Commission, the Council or any other EU institution that is being indicated. The problems with bilateralism, as well as the different priorities of the member states and the EU institutions in terms of the foreign policy objectives, have been discussed. As conclude above, the EU would benefit greatly from a more synchronized approach in its interregional cooperation with the GCC.

As mentioned above, there are several functions of interregionalism. However, the focus of this study has been interregionalism as a device to export values and concepts of order, which is closely linked to EU's foreign policy objectives of regionalism and democracy and human rights. Regarding these objectives the study reveals two main problems. A greater unity and coordination is required in both areas, as for example not even the Commission and the Council has coordinated their policies in the area<sup>88</sup>. Also, it is difficult to address the concepts of democracy, good governance and human rights simultaneously. EU's approach in promoting this particular foreign policy objective might be improved by focusing more on human rights as these are defined and established in international law. This might also lessen the credibility problem of the current gap between rhetoric and reality. The EU cannot afford to be seen to make an exception for the GCC states, to do so would not only lessen EU's credibility, but cause resentment from the organization's other regional partners around the world.

Nevertheless, the EU is in the forefront of interregional relations. The EU's presence and impact have increased, partly as a result of the expansion of its size

---

<sup>88</sup> Smith, Karen, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*. 2008, p. 137

and its policy scope<sup>89</sup>. It cannot be denied that the EU-GCC cooperation has gone from a weak economic relation to an extensive interregional collaboration in several areas. The interview subjects were aware of the EU's strong negotiation position, but this also means an increased obligation for the EU. In addition, the EU's "softer approach" and its reluctance to use negative measures are supported by the interview subjects, and seems to be appreciated by the GCC as well. Even though there has been an enhancement of the interregional cooperation in areas such as environment, security and research, it is difficult to determine to what degree the development in human rights and civil liberties are affected by the EU-GCC cooperation. It is however important to keep in mind that it was not until the 21<sup>st</sup> century that significant steps were taken to further enhance the interregional relationship. Even though the authoritarian rule is still strong in the Gulf region, countries such as Qatar and the UAE now have the highest female-to-male university enrollment ratio worldwide, with women outnumbering men three to one<sup>90</sup>. Also, the Gulf countries have shown the fastest improvements of female education of any region<sup>91</sup>.

In sum, in spite of the limitations of the cooperation, such as a continuing trend of preference for bilateral agreement over interregional ones and a deadlock negotiation process for many years, the current EU-GCC cooperation can be characterized as a comprehensive partnership. The collaboration range from economic and trade relations, cultural and scientific cooperation to collaboration on political and security issues. The EU's policy effectiveness, the attractiveness of its negotiating and regulatory structures, and the multiple roles played by the EU in the global political economy, are some reason for EU's emergence as a major contributor to global governance. Thus EU has an important part to play in assisting the reform process in the Gulf region. However, it is evident that the promotion of the EU foreign policy objective of democracy and human rights would be virtually impossible to encourage without the fostering of interregionalism in general.

---

<sup>89</sup> Bretherton, Charlotte – Vogler, John, *The European Union as a Global Actor*. 2005, p. 6

<sup>90</sup> Kelly, Sanja, "Recent Gains and New Opportunities for Women's Rights" in Freedom House *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa*, Gulf Edition, 2009,

<http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=164&parent=15&report=76> Last visited 2010-05-16

<sup>91</sup> UNDP, *The Arab Human Development Report 2002*. 2002, p. 3

## 8 References

- Alasfoor, Reyadh, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Its Nature and Achievements*. Department of Political Studies, Lunds University: Lund, 2007
- Balamir Coskun, Bezen, *The GCC's Soft Security Agenda & the EU's Role in Facilitating Confidence and Security Building in the Persian Gulf: Problems and Prospects*. European University Institute, 2007
- Bauer, Michael., Hanelt, Chistian and Koch, Christian, *The EU-GCC Partnership: Security and Policy Challenges*. Gulf Research Center, 2010.
- Bretherton, Charlotte and Vogler, John, *The European Union as a Global Actor*. Routledge, London, 2005
- Commission Communication (I), *Agenda 2000: For a stronger and wider Europe*. 1997, p. 27. Last visited on 2010-07-02 <http://www.ena.lu/commission-communication-agenda-2000-stronger-wider-union-1997-020006131.html>
- Esaiasson, Peter., Gilljam, Mikael., Oscarsson, Henrik and Wängnerud, Lena, *Metodpraktikan: konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*, 2., [rev.] uppl., Norstedts juridik, Stockholm, 2003
- EUROSTAT, (Comext, Statistical Regime 4) "EU Bilateral Trade and Trade with the World". DG Trade, 2009
- Freedom House World Report 2009, "Bahrain", <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7562> Last visited 2010-05-16
- Freedom House World Report 2009, "Kuwait", <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7640> Last visited 2010-05-16
- Freedom House World Report 2009 "Saudi Arabia" <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7696> Last visited 2010-05-16
- Freedom House World Report 2009 "United Arab Emirates" <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7727> Last visited 2010-05-15
- Freedom House World Report 2009, "Qatar" <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7687> Last visited 2010-05-16
- Gustavsson, Jakob and Tallberg, Jonas (eds.), *Internationella Relationer*. Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2006
- Hadenius, A., & Teorell, J., "Cultural and economic prerequisites of democracy: Reassessing recent evidence", *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 39(4), p. 87–106, 2005

- Hague, Rod & Harrop, Martin, *Comparative government and politics: an introduction*, 6th ed., Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2004
- Herb, Michael, "Princes, Parliaments, and the Prospect for Democracy in the Gulf" in Posusney, Marsha Pripstein & Angrist, Michele Penner (red.), *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: regimes and resistance*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, Colo., 2005
- Hveem, Helge "Explaining the regional phenomenon in an Era of Globalization" in Stubbs, Richard and Underhill, Geoffrey R. D. (eds.), *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006
- Hänggi, Heiner., Roloff, Ralf and Rüländ, Jürgen, "Interregionalism – A new phenomenon in international relations" in Hänggi, Heiner., Roloff, Ralf and Rüländ, Jürgen (red.), *Interregionalism and international relations*, Routledge: Abingdon, Oxon, 2006
- Hänggi, Heiner, "Interregionalism as a multifaceted phenomenon – In search of a typology" in Hänggi, Heiner., Roloff, Ralf and Rüländ, Jürgen (red.), *Interregionalism and international relations*, Routledge: Abingdon, Oxon, 2006
- Kamal El- Amir, Nilly, *Towards a Security Transregional Relations between the EU and the GCC: Possibilities and Obstacles*. European University Institute, 2007
- Kelly, Sanja, "Recent Gains and New Opportunities for Women's Rights" in Freedom House *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa*, Gulf Edition, 2009, Last visited 2010-05-16 <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=164&parent=15&report=76>
- Linde, Jonas and Ekman, Joakim, *Demokratiseringsprocesser*. Studentlitteratur: Lund, 2006
- Malmvig, Helle, *An unlikely match or a marriage in the making? EU-GCC relations in a changing security environment*. Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, 2006
- Nonneman, Gerd, 2006. "EU-GCC Relations: Dynamics, Perspectives and Political Reform". *Journal of Social Affairs*, 23(92): 13-33
- Petersson, Bo and Robertson, Alexa (eds.), *Identitetsstudier i praktiken*. Malmö: Liber ekonomi, 2003
- Psarras, John., Flamos, Alexandros and Patlitzianas, Kostas, *Enhancing the EU-GCC Relations within a New Climate Regime: Prospects and Opportunities for Cooperation*. Al-Jisr Project, Brussels, 2009
- Risse, T., Ropp, S. C. and Sikkink, K. (eds.), *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999
- Rüländ, Jürgen, "Interregionalism – An unfinished agenda" in in Hänggi, Heiner., Roloff, Ralf and Rüländ, Jürgen (red.), *Interregionalism and international relations*, Routledge: Abingdon, Oxon, 2006
- Smith, Karen E., *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*. Cambridge: Polity, 2008

- Smith, Michael "The Foreign Policy of the European Union" in Stubbs, Richard and Underhill, Geoffrey R. D. (eds.), *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006
- Solomon, Ty, "Norms and Human Rights in International Relations", *Political Studies Review*, 2006(4):1 p. 36-47, 2006
- UNDP, *The Arab Human Development Report 2002*. The United Nations Development Programme: New York, 2002