

Development and International Relations

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# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Measuring the projection of influence through the  
institutional frame and the policy setting agenda



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## 1 Introduction

The European Union is a unique economic and political union, consisting of 28 member states. It is a voluntary union with the goal of achieving a common set of goals through cooperation in international policies and also domestic policies of individual sovereign member states. The European Union was established in 1993 when the Maastricht Treaty came into force, however the origin of the Union dates back to 1950s. The European Union as we know it nowadays is a result of a complex development that culminated in 2009 by signing of the Lisbon Treaty. There are many goals that the European Union is trying to achieve, the main ones could be reduced to: a Europe with a strong economic growth, improvement of its competitive abilities on the world market, increased standard of living for its citizens, and common foreign and security policy. Although all those policies have enormous impact on all member states and also on the international scene, we are not going to focus on majority them, since the focus of this project is placed mainly on the power projection of the European Union as a major player in the international politics.

After last enlargement of the European Union in 2013, when Croatia joined, the EU now is formed by an area of roughly 4,5 million of km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of more than 512 million. It is the biggest economic union in the world, with a combined GDP of 15,3 trillion euros, which covers almost one quarter of global nominal GDP (EUROSTAT, 2018). Moreover, the EU and its member states are one of the most frequent and biggest contributors for humanitarian aid all over the world, focusing mainly on a development in less developed countries. All these characteristics indicate that the EU is playing one of the key roles when it comes to the international scene. From this point of view, we can consider the EU as a global player. However, there are other aspects of the EU that reduce its power on the international scene. This is caused by institutions of the EU and the limit of their competences. The EU and its institutions have no supreme authority to force its member states to cooperate, and therefore can only employ the amount of power that member states decide to entrust to them.

One of the main regions of interest for the European Union is the Middle East. There are many factors that define that interest; the most important ones are the proximity of the region to the borders of the EU and the economic importance of the trade between the EU and countries of Middle East. This is supplemented by the fact that EU spends huge amount of resources providing humanitarian and development aid to many of those countries. However,

despite all these facts, there is a lack of projection of power, and a lack of influence that the EU has over the Middle East.

In this project we are going to examine the presence of the EU in the Middle East with the focus on European institutions, the examination of which can help us understand competence of the EU as an international actor. We will try to determine whether the structure of these institutions impact the ability of the EU to act decisively on the international stage and we will use the case of the Middle Eastern region as we consider it the most suitable region for examination due to its strategic importance on the world stage. We are going to evaluate the EU's position in the Middle East in the light of contemporary developments, and in that relation examine the case of the Iran nuclear deal. The deal presents an indication of EU's intention to act as a major player, but also its lack of authority on the international scene reflected by the US withdrawal and unsure future of the deal. To sum it up, with the help of institutional structure of European institutions and their concrete steps taken during the Iran deal negotiations, we ask ourselves a question: **Why isn't the European Union using its power to project more influence in the Middle East?**

## 2 Theory

### 2.1 Neoliberal Institutionalism

Neoliberal institutionalism is a theory of international relations, the foundations of which were laid by the book *Power and Interdependence* (1977) by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye. The reformulation of institutionalism was prompted by increasing economic interdependence in 1970s; however, it did not try to replace realist theory, only to limit its scope (Richardson, 2008, p. 223). While being the part of the larger theoretical category of liberalism in international relations, neoliberal institutionalists can achieve partial agreement with the (neo-)realists on the presence of anarchy in international system and the role of state as main actor in international affairs. The two theories differ in the view on international cooperation, where neoliberals argue that states can be motivated to cooperate in order to achieve absolute gains (Janik & Sterling-Folker, 2011).

The term neoliberal institutionalism itself describes part of liberal research of international relations that investigates the cooperative role of institutions. Neoliberal institutionalism uses the core argument that cooperation on the international level is most readily achievable, and also defines international institutions (both formal and informal), their creation, and maintenance. The institutions, and also informal institutional arrangements, or regimes, are voluntarily created by states with the collective goals in mind (Janik & Sterling-Folker, 2011).

Neoliberal institutionalists argue that both formal and informal forms of cooperation have potential to establish lasting bonds between nation-states by:

“facilitating iterated interaction, diffusing information, heightening transparency, and lessening the ability of actors to defect from institutional agreements. By normalizing rules and regulations in this way, institutions promote an environment of trust in which nation-states can obtain a variety of collective gains that they would otherwise eschew. Thus, institutions aid in efficiently solving collective action dilemmas, particularly in areas that do not involve security issues.” (Janik & Sterling-Folker, 2011, p. 1674)

Finding a solution to collective dilemma might not always be seamless, however. As mentioned above, institutions are self-interested creations of the nation-states. And while autonomous self-interested behaviour can be problematic for the states, even preferable

solution of achieving interests through international institutions can experience coordination issues. In some cases, small conflict of interest can be easily overcome; in other cases, larger conflict between states' interest may endanger cooperation as a whole. Neoliberal institutionalists argue that in either case institutional solutions are preferable alternative to the risk of coordination failure (Stein, 2008).

In relation to creating lasting bonds between states and overcoming coordination failure, neoliberal institutionalism likewise focuses on the significance of long-term gains. Neoliberal researchers note that institutions offer a forum for recurrent interaction, and actors engaged in these recurrent, continuous interactions are less likely to defect from cooperative arrangements. The view of the institution thus culminates into the concept of a bearer of long-lasting relations with long-term gains and benefits for the participating states in areas such as economy and security (Janik & Sterling-Folker, 2011).

One of the main focuses of neoliberal institutionalism is also the so-called 'spillover' effect that repeated interaction inside institutional framework brings. Recurrent interactions between involved actors generate trust between them and teach each other of their respective preferences. This interaction thus boots cooperation among divergent actors who become less likely to engage in hostilities, and also creates interdependence between them. Interdependent relation between states then reduces the probability of states to defect or cheat because the action would bring them economic or political harm. This relation also reduced the ability of actors to benefit from actions of other actors without investing into them themselves (Janik & Sterling-Folker, 2011, p. 1675).

Neoliberal institutionalism does not consider institutional agreements a hindrance of state sovereignty because state actors retain authority over their foreign and domestic policies. At the same time, according to neoliberal institutionalists, institutions decrease autonomy of the state actors for unilateral action. This relation between state and institution compel state actors to take other actors' interests into consideration if they wish to achieve their own interests. The international environment created by these relations is in return more peaceful and harmonious for no state actor will make irrational decisions based solely on their own desires but is forced to make compromise instead (Janik & Sterling-Folker, 2011, p. 1676).

The main criticism of the neoliberal institutionalism dwells on the prospects of institutions and international cooperation being portrayed easy and simple. Opponents of the theory argue that effective international cooperation is harder to construct than the picture

provided by institutionalists. Also, critics note that institutions are often not so benign and just and their actions revolve around the powerful actors (Stein, 2008, pp. 209-210).

## 2.2 Neorealism

Neorealism is a theory of international politics that is built on some ground principles of realist theory but differs in the root behavioural causes of individual states. It was firstly developed by Kenneth Waltz in his book “Theory of International Politics” (1979). It was developed as a response to realism of Morgenthau which was lacking a more scientific approached theory. Neorealism shifts from belief of realists that states behaviour can be explained by human desire to dominate others. For Neorealists it is the structure of the international system that defines in large part how states behave, therefore they can be also regarded as structural theorists. Unlike for Morgenthau, for neorealists regime types and regime goals are irrelevant (Lebow, 2011).

The concept of structure of international system becomes the focus point for neorealists. Waltz defined it as follows. Firstly, it agrees with classical realist that international system is anarchical in its structure, with no higher authority than individual states to rule or organize the system. This anarchical system is likely to persist, since states enjoy their sovereign status when it comes to the international politics. Secondly, it defines that the international system is formed by smaller units – states. Each state has same tasks to perform on everyday basis of governing, for example tax collection, economic regulation or ensuring capable national defence (Jackson & Sørensen, 1999, p. 51). However, there is one aspect that differs them from each other and that is their power. More specifically Waltz focuses on relative power that is the power that state can manifest respectively to other state’s power.

Another of key concepts that neorealists use is the phenomenon of security dilemma. Anarchical structure of the system forces individual states to deal with uncertainty and insecurity. Any state can at any time face an aggression from another state and there is no higher authority in the international system that could solve potential conflict. Therefore, individual states must rely on one thing that can ensure their safety – gaining more power. By pursuing as much power as possible, eventually becoming a hegemon in the region, the state can insure its security, since there is no other power capable of challenging that state, or to threaten it. This phenomenon can be most clearly seen in practice in military build-ups of

individual states. Development of military, deployment of forces, etc. is on one hand helping that state to ensure its power, but it also means a threat to other states of the region. This is usually met by the same response from other states in a shape of arms race, or projections of power, threats, eventually leading to armed conflict. Concrete examples can be found in nuclear race of US and Soviet Union during the Cold War, or in case of India and Pakistan. Neorealists argue that because of this security dilemma, the international conflict would emerge even in the system in which every state would have only benign intentions (Lebow, 2011).

Opposing to previous debates, neorealists were able to share some common thoughts with neoliberals, which resulted mostly in neoliberals accepting neorealists presumptions as starting points (Jackson & Sørensen, 1999, p. 52). Therefore, neorealist and neoliberal theories are not opposing to each other as they used to. Neorealists acknowledge that cooperation between states can help them on their path to gain more power. However, they argue that such cooperation serves only for maximizing their relative power towards other states, or group of states. Moreover, there is always a dilemma states are facing when engaging into cooperation, whether it will not benefit the other state more. “When faced with the possibility of cooperating for mutual gain, states that feel insecure must ask how the gain will be divided. They are compelled to ask not ‘Will both of us gain?’ but ‘Who will gain more?’” (Waltz K. N., 1979, p. 105). For small states, weak in relative power, the objective of associating themselves with a great power is a question of preserving their autonomy (Jackson & Sørensen, 1999, p. 51).

According to neorealists, in order to understand international relations, we must look into key aspects that define the polarity of the system, the distribution of power across the global community and the number of relevant actors (Lebow, 2011). We identify three types of polarity: unipolarity, bipolarity and multipolarity. Unipolarity presents the most stable and secure system, where one hegemonic power is capable to enforce order and stability, with no one competent enough to threaten it, for example Roman Empire during antiquity. Bipolarity, most visible during the era of Cold War between US and Soviet Union, is also a system that presents a high degree of stability since both competing powers present roughly same military might and they both realise that a potential open conflict would likely be indecisive, with both sides losing their relative power towards the rest of the global community. Finally, the multipolar system is the least stable of those three. It presents three or more global powers that on one hand strive to gain more power, and on the other hand they try to pre-empt other

powers to get more power. Since there is not much difference between the global powers, when it comes to economic or military might, it makes the alliances between them crucial for balance of the power. Potential defections or additions to such alliances, alongside difficulties when it comes to estimate calculations of strength and intentions of such alliances make the international scene tenser, up to a point of war outbreak (Lebow, 2011).

Neorealism is not a unified theory, we can differentiate most importantly between offensive and defensive realism. These two branches of neorealism distinguish different amount of power that a state needs to develop. Defensive realist, like Waltz, focus on minimal or low levels of security the states are trying to reach, in order to be able to prevent any kind of aggression or interference towards them. States are trying to maintain the balance of power on international level, many times by strengthening their alliances or shrinking opposing ones. Offensive realists, like Mearsheimer, suggest that for states it is more important to be able to dominate others, to maximize their power, so they have enough to influence other players on the international scene aiming to reach a position of regional hegemon (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 3).

### 3 Methodology

In this project we chose to analyse the effectiveness of the European Union, or rather its lack thereof in terms of projecting power and influence in the Middle East. What made this issue the subject of our interest is the fact that the three of us, while studying Development and International Relations, have realized the importance of having and exerting power in this day and age and have come to the conclusion that while the European Union is a very important actor on the world political arena, it is somehow underwhelmingly inactive in terms of asserting its interests in a volatile environment as is the Middle East. So, what we wondered is: Why is it so? How come when sat beside a fellow player such as the United States, EU loses vigour? Another reason for our musings, was the stature of the United States on the global arena and what its recent actions, the departure from the Paris Climate Agreement and the JCPOA being some of them, meant for the rest of the world. The EU has found itself in need to take a more active approach and we have wondered why hasn't it before?

By questioning and discussing these issues and also by looking back on our development studies, we have come to the conclusion that the answers to our questions lie in two theories: the neoliberal institutionalism and the neorealism one. We have found that the reason for the apparent impotency of the European Union when it comes to active foreign policy implementation is the fact that its institutions, while being glaringly complex and meticulously organised in a way that would make inter-state cooperation fairly easy and while being objectively cohesive by all means, have led to difficulty in achieving the most nuanced goals, because keeping both individuality and the "all for one and one for all" idealistic ideas in mind makes reaching a consensus all but impossible.

We start by explaining both theories in order to make our reasoning clear and obvious. We chose neoliberalism institutionalism and neorealism because in light of our research, they were the most fitting. Neoliberal institutionalism puts value not on the power of one particular player, but on the cooperation of multiple entities and provided that they work together, they will achieve what was set out to gain. It is a concept most relied upon when it comes to gaining the maximum benefit and minimizing the negative costs. When considering the unpredictableness of today's society and its main rulers, this theory is the most idealistic in its reach, but also the one democracy and those who uphold it, should try to relay upon. Neorealism, likewise, emphasises the need to understand how choices are made by the actors

involved. Both theories, while still having differences in themselves, seek to identify the conditions and implications of how international cooperation is possible. Our expectation was to find whether they can help us understand and explain the issue at hand and we have come to establish that they are most relevant.

In the analysis part of our project, we decided to delve into understanding the very institutions of the European Union that we think hinder the EU's chances of expressing its opinions and goals clearer. We focus at length of the three main institutions that make the European Union the complex organisation that it is, mainly the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament. We seek to establish what are the competencies of these institutions and which of them are mostly involved with setting and achieving the EU's foreign policy agenda.

We will try to exemplify our casework by referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the role of the European Union in its inception and in keeping it afloat even despite the United States' counterproductive actions and the fact that despite its magnitude when referring to global politics, the JCPOA was the first measure that the European Union took in trying to go from its mediator position to a key player. We decided to apply the two theories that we discussed onto the JCPOA to evaluate our inquiries and to assess whether they refract properly on the issue at hand.

Finally, in the last part of our project we will discuss at length the issues that cause the ineffectiveness of the European Union and also how other actors influence the EU's involvement in the Middle East. By choosing to focus on the institutionalism aspect we will delve more into the issues that the European Union has on a structural level and whether or not the EU has taken any action towards solving them. Since the Treaty of Lisbon made quite a bit of changes, including empowering of the European Parliament and creating a long-term President of the European Council and a reformed position of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, we assess that the European Union has taken direct action towards evolving as an organisation into a more active player of the international sphere. In our discussion, we will find whether that's truly the case and if so, what does it mean for the prospects of influence projection in the Middle East.

When choosing to focus on the JCPOA as the example of foreign agenda setting, we couldn't help but notice what role other external actors, mainly the US, but also regional powers have on impeding any action that the European Union might want to take in addressing Middle Eastern issues. We will therefore dedicate some time to addressing these

actors and their involvement with the EU or impediment tactics at length in the discussion part.

Lastly, we wondered why despite being an international force for decades now, the European Union is considered a, dare we say it, spineless party when it comes to its involvement in international conflicts and crisis situations. We are researching the activity of the European Union and its evolution since its inception and we have gathered that there is a specific reason for its inaction, one that we will delve more upon in the very last chapter of our discussion, so to conclude whether or not it is still an issue now.

The sources that we used were mainly found that the Aalborg University Library, but we also relied on other articles and online sources. We tried to collect different sources in order to not project a biased view on the matter. We also based our approach on the coursework that we studied during the semester, mainly about institutionalism, realism and geopolitical aspects. With that being said, we start our analysis by examining the European institutions and their role in setting a foreign policy agenda and implementation of thereof.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 European Institutions

The European Union is an intricately constructed organism consisting of 28 democratic European countries, functioning as a platform for promoting peace and well-being of its member's citizens, offering freedom, security, justice, as well as sustainable development and enhanced economic, social and territorial cohesion among its constituents (European Union, 2018).

The sui generis nature of the European Union comes from all the independent member countries assimilating some of their 'sovereignty' in order to strengthen one another and advertently, the Union. By delegating some of their decision-making power to the well-established representative institutions, the member states make decisions democratically and at the same time, increase their singular power capacity (European Union, 2014, p. 3).

The three main institutions involved in EU legislation are:

- The European Parliament, which represents the EU's citizens and is therefore elected by them;
- The Council of the European Union, which represents the individual member states, with the Presidency of the Council being shared by the member states and appointed on a rotating basis;
- The European Commission, which stands to represent the interests of the European Union as a whole (European Union, 2014, p. 6).

Usually, the one who proposes new legislation is the European Commission, but it is the Council and the Parliament that pass the laws. The European Union is based on the rule of law and was founded on treaties; therefore every decision and proposal for law must be based on a specific treaty article, which then determines the specific legislative procedure that must be followed (European Union, 2018).

The Presidency presides over the Council of the European Union. It is comprised of 3 groups which become the Trio and which are responsible for ensuring the consistency of the work of the Council for a period of 18 months. The Presidency is, above all, impartial. It serves as moderator for discussions and cannot favour its own opinions or another member state in particular; and it may only take action when it encounters a stalemate. The main

responsibility of the Presidency is to deploy national resources. The workload itself is substantial, so the Presidency works in support of the General Secretariat of the Council. The GSC's purpose is assisting the Presidency with logistical and organisational support and it has gradually build up to an advisory role which manifests circumstantially (Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 12).

During its semester, the Presidency must work towards facilitating all conversations between the European Parliament and the Council. In the early days, its main task is presenting the Presidency's work programme to the plenary and the individual committee meetings. Some committees even request additional meetings during the Presidency term to be kept updated with the work of the Council on specific issues (Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 53). The same cannot be said for the European Commission and the External Action Service, for outside the context of institutional operation and the initial meeting to present to the two the term work programme, there is seldom contact between the Commission and the Presidency (Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 57).

We cannot speak about the European Union and the way it is organised without referring, of course to the President of the European Council. All the work in the European Council is coordinated by the President, but the most important aspect of the job is the fact that the President represents the Union to all the external actors, the outside world. It is the president who embodies the interests of the Union and its foreign affairs, as well as any security measures (European Union, 2014, p. 12).

There are three main legislative procedures that the EU follows to very thorough degrees in order to preserve the transparent and democratic ways that pillar it:

- Consultation – in which the Council consults the Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The Parliament can approve and reject proposals as well as ask for amendments. Should the Parliament ask for an amendment, the Commission will consider the changes and will send the amended proposal to the Council and whether the proposal will be amended further, the Council must do so unanimously.
- Assent – while similar to Consultation, the Parliament cannot amend a proposal but must either accept or reject it and either requires an absolute majority.
- Co-decision – the Parliament shares equal legislative powers to the Council. Should the agreement between the two institutions not be met, the proposed legislation will be

put before a conciliation committee composed of an equal number of Parliament and Council representatives (European Union, 2014, p. 8).

By striving towards a transparent and democratic government that is as open as possible and involves its citizens to the best of its ability, the European Union has created a decision-making process that requires almost absolute synchronicity, a firm frame of mind and very thoroughly shared common interests. And while efficient and far-reaching as it is, the European Union is, at its core, still divided. Each state has its own inner workings, advertent goals and may even be susceptible to ‘outsider’ influence. Therefore, on truly taxing issues that may be at odds with the previously stated factors, the Union becomes quite bereft of powers.

#### *4.1.1 European Commission*

The European Commission is the main executive body of the European Union. It is currently composed of twenty-eight Commissioners, each representing one member state. The legal basis of the Commission dwells on Article 17 of the Treaty on European Union and Articles 234, 244 to 250, 290 and 291 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and its origin can be traced to the so-called Merger Treaty signed in 1965 (Novak, 2018).

The Commission is appointed for 5 year-term with the appointment taking place within the period of 6 months following the elections to the European Parliament. The procedure of appointing a new Commission consists of several steps. First, a Commission President has to be proposed by the European Council and subsequently approved by the European Parliament. Second, the President-elect engages in the discussion with the governments of the member states and chooses new members for their Commission. Last, the proposed members are subject to hearings at the European Parliament, which gives its opinion on the entire ‘College’. Once approved by the Parliament, the Commission can be formally put into office by the European Council (European Union, 2014).

Besides being responsible for the function of the Commission, the President of the Commission decides its internal organisation. They allocate the sectors of the Commission activity among the Commissioners, giving them responsibility for a specific area of policies and all departments that fall under their respective category. The President also appoints the Vice-Presidents from the members of the Commission; the High Representative is given the position of Vice-President automatically (Novak, 2018).

The bureaucratic structure of the Commission comprises of the directorates-general, which are the departments responsible for policy, and the services, the special departments for ad-hoc issues. Directorates-general are equivalents of the government ministries in national administrations and they fulfil many of the same roles. The number of the directorates-general does not correspond to the number of Commissioners and some members of the Commission may be responsible for more than one directorate-general. Each Commissioner also has a supporting cabinet with large number of bureaucratic employees to facilitate the work of the Commissioner (Staab, *The European Union Explained*, 2011, p. 49).

The European Commission has four main roles: 1. proposing new legislation, 2. managing and implementing EU policies and the budget, 3. enforcing European law, 4. representing the EU on the international stage (European Union, 2014).

1. Proposing new legislation. The Commission has the right of initiative, which means it is the sole institution in the EU that is able to draft proposals for new European legislation. The proposals are then presented to the Parliament and the Council (European Union, 2014). Within the Commission, a proposal might come from the President, a Commissioner, the head of directorate-general, or even a section director. In other cases, the legislation proposition might originate from the Council, the Parliament, a member state or an interest group, who all may ask the Commission to initiate legislation process. The European Court of Justice ruling may also prompt a legislative proposal (Staab, *The European Union Explained*, 2011, p. 51).

2. Managing and implementing EU policies and the budget. As executive body of the EU, implementation of policies is one of the more prominent roles of the Commission. Because it lacks human resources for implementation of legislation on national or local level, it must rely on national authorities to assist in this area. Because of this dependency, the Commission focuses its executive powers on passing concrete rules and regulation that transform legislation into practise. (Staab, *The European Union Explained*, 2011, p. 51) The budgetary affairs are handled by the Commission under close supervision of the European Court of Auditors. Both institutions are aiming to ensure efficient financial management of the EU budget (European Union, 2014).

3. Enforcing European law. Often titled as ‘guardian of the treaties’, the Commission ensures that the Treaties, and any secondary legislation adopted in order to implement them, are properly enforced. In case a member state fails to fulfil its obligation to the Treaties, the Commission is able to start a procedure to achieve compliance (Novak, 2018).

4. Representing the EU on the international stage. The Commission is responsible for more than 130 diplomatic offices and delegations all over the world. Even though, the heads of these delegations carry diplomatic status of ambassadors, capacities of the EU are not comparable to a foreign service. The driving force of the EU foreign relations, the Common Foreign and Security Policy falls under the authority of the member states, but the Commission has proved to be a very capable player in some areas, such as international trade. The Commission is also highly involved in the processes connected to association and accession agreements for it assesses the progress made by a candidate country and suggest how to proceed (Staab, *The European Union Explained*, 2011, p. 52).

Important part of the international representation of the EU also dwells on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who as mentioned above, also serves as the Vice-President of the Commission. The current position of the High Representative comes from the Treaty of Lisbon that entered force in 2009. The High Representative is among other things responsible for steering European foreign policy and security policy; coordinating the EU's foreign policy tools such as development, trade, neighbourhood policy, humanitarian aid and crisis response; and building consensus among the member states (European External Action Service, 2016).

The High Representative is also a chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Council, one of the configurations of the Council of the European Union that brings together the ministers of foreign affairs of the member states. The main role of the Council is to “ensure the unity, consistency and effectiveness of the EU's external action.” (Council of the European Union, 2018)

Assistance to the High Representative's activities is provided by the European External Action Service (EEAS). The EEAS represents EU's diplomatic corps responsible for EU's external relations. Its activities among others include support of democracy, international development, crisis response and humanitarian aid. The EEAS operates the above-mentioned over 130 diplomatic delegations of the EU that cover more than 160 countries and gives the EU united foreign policy presence on the world stage (Hatton & Hamill, 2015).

### *4.1.2 European Parliament*

The European Parliament is a large political arena and a multi-faceted institution whose purpose is to represent the interests of EU citizens, which is why members of the Parliament (the MEPs) are directly elected by them. The institution has three places of work: Strasbourg (France), where the main office is located, but also Brussels (Belgium) and Luxembourg. Elections are held in each European country every 5 years and everyone above 18 is entitled to vote, with the exception of Austria, where the eligibility age is 16 (European Union, 2012).

The first subparagraph of Article 14(2)<sup>1</sup> TEU defines the composition criteria for the European Parliament thusly: the total number of Members is not to exceed 750, plus the President, with a minimum of 6 representatives per state and a maximum of 96 seats. The total number of seats is allocated in correspondence with the state population size, but more populous states agree to be under-represented in order to offer more representation to less populous EU countries. The expected withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2019 prompted a rethink on the redistribution of the 73 seats. On 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2018, the European Council adopted a decision on the composition of the House after the elections in 2019, reducing the number of seats from 751 to 705 (European Parliament, 2018b).

The Parliament is organized as follows:

- The President – elected for a renewable term of 2 and a half years, oversees the debates in plenary and makes sure that the Parliament's Rules of Procedure are followed; renders the EU budget operational by signing it; stresses the Parliament's point of view and concerns regarding certain matters at the beginning of each European Council meeting.
- The plenary – strictly speaking, it is the Parliament, headed by the President. Plenary sessions are usually held in Strasbourg, one week per month, with additional meetings held in Brussels. The plenary examines proposed legislation and votes on amendments before coming to certain decisions on the entirety of the meeting, it also questions events that take place in the EU or outside of it.

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<sup>1</sup> European Council Decision (EU) 2018/937 of 28 June 2018 establishing the composition of the European Parliament (OJ L 165I, 2.7.2018, p. 1).

- Political bodies – the Bureau (the President and 14 Vice-Presidents), the Conference of Presidents (the President and the political group chairs), the five Quaestors (responsible for the Members’ administrative and financial business), the Conference of Delegation Chairs and the Conference of Committee Chairs.
- Committees and delegations;
- Political Groups;
- European political parties and foundations;
- Parliament Secretariat. (European Parliament, 2018b)

The European Parliament has three main roles or power reaches:

1. Legislative Power. The so-called ordinary legislative procedure or the co-decision procedure places the Parliament and the Council of the European Union on equal footing, allowing laws to be passed jointly by the two institutions. This procedure applies to most of EU legislatives. Ordinarily, the Commission makes a proposal which must be adopted by both the Parliament and the Council, with the Parliament’s assent being a requirement for all international agreements. The Parliament’s approval is required for political and institutional decisions, such as social security and protection acts, and the institution also provides incentive for new legislation by examining the Commission’s annual work program and prompting it to put forward proposals.

2. Supervision Power. The Parliament exercises democratic supervision over the other European institutions in a number of ways: the member states nominate prospective new members and potential President of the Commission, however they all must be auditioned by the Parliament and cannot be appointed without its approval; the Parliament has the power to pass a motion of censure, calling for mass resignation of the Commission and also regularly examines their reports; it also monitors the work of the Council, having the power to inquire upon the Council’s actions.

3. Budgetary power. While the EU’s annual budget is decided by both the Parliament and the Council of the European Union, it is not enforced until it is signed by the President of the European Parliament. Budget spending is monitored by the Committee on Budgetary Control and each year the approval of the Commission’s handling of the budget is decided by the Parliament in a process known as ‘granting a discharge’ (European Union, 2012).

The Parliament has already inserted itself in multiple areas and issues of foreign nature or that are on the Union's foreign affairs agenda. On the issue of the Iran Deal, it was the Parliament pushed the EU towards having talks with the new leadership in Iran in order to get on the same page not only when concerning the nuclear problem, but also on human rights and regional security. The Parliament has recently shown that it can also speak up and take stage when the other EU institution and member states drag their feet. In doing so, it has "scrutinized the Union's foreign policy in an increasingly useful way", as Judy Dempsey, Carnegie Europe Editor in chief has proclaimed. (Dempsey, 2014)

As it happens, rising concerns from Russia, China, the perpetually problematic issues in the Middle East and even new troubling factors such as miscommunication with the United States, have impacted each member State in various ways and the Parliament, being the institutional liaison and the voice of the public, has found it imperative to address security issues and to prompt definitive action.

#### *4.1.3 European Council*

European Council is one of the seven institutions of the European Union. It is composed by heads of the member states or heads of their respective governments. Apart from those, one seat is taken by president of the European Commission and president of the European Council, both with no right to vote. European Council usually meets four times a year (Jrgensen, Aarstad, Drieskens, Laatikainen, & Tonra, 2015), however a president of the European Council can assemble additional summits, usually to discuss issues of urgent character.

The European Council is commonly mistaken with the Council of the European Union. European Council is not involved in the EU legislation; nonetheless it is one of the most important institutions. The main role of the European Council is to "determine the EU's general political direction and priorities" (European Council, 2017), which basically means determining the political agenda of the European Union. It has also an important role in development of the integration process. By the end of each summit of the European Council a report is created, with adopted conclusions. Subsequently it is given to the Parliament with recommendations of actions that should be taken. In this way European Council is able to influence policy-making processes of the European Union.

Since 2014, the European Council have agreed on five priority areas of interest for the EU. These areas reflect the strategic agenda of the EU and are used as a guideline for all European institutions.

1. The European Council encourages economic growth, increase of competitiveness, increase of the investments, and creation of more and better work position. More specifically we can mention example of finalization of Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations by 2015, or expansion of the euro area governance.

2. The European Council places high priority on empowerment and protection of EU citizens and a struggle against social exclusion and poverty. A concrete example of this endeavour is a continuous effort to lower youth unemployment

3. The European Council highlights the need for diminishing oil and gas imports dependence of EU and the need for sustainable energy. Concrete steps in this matter include finalization of EU Energy Market project, diversification of energy suppliers for the EU, development of better energy infrastructure.

4. The European Council outlines the necessity of cooperation across the whole European Union when it comes to security issues such as fighting terrorism or management of migration.

5. The European Council calls for a stronger EU position in the world affairs. This can be achieved by following concrete steps such as consistency of foreign policies between the EU and individual member states, stronger EU common defence and security policy. This call is not limited by the borders of EU, the European Council also encourages to promote stability across the borders (European Council, 2017).

Another important task of the European Council is to play a role in an election/appointment process of different important EU actors. This include the election of the President of the European Council, proposition of a candidate for President of the European Commission, appointment of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, official appointments of all member of the European Commission, and the appointment of all six members of the Executive Board of the European Central Bank (European Council, 2018).

Nevertheless, one of the most important functions for this project is that the European Council “defines the principles of, and general guidelines for, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and decides on common strategies for its implementation” (European

Parliament, 2018a). The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is a set of agreements of the European Union aiming to set up a shared foreign policy, and also to strengthen external ability to act in the case of conflict. CFSP considers North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a key actor when it comes to defence of the European Union, while the EU is taking responsibility when it comes to humanitarian missions or other peace keeping activities. Treaty of Lisbon reformed CFSP and created an office of High Representative, which is taken for five years in term. High Representative is also taking charge of European External Action Service, which was also created in the treaty of Lisbon.

There is also a criticism towards CFSP. Although it wraps up foreign policies of European Union it does not replace foreign policies of its individual member states. After the Lisbon Treaty with an establishment of High Representative office it looked good on paper, however, it does not solve the most fundamental issue when it comes to making a common foreign policy, that is unanimous approval of the member states (Staab, European Union Explained : Institutions, Actors, Global Impact, 2013).

## **4.2 Iran Nuclear Deal**

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), colloquially known as the Iran nuclear deal, was signed in July 2015 between Iran and the EU+3 (France, Germany, the UK and the EU plus China, Russia and the USA). The main objective of the deal is to ensure that Iran's nuclear programme is of entirely peaceful nature and in exchange lift restrictive measures imposed on Iran. The deal also aims to normalise Iran's relationship with the international community in the areas of trade, technology, finance and energy and was in this regard endorsed by the UN Security Council (Immenkamp, 2018, p. 2).

The core of the nuclear deal dwells on several regulations concerning Iranian nuclear sector. Iran is not allowed to enrich uranium beyond 3.67% threshold and need to reduce its stockpile of low-enriched uranium to 300 kg. Further restrictions on nuclear fuel, heavy water and centrifuge usage are also imposed. Lastly, Iran agreed that it will not seek, develop or acquire any nuclear weapons. The observance of the agreement is monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (Immenkamp, 2018, p. 2).

The European Union played a key role during the negotiations of the nuclear deal, and later in the enforcement as well. None of the permanent members of the Security Council would be accepted in this role, since Iran did not perceive any of them as a neutral actor. On

the other hand, the EU was viewed as a moderator and a facilitator able to build bridge between Iran and the US (Blockmans & Viaud, 2017).

The EU was also put in a leading role in Joint Commission created by the JCPOA in order to monitor the implementation of the deal. Consecutive Joint Commission meetings proved the EU's ability to muster the technical, legal and diplomatic expertise needed to implement the powers bestowed on it by the JCPOA. The EU became the chief guarantor of the nuclear deal and at the same time played multifaceted role as coordinator, convener, legal interpreter, mediator and conciliator. Active role played by the EU meant that lifting of sanctions on Iran paved the way for new openings in deepening and widening EU's political and socio-economic relations with Iran (Blockmans & Viaud, 2017).

However, in May 2018, US President Donald Trump withdrew from the JCPOA even after European leaders and the EU High Representative repeatedly tried to convince him not to proceed with this action. The nuclear deal is considered the main foreign policy success for the EU and the Union has vital political interests in keeping the deal alive. Yet, the USA is being increasingly antagonistic towards Iran and that limits EU's room for manoeuvre. The future of the deal is currently uncertain, but the situation presents opportunity for the EU to show its ability to act as an autonomous actor (Rózsa, 2018).

#### *4.2.1 Neoliberal Institutional Perspective on Iran Deal*

Neoliberal institutionalism, as well as neorealism, can be considered the rationalistic aspects of International Relations. Rationalism seeks to present how decisions are made by the actors involved and by extent; rationalists are of an opinion that through collecting the necessary data and making the right conclusions, the actors' behaviour individually, as well as collectively, can be explained. Idealists, true to their name, believe that cooperation is the key to achieving a better and more organized world and yet by contrast, neoliberal institutionalists base their opinions on a more utilitarian concept of rationality which implies the capacity to weigh the costs and benefit of each and every course of action. While liberals start from the premise that states follow their own interests, neoliberal institutionalists conclude that a successful cooperation is pillared by mutual interests that can be satisfied by working together on a multitude of issues (Stans, 2010, pp. 237-238).

One such example of a collective action that has the purpose of benefitting the interests of the actors involved and is almost idealistic in its reach, is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the Iran nuclear deal. As we've already mentioned, the

European Union played a key role in the negotiations of the deal and its enforcement, however, the departure of the United States from the deal is threatening its maintenance.

The JCPOA's true aim is impeding the proliferation of a weaponized Middle East. It prevents Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons by cutting off its reach towards plutonium and limits its possibility of uranium enrichment. From 10 to 15 years after the settlement of the agreement, the physical constraints on fissile material production at the declared facilities and the verification processes will expire (Samore, 2015, pp. 4-8). The JCPOA is, in essence, an exercise in multilateral cooperation towards the denuclearization cause that fortuitously buys time for the allied parties to plan for a longer solution without the imminent threat hanging over the world's head.

Institutionally wise, the JCPOA's interests are two-fold. On one side there is Iran, whose main concern is its economy. In exchange for proliferation halt, the agreement offered Iran mild sanction relief:

- Access to hard currency. Iran was able to repatriate 700\$ million per month in hard currency from oil sales, and also to access 65\$ million per month of its foreign reserves for the tuitions of the Iranian students abroad.
- Limited oil exports. Iran's oil exports were required to remain at their December 2013 level of approx. 1.1 million barrels per day.
- Trade in selected sectors. International sanctions on the sales of petrochemicals, gold and other precious metal trading and transactions in the auto production sector were also suspended (Kerr & Katzman, 2018, p. 7).

On the other hand, there are the interests of the E3/EU+3, which are quite simple: Iran ceases any attempts towards seeking and developing nuclear weapons and therefore, the E3 is closer to their aim of regional and international peace and security (U.S. Department of State, 2015). Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Russia, China and the United States, along with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, represent the multifaceted aspect of the agreement. This same aspect and the fact that the very nature of the Deal centres on the nuclear energy issue is the reason why the JCPOA is hailed as the "state of the art of professional multilateral diplomacy," as Wendy Sherman, the team leader of the American representatives during the JCPOA talks was so keen to proclaim (Sherman, 2018).

On May 8<sup>th</sup> of this year, President Donald Trump announced that the United States would no longer participate in the JCPOA and that the sanctions that have been previously retracted, will be reinstated in due time. The remaining E3/EU+2 member states have rushed to reiterate their support for the agreement and announced that they fully intend to protect their companies from any and all U.S. sanction effects (Kerr & Katzman, 2018, p. 26).

EU High Representative, Federica Mogherini, stated that if “Iran continues to implement its nuclear related commitments, [...] the European Union will remain committed to the continued full and effective implementation” of the agreement (Strategic Communications, 2018). Thus, the EU prompted a new initiative: the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), whose purpose is to facilitate legitimate payments between European and Iranian companies, including both exports and imports. Iranian President Rouhani, stated that as long as Iran’s interests are protected, and the other 5 signatories abide by the agreement, Iran will stand by it (Giesbers, 2018).

From the point of view of the neoliberal institutional theory, the Iran deal can be preserved as long as there is interest of cooperation and mutual benefits between the remaining parties. In the “Neoliberal Institutionalism”, by Janik & Sterling-Folker stated that:

“At its core, neo-liberal institutionalism argues that international cooperation is possible and most readily achievable, with the creation and maintenance of international relations broadly defined. Both formal and informal institutional arrangements are the subject of neo-liberal institutionalist analysis. [...] States create and voluntarily submit to such institutions, which posse collective goals and establish mechanisms to achieve them” (Janik & Sterling-Folker, 2011, p. 1674).

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is very properly defined and very much embodies the almost idealistic aspect of institutionalism. Liberal academics project institutions as being “powerful forces for stability and order”. Leading liberal institutionalist and father of the neoliberal institutionalism theory, Robert Keohane, stated that “avoiding military conflict [...] depends greatly on whether the next decade is characterized by a continuous pattern of institutionalized cooperation” (Keohane, 1993, p. 53).

Fundamentally, the JCOPA was devised as the pillar on which the entire international cooperation and stability system was supposed to stand on. While the United States’ withdrawal does represent a threat and it has shown just how easily the foundations which

took years to build can shake and crumble, what it also shows, is that U.S. has become unreliable and that it's time for another actor to take centre stage. Should the European Union maintain this momentum, it could assume a position that would allow it to project influence in the Middle East in accordance with its interests and priorities.

#### *4.2.2 Neorealist Perspective on Iran Deal*

Apart from linking the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to neoliberal institutionalism, we must also explain what happened from a neorealist perspective. Neorealism serves us well to describe everything regarding the JCPOA, meaning every stage of the deal, starting in times before the deal, up to the point when Donald Trump withdrew US part from it.

In the Middle East, before the JCPOA was signed, a huge security dilemma emerged between all Arab states, since the only state possessing nuclear weapons in the region was Israel. Due to a long history of conflicts between Israel and other Arab countries there was an understandable anxiety between the Arabs about Israel being the nuclear monopoly in the region. As Kenneth Waltz, a defensive neorealist, argue that a possession of nuclear weapons by Israel “fuelled the instability of the region” (Waltz K. , 2012, p. 3) for a long time. According to this, Iran pursuing a development of their own would bring more stability to the region, by re-balancing the power in the region. Moreover, Waltz argues that applying economic sanctions on Iran only isolates it more, which leads to even further desire to develop a nuclear bomb (Waltz K. , 2012).

However, for all other states in the region (except close allies like Syria) and in the world a development of nuclear weapons by Iran also presents a threat. It is not only a security dilemma of Iran becoming another nuclear power, but also a question of relative power balance in the world and the strength of Iranian Islamic Ideology on the international forum. These threats for other mayor players explain why there were huge sanctions imposed on Iran prior to the deal.

Creation of the JCPOA is a compromise between the countries with relative gains and losses on both sides. First of all, Iran realised that with continuing imposition of economic sanctions it would suffer heavy losses. Moreover, there was also a hanging threat of potential military intervention that could bring an end to the regime in Iran. Signing a deal means for Iran a lift of sanctions that restores its position of a major player in the international oil trade and will return investors to Iran. Through neorealist perspective Iran is still gaining stability

and relative power through economic development that this deal provides. On the other hand, as it is described in the previous chapters, Iran is forced to make many concessions when it comes to its nuclear development. It does not only prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb, which would mean solving the security dilemma. It also intervenes to other spheres, for example nuclear medicine, that requires more enriched uranium than the 3,7% which is allowed according to the deal.

The JCPOA is a success also for the other states involved when it comes to neorealist analysis. It was undoubtedly a major success in international diplomacy, by bringing a EU3+3 to an agreement, which is rarely taking place. The mere fact that those were brought to negotiating table can be assigned to the initiatives of the European Union. EU proved throughout the years to be a capable mediator, with High Representatives doing a fair amount of negotiations with all sides involved, to achieve a compromise. A successful signing of this deal gave a new view on EU, as an institution of “great importance for international peace and security” (Fabius, 2016, p. 37). This new perception of EU boosted its importance when it comes to power balance, as it stood firmly in securing its interest. It is also important to mention that for the EU the diplomatic solution of the issue corresponds with the long-time strategy of diplomacy over war. There are also more obvious advantages that EU gained with this deal. Firstly, it eliminated a threat of a nuclear power rising in a neighbouring region of the Europe. Secondly, it re-activated important trade relations between EU and Iran, which means reduction of dependence of the EU to Russia, when it comes to oil and gas supplies. Moreover, it also represented a trade interest of individual members of EU, specifically France and Germany, which by being one of the Iran’s largest trade partners gained a lot (OEC, 2016).

When it comes to the US and its perspective, we can argue that there were two completely different attitudes towards the deal during the presidency of Obama and Trump. Obama’s government did not pursue a unilateral strategy of competition which would be expected if following neorealist theory. It can be argued that during the Obama presidency, US realised that the world system had changed to multilateral and that the US had lost its undisputed hegemonic position since the end of the Cold War. That is why the US cautiously calculated the cost-benefit of its possibilities, when doing an analytic approach towards Iranian issue. The arms race and threats between them and Iran could lead to unknown result, as US have learned from their failed attempts to interfere in the Middle East. Signing the deal could therefore be considered as a relative loss for the US, from neorealist perspective, as

lifting the sanctions would strengthen Iran relative power in the region and also internationally for the time being.

With Donald Trump taking presidency the attitude towards the JCPOA totally changed. By withdrawing from the deal, US once again presented itself as a competitor, that is ruthlessly pursuing its interests on the international scale. The discourse between US and Iran turned away completely from negotiations, and shifted to mutual threats of destruction, for example the famous tweet of Donald Trump that if Iran will not stop threatening US it will face “CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED” (Ramzy, 2018).

EU and the other states did not follow, as Iran is reportedly complying with the demands of the deal, and it continues to benefit all actors. EU’s High Representative Federica Mogherini stated that “In any event, the European Union will guarantee that the deal keeps “ (Davenport, 2017). Such statements and compliance of all other countries to the deal proves that it is of interest of all actors. Therefore, speaking from neorealist perspective, this deal was in interest of everyone engaged in it, except the US, which proved it by withdrawal.

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 The Effectiveness of the European Union

Despite being one of the forefront organizations in the world and a key actor in the global political arena, the European Union is surprisingly bereft of influence when it comes to projecting power and reaching their objectives in the foreign affairs sector. In times of international crisis, the European Union's effectiveness has been questioned repeatedly. Simply put, while EU is a cohesive organism and is intricately and carefully devised to be the best of what it set out to be, it still is, for the lack of a better word, fragmented. This very same fragmentism is the very reason why even the existence of a clearly defined foreign policy is put into question when it comes to the European Union.

The fundamental reason for this issue can be found in the very nature of the European Union as an international organization. While it is the most advanced and integral on the scene, it still is an organism comprised of 28 member states and 28 foreign policies and individual interests. Prof. Daniel C. Thomas, of Dublin European Institute, has defined the effectiveness of the European Foreign Policy as "the Union's ability to shape foreign affairs in accordance with the objectives it adopts on particular issues" (Thomas, 2012, p. 460).

The effectiveness of the European Union has been analysed repeatedly in the past and two aspects that recur, are the political and institutional ones – mainly, their shortcomings. Politically wise, each member state is reluctant, to say the least, to delegate and confer power to the EU regarding any nation-state competence issues, like foreign policy or fiscal policy. In Lorenzo Vai's article on The Effectiveness of EU Foreign Policy Governance, he remarks that "the loss of such national competences could undermine the *raison d'être* and existence of nation-states (in the case of foreign policy it would curtail the full independence vis-à-vis another international actor) thus turning the EU in a complete federation, a sort of unconscious survival instinct frequently appears from the MSs, bringing together, against the strengthening of a unique EFP, national political, private and bureaucratic interests, as well as an atavistic distrust for the 'others'" (Vai, 2016, p. 3).

It is difficult to find a common ground when it comes to the European Union policies, mainly because the very notion of 'common ground' is vastly different when applied to an international organization, as opposed to a more consolidated and integrated political entity. When it comes to the institutional aspect of EFP deficiencies, Lorenzo Vai, as previously mentioned, illustrates the problem in a three-folded manner:

1. Structural/institutional ‘sins’. He enumerates them thusly: “1) an artificial separation within the architecture of the EFP; 2) a lack of EU capabilities; 3) a democratic deficit in the EFP policy cycles” (Vai, 2016, p. 4). While in a state, a well-defined foreign policy is constructed on the basis of economic and geographic policies, as well as other, more nuanced affairs, and it is determined and conducted in a consolidated manner, any external action taken at an European level, as a member of the EU, is by contrast, structurally divided. The lack of EU capabilities, as so named in the second ‘sin’, is referred to the fact that EU is instrumentally deficient. The European Union does not have its own intelligence agency, or military headquarters or even its own military. These deficiencies marginalize the EU’s foreign policy attempts and largely hinder its ambitions to become a global security provider (High Representative of the Union, 2016)

2. Reforming the structural issues. With the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union has tried to reform some of its more concerning structural issues, but curiously, without changing the core structure of the institution. The two most significant innovations at the institutional level are: the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who is also the chairman of the Foreign Affairs council and the Vice-president of the Commission, and the European External Action Service. Despite making a valiant effort to reduce the artificial separation of the European Foreign Policy, the Lisbon Treaty wasn’t the ‘game-changer’ that it set out to be, in that sense. The addition of the EEAS, while it adds to the security expertise and facilitates the formulation and conduct of external actions, hasn’t made the member states available in launching a permanent structured cooperation to strengthen their capabilities in military defence issues (Vai, 2016, p. 8).

3. The characteristics of an effective foreign policy. The five fundamental qualities, or characteristics which form the basis of all the actions that the European Union has to conduct in order to achieve its goals are: activism, readiness, autonomy, coherence and visibility (Vai, 2016, p. 9). These characteristics are under constant threat from the institutional deficiencies that EU has still to overcome and, to put it simply, jeopardize the EU’s possibilities in forwarding their goals and projecting power in the right place and at the right time.

Reforming the institutional issues of the European Union, while certainly desirable, is virtually unattainable if there isn’t a common will to do it. At the same time, we cannot say that EU has been completely stagnant in reference to its Foreign Affairs Policies. Steadily and surely, it has been making progress in imbedding itself into the forefront of the global

political arena, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action only serving to solidify EU's transition from a mediator with unreachable prospects, to key player.

The Iran deal was EU's first attempt at "effective multilateralism" and "actorness". International relations experts refer to it as an "effort to forge an effective posture as a multilateral actor". Granted, it was a very successful attempt, as Tanja Cronberg, a member of the European Parliament in charge of the Iran situation stated that the deal and its implication represented the "vision of European Security Strategy and a founding general principle of EU foreign policy." The European Union also came to consider itself a "necessary counterbalance to U.S. militarism and Bush's unilateralism in Iraq", as for the EU, effective multilateralism is the explicit critique of the actions that the United States took in Iraq (Rezaei, 2018, p. 85).

After the departure of the United States from the Iran Deal, it was clear the political face of the world wasn't the same as it once was. The European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker remarked: "At this point, we have to replace the United States, which as an international actor has lost vigor, and [...] influence" (Sengupta, 2018). As of late, the White House has been effectively obstructing multilateralism by withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement in 2016 and the UN Human Rights Council and recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (Giesbers, 2018).

Most current actions of the United States have prompted dismay and critique, but the JCPOA is another matter entirely. Hailed as a crucial agreement for preserving peace and security in the Middle East and unanimously endorsed by the UN Security Council in July 2015, a withdrawal from the United States represents a radical rift of the transatlantic unity. What this rift signifies for the European Union is that from now on, it has to, simply put, take matters into its own hands.

While the European Union faces many internal struggles, both the institutional aspects that were discussed above and the policies that it has adopted over the years that led to internal disruptions, such as migration issues, the message that it sends with the initiation of the Special Purpose Vehicle is that it will continue to support Iran economically and that the deal is more than just a nuclear agreement, it's a means of stagnation of the nuclear arms race proliferation in the entirety of the Middle East (Giesbers, 2018).

The JCPOA represents an important stepping stone for the European Union's ascend to the achievement of strategic autonomy. While the circumstances are by no means perfect, with the state of the United Kingdom's membership in the EU hanging into balance, the EU is

rooted into its beliefs of multilateralism and by hanging on to them, it projects the dignified stature of democracy that it worked decades to define.

The European Union is about more than just building a common market and providing aid. It is an institution of political regulation, and while in so far it has strived to become the best of what it set out to be, the time has come for it to surpass the limitations that it imposed on itself, whether deliberately or not and transcend the territorial and institutional boundaries that have marginalized the Union since its very inception.

## **5.2 Influence of External Actors on European Union's Role in the Middle East**

Position of the EU in the Middle East is strongly influenced by many external factors, mainly behaviour of other important international actors. Great powers such as the USA and Russia, but also regional powers like Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have a great deal of influence over what can the EU achieve in the region.

Main concept of the EU's policy for the Middle East encompassed in the EU Global Strategy from 2016 is based on the idea of principled pragmatism. This means that the EU does not create any grand plans for transformation of the region to avoid raising unachievable expectations. Instead, the EU is centred on the support of the positive developments of the region such as resilience of Tunisia, or promotion of peace processes in conflicts in Syria or Libya. At the same time, however, pursuit of human rights, civil society, and democratisation agenda is lacking necessary support that could help achieve success in these areas (Lecha & Tocci, 2016).

The implementation of the EU's policies for the region is difficult in general. One of the most important actors that clashes with the EU's policies for the Middle East in the past few years is Russia. Russian intervention in Syria and support of President Bashar Al-Assad in particular, is directly in opposition to European proposals for resolution of the civil war in Syria. Likewise, Russia refuses to take part in counterterrorism actions, and humanitarian help if it will not bring it something in return (Baev, 2017). Russia is actively engaged in the region and that gives it a severe power advantage over the EU. European policies might be structured in a way that would gradually achieve progress and positive development in the region, but the EU is not prepared to face Russian opposition to those policies. In that way, the EU has to take Russian position into consideration every time it tries to find resolution to the region's problems, mainly when it comes to Syria.

In addition, regional powers always have to be taken into consideration when evaluating policy for any region in the world, and Turkey and Saudi Arabia serve as great examples for the Middle East. Turkey is very closely interlinked with the EU, not only economically and politically, but also as a member of NATO and an EU candidate country. There no longer seem to be a prospect of Turkey's accession to the Union and the country's policies have taken turn in a different direction, yet the EU has to weigh Turkey's stance in relation to migration policies, Kurdish question, and also Syrian conflict. While not so close geographically or policy-wise, Saudi Arabia also represents important actor and its positions play active role in EU policy for the region. The kingdom holds prominent position in oil exports and military expenditure which transfers into a voice in matters such as Iran nuclear deal, conflicts in Yemen and Syria, Arabian Gulf cooperation, and counterterrorism initiatives (Bauer, et al., 2018). The EU takes both countries seriously as well as other regional powers. Influence of these smaller powers on the EU policies is considerable since without cooperation of the important actors, the EU would not be able to achieve anything in the region.

Finally, the most important actor that has a substantial influence on the EU's decision making processes and implementation of its policies in the Middle East is the United States of America. The sole-superpower's participation in NATO creates a strong transatlantic bond with the European countries, many of which are also members of the EU. Besides security cooperation in NATO, the US has also long-lasting historical connection with Europe, and an ideological proximity that plays a significant role in the relations between the US and the EU as well. This with the combination of very significant presence of the US in the Middle East means that the EU has to take US view into account on every issue in the region.

In many cases, the EU has similar goals to those of the US and tries to coordinate its actions with the US. Examples for such coordination can be found in initiatives like wide institutional cooperation in fighting terrorist threats such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, and humanitarian operations in Syria. However, many of these operations are ineffective and suffer from differences of political and strategic opinions inside the EU that create problems during their implementation (Fishman & Brattberg, 2017).

Similarly, there are many issues in the Middle East, the resolution of which, both the EU and the US, consider crucial but level of cooperation in these matters degraded in the last few years. One such case is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During era of President Barack Obama, the US and the EU had worked closely together on the resolution of the situation

promoting two-state solution, as both sides saw the conflict as a source of regional turmoil. However, any cooperation efforts in this issue were destroyed by President Donald Trump when he decided to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and thus dealt a crippling blow to any future EU efforts for a two-state solution (Lovatt, 2017). President Trump and his worldview are contradicting many of the EU's views on the Middle East, and shift positions of the actors to a new dimension. Relation between policies of the US and the EU for the region has altered from one that was often aligned and open to a compromise into a contradictory one.

This new dynamic can also be seen in the previously analysed Iran nuclear deal. The EU made rapprochement with Iran one of its main foreign policy priorities in 2013 when a new round of nuclear negotiations began. Iranian isolationist anti-Western rhetoric was always mainly focused on the US and Israel, and not on the EU which meant an opening for mediation of improvement, and possible normalisation of relations. Both Obama administration in the US and Rouhani administration in Iran welcomed this diplomatic effort. Several years of negotiations eventually culminated in signing of the JCPOA and newly established diplomatic links between Iran and the EU also created a massive boost to trade, and provided a new platform for possible future negotiations for resolution of other Middle Eastern issues (Geranmayeh, 2017). Even though the deal was criticized by some parties, there is no question it was a huge success for the EU diplomacy. It proved that if the coordination between institutions works, and if there is a suitable opening for EU intervention, the Union is able to achieve previously unimaginable breakthroughs.

Even though the EU had managed to use its soft power efficiently and brought Iran deal to life, the story after Donald Trump is a different one. As we mentioned previously, Trump announced US withdrawal and re-imposition of sanctions in May 2018, leaving many uncertain whether that meant the deal was dead. The EU confirmed that it remains committed to implementation of the deal, but the situation created many potential conflict areas, the threat of US sanctions inflicted on the EU companies being only one of them. This turn of events proves that while the EU cannot be denied ability to achieve a foreign policy success, at the same time it is clearly not prepared to resist powerful world-stage actor such is the US and its influence.

Development of EU foreign policies in the Middle East during era of President Trump underlines weaknesses of European diplomatic efforts and reinforces argument that if the EU truly wants to achieve its goals in the region, it needs to strengthen its own resilience against

external influence the lack of which is causing failure of many EU policies. While it is important to always consider views of other powers, either great or regional ones, and if possible seek cooperation in all endeavours, to achieve a true success, the EU has to be capable of supporting policies that even if not agreed upon with other actors, would be able to withstand the external pressure. And only then could the EU really push through its policies and make desired changes to the Middle Eastern region.

### **5.3 Evolution of the EU Policies Regarding Issues in the Middle East**

After looking at a history of EU's interventions in foreign countries, we must conclude that for a long time, decisions, action plans, resolutions, etc., made by the EU's institutions were not really successful when it comes to cooperation or settlement of conflicts. European Union has been for many years in its foreign policy acting as a soft power, its attitude was vague, oriented towards promotion of democracy. Apart from that, the EU has been for many years one of the biggest donors of humanitarian and developing aid towards countries affected by conflicts or poverty issues. Even in the cases of a more active approach towards different interests, EU used to play a role of an observer that turned into active only after other powers had shown initiatives. This was caused due to mainly two reasons: incompetence of EU's institutions to effectively consolidate its member states into joint collective action, and a huge influence of the external actors, mainly US, to EU's policies outside its borders. This can be clearly seen over the issues of Middle East. In many cases the interest of particular member states of EU had been so distinct, that a unilateral policy towards the region was unimaginable, especially in countries with most power and most interests in the region, such as Great Britain, France, and Germany. Moreover, frequently policies towards individual state in the Middle East prevailed to policies towards the whole region. In the following part we are going to discuss different cases of EU's involvement in Middle-East and the on-going battle of ineptitude of its institution and the involvement of other actors with more pro-active attitude

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 is a perfect example in which the EU failed miserably to make a common action plan. Although it occurred before the Lisbon Treaty, it clearly shows that without a political consensus of its member states, there can be no political action. Prior to the invasion of Iraq, there was a sharp discussion between France and Germany strongly opposing the US-led invasion, and Britain and Spain supporting it. As a result, EU was not

able to reach any agreement regarding this issue, therefore presented itself on the international scene as completely fragmented. After the invasion and the “successful first stage” US President George W. Bush encouraged the EU to concentrate on providing humanitarian aid in Iraq (Kuzmicheva, 2006), which was truly the only thing EU was able to agree on. Although this disunity between member states highlighted harshly structural weaknesses of the EU, it can be considered as one of the main reasons for change of policies within EU, with focus on coordination and better structural possibilities to respond more effectively. This claim can be supported by statement of Chris Patten, the co-temporary EU external Affairs Commissioner:

“There is much discussion of institutional changes that could help give European foreign policy more coherence and visibility...Institutions can sometimes help to develop or change political will. But no amount of institutional tinkering can be a substitute for political will. Europe will only have a wholly credible foreign policy when the political will exist to create one” (Patten, 2003, p. 6)

Another of the example of EU involvement in the Middle East is an on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the beginning, during the Madrid Conference in 1991, EC (as a predecessor of EU) was merely an observer, but throughout the years EU continued with an effort to be part of the negotiations to effectively solve the conflict. Huge part of EU involvement was and still is, of course, the provision of humanitarian aid. With its recent years' contribution of more than a billion euro per year, it is with no doubt the largest donor to the Palestine (EEAS, 2016). Apart from this contribution, EU has been working on different plans on settlement between Israel and Palestine, inclining to two-state solution, and in general supporting UN Resolutions on that matter. Throughout the years there have been several calls from experts for a more active involvement of the EU in the process, but unfortunately for the EU, this conflict is hugely influenced by external actor, the US. Even though EU's position in many cases differs from the US, which is supporting Israel at all costs, it has been unable to create any form of legal or economic pressure on Israel. After the controversial move of Donald Trump's administration to relocate US Israeli embassy to Jerusalem and proclaiming it its capital, the EU condemned this move, but no further pressure was evolved, even though it is a clear violation of the peace plans forged by UN and EU that is built on the division of Jerusalem for both Israel and Palestine. Disunity between European

states appeared once again, with the Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Latvia and Romania abstaining from signing the condemnation (Rettman, 2018).

The influences of the other actors over the region are most clearly visible in the case of Syria. Meanwhile Russia and the US project their respective powers in the civil war-torn country; the EU is once more left as a provider of humanitarian aid, without any real power to do something about that conflict. Furthermore, it should be the EU foremost interest to step into that conflict, since it is the EU that needs to face the outcome of that conflict – a wave of refugees coming to Europe that brings not only multiple economic challenges but also a threat to security in a form of terrorism. Not to mention the political challenges about how to proceed with those immigrants, since member states have different, in many cases opposing, views.

What are we trying to prove by this brief historical overview of EU's activities in the Middle East, is that despite the fact that this region is neighbouring with the EU, it has been neglectingly mismanaged. However, over the years there has been some improvement and EU is slowly getting out of shadow of mere observer and aid provider, to a more active role that can actually inflict policies in the region. Therefore, the Iran Deal can be considered as a major success for the EU's foreign policy

The case of EU's involvement with Iran goes back to 2000, when first concerns appeared about Iran possible interest in developing nuclear weapons. Right from the beginning of dialogues with Iran, Europe adopt a belief that a cooperation, rather than isolation and confrontation could serve better the cause. During next years, EU adopted an interesting policy, agreeing that the EU-3 Group (Great Britain, France, and Germany) will serve as a negotiator with Iran on behalf of whole union (Kuzmicheva, 2006). This was an important step towards more active EU, since other member states basically given up on pursuing their individual opinions on that matter. Years of negotiations and preparations finally reached its goal in 2013, when JCPOA was signed. Details of the deal were already mentioned in this project, as well as different theoretical approaches towards it, therefore we are going to focus more on the consequences of the US withdrawal from the deal.

This time, contrary to the many previous occasions, the EU has proven to be more than just a spectator and denied playing according to rules of someone else. EU did not back up from the plan it worked so hard to achieve, just because US decided it is a bad deal. Quite contrary is now actively trying to protect the Iran deal from the consequences of the US withdrawal, to ensure the survival of the deal. Re-imposition of sanctions of US has been met

by the counter measures from the EU side which announced a special payment channel that could evade those US's sanctions. As Frederica Mogherini said, this programme serves: "to facilitate legitimate financial transactions with Iran and this will allow European companies to continue trade with Iran" (Fassihi, 2018). Despite many critics, the EU is now preparing to do everything in its strength to save the deal, even if that means introducing a financial system that effectively evades US sanctions. This can be considered as a major step for EU's foreign policy as it is taking action plans contrarious to the ones of the US, therefore overcoming everlasting influence of the external actors over such policies.

## 6 Conclusion

The European Union has without question a great potential to be an active actor in international matters concerning the Middle East. However, it fails to project its power to become more influential player in the region. This paper examined why that is the case by taking a closer look on European institutions and their structure, analysing the case of Iran deal and by discussing the main aspects that are causing this state.

When researching the footing of EU institutions, we noted that they were considerably strengthened by the Treaty of Lisbon which also reformed a position of High Representative and thus opened new ways of shaping common foreign policies for the Union as a whole. It is important to mention, however, that the member states have to first achieve consensus before any policy can be pushed forward. This is limiting factor to institutional efficiency that combined with insufficient leadership and bureaucratic complexity impedes any push for collective action.

With that said, the institutional machine of the EU is not as ineffective as it might seem. In order to examine the brighter side of EU foreign policy in the Middle East, we focused on the case of Iran deal which is often claimed to be a biggest achievement of Union's diplomacy. In our analysis, we reviewed the deal with two theoretical perspectives: neoliberal institutionalism and neorealism, with the goal of figuring out why were the EU efforts successful in this case when usually the opposite is true.

From the neoliberal institutionalism point of view, the European Union only just recently broke the stagnation stasis that it was under when it comes to its effectiveness in foreign affairs. The Iran deal propelled the EU from its mediator position to active player and the recent damage control that it had to do to preserve the economic aspect of the deal with Iran, proved it capable of extending its reach effectively even in the Middle East, where it reluctantly dared to delve before. The JCPOA is the result of fruitful cooperation between institutions and the European Union proved that it is capable of putting aside its internal predicaments to work towards stopping the proliferation of the nuclear crisis in the Middle East.

From the neorealist perspective we can evidently conclude that the EU is currently following its interest in the Middle East. Although it took some years and some needed development but the EU is now with standing firmly with position on preservation of the Iran Deal. From neorealist perspective it means that the EU has finally started to pursue its interest

in the region, regardless other factors, which is one of the features typical for major players. If this pattern continues the EU could finally reach new levels of importance in the international policies of the world, a position that had been assigned to it for a long time, but only ‘on paper’.

Our analysis then continued with research of the main reasons for EU’s inability to enforce its policies towards the Middle East. We examined the role of institutions and their relationship with the member states, influence of external actors, and concluded with what we consider a progressive evolution of EU’s policy implementation towards the Middle East. The ineffectiveness of the European Union stems mainly from its institutional fragmentation. Each member state’s foreign policy directive is vastly different from a directive promulgated by a cohesive institution such as the EU and this individuality is an impediment when it comes to achieving a common ground on an array of subjects, but especially on that of foreign affairs.

Another key factor that has a substantial influence over the perceived EU impotence in the region is the role of the external factors. In our analysis, we came to the conclusion that EU’s resilience towards other actors is not corresponding with the Union’s potential. It, of course, must take into consideration positions of every significant actor present in the region, though the EU is often vulnerable to these positions and unable to withstand the external pressure put on its policies. We again returned to the case of Iran deal and a severe blow it suffered from the US withdrawal. Reliance on US support in this matter underlines EU’s inability to resist influences of the external actors. It is yet to be seen, however, whether or not the Iran deal survives this crisis, giving the EU opportunity to prove that it is in fact capable of acting independently and is truly a major player on the scene.

These two above mentioned reasons had been often discussed as usual rationale for EU reluctance to follow its interest in the region, interest that should have been followed given the importance of the region for the EU. However, with the new development regarding Iran deal, we can conclude that EU has stepped out of this shadow of incompetence. It proved itself worthy of international recognition of major player, by not giving up when US withdraw, but more importantly by actively opposing the US while trying to save the deal.

Finally, to sum it up and answer our initial question: the EU isn’t using its power to project more influence in the Middle East because of its institutional fragmentation, inconsistent foreign policies of member states, and vast amount of influence of external actors it is not able to resist.

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