

A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: The European Union's Foreign Policy towards the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the Light of China's Assertive Foreign Policy in the Gulf 2003-2023

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Abstract

China and the European Union are currently acting as game pieces in the shifting geopolitics of the Gulf region since American presence has retracted, and where China quickly seeks to fill that vacuum economically, militarily and politically. This paper seeks to analyze how China's assertive foreign policy in the Gulf energy sector and trade sector initially threatens the European Union's security matters and economic interests in the region, and how this is reflected in the European Union's foreign policy towards the GCC between 2003-2023. The assessment of the EU's foreign policy with the GCC is contextualized in the light of the principled pragmatism theory, which indicates that a body or actor seeks to pursue its interests of realist nature by advancing them out of an idealist notion such as norms and values. The nature of EU's principled pragmatism is then analyzed in sources of a primary origin, fundamentally the 1989 *Joint Communication on a strategic partnership with the Gulf*, which initial multilateral relation was set between the EU-GCC, and is applied and compared with internal documents of the European Parliament concerning foreign policy in the Gulf and with the GCC. What came out of these documents, in addition to supporting secondary sources and academic journals, was that the EU is advancing and promoting the role of the European and Gulf private sector in trade and energy sectors in comparison to China's public sector approach that only further stimulates the rentier economies of the Gulf states and upholds its corrupt and unequal systems thereof. The EU's rhetoric is that of sustainability and people to people interaction, but is underlined by an ambition to include a human rights aspect, something which the Gulf states do not find relevant in the trade and energy sector. Thereby China is still a partner of great interest to the GCC, and the EU has to find a fine line in not excluding China completely following the mantra of "de-risk, no de-couple." Hereby the EU has adopted a principled pragmatism foreign policy which recognizes China's rising economic, political and military power in the GCC, yet seeks to meet it by advancing and protecting its own interests of political and economic nature wrapped in a normative values based rhetoric and action which includes the private sector and civil society; two actors China is not involving in its advancement of the Gulf.

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List of Abbreviations

AIIB = Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

BRI = One Belt, One Road Initiative

CMG = China Merchant Group

CSCEC = Chinese State Construction Engineering Corporation

COSCO = China Ocean Shipping Corporation

EES = European Security Strategy

EU = The European Union

European Political Cooperation = EPC

FTA = Free Trade Agreement

GCC = Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates)

IGC = Intergovernmental conference

SEZAD = Special Economic Zone at Duqm

SOE = State Owned Enterprises

U.S = The United States

VAT = Value-added tax

WLP = World Logistics Passport

Introduction

“The Middle East is undergoing new and profound changes. The aspiration of the Arab people for peace and development is much more compelling, and their call for equity and justice is stronger than ever. As strategic partners, China and Arab states should carry forward the spirit of China-Arab friendship, strengthen solidarity and cooperation, and foster a closer China-Arab community with a shared future, so as to deliver greater benefits to our peoples and advance the cause of human progress.”¹

President Xi Jinping at the China-Arab States Summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on
December 9, 2022

For a long time the West, primarily the United States (U.S), marked its political, economic, cultural, military and diplomatic presence in the Middle East as regional hegemony. However, the U.S announced in 2021 a shift in its foreign policy by “right-sizing” its military presence and diplomacy in the Middle East, meaning that Washington is withdrawing its military resources to some extent in the region. Stand-alone a much debated topic in the U.S, the policy brings fundamental changes to the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East as a new multipolar regional order presents itself. With the U.S presence declining, China is taking advantage of this opportunity by increasing its political and economic cooperation in the region as part of the One Belt, One Road Initiative (BRI), where investments have increased annually and are mainly allocated to infrastructure projects and connectivity projects.² This process is translated back to Xi’s speech above, where sustainable solidarity and strategic cooperation form the basis of a contemporary and future Sino-Arab partnership. The European Union (EU) significantly benefited from the U.S presence in the Middle East, especially in security-wise matters due to the military presence of U.S Army troops. Naturally, the EU fears these developments of the U.S leaving and China entering, because China seeks to translate its economic activity into political influence in the region and thereby

¹ Xinhua, “Full text of Xi Jinping’s keynote speech at China-Arab States summit,” *China Daily*, December 10, 2022, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202212/10/WS6393e520a31057c47eba3b69.html>.

² Mohammad Eslami and Maria Papageorgiou, “China’s Increasing Role in the Middle East: Implications for Regional and International Dynamics,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, June 2, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/china-is-getting-comfortable-with-the-gulf-cooperation-council-the-west-must-pragmatically-adapt-to-its-growing-regional-influence/>.

hinder, diminish and threaten European economic and security factors in the region.³ Another important factor is the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2011, where surveys done by the Arab Barometer indicate that the Arab political spectrum demands a governance that provides economic dignity, and as democracy has failed to deliver that, Arabs have become more favorable towards authoritarian regimes such as China.⁴ With the retrenchment of the United States, an increasingly assertive China and a local civil society which sees itself open to cooperating with non-Western countries based on authoritarianism, Europe will find itself competing against actors in this new multipolar order that challenges the Western economic and political hegemony in the Middle East. The EU will have to reconsider its foreign policy towards the region in order to secure its interest.

As recently as in the European Commission State of the Union Speech 2023, President von der Leyen stated that the EU's approach towards China's economic trade practices within the EU's borders is that of "de-risk, not decouple", referring to China's economic assertiveness in Europe which disturbs the harmonization process of the European economic integration project.⁵ This threat to economic integration can be solved by not closing the doors on China, but by maintaining a policy of open dialogue and diplomacy while still keeping China at a distance. Furthermore, von der Leyen highlighted the ambitions of becoming a geopolitical union, with green transition and digitalization as normative keywords underlining the process, and where China's assertiveness is pointed out as one of the key drivers of this geopolitical union. Weight is thus emphasized on China's assertiveness within the EU, but analyzing the EU's foreign policy in the Middle East can provide us how the EU promotes its "de-risk, not de-couple" strategy outside of the EU's borders in the light of its geopolitical ambitions. This strategy can be explained by the concept of principled pragmatism, implying that the foreign policy of the EU and its normative power is underpinned by its values and interests, bringing forth a policy of both realism and idealism.⁶ The Middle East, with its geographical proximity to Europe, has always been a crucial region for the EU as instability or unfavorable political outcomes that destabilize the region puts European security at risk.

³ Julien Barnes-Dacey and Hugh Lovatt, "Principled Pragmatism: Europe's Place in a Multipolar Middle East," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, April 22, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/principled-pragmatism-europes-place-in-a-multipolar-middle-east/#summary>.

⁴ Amaney A. Jamal and Michael Robbins, "Why Democracy Stalled in the Middle East: Economic Despair and the Triumph of the China Model," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2022, 28-29.

⁵ "2023 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen," Press Corner, European Commission, last modified September 13, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_4426.

⁶ Nathalie Tocci, "From the European Security Strategy to the EU Global Strategy: explaining the journey," *International Politics* 54 (May 2017): 494-495, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41311-017-0045-9>.

As the Middle East as a whole is too broad as a case study, the foreign policy and multilateral relationship between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) will be contextualized and analyzed. The GCC and its member countries are of significant importance to both the EU and China as they are rentier states exporting oil to the global economy. The current shift in the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East is thus a favorable situation for China who can play out its “opponent’s” like the European Union, consequently jeopardizing the status quo of the global economy by de-dollarizing the oil market by for example establishing yuan as the official currency for oil trade.⁷ The core argument is thus that China’s assertiveness is a threat to European interests and security concerns - both domestically and in the Gulf, and the EU is mirroring an increasingly assertive foreign policy in the region as a response thereof. Economically, China deprives the EU of critical market access to the GCC and subsequent trading hubs in Asia following the militarization of industrial parks in the region, while security wise China may gain increased control of oil production in the Gulf and jeopardize the European markets access to Gulf oil. A conclusion to this argument is contextualized and analyzed via the following research question: in light of China’s increased assertiveness, how did the European Union protect its own economic interests and security concerns in the Gulf region between 2003-2023?

In protecting its energy supply to the European market, a matter related to EU’s security matters, the EU aligns itself with the GCC-states and her Vision-programmes that aim to diversify the economy. Hereby the EU simultaneously brings forward its normative principles of sustainability, good governance and neoliberalism by transforming the rentier economy of the Gulf states, a task which the EU gives the private sector to and in parallel secures its own interest and energy supply. This at the same time aims to address China’s assertiveness in the Gulf energy sector who puts emphasis on the public sector and the rentier economy, and seeks to exclude Europe from its connectivity projects in the Gulf.

Allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the EU’s foreign policy in the Gulf, from the adoption of the European Security Strategy (EES) in 2003 until 2023, brings an understanding of how the EU’s foreign policy is reflected in its development as a geopolitical actor and has shaped over time depending on the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East/Gulf. With the adoption of the EES in 2003, the EU for the first time agreed on a joint threat assessment and presented clear objectives for advancing its security interests, based on

⁷ Barnes-Dacey and Lovatt, “Principled Pragmatism.”

its key values and normative principles.⁸ The EES also signified a diversion from alignment of U.S foreign policy and values, with the EU now setting its own course forward in international politics. Considering these two facts, this thesis will analyze how the EU “combats” China’s assertiveness in the Gulf in order to protect its own economic and security interest, and what that implies for the EU’s historical process as a geopolitical and regional actor in the Middle East/Gulf. For the EU’s security considerations in the Gulf. This paper consists of three chapters; the introduction looks upon principled pragmatism and the methodology which outlines this paper. The first chapter seeks to contextualize how the geopolitical landscape in the Gulf has come to be in favor of China’s assertive foreign policy, thereby answering the first subquestion in what way China has increasingly asserted itself politically and economically in the Gulf between 2003-2023?

The second chapter goes into depth how the European Union’s (national) security considerations is affected by China’s assertiveness in the Gulf and the EU’s foreign policy towards the GCC in response thereof, specifically looking at the energy sector. Thereby the second sub-question will be answered; how are the security concerns reflected in the EU’s foreign policy between 2003-2023 in the Gulf in light of China’s assertiveness?

The third chapter answers the sub-question of how is the EU’s economic interest articulated in its foreign policy between 2003-2023 towards the Gulf in the light of China’s assertiveness? The answer is that the EU is adopting a foreign policy of increased assertiveness which both aims to go against China’s BRI by projects such as IMEC, but also stand open to joint-ventures with already established Chinese projects in the Gulf such as Duqm (SEZAD); an approach which the EU calls “de-risk, not de-couple.”

1.1 Theory and Literature

This paper is based on two contemporary academic debates; that of China’s increased assertiveness and political influence in the Middle East, and the EU’s response and policy towards China’s assertiveness. The former debate is crucial in order to gain an understanding of the latter, and forms the foundation of this paper. China’s assertive foreign policy refers to how it “actively pursues its interests and acts boldly toward achieving its goals, contradicting

⁸ “European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in A Better World,” Council of the European Union, 2009, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30823/qc7809568enc.pdf>.

the interests of other actors”.⁹ This is based on the fact that China’s is fundamentally challenging its foreign policy behavior of the previous thirty-years, and is believed to derive from the economic crisis in 2008-2009. In the 1990s and 2000s, China thus showcased a restrained and low-key foreign policy which mirrored the EU’s low threat assessment, regarding China as primarily an economic partner. Scholarly work written after the economic crisis in 2008, such as that of Michael Swaine (expert in China and East Asian security studies at Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft), argues that China’s “new” foreign policy challenges U.S hegemony and aims to assert itself as a major player in the global market and political arena.¹⁰ This notion was further confirmed with the introduction of the “One Belt, One Road initiative” (BRI) in 2013, which aimed to connect and integrate the world in order to enhance the level of welfare and economic prosperity for participating countries. Around the same time, Li and Taube argue on the other hand that the advanced assertiveness of China in contemporary times is nothing new, and that China’s assertiveness originates from the beginning of the 1990’s under President Jiang Zemin, where China on several occasions displayed assertiveness in policies undertaken before the economic crisis in 2008-2009.¹¹ In unison with this claim, Björn Jérden (director of the Swedish National China Centre) means that the West has cherry-picked China’s assertive actions, and that China’s assertiveness in the 1990’s is a well-known fact with examples such as the third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995-1996.¹² The third Taiwan Strait Crisis involved China and Taiwan, where the former fired missiles in the surrounding waters of Taiwan, which at that time was regarded by China as moving away its foreign policy from the One-China policy. Therefore, the assertive foreign policy of China was not groundbreakingly new as claimed earlier, and has to a greater extent outlined China’s foreign policy today since China has proved itself as a geopolitical power that on a regional and global scale has a lasting impact on economic and political structures.¹³ This was already a concern in the beginning of the 2000’s, with scholars such as Thomas Parker (professor of security studies at George Washington University) highlighting

⁹ Richard Q. Turcsanyi, “What’s Really Behind Chinese Assertiveness in the South China Sea?” *The Diplomat*, December 22, 2017,

<https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/whats-really-behind-chinese-assertiveness-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

¹⁰ Michael Swaine, “Perceptions of an Assertive China,” *China Leadership Monitor* 1, no. 32 (May 2010): 10, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/IS3704_pp007-048.pdf.

¹¹ Yuan Li and Markus Taube, “Introduction: The Belt and Road Initiative - manifestations, driving forces and, international responses,” in *How China’s Silk Road Initiative is Changing the Global Economic Landscape*, ed. Yuan Li and Markus Taube (London: Routledge, 2019), 1.

¹² Björn Jerdén, The Assertive China Narrative: Why It Is Wrong and How So Many Still Bought into It, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 75,

<https://academic.oup.com/cjip/article/7/1/47/574393#9226122>.

¹³ Li and Taube, “Introduction,” 9.

China's growing interest in the Persian Gulf and dependency on Gulf energy exports.¹⁴ For China, the Gulf region equals energy security, with China currently being the world's largest oil importer with oil crude imports valued at \$128 billion dollars in 2021.¹⁵ Given these numbers, the geostrategic importance of the Middle East indicates that China will not be leaving the region soon. In the security sector, China has become increasingly assertive too by establishing its first overseas military base in Djibouti and having operational control of the port of Gwadar in Pakistan, providing military presence to the maritime key points of the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb.¹⁶

The EU's position and role in the Middle East has not been as prominent as that of the U.S, and as historically long as that of China, argues Laipson in 1990 before the completion of the European Union in 1992. However, at the end of the Cold War, and especially in the light of the completion of the European Single Market and the ESS, the EU was regarded as a growing power. Given its geographical proximity to the Middle East it could have "a more sustained and durable political, economic and cultural presence in the region than the United States or the Soviet Union."¹⁷ Unlike them, Europe has a colonial and imperialist history in the Middle East, and may be one of the key reasons why Europe in a post-colonial setting never truly established itself as a prominent actor in the Middle East. The sustained and durable presence in the region never really came to a stand, as economic relations with the European Union were strained at times and its economic agreements are believed to be exploitative and of neo-colonial nature; a debate related to the core-periphery framework.¹⁸ This in turn can be related back to the public opinion in the Gulf of preferring cooperation with authoritarian regimes like China, as democracy may be connotated with the colonial ties of European powers. Sanam Noor, researcher and analyst at the Government of Pakistan in non-traditional security and conflict resolution, means that this un-assertiveness by the EU stems from the normative values of the predecessor of the EU; the European Community

¹⁴ Thomas Parker, "China's Growing Interests in the Persian Gulf," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 7, no. 1 (2000): 236, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24590209>.

¹⁵ Abdullah Baabood, "Why China is Emerging as a Main Promoter of Stability in the Strait of Hormuz," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, May 24, 2023, <https://carnegie-mec.org/2023/05/24/why-china-is-emerging-as-main-promoter-of-stability-in-strait-of-hormuz-pub-89829#:~:text=China%2C%20the%20world's%20largest%20oil,the%20first%20quarter%20of%202022>.

¹⁶ Camille Lons et al., "China's great game in the Middle East," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, October 21, 2019, https://ecfr.eu/publication/china_great_game_middle_east/.

¹⁷ Ellen Laipson, "Europe's Role in The Middle East: Enduring Ties, Emerging Opportunities," *Middle East Journal* 44, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4328053>.

¹⁸ Rodney Wilson, "The Economic Relations of the Middle East: Toward Europe or within the Region?" *Middle East Journal* 48, no. 2 (1994): 270, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4328691>.

(EC). The preoccupation of the European Integration Project of the EC, the inability to form a comprehensive foreign policy in the Middle East due to disunity within the bloc as well as promoting its normative values of peace and (economic) prosperity, resulted in the EC as observant and participant instead of a leading and indispensable partner.¹⁹ It was first in 2003 with the adoption of the ESS and The Treaty of Nice that a true common foreign and security policy was established. Prior to this, the EU's foreign policy in the Middle East was primarily focused on the Palestine-Israel conflict, but after 2003 and especially 9/11, EU's common foreign policy diverged increasingly from that of the US.²⁰ The EU promoted a strategy which was based on its own values and security interest, thereby arguably advocating to become a more geopolitical actor. Nathalie Tocci, a specialist in the role of the EU in international affairs and former advisor to the Italian government and EU officials on foreign policy matters, explains this period as transformative. In 2003, the EU became a transformative power, meaning that at a time of US hegemony the EU and the U.S promoted "Western" and "European" norms and values with regards to domestic development in developing countries to create a "better world," but in 2003 the EU became a body working on principled pragmatism in which its normative power is underpinned by its values and interests.²¹

Principled pragmatism refers to an amalgam of realist and idealist foreign policy which underscores that foreign policy decisions are based on a (realist) interest, executed on normative principles.²² Thus its normative principles form the rhetoric of the foreign policy, but the goal of the action undertaken is of a realist nature. The theory of principled pragmatism was first thoroughly analyzed by Rafael Velazquez-Flores, who argues that it consists of three analytical models; (1) Allison's approach which means that security and interests prevail, (2) the three levels of analysis provide the context to identify interests on a system, state and individual level, and (3) finally Putnam's model who looks to the interest of domestic and external groups/factors which form foreign policy decisions.²³ The difference between the EU's transformative and principled pragmatism foreign policy is that the former

¹⁹ Sanam Noor, "European Union and the Middle East: A Historical Analysis," *Pakistan Horizon* 57, no 1 (January 2004): 24, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41394035>.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 37.

²¹ Nathalie Tocci, "From the European Security Strategy to the EU Global Strategy: explaining the journey," *International Politics* 54 (May 2017): 494-495, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41311-017-0045-9>.

²² Rafael Velasques-Flores, "Principled Pragmatism: An Approach to Study Foreign Policy," in *Global Foreign Policy Studies*, ed. Karen E Smith, Kai He and Cameron G. Thies (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 17.

²³ Velasques-Flores, "Principled Pragmatism," 17.

is how the EU wants the world to be, while the latter looks at the world how it actually is.²⁴ Principled pragmatism has also been used and promoted by the EU itself, with the adoption of The EU Global Strategy (EUGS) in 2016 and where its foreign policy would “stem as much from a realistic assessment of the current strategic environment as from an idealistic aspiration to advance a better world”.²⁵ The EU thus openly promotes an increasingly assertive strategy which is formed by its liberal rhetoric, and normative soft power in advocating democracy, the rule of law and human rights.²⁶

Situating the current multipolar Middle East in a realist framework of power (seeking) behavior suitably explains the geopolitical landscape in the region and foreign policy China and the EU adopt vis-a-vis the GCC and the Gulf. Hugo Meijer, the founding director of the European Initiative for Security Studies (EISS), recognizes the EU’s foreign and security policy towards China, but reduced the policies from EU’s major economic powers to the Asia-Pacific region and thereby highlighting bilateral relations between EU member states and China only.²⁷ As China’s increased assertiveness is a threat to the EU’s position in the region, specifically targeting regional economic and security interests, this paper brings a valuable insight into the EU’s foreign policy approach and future geopolitical role in the region in regards to economy and security, as well as highlighting how the EU positions itself currently in the global arena depending on its values and geopolitical interests in a multipolar geopolitical setting. It furthermore looks beyond the most common existing literature on EU-China relations, which usually looks from the perspective of the European foreign and security policy towards China. This paper instead brings an analysis of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) towards China via a third actor (GCC) on a multilateral level.

1.2 Methodology

The methodological framework for this paper and its subsequent chapters are of a qualitative nature, combining primary and secondary sources. Quantitative data would have been more appropriate if this paper sought to statistically analyze various cases with different attributes, but this paper seeks only to present what empirically embodies the EU’s foreign policy in the

²⁴ Tocci, “From European Security Strategy,” 499.

²⁵ Ana E. Juncos, “XI: Principled Pragmatism and Resilience,” in *Resilience in the Western Balkans*, ed. Sabina Lange et al (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2017): 75, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07086.15>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hugo Meijer, *Awakening to China’s Rise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2022), 4.

Gulf and how that fits within the principled pragmatism framework, not how big of a scale the EU's foreign policy is with the GCC. The secondary sources utilized for this chapter are primarily of a qualitative nature, including both peer-reviewed and non-peer reviewed articles, journals, news articles and books. However, the qualitative sources may be accompanied by sources of a quantitative nature, seeking only to further strengthen the main arguments by analyzing primarily the economic impact of the projects and policies undertaken by each respective. The most important secondary sources are the academic articles "Principled Pragmatism: An Approach to Study Foreign Policy" by Rafael Velasquez-Flores and "From the European Security Strategy to the EU Global Strategy: explaining the journey" by Nathalie Tocci, in addition to the book *China and the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries : Strategic Partnership in a Changing World* (2016) by Muhamad Olimat and *The European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council: Towards a New Path* by Adel Abdel Ghafar and Silvia Colombo. The former brings an understanding to the nature of the EU's foreign policy, which can be reflected back upon its interests with the GCC, and forms the theoretical framework for this research. Tocci's generalization of the development of the EU's foreign policy sheds light on the EU as a geopolitical actor in a multipolar setting, yet presents inconsistencies as her generalizations of EU's foreign policy development because it neglects that the EU may have adopted and showcased principled pragmatism during US hegemony in the Gulf. Olimat brings a qualitative historical analysis of the Sino-GCC relationship from a multidisciplinary perspective, thereby bringing forward on how the nature of EU's foreign policy in the Gulf after 2003 came to a stand, and where finally Abdel Ghafar and Colombo critically assess the EU-GCC multilateral relationship and what its shortcomings are.

The primary sources will analyze if and how the EU's principled pragmatism has been adopted in its foreign policy via official EU documents, strategies, resolutions and projects with the GCC between 2003-2023. Official cooperation between the EU Commission and the GCC is primarily analyzed in the *Joint Communication on a strategic partnership with the Gulf* from 1989, which establishes a mutual dialogue on economic relations, environment, research and more.²⁸ *The Delegation of the European Union to the United Arab Emirates* is crucial too as it gives access to archives, press and publications on projects and the strategy

²⁸ "Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the EU," EEAS, European Union External Action, last modified August 3rd, 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gulf-cooperation-council-gcc-and-eu_en.

of the EU in the Gulf.²⁹ It is important to highlight that the EU Commission conducts multilateral relations on a public level; therefore documents from the EU Parliament form a greater importance to this research as their unpublished sources gain insight to the EU's official undertakings and foreign policy towards the GCC. By looking at unpublished sources, one avoids information published for the public which can be tinted in a certain way or highlight information which is seen only relevant to the public. Examples of such unpublished documents are the *EU-GCC Clean Energy Network* and *JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL: A strategic partnership with the Gulf*.³⁰ Outlining its objectives in the region, these documents show that its approach of principled pragmatism may always have been present, bringing forward the normative values of the EU via its foreign policy in the Gulf before and during the multipolarity in order to protect its own economic interest and security concerns in the region. Important to note is that the principled pragmatism approach is stated in published sources, but may be less clear in internal documents and thus I need to identify what its normative value based approaches are. This is also what I expect to find; policies and undertakings which are clearly not branded as principled or pragmatic, but are based on a normative approach yet have a decision of a realist nature behind it such as sustainable goals underlined by a human rights or good governance approach. I furthermore expect these policies to either target the green energy sector and thereby aim to combat the energy sector and security factors for China, or the infrastructure sector which China is at the forefront of. Primary Chinese sources from the government will be difficult to find due to non-transparency but also language as it primarily is in Chinese, but official statements or project documents in the GCC will be helpful as they are in English and articulate what China aims with these projects that potentially jeopardize EU interests. Other important primary sources are graphs and tables from atlanticcouncil.org³¹, as well as Chinese and European

²⁹ "Projects," Delegation of the European Union to the United Arab Emirates, European Union External Action, accessed December 22, 2023,

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/projects_en?s=210&f%5B0%5D=project_site%3AUnited%20Arab%20Emirates.

³⁰ "JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL: A strategic partnership with the Gulf," Opened for signature May 18, 2022, *European Commission* (2022), <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Joint%20Communication%20to%20the%20European%20Parliament%20and%20the%20Council%20-%20A%20Strategic%20Partnership%20with%20the%20Gulf.pdf>.

³¹ Joseph Webster and Joze Pelayo, "China is Getting Comfortable with the Gulf Cooperation Council: The West Must Pragmatically Adapt to its Growing Regional Influence," *Atlantic Council*, April 5, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/china-is-getting-comfortable-with-the-gulf-cooperation-council-the-west-must-pragmatically-adapt-to-its-growing-regional-influence/>.

investment data from [aei.org](https://www.aei.org), highlighting the energy sector and trade industry in numbers.³² These sources are of a more quantitative nature, and are important additional sources to the qualitative primary sources because the latter indicates the official policies laid out, while the former accounts for what in fact was accomplished and what its effects were in numbers. These can then be further strengthened by secondary sources such as academic journals. Finding primary sources on Chinese investments as part of its BRI are expected to be more difficult than finding primary sources on investments and foreign policies by the EU as the latter tends to be more transparent than the former. The more “controversial” and bigger investments by China tend to be published for the public, but might lead to a cherry-picking of sources and information that specifically was intended to put China in a good light. I still choose to utilize them because they indicate that China indeed is undertaking mega-projects in the energy sector and trade industry, and how their initiatives jeopardize the interests of the EU.

Chapter 1: The Rise of the Red Dragon and the New Silk Route

This chapter seeks to analyze how China has increasingly asserted itself politically and economically in the Gulf between 2003-2023, and to do so we need to contextualize the Sino-GCC relationship in a historical assessment in order to understand how China has been able to nestle itself in the Gulf oil sector and its adherent supply chain and how come this is a threat to EU’s security matters and economic interests in the Gulf.

In the spring of 2011, demonstrations across the Arab world culminated with people taking the streets to demand “bread, dignity and social justice.” In Tunisia, the uprisings and protests resulted in a regime change of a more democratic nature, but for Syria, Yemen and Libya the results were devastating civil wars that ravaged the countries.³³ However, the aftermath of the Arab Spring not only highlighted the modest political, economic and social outcomes for the region and its people, but also a shift in mentality and attitude towards political rights and democracy. As democracy had failed to deliver “bread, dignity and social justice,” favorability towards democracy declined. A survey by the Arab Barometer in 2018-2019

³² “China Global Investment Tracker,” Economics, American Enterprise Institute, accessed November 9, 2023, <https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>.

³³ Kali Robinson and Will Merrow, “The Arab Spring at Ten Years: What’s the Legacy of the Uprisings?” *Council of Foreign Relations*, December 3, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/article/arab-spring-ten-years-whats-legacy-uprisings>.

indicated that in 7 out of 12 Arab countries surveyed, 70% preferred democracy over other options.³⁴ Two years later, in 2021-2022, another survey of 23,000 interviews in Arab countries highlighted that China was preferred over the U.S (with the exception of Morocco), and that China is considered less a threat in terms of economic power and influence in the MENA-region than that of the U.S.³⁵ The Gulf countries were also not immune to the protests and demand for reforms which its neighboring countries experienced. Bahrain was the most notable in that sense because of casualties as a result of the protests and media coverage of it. Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) faced protests too, yet these were less covered and more muted than other countries due to the authoritarian nature of these states and the power dynamics between state and citizens as a result of the rentier economy, affecting the reports brought out by local media outlets in terms of censorship.³⁶ The rentier nature of the majority of Gulf states refers to how the ruling families (such as Al-Saud in Saudi Arabia and Al-Maktoum in the U.A.E) and elites have utilized the rent from their natural resources, such as oil and gas, to create stability via modern state development and thereby claim loyalty from its citizens in return. However, the state formation is based on corrupt practices such as nepotism and tribalism, as well as not always conforming to the international standards set on human rights. This led to people taking to the streets and demanding regime change and democracy.³⁷ Paradoxically enough, just like the rest of the MENA-countries, Gulf countries indicated favorability towards cooperation with authoritarian regimes like China, where once again a public survey by the Arab Barometer in 2021 highlighted that for example in Kuwait, 49% of the population indicated a preference in having stronger economic ties with China.³⁸ In broad, approximately 63% of youth in the GCC support disengagement of the U.S in the Middle East.³⁹ Thus the citizens of the GCC-countries have opened their doors to China, but has China taken advantage of this change in the Arab political spectrum too?

³⁴ Natalya Rahman, "Democracy in the Middle East and North Africa: Five Years after the Arab Uprisings," *Arab Barometer*, October 2018, https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/Democracy_Public-Opinion_Middle-east_North-Africa_2018.pdf.

³⁵ "US-China in MENA 2022," Arab Pulse, Arab Barometer, last modified January 17, 2023, <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2023/01/12352/>.

³⁶ May Seikaly and Khawla Mattar, *The Silent Revolution: The Arab Spring and the Gulf States* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2015): 4. <https://search-ebshost-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=975982&site=ehost-live>.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

³⁸ Michael Robbins, "Fragile Popularity: Arab Attitudes Towards China," *Arab Barometer*, December 15, 2021, <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2021/12/fragile-popularity-arab-attitudes-towards-china/>.

³⁹ "Most youth would like the United States to disengage from the Middle East," Findings, Arab Youth Survey, last modified 2023, <https://arabyouthsurvey.com/en/findings/#my-global-citizenship-6>.

One thing is for certain; the surveys by the Arab Barometer and Arab Youth Survey indicate that Arab sentiment towards the West has declined. For the EU it will become more difficult in exercising its normative value based foreign policy and securitize its (political and economic) interests in the GCC if its people and leaders prefer China as an economic and political partner.

The bilateral relations between China and the GCC-countries dates back to the pre-Silk Road era, which began in 138 B.C. Its main purpose was to exchange commodities and knowledge between the East and West. During this time, China established contacts with the Kingdom Aman (Oman-Arabia), highlighting that China already then created trade independence with the Gulf region.⁴⁰ Fast forward to the Cold War period, the Chinese influence in the GCC then was to primarily support leftist regimes in Oman and Yemen, nurturing revolutionary aspirations in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. China eventually established official diplomatic relations with Kuwait in 1971, with the other Gulf states following after.⁴¹ In historical context, the Chinese relationship with the Gulf-countries was thus underpinned by ideological and economic values respectively, and when the GCC officially was established in 1981, the relationship would be primarily economic as seen in 1993 when China became net oil-importer from the Gulf.⁴² During the Gulf War, China also had an important role in providing weapons to Saudi Arabia with a \$3.5 billion deal on missiles, seen as the official starting point of more amicable relations between the two countries.⁴³ In 1999, China indicated the first steps in a more assertive foreign policy, when President Jiang Zemin visited Saudi Arabia and signed a strategic oil cooperation agreement. This allowed Chinese companies to invest in Saudi Arabia's domestic oil market and Saudi companies to participate in China's domestic refining process. Energy sales quickly increased from a worth of \$1.5 billion in 2000 to \$25 billion in 2010.⁴⁴ In the GCC in general, oil imports have since then continuously increased on an annual basis where in 2015 China passed the U.S in top oil importing country with imports of 6.1 mbpd (thousands of barrels/day).⁴⁵ Considering the domestic economic growth rate, urbanization, industrialization and demographics of China, energy security is crucial for China's regime survival,

⁴⁰ Muhamad Olimat, *China and the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries: Strategic Partnership in a Changing World* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016): 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 14-15.

⁴² *Ibid*, 30.

⁴³ Jonathan Fulton, *Thirty Years of Sino-Saudi Relations* (Washington D.C: Atlantic Council, 2020): 3, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Sino-Saudi-Relations_WEB.pdf.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 6.

⁴⁵ Olimat, *China and the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries*, 30.

sovereignty and economic prosperity, which cruciality thus underscores China's foreign policy and multilateral relationship with the GCC. There are however three factors which jeopardizes China's energy security from the GCC; lack of control of trade and shipping routes, insufficient domestic oil production and fluctuating oil prices.⁴⁶ China has approached these problems by increasing its domestic oil production and seeking greater control of transportation routes with projects such as the Burma-China pipeline. With numbers still indicating an annual increase in oil exports from the GCC to China, with as recent as in 2022 being 210 million tonnes of oil (double the amount of imports in 2014) and representing 41% of China's overall crude oil imports, the oil imports from the Gulf do not seem to decline in the coming future and indicate that the securitization of the energy supply from the Gulf is of significant national interest to China.⁴⁷

1.1 China and the GCC Energy Sector

Via its BRI, China has made the transportation issue of crude oil to China from the Gulf a primary strategic task, thereby seeking to control one of the impediments to its energy security. The majority of GCC-countries are located by the Persian Gulf, where the Strait of Hormuz opens up to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, highlighting its strategic and geopolitical significance as it is the only maritime exit out of the Persian Gulf. However, because of occasional stirrups between the U.S (which Fifth Fleet guards the strait) and Iran, the global oil supply has been threatened several times.⁴⁸ China has therefore in recent years invested in projects in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with one such project being the 2012 Habshan-Fujairah pipeline of 3.2\$ billion, seeking to bypass the Strait of Hormuz by shipping oil from the Emirate of Fujairah to China.⁴⁹ The project was constructed by China Petroleum Engineering and Construction Corporation (CPECC) in a joint venture with the International Petroleum Investment Company in Abu Dhabi. This was one of the first projects China undertook in the Gulf as part of its BRI, seeking to integrate the GCC-countries in its strategy. In the same year, China signed a strategic partnership between state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC),

⁴⁶ Olimat, *China and the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries*, 32.

⁴⁷ Tingting Zhang, "Energy Cooperation Between China and the GCC Countries Under the BRI," in *China-Gulf Oil Cooperation Under the Belt and Road Initiative*, ed. Tingting Zhang and Dehua Wang (Singapore: Springer, 2020): 59,

https://link-springer-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/content/pdf/10.1007/978-981-15-9283-6_3?pdf=chapter%20toc.

⁴⁸ Olimat, *China and the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries*, 34.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

where CNPC obtained a concession equating to a 40% share in a joint venture with ADNOC to extract oil in the UAE, in addition to ADNOC supplying CNPC double the amount of crude oil for the Chinese market.⁵⁰ This has evolved into a mutual bilateral integration in which China has increasingly nestled itself into Gulf oil production with joint ventures such as the Sinopec and Saudi Aramco in the Yanbu refinery project (YASREF), with Sinopec owning 62,5% of the YASREF stakes and Aramco the remaining 37,5%.⁵¹ Within China, Gulf oil companies seek to improve and expand domestic oil production with projects such as the Fujian refinery (FREP); a project in which Saudi Aramco holds a quarter of its venture and whose aim is to produce green energy for the Chinese market.⁵² For the GCC, integration into the BRI was considered advantageous too since its members' share of trade and investment from Asia's emerging economies diversified the local economy.⁵³ An example of one such connectivity project to stimulate investment and promote consumption in the Gulf is the Jebel Ali Free Zone in Jafza, Dubai. Globally the third largest re-export hub, Jebel Ali is the flagship free economic zone of Emirati national logistics company DP World, and an integral part of the UAE's integrated business hub. Around 60 percent of China's total trade worldwide goes through Jebel Ali, before being further shipped to its point of destination in Europe, and North and East Africa.⁵⁴ Trade volume between China and the UAE has continuously increased on an annual basis from \$934.3 million (2002) to \$10.1 billion (2011), and in 2014 China overtook India as the UAE's largest trading partner.⁵⁵ China has held that position since, and has used its presence in the Jebel Ali Free Zone, including the close partnership with DP World, to its favor. In 2022, DP World signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Lin-Gang group, a Chinese state-owned enterprise, to support logistics and trade development at the Lin-Gang Special Area, a free trade zone in Shanghai.⁵⁶ One of the projects as part of the MoU is a World Logistics Passport (WLP), in

⁵⁰ Emma Scott, "China's "One Belt, One Road" Strategy Meets the UAE's Look East Policy," *China Brief* Volume 15, no 11 (May 29, 2015),

<https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-one-belt-one-road-strategy-meets-the-uaes-look-east-policy/>.

⁵¹ Hu Yifeng, "YASREF: A Rising Energy Star from Saudi Arabia," *Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China*, accessed March 8, 2024,

<http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/beltandroad/sa/enindex.shtml#:~:text=Sinopec%20owns%2062.5%20percent%20of,quality%20products%20and%20operation%20safety.>

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Scott, "China's "One Belt, One Road."

⁵⁴ Shane McGinley, "Middle East nets half of China's Belt and Road funding," *AGBI*, July 27, 2022,

<https://www.agbi.com/analysis/development/2022/07/middle-east-nets-over-half-of-chinas-belt-and-road-funding/>.

⁵⁵ Scott, "China's "One Belt, One Road."

⁵⁶ "DP World partners with Lin-Gang Special Area to develop Chinese trade zone," Releases, DP World, last modified November 2, 2022,

https://www-chicagomanualofstyle-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html.

which members of the WLP can access new trade routes, increase their economic efficiency while Chinese companies can gain swift and more cost-efficient access to markets in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa.⁵⁷ Important to note is that Europe and the U.S are excluded from this initiative, highlighting the BRI's primary focus on developing countries and regions, in which China already has established other connectivity projects and thereby seeks to integrate the world closer to China via the BRI. The United States is not part of the BRI, but several countries in Europe such as Greece and the Western Balkan region face projects funded by China as part of its BRI, thus not including Europe in the WLP seems intentional as it is the only member of the BRI who is not included in the project, only benefitting Chinese traders and freighters by fast-tracking cargo, reducing customs clearance times, and removing administrative costs.⁵⁸ China seems therefore to aim for establishing a monopoly in the trade and freight industry in the UAE with Asian hubs in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, and thereby restricting or hindering critical market access for the European and American markets. Since 2002, Chinese companies have exploded in Jafza from 15 to 238 in 2014, including the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC), China Railway Engineering Middle East, China Ocean Shipping Corporation (COSCO) and Haier, all of which are state-owned enterprises (SOEs).⁵⁹ This further demonstrates increased Chinese presence and assertiveness in the Gulf and Emirati trade business.

Saudi Aramco also signed a similar MoU with Shandong Energy group, stating an agreement on crude oil supply and sharing of sustainable technologies on carbon capture and hydrogen. These technologies would aim to nurture China's carbon neutrality target, and according to Aramco, led to a bilateral strategic partnership in which Saudi Arabia and its Vision2030 has been given increased investment opportunities to diversify its rentier economy.⁶⁰ These Chinese investments go beyond the oil and gas sector, with modernization projects such as the Medina Railway, Jizan Port and Jeddah Islamic Port.⁶¹ China's increased influence in the Gulf oil market and trade sector indicates that the integration and connectivity aim of the BRI

⁵⁷ DP World, "DP World partners with Lin-Gang Special Area."

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Wang Ling, "China is a land of opportunities," *Aramco*, October 31, 2023, <https://china.aramco.com/en/news-media/china-news/2023/exclusive-interview-of-aramco-asia-president-mutib-a-al-harbi>.

⁶¹ McGinley, "Middle East nets half of China's Belt and Road funding."

forms a mutual symbiosis with the GCC's economic diversification plans and projects, aligning their current development strategies to sync and align with each other. However, even if China via its BRI primarily focuses to expand and strengthen its trade networks via projects and infrastructural development, it has in recent years also economically institutionalized itself in the GCC.

1.2 China and the “Shekou”-model in Oman

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was established in Beijing in 2016 and is currently the second largest multilateral development institution after the World Bank, considered to be an alternative or rival to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.⁶² The AIIB has on a continuous basis since its founding provided funding and private capital investments in the Gulf-region and the GCC for infrastructural projects and restructuring of the Gulf economy. One of its first and major investments was the Duqm Port Commercial Terminal and Operational Zone Development Project in Oman in 2016, where the AIIB loaned €265 million of the total estimated cost of \$353.33 million for the project. This equals 75 percent of the total costs, with the remaining 25 percent being funded by the Special Economic Zone of Duqm (SEZAD) itself.⁶³ The mission of the project as described in the project document is *“to help Duqm Port capture its full economic potential through improved transport efficiency, strengthened logistics services, facilitated mineral exports, and reduced supply chain delivery time and costs for the wide spectrum of industries in the new Duqm Special Economic Zone and its broader port hinterland.”*⁶⁴

As seen with the other project in Fujairah, the SEZAD-project aims to improve the infrastructure of yet another Gulf-port in which Chinese trade will be able to be more safely and efficiently transported overseas, avoiding the Strait of Hormuz. For Oman, the AIIB points out that the project first and foremost enables the Omani government's economic diversification ambitions and the strategic position of Duqm for the development of the Al-Wusta region in Oman once the Etihad railway network is completed.⁶⁵ The Etihad

⁶² Suisheng Zhao, *The dragon roars back : transformational leaders and dynamics of Chinese foreign policy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2023): 249.

⁶³ Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, *PROJECT DOCUMENT OF THE ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK: Sultanate of Oman Duqm Port Commercial Terminal and Operational Zone Development Project* (Duqm, Oman: AIIB, December 8, 2016): 5, https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/approved/2016/_download/duqm-port-commercial/document/20161213051938915.pdf.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 6.

railway project was constructed by the Middle East subsidiary of CSCEC, highlighting Chinese involvement here too.⁶⁶ Yet, as also indicated in the project document by the AIIB, a Sino-Oman industrial park will be built in the special economic zone under joint venture with Oman Wanfang and SEZAD, an agreement which comprises \$10.7 billion and would generate 22 million tons of cargo per year.⁶⁷ Noteworthy is that Oman Wanfang is a subsidiary of China-Arab Wanfang Investment Management Co, a Chinese government funded cooperation. In other words, AIIB funds and invests in Gulf projects in which Chinese businesses and companies are directly involved, thereby ensuring that Chinese infrastructure projects can be completed and maintained. A similar case is that of Chinese state-owned Silk Road Fund, which specifically aims to foster increased investment in countries along the BRI. It primarily covers Eurasia, and purchased a 49 percent stake in Saudi Aramco's gas pipelines subsidiary for \$15.5 billion in 2022.⁶⁸

Between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, on the shores of Yemen, one will find Bab al-Mandab Strait; a narrow waterway crucial for trade between Europe and Asia. In 2017, China Merchant Group (CMG), a Chinese state-owned enterprise constructed a Chinese navy supply base following years of consequent funding of infrastructure since the 1980's.⁶⁹ Scholars as Wan et al consider this project a success as it has connected East Africa to the global economy, and postcolonial nations have been given self-determination following neo-colonial involvement of Western powers.⁷⁰ Chinese investments and building of infrastructure is thus not only of economic interest to underdeveloped and postcolonial nations, but also ideological as they clearly delineate themselves from the Gulf's previous colonizers and Western involvement. Other scholars, such as Funaiole et al, mean that China's involvement in Djibouti is of a neocolonial nature, and that China's increasing economic power is translated to political and military power via these projects. This phenomenon is called the "Shekou model", a term which refers to the port and Free Trade

⁶⁶ "Etihad Railway Phase 2A Project Successfully Completed by CSCEC's Middle East Subsidiary," Insights, Arab-China Institute for Economics and Policy, last modified August 30, 2023, <https://www.aciep.net/en/2023/08/30/etihad-railway-phase-2a-project-successfully-completed-by-china-state-construction-engineering-corporations-middle-east-subsidiary/>.

⁶⁷ Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, *PROJECT DOCUMENT OF THE ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK*, 5.

⁶⁸ "Aramco closes gas pipeline deal with global investor consortium," News, Aramco, last modified February 23, 2022, <https://www.aramco.com/en/news-media/news/2022/aramco-closes-gas-pipeline-deal-with-global-investor-consortium>.

⁶⁹ Yan Wan et al, "Djibouti: From a colonial fabrication to the deviation of the "Shekou model", *Cities* 97 (February 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2019.102488>.

⁷⁰ Wan et al, "Djibouti", 1.

Zone of the same name in the Guangdong Province in China.⁷¹ Even if China's plans for the Duqm industrial area are of a commercial nature, I believe its ultimate aim may be to establish a military facility there too as in the case of Djibouti, thereby gaining economic and political leverage in Oman given its geostrategic location.

China's investments in the Gulf indicates to a larger extent the promotion of connectivity and development projects as part of its BRI, in which the main sectors are trade and energy. Via these projects, China has increasingly integrated itself in the Gulf economy while simultaneously bringing advantages to the member countries of the GCC such as promoting foreign investment, increased job opportunities, enhanced market potential in the region while setting up a diversified and sustainable development in the region which falls in line with the region's sustainable development visions. China's presence and assertive foreign policy in the region can be explained by a discourse which is underpinned by two core principles; that of sustainable development and non-intervention. Sustainable development refers to the justification of Chinese enterprises such as Sinopec and Oman Wanfang that the projects developed will 1) domestically promote the economic diversity and development of the (Gulf) country involved and 2) bring China closer to its carbon neutrality project while simultaneously expanding and deepening its economic integration in the global economy and market. How sustainable or not these projects in fact really are, are not of immediate relevance to this paper as the rhetoric and justification that China utilizes for funding these projects are key to highlight its assertive foreign policy, and that via these projects China is able to secure its energy supply which is directly related to national security matters and China's own economic and human development. That China has been able to assert and integrate itself to the extent it has in the Gulf economy sheds light on China's success of its non-intervention policy which is part of its "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence" foreign policy guideline.⁷² Compared to the geopolitical foreign policy guideline of the U.S, which since the 1950's has established its presence in the Gulf region via military interventions and promotion of regime change favoring "democratic" governments, China is building strategic relationships in the Gulf which are based on geo-economic terms.

⁷¹ Matthew P. Funaiole et al, "Dire Straits: China's push to secure its energy interests in the Middle East," *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, February 3, 2023, <https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-middle-east-military-facility/>.

⁷² Farah Bazzi and Mariam Hothout, "China's Belt and Road Initiative in de MENA-regio," *ZemZem* 19, no. 1 (2023): 11.

China thus has a favorability for (in most-cases) authoritarian regimes like the GCC who seek financial support, but who are not prepared to make political concessions.⁷³ China does not impose values on its BRI countries, and expects the same in return, therefore becoming an alternative to “Western” partners such as the EU which imposes normative values like democracy and human rights in its foreign policy. This highlights the non-intervention pillar of Chinese foreign policy in the Gulf. Returning back to the question of the beginning of this chapter, China has thus played its role well; first being a preferable hegemon in the eyes of the civilian population of the Gulf, where China timely began with its BRI investments in the Gulf in 2012 after the Arab Spring culminated, and “Western” democracy favorability declined in the public opinion. Secondly, it matched the market diversification ambitions and vision programmes of GCC-members, aligning itself with the Gulf regimes and forming a mutually beneficial relationship in economic terms. Thereby the ancient Silk Road has reincarnated itself into a New Silk Road, where the development and construction of ports indicate the addition and fundamentality of a Maritime Silk Road where China has an overhand in. This deprives the EU of critical market access to the GCC and subsequently trading hubs in Asia, affecting its economic and security matters in the Gulf.

Chapter 2: Development of the Rentier Economy and its Hydrocarbon Energy Sector - The First Seeds of a Fruitful EU-GCC Relationship

This chapter seeks to first investigate briefly the nature of the multilateral relations between the EU and GCC, while thereafter contextualizing if and how the EU protects its interests in the energy sector given China’s assertiveness in it, and if this approach indeed is a foreign policy of a principled pragmatism nature. By looking at how the EU protects its security interest in the Gulf region via the energy sector and the transition of the hydrocarbon dominated economy, we will gain an understanding of how the adoption of the ESS in 2003 has led the EU to become a more geopolitical actor via its foreign policy, reflecting its normative values through principled pragmatism in the light of China’s assertiveness and geopolitical shift in the Middle East.

⁷³ Bazzi and Hothout, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” 11.

The history of the multilateral relations between the GCC and the EU are by far more novel than the Sino-GCC bilateral relationship, which of course derives from the fact that the EU itself is a modern day invention and its establishment of a common foreign policy took place in stages in parallel to the advancement of the European integration project. This notion of a slow progressing and non-aligned common foreign policy due to member states individual interests has led to an unfulfilled potential in the multilateral relations with the GCC, especially so since the GCC experiences internal issues which derive from its multilateral structure. The GCC-member states have a similar economic structure as rentier states because they are hydrocarbon producers. This results in a lack of interest to further integrate and promote trade, but can also be influenced by geopolitical factors and the structure of the Gulf states via its ruling families, who still experience historic rivalries and competition among each other. The Gulf also fears if integration would increase, it would result in a sacrifice of their sovereignty to Saudi Arabia's pre-eminence.⁷⁴ Within EU-GCC multilateral relations, these historic and colonial notions still form the foreign policy of the GCC and her member states, and make it furthermore difficult given the un-aligned and novel nature of these multilateral bodies as explained before.

In regards to the establishment of a common foreign policy within the EU, the first official step was the European Political Cooperation (EPC) in 1970, with subsequent milestones in April 1990 with an intergovernmental conference (IGC) that would “define and implement a common foreign policy and security policy, and the Treaty of Nice in 2003 which presented opportunity for enhanced cooperation in the “area of common foreign and security policy for implementation of joint action or common position.”⁷⁵ This resulted in the European Security Strategy (EES), which promoted the Union as a stable core in the unruly events taking place in the world; a Union which functioned as a role model of a multilateral world order based on its normative value of “spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights.”⁷⁶ These normative values formed the core of the American liberal hegemonic world order, which was an outcome of the Second World War and the Cold War bipolar rivalry, and thereby the EU's foreign policy vision aligned with that of the U.S. In promoting these values, the EU adopted a comprehensive approach which promoted and recognized the

⁷⁴ Adel Abdel Ghafar, and Silvia Colombo, *The European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council : Towards a New Path* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-0279-5>.

⁷⁵ Noor, “European Union and the Middle East,” 26.

⁷⁶ Tocci, “From the European Security Strategy to the EU Global Strategy, 495.

role of civilian instruments, yet if necessary and when not complying to the normative values, robust interventions and severed relations with the EU could be of consequence.⁷⁷ The EU considered itself a guardian and promoter of (Western) norms and multilateral nature of the international liberal order. Therefore, China's assertiveness and foreign policy surrounding the BRI in Europe, or in this case the Gulf, is a threat to the normative values of the EU and the Western liberal world order. The normative values such as supporting social and political reform are of interest by the EU in the Gulf region, who promotes and sustains these values on a multilateral basis with the GCC via projects or dialogue, which nature will be demonstrated in this and the following chapter.

The GCC on the other hand was created in 1981 following the Iran-Iraq war, with the aim of the Arabian Peninsula to become more regionally integrated and deal with potential security threats.⁷⁸ In other words, a very similar story to that of the EU given its multilateral nature and aim to generate integration and interconnection among its member states, but different due to the geopolitical, administrative and bureaucratic factors mentioned before. The organizational structure is also different, where the EU consists of seven institutions which drafts policies and sometimes even have legislative functions. The GCC consists of a Ministerial Council which is formed by the eight foreign ministers of each member state, and a Supreme Council who is responsible for preparing special studies relating to cooperation, coordination and planning for common action within politics, economics, et cetera. The Supreme Council also constitutes the Dispute Settlement Commission and is considered the second most important organ of the GCC, highlighting once more that internal disputes deriving from the rivalry among the ruling families and elite is common, hindering the policy making process within the GCC.⁷⁹

Official multilateral relationships between the EU and the GCC began in 1985 with a meeting of official representatives. Three years later, in 1988, the EU-GCC cooperation agreement was signed and implemented in 1989. The EU-GCC Cooperation Agreement was ambitious, stating in the document itself the facilitation of economic development, diversification and political relations in order to increase stability in the Gulf and "to broaden and consolidate their economic and technical cooperation relations and also cooperation in energy, industry,

⁷⁷ Tocci, "From the European Security Strategy to the EU Global Strategy, 495.

⁷⁸ Abdel Ghafar and Colombo, *The European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council*, 3-4.

⁷⁹ "GCC and EU: How they work and why they exist," *Al Jazeera*, December 5, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/5/gcc-and-eu-compared-how-they-work-and-why-they-exist>.

trade and services, agriculture, fisheries, investment, science, technology and environment.”⁸⁰ These ambitions highlight the normative nature of how the EU aims to support social and political reform in the GCC, where the energy sector is mentioned as one important point of interest. Despite these ambitious agreements, authors Colombo and Abdel Ghafar of the book *The European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council: Towards a New Path*, mean that “the progress has been slow and uneven for a number of reasons, including bureaucratic and administrative inefficiencies.”⁸¹ This highlights once more the internal problems of the EU and GCC themselves, reflecting back upon the fact that they do not act as a unified body on a multilateral level, but rather on a bilateral level. Thereby the cooperation agreement between the GCC-EU has been slow and very few concrete steps have been made. One such example is the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations which have been on the agenda since 1990, and are currently still not in place. The Arabian Peninsula, unlike the Mediterranean region of the Middle East such as Lebanon or Jordan and which the EU has established comprehensive relations with since the 1990’s, is not part of the EU’s strategic neighborhood.⁸² Still the Arabian Peninsula and its Gulf states are of strategic importance to the EU given its economically mutual interest in trade and investment relations, but also for security matters specifically related to energy security for the European market who seeks to diversify its energy partners by becoming less dependent on Russian gas. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU-GCC Joint Council met just a few days after the invasion, and endorsed the new Joint Cooperation Programme for the period 2022-2027. Herein was affirmed that the EU-GCC partnership should contribute to deepening mutual trust, achieving common interests, and maintaining regional and international security.⁸³ With China nestling itself into the oil and gas sector since early 2010’s, seeming to exclude the EU in order to secure its own interests, the slow and ineffective relationship between the EU and the GCC highlights the heavy geopolitical importance the GCC has to the EU and how it threatens the national energy security of the European market and its mutual economic interest in the trade sector.

⁸⁰ “EU-GCC Cooperation Agreement,” opened for signature 1 June, 1988, *Council of the European Communities* L 054, no. 32 (1989): 4, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:1989:054:FULL&from=EN>.

⁸¹ Abdel Ghafar and Colombo, *The European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council*, 4.

⁸² “European Neighbourhood Policy,” Regional Policy, European Union External Action, last modified July 29, 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-neighbourhood-policy_en.

⁸³ European Union External Action, “Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the EU.”

2.1 Energy Security

In an annual report from 2003 by the European Commission to the European Council and the European Parliament, the GCC is only mentioned in regards to the FTA talks, but having no other significant interest in relation to development policy and implementation of external assistance.⁸⁴ This was the case up until 2008, when the FTA talks were suspended and have since then been replaced by informal contacts. However, the FTA seemed up until 2008 to be the primary point of interest to the EU, not mentioning the energy sector in relation to providing oil and gas for the European market. China's assertiveness in the region is also not mentioned, with the exception of an opinion paper by the European Economic and Social Committee in 2008, in which it is proposed that the EU, Africa and China should work towards a trilateral dialogue and cooperation given China, but also the GCC, since they are emerging financiers on the continent and could thereby jeopardize the EU's position as its main economic partner.⁸⁵ China's and the GCC are thus considered "assertive" players in the context of EU-Africa relations, but after the first years of implementing the ESS it did not recognize China's assertiveness in the GCC in relation to energy security. The reason for this is that the EU did not define the term energy security in legal and official terms until the Lisbon Treaty and the energy policy strategy *Energy 2020—A strategy for competitive, sustainable and secure energy*. Herein EU member states were obligated to diversify the origin of oil supply, and its importance was further emphasized during 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine.⁸⁶ These developments were of great benefit to the GCC as it could fill in for the shares of oil and gas supply which previously were of Russian origin. In the following year, the European Council adopted the *Energy Union Strategy*, which presented a comprehensive strategic and legislative layout of the energy market in the EU. Important to note is that energy security is not the only point of interest to the EU with the

⁸⁴ "ANNUAL REPORT 2003 FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ON THE EC DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE IN 2002," *Commission of the European Communities* COM(2003), no. 527 (September 3, 2003): 152, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52003DC0527>.

⁸⁵ "Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The EU, Africa and China — Towards trilateral dialogue and cooperation,'" opened for signature October 17, 2008, *European Economic and Social Committee* C318, no. 106 (December 23, 2009): 107, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009AE1478&qid=1706456925205>.

⁸⁶ "COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS: Energy 2020 - A strategy for competitive, sustainable and secure energy," *European Commission* COM2010, no. 639 (November 10, 2010): 5, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0639:FIN:En:PDF>.

GCC in terms of security. Regional security in the Gulf and health security, especially in the light after the COVID-19 pandemic, has been laid out as important mutual interest in the EU-GCC Joint Action Programme (2022-2027) communication document too.⁸⁷ Energy security is one of the more crucial matters to the EU's security interest because the EU energy production is insufficient in meeting the 27 member states' energy demands, where in 2018 around 58% of its energy supply was imported.⁸⁸ From the GCC, Saudi Arabia provided 6.5% of total oil imports to the EU, and Qatar with 6.4% of total natural gas imports to the EU in 2019.⁸⁹ Important to note is that the target markets vary per member state as each member state does not have the same energy demand, meaning that bilateral relationships steer the interconnectedness with the GCC. One of the key considerations and initiatives of the strategy was a green energy transition of the European market and a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2050 as part of the European Green Deal. The EU's energy security policy is thus either an opportunity for the EU-GCC relationship, or a further impediment as the Gulf oil and gas supply no longer would fit in the EU's green energy discourse. It seems however that the EU is keen to include its energy security strategy in its foreign policy towards the GCC, given that the GCC and its member states have a mutual interest in transitioning towards more green industries and diversification of its hydrocarbon dominated economy via its "Visions" programmes.

In 2010, the same year as China's assertive BRI was established, the EU funded the *EU-GCC Clean Energy Network* under its Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) of the European Commission. This project initiates a common response and cooperation on the renewable energy sector, with the aim "to act as a catalyst and element of coordination for the development of cooperation on clean energy, including the related policy and technology aspects among various stakeholders in the EU and GCC countries."⁹⁰ Hereby the mutual interest of transitioning the hydrocarbon economy in the Gulf is reflected, as is the direct multilateral involvement of the EU and the GCC in the green energy development of the GCC-member states. Both multilateral bodies function as a catalysator for the private sector to steer and control this transition, in comparison to China which promotes state-owned enterprises who focus on making the hydrocarbon sector more sustainable rather than

⁸⁷ European Commission (2022), "JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL: A strategic partnership with the Gulf."

⁸⁸ Abdel Ghafar and Colombo, *The European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council*, 112.

⁸⁹ Ibid 112-113.

⁹⁰ Monica Alessi, "EU-GCC Clean Energy Network II (CENII)," *CEPS*, accessed on March 24, 2024, <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-projects/eu-gcc-clean-energy-network-ii-cenii/>.

transitioning to non-dependent hydrocarbon sectors. Five years later, in 2015, the project was further expanded by stressing that sustainability can be achieved by exchange of experience and knowledge, as well as coordination and promotion of joint actions between the EU and GCC stakeholders.⁹¹ One such stakeholder explicitly mentioned is MASDAR (Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company); a subsidiary of Mubadala Investment Company and a national powerhouse when it comes to renewable energy projects. In 2014, the European Investment Bank (EIB) announced that it together with MASDAR reached a framework agreement in working together to accelerate renewable energy development in the Middle East by identifying investment opportunities that develop and finance renewable energy projects.⁹² Since then, MASDAR has significantly marked its involvement in European sustainable energy projects, such as the joint venture project Asopia Solar Power Plant in Greece 2021⁹³ and a green energy supply chain with the Port of Amsterdam.⁹⁴ Within the UAE itself, MASDAR and German-owned Uniper announced in 2022 the construction of a Hydrogen Solar PV power park project, a joint venture between the two companies with a 50% ownership stake each.⁹⁵ In the same week before the project was announced, the European Commission had approved a bailout of Uniper by the German Federal Ministry of Finance for €34.5 billion.⁹⁶ The nationalization was approved only because of the surging gas prices after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and thereby falls in line with the European Green Deal and its aim of securitizing its supply of energy and green hydrogen produced on renewable means.⁹⁷ Once again, the EU promotes the role of the private sector by European companies

⁹¹ “EU-GCC Clean Energy Network,” Call for tenders, European Commission, last modified May 11, 2017, https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/calls-tenders/eu-gcc-clean-energy-network-ii_en.

⁹² “Masdar and European Investment Bank Working Together to Accelerate Renewable Energy Development Middle East,” Press corner, European Commission, last modified January 20, 2014, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/BEI_14_12.

⁹³ “Case M.10330 — Masdar/Taaleri/KYOTO/Autohellas/JV Commission decision pursuant to Article 6(1)(b) of Council Regulation (EC) No 139/20041 and Article 57 of the Agreement on the European Economic Area2,” opened for signature July 1, 2021, *European Commission C(2021)*, no. 5717 (July 26, 2021): 1-2, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021M10330&qid=1711633869743>.

⁹⁴ Mark Segal, “UAE to Europe Green Hydrogen Supply Chain Planned by Masdar, Dutch Companies,” *ESG Today*, January 16, 2023, <https://www.esgtoday.com/uae-to-europe-green-hydrogen-supply-chain-planned-by-masdar-dutch-companies/>.

⁹⁵ “Power plant profile: Uniper Masdar Hydrogen Solar PV Park, United Arab Emirates,” Data Insights, Power Technology, last modified January 31, 2024, <https://www.power-technology.com/marketdata/power-plant-profile-uniper-masdar-hydrogen-solar-pv-park-unit-ed-arab-emirates/>.

⁹⁶ “Case M.10951 – BMF / UNIPER Commission decision pursuant to Article 6(1)(b) of Council Regulation (EC) No 139/20041 and Article 57 of the Agreement on the European Economic Area,” opened for signature November 11, 2022, *European Commission C(2022)*, no. 9769 (December 16, 2022): 1-2, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022M10951&qid=1711635898329>.

⁹⁷ Vera Eckert, “Uniper says working with UAE's Masdar on hydrogen project,” *Reuters*, December 22, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/uniper-says-working-with-uaes-masdar-hydrogen-project-2022-12-22/>

in the green energy transition in the Gulf that aim both to securitize its energy supply in Europe and establish joint ventures with public sector enterprises in the GCC, ultimately creating increased jobs and thereby the growth in the Gulf economy as a whole. This differs significantly from the public sector cooperative ventures between Sino-GCC projects in the energy sector, as the projects and undertakings by the EU in the GCC are of a neoliberal nature which aligns with the EU's normative values of promoting social and political reform as the rentier economies of the GCC are experiencing corruption and abuse of power.

Another project funded by the FPI of the European Commission is the *EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification*, which also supports the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. Initiated in 2018, the project aims to support the process of economic diversification and divert from hydrocarbon dependent sectors, while stimulating cooperation on climate-friendly trade, investment, research and innovation. It also supports dialogue between stakeholders from the EU and GCC, as well as formal government to government dialogues.⁹⁸ The project is quite active with several events taking place in many of the GCC-countries, such as panel discussions, investment forums and lectures related to investment and green energy between GCC and EU stakeholders.⁹⁹ One company brought forward is Dii Desert Energy, a German industry initiative in Dubai established in 2009 which specifically targets the acceleration of the rentier economy of the GCC towards a hydrocarbon-free sector economy.¹⁰⁰ One of Dii Desert Energy's key initiatives is MENA Hydrogen Alliance; a platform where actors of the private and public sector, in addition to academia, nurture the process of green hydrogen economies by guiding the private and public sector on global policies relating to low-carbon hydrogen and knowledge events such as workshops and round tables. Dii Desert Energy also lists its strategic partners and key supporters, which includes Mediterranean Green Electrons and Molecules, a network funded by the EU. However, noteworthy is that one of its strategic partners is Chinese state-owned State Grid Corporation of China; the largest utility company in the world and globally the fourth largest company in terms of revenue (2024).¹⁰¹ One of its key partners is Global Energy Interconnectedness Development and Cooperation Organization, a Chinese non-governmental and non-profit organization that produces an international network of Ultra

⁹⁸ Willem Pieter de Groen, "EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification," *CEPS*, accessed March 26, 2024, <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-projects/eu-gcc-dialogue-on-economic-diversification/>.

⁹⁹ EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification (@eugccdialogue), *Instagram*, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/eugccdialogue/>.

¹⁰⁰ "About us," Team, Dii Desert Energy, last accessed March 30, 2024, <https://dii-desertenergy.org/about-us/>.

¹⁰¹ "Fortune 500," Fortune 500, *Fortune*, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://fortune.com/ranking/fortune500/>.

High Voltage (UHV) for the deployment and utilization of clean energy for sustainable international projects.¹⁰² What can be drawn from this is that joint projects between EU-funded companies and Chinese private and state owned companies seek to develop the Gulf's rentier and hydrocarbon based economy into a green and circular economy. Thereby, they cooperate on mutual interest to both secure their energy needs, while simultaneously following the sustainable and renewable energy discourse. Although the project is not a direct involvement between the EU and the Chinese state, they are indirectly involved and thereby aligns itself with the EU's foreign policy of principled pragmatism; protect its own interest in the region yet still advance its normative values by maintaining open communication and dialogue towards China, even if kept at a distance. Precisely as the President of the European Commission von der Leyen herself would say ; de-risk, not decouple.

2.2 The Gulf and her Visions

The involvement of the EU-funded European private sector in renewable energy sector projects aims to align with the GCC-countries economic transition programmes, or Visions. In 2022, the European External Action Service (EEAS) issued a joint communication towards the European Parliament and European Council on a strategic partnership with the Gulf, and where one stated goal was to open up a European Chamber of Commerce in the GCC in order to strengthen the role of the European private sector in the Vision programmes.¹⁰³ Empowering the private sectors is fundamental for rentier economies like the one's in the GCC as the energy-subsidized public sector attracts only GCC-nationals and not many youth. This can also be derived from the effects of rentier economy, in which nepotism and corruption are common practices, resulting in difficulties in entering the public job sector as an "outsider". However, the private sector also attracts expatriates or blue-collar labor migrants from South-Asia and Africa, simply because they are cheaper labor than GCC-nationals.¹⁰⁴ The Visions aim to attract Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and invest

¹⁰² Global Energy Interconnection Development and Cooperation Organization, 2016: 2, <https://www.kit.edu/downloads/Forschen/1-GEIDCO%20introduction.pdf>

¹⁰³ "JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL: A strategic partnership with the Gulf," *European Commission JOIN*(2022), no. 13 (May 18, 2022): 3, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Joint%20Communication%20to%20the%20European%20Parliament%20and%20the%20Council%20-%20A%20Strategic%20Partnership%20with%20the%20Gulf.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ Steffen Hertog, "State and Private Sector in the GCC After the Arab Uprisings," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3, no. 2 (November 2013): 8, https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/54399/1/Hertog_state_private_sector_GCC_after_arab_uprising_final.pdf.

themselves in non-hydrocarbon economic initiatives which will lead to self-sufficiency and independently generated growth rather than the rentier economy and its governments public spending dependency.¹⁰⁵ The instrument who targets this most specifically is the aforementioned *EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification*, who in comparison to China, fosters dialogue with the private sector and builds bridges between educational institutions and businesses to share knowledge and competence in entrepreneurship. The main difference between China and the EU is on what level they approach the GCC and her Visions. China involves state-owned companies and establishes joint-ventures of considerable size with public sector GCC-companies such as Saudi Aramco, which for both countries are of mutual benefit as they seek to sustainably improve the energy sector while simultaneously strengthening the oil and gas sector in China by “greener” refineries. The approach of the EU is different in that it seeks to strengthen the private sector by involving European private sector companies which projects have been funded by the EU, and approach the development of a renewable energy sector on a grass root level by organizing panel discussions and lectures with the aim of sharing knowledge from academia and private sector within the EU and the GCC. What still is problematic in the EU’s approach is that there is too much involvement between EU and GCC member states on a bilateral level, rather than on a multilateral level. This is not problematic in the general sense, but rather for the EU as a multilateral and geopolitical body. Big joint-venture projects between European and Gulf private sector companies, such as the Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Solar Park (the UAE and Spanish Company Grupo-TSK) and Qatar’s Al-Kharsaah solar power plant (Qatar and French company Total Energy), are not funded by the European Union. They are issued on a bilateral level, hindering and constraining the potential enhanced political and economic relation between the GCC and EU, which eventually leads to stereotyping and misconceptions.¹⁰⁶ There is a lack of understanding what the EU embodies and stands for, as the EU is only understood to a bilateral level of its member states. Although this may be true to some extent, the EU has in significant years aimed at overcoming the constrained communication and bilateral institutional relationship with the GCC, as the above projects and initiatives demonstrate. One improvement point, according to Abdel Ghafar and Colombo that could be put forward, is the lack of involvement of civil society which both encapsulates the unemployed youth and private sector.¹⁰⁷ With the *EU-GCC Clean Energy*

¹⁰⁵ Hertog, “State and Private Sector in the GCC,” 13.

¹⁰⁶ Abdel Ghafar and Colombo, *The European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council*, 23-24.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 24.

Network, the EU has begun to establish its presence in projects which align with the Visions of the GCC, highlighting the mutual interests of both multilateral institutions which are both politically and economically beneficial. With the *EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification* the EU has truly set a step in involving civil society, educational institutions and the private sector. It hereby demonstrates that moving beyond the member based bilateral institutional relation with members of the GCC is crucial in improving European-Gulf relations, while simultaneously targeting and establishing itself as a competitor to China's assertiveness in the GCC's energy market. A change in EU foreign policy which is crucial in securitizing its own regional interest and (national) security of supplying Europe with its energy demands.

Chapter 3: Going beyond in seeing the GCC as an energy supplier

In the previous chapter, the historical development of the EU's foreign policy was laid out. The parallel process of the European integration project affected the foreign policy, and so also the EU's foreign policy with the GCC. Both multilateral bodies suffer from bureaucratic, economic and geopolitical hindrances that stall or slow down an effective multilateral foreign policy between the two. Despite this, in recent years the EU funded joint venture projects between the European private sector and Gulf public sector on the economic front, specifically targeting the green energy transition and renewable energy initiatives of the Gulf, aligning itself with the "Vision" projects of many GCC-member states, while simultaneously securing Europe's own economic and security interest in terms of energy provision. At the same time, the EU funds dialogues that eventually aim to diversify the GCC's rentier economies, seeking to strengthen the European and Gulf private sector and civil society. This is first and foremost an initiative to improve investment opportunities in the GCC, both European and domestic, but for the EU also a means to impose its normative values of good governance and democracy in the GCC-countries as it seeks to disclaim the rentierism in the GCC and the undemocratic practices that come with it as nepotism and corruption. A change which would benefit the EU's position economically in the GCC, but also function as a leverage against China's involvement with the GCC, indicating the principled and pragmatic nature of the EU's foreign policy in the Gulf; bring forward its own interest but in such a manner that it aligns with the Gulf-states while simultaneously keeping China at a distance.

Still, as mentioned beforehand, there looms a big obstruction in the foundation of the GCC-EU relationship with regards to the 1989 EU GCC Joint Cooperation Agreement, and if accomplished and realized, potentially could elevate and strengthen the EU-GCC relationship in economic terms. One of the 1989 Agreement's biggest ambitions was the set up of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), in which both parties would enjoy further integration and access to each other's markets. Notable is that in the agreement itself, the market in which the EU (still called the EC at the time of the joint agreement) stressed most upon was the oil and gas sector, stating that “the industrial and commercial field ensuring that the agreement does not undermine efforts to restructure the Community's oil refining and petrochemical industries and to maintain a production capacity in these industries, in accordance with the Community's basic interest and its security of supply.”¹⁰⁸

What this highlights is that already before the establishment of the EES, the EU had a security concern in regards to the energy supply for its members, and that the GCC was of importance in securing their energy provision. On the other hand, concerns from the GCC side were mainly targeted towards the sensitive factors of its economy and protection of its infant industries if there would be an adoption of measures, highlighting the suspicion and cautiousness the GCC had towards the foreign policy of the EU .¹⁰⁹

The negotiations came to a complete halt in 2008, and according to the EU this was due to “different levels of ambition on key points.”¹¹⁰ Even so, the reason is a bit more nuanced than the EU brings forward. As reflected in the Agreement of 1989, the EU mainly saw its GCC-partners through an economic oriented lens wherein emphasis is put on the oil and gas sector, even if the Gulf states have a crucial role in geopolitics and security matters of the MENA-region. In later years, the EU has blamed the lack of an integration process of the GCC-economies as the main obstacle towards an FTA, where for example a common value-added tax (VAT) is a necessary precondition for increased regional integration.¹¹¹ Also the human rights clauses in the FTA were considered economically irrelevant by the

¹⁰⁸ COOPERATION AGREEMENT between the European Economic Community, of the one part, and the countries parties to the Charter of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (the State of the United Arab Emirates, the State of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar and the State of Kuwait) of the other part,” *Official Journal of the European Communities* L54, no. 3 (February 25, 1989): 2,
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A21989A0225%2801%29>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL: A strategic partnership with the Gulf,” *European Commission*, 3.

¹¹¹ Abdel Ghafar and Colombo, *The European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council*, 20.

GCC-states, furthermore hindering a progressive negotiation process.¹¹² The problem lies however also on the European side, as Association of Petroleum Producers in Europe have for a substantial time lobbied against trade liberalization since the 1980's, resulting in European governments blocking duty-free access to petrochemical products from the Gulf.¹¹³ But has the EU truly done nothing in terms of further integration with the GCC in the trade sector, given China's increasing influence and economic power in it?

The EU has in subsequent years further developed the 1989 Agreement, adding additional points of mutual interest. Sustainable development, labor rights and digital trade are promoted and facilitated via dialogues similar to that of the previously mentioned *EU-GCC Clean Energy Network* and *EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification*.

3.1 Investment and Global Supply Chains as Bridging Elements

In May 2017, the EU and the GCC jointly launched the *EU-GCC Trade and Investment Dialogue*. The programme aims to enhance cooperation on matters related to the trade and investment sectors, such as customs, prevent smuggling and counterfeiting, and promote sustainable and global supply chains.¹¹⁴ One such project that the *EU-GCC Trade and Investment Dialogue* promotes is the *EU-GCC Trade and Business Cooperation Facility*, a project funded by the European Commission and run by EU and GCC private sector actors. Its main partners are the Confederation of Danish Industry, VentureScout, Business Europe and the Federation of GCC Chambers.¹¹⁵ The project seeks to strengthen trade, investment and business cooperation between the EU and the GCC through business networks, SME promotion and dialogue. What one can see is modest activity from the project between 2017-2019, such as The Confederation of Danish Industry negotiating with Saudi Arabia on development reforms in the trade sector in 2017.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, a masterclass in sustainability and innovation for young fashion entrepreneurs from the Gulf was held in Denmark in the same year. As noted, Denmark seems to have an overarching interest in establishing and improving relations with the GCC. In its Foreign and Security Policy

¹¹² Richard Youngs, "Impasse in Euro-Gulf Relations," *FRIDE Working Paper*, no. 80 (April 2009): 2, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/130999/WP80_Impasse_in_euro_ENG_abr09.pdf.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ "JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL: A strategic partnership with the Gulf," *European Commission*, 2.

¹¹⁵ "Welcome to EU-GCC," Home, EU-GCC Trade and Business Cooperation Facility, accessed April 24, 2024, <http://eu-gcc.org/>.

¹¹⁶ Niels (@tanderupniels), "Moving from reforms on paper to implementation at meetings in Saudi Arabia #DI working for trade and development," X, May 17, 2017, <https://twitter.com/eugcctrade>.

Strategy, Denmark aims to achieve its foreign policy goals by functioning as an extended arm for the EU. These goals encompass increased Danish global engagement, expand Danish positions of strength in the green energy sector, support Danish companies in a changing geopolitical landscape with the aim to translate economic weight into global influence when entering international partnerships.¹¹⁷ The strategy also believes that the EU should strengthen its political dialogue and impact as a geopolitical actor, and look at sustainable solutions that are adapted to local demand.¹¹⁸ Denmark has thus truly aligned itself with the EU in advancing the EU's geopolitical role in the global political arena on the basis of its normative values (green energy, neoliberalism), thereby making it a worthy competitor to China.

Beyond 2019, there is no further activity from the project and its dialogue has come to a halt because the project was only funded for three years by the European Commission.¹¹⁹ The short lived project however still highlights that the EU and the GCC jointly believe that the private sector has a crucial role in enhancing cooperation between the two, while simultaneously achieving its set goals in the trade industry and investment sector. It is thus in general the same approach as in the energy sector, where private European actors are put as main actors in the dialogue with the GCC, but instead of public ventures from the GCC, civil society and private sector are brought forward as an integral part of the enhancement of (trade) relations between the EU and GCC. Al-Araimu and Bianco, both analysts at the European Commission funded project *Sharaka* that aims to promote relations between the EU and the GCC through the implementation of policy-oriented research, writes that institutional relations between the GCC-EU are considered to be of insignificant interest to the public opinion in the GCC-states as media exposure is low. The media that is published is in a negative light and spreads misperceptions about the relationship in the public opinion in the GCC-countries.¹²⁰ These misperceptions harm the possibility of an effective multilateral cooperation framework, and can be turned around by promoting EU projects together with civil society organizations and the private sector in the GCC. The problem with establishing a

¹¹⁷ Amnah Mosly, "GCC-Denmark Relations," *Gulf Research Center* (September 2023): 2, <https://grc.net/public/documents/6528fca57cbf0GCCDenmarkRelationscomp.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Mosly, "GCC-Denmark Relations," 2.

¹¹⁹ EU-GCC Trade (@eugcctrade), "Today we hosted a very successful masterclass together with @designskolenkolding, @materialisenv and @kopenhagenfur. Teachers, design students and established designers worked together on sustainability and innovation," Instagram, Oktober 13, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/eugcctrade/>.

¹²⁰ Fatma Al Araimu and Cinzia Bianco, "The Role of Mass Media in Building Perceptions of EU-GCC Relations and Related Impacts," *Sharaka Research Paper* 9, (March 2014): 13, https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/Sharaka_RP_09.pdf.

formal dialogue with GCC civil society organizations and the EU is that GCC-governments often regard these organizations with suspicion, as they may be a security threat to the rentier economy or the ruling families of the Gulf states. The educational sector also has potential to strengthen the foundation of EU-GCC relations, as young generations from Europe and the Gulf are eager to learn across cultural divides and gain experience, but so far this opportunity has not been taken advantage of to foster a common cooperation framework efficiently.¹²¹ Ahmed al Mukhaini, political analyst at Durham University, proposes in his research paper for *Sharaka* magazine that a long-term joint framework which focuses on institutional, policy building and technical support for higher education and scientific research, could possibly strengthen the EU-GCC relationship. He calls this framework the EU-GCC Helsinki process due to its “invasiveness into existing structures and institutions in the EU and GCC,” and encompasses three main points where the first two focuses on higher educational institutions in the GCC by opening up EU research centers in the Gulf, in addition to make EU universities more accessible linguistically to GCC-students.¹²² These measures would bridge the gap between young people in the EU and GCC, while simultaneously sharing knowledge and combat the misperceptions of the EU in the Gulf. The third point is related to Al-Araimi and Bianco’s argument of quantifying the image representation of the EU in the Gulf by funding scientific research directed to media and culture.¹²³ The previously mentioned masterclass on sustainability and innovation for young fashion entrepreneurs from the Gulf in Denmark is an example of such a project which seeks to encourage education as a bridging factor in EU-GCC relations. People-to-people interaction therefore seems to be the way forward. The emphasis is put on civil society organizations, as they first and foremost can change the negative conception of the EU if the EU interacts and promotes economic projects with them, and thereby work from the grassroot and up. If that is achieved, the public opinion of China may come to differ as well, and become more reluctant towards the assertiveness of China in their countries. The problem is however that if they are only promoted in short-lived undertakings and projects, the process will come to be prolonged and China will have more time to expand and gain further economic influence in the Gulf region.

¹²¹ Ahmed Ali M. al Mukhaini, “EU-GCC Cooperation in the Fields of Higher Education and Scientific Research: The Way Forward,” *Sharaka Research Paper* 6, (January 2014): 2 https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/Sharaka_RP_06.pdf.

¹²² Ibid, 22.

¹²³ Ibid.

However, in terms of promoting sustainable and global supply chains, the EU has in more recent years targeted a more ambitious project called “The India – Middle East – Europe Economic Corridor,” or IMEC. The agreement was signed as an MoU between the European Union, the U.S, India and two GCC-members; Saudi Arabia and the UAE at the G20 meeting in New Delhi in 2023. The participants committed to working together to link the three regions through connectivity infrastructure, bringing the economic relationship between them to a new level and providing improved access to goods, energy and data to citizens and businesses.¹²⁴ The project targets the Gulf area specifically as it seeks to build a railway network from the UAE to Israel via Saudi Arabia and Jordan, which would not only transform the current maritime and road transport routes, but also economically integrate the region via connectivity projects to enhance digital connectivity and pipes for clean hydrogen export.¹²⁵ The project excludes China, and can therefore be argued to counter the BRI, yet as mentioned in the first chapter, China has similar projects like the Etihad Railway, which is already in use in comparison to IMEC that is still in the negotiation stage. The fact that China has already invested in multiple development schemes as part of its BRI projects in the Gulf, with some supply chains already up and running, could prove to be problematic for the ability of IMEC to be realized. The previously mentioned MoU between Chinese Lin-Gang group and DP World Jebel Ali Free Zone in Dubai, and the Duqm (SEZAD) project in Oman indicate that China is eager to increase its influence in maritime trade routes around the Gulf, especially around the crucial Hormuz Strait and Bab el-Mandeb Strait. With the fear of Duqm eventually becoming a military strategic point for China, including China and the Gulf becoming more economically integrated as a result of these mega projects, it will become strategically difficult to advance the ideas of IMEC as China already has leverage in advancing the Gulf’s mutual interest of increased economic integration and a “greener economy.” This will make it more difficult for other actors to become involved, especially if China is excluding them, like the EU. The IMEC can thus be seen as a counter response by Europe and its allies towards China’s BRI. This notion has also been sensed within China itself, but also the potential opportunities that come with it. Wang Wenbin, spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, believes that global infrastructure initiatives such as the BRI and IMEC should cooperate and not compete on a geopolitical basis. IMEC and the

¹²⁴ “President von der Leyen marks the EU’s commitment to the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) during the event hosted at the G20 in New Delhi,” Press Corner, European Commission, last modified September 9, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_4421.

¹²⁵ Abdul Moiz Khan, “The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC): Too Little, Too Late?” *Carnegie* (December 12, 2023), <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/91214>.

BRI overlap with each other on several central logistical points, such as the Jebel Ali Free Zone, and can complement each other in the trade sector.¹²⁶ If this fits within the EU's "de-risk, not decouple" approach is still unclear, as the EU does not exclude collaboration with China, but the question remains to what extent the EU would be involved in such a cooperation. What is clear is that IMEC sets out to compete with the BRI, and thereby the EU claims increased assertiveness in the region in reaction to China's likewise assertiveness.

3.2 Duqm (SEZAD): Fight or Flight?

As the third largest re-export hub, and for the EU resulting in the UAE being its biggest trade partner in terms of positive trade surplus (€37 billion in 2016), the Jebel Ali Free zone is of great importance for EU exports as goods are being further shipped from there to Africa and the Middle East.¹²⁷ Naturally, China's assertiveness in the Jebel Ali Free zone and its partnership with DP World would be considered an element of jeopardization in regards to the EU's trade relations with the UAE, especially the previously mentioned MoU in 2022 between China and Jebel Ali owner DP World that includes the WLP programme and its exclusion of Europe. It could therefore be expected that the EU financially supports projects in the Jebel Ali Free Trade Zone by direct funding or European private sector involvement in order to meet China's assertiveness. However, this is not the case. European companies and the private sector are involved in the organization and supply chain services of Jebel Ali, but there is no involvement of the EU. For example, French automotive logistics company GEFCO signed a partnership in 2021 with DP World at Jebel Ali which would provide the Gulf region with new car solutions. This includes vehicle storage and covered parking which protects the vehicles from sun exposure, dust and hailstorm.¹²⁸ According to GEFCO, these solutions will facilitate European automotive manufacturers to reduce transport costs for outbound transportation via Jebel Ali within the GCC, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Africa. Hereby, the automotive sector export from Europe to the GCC is further facilitated and promoted, while simultaneously targeting China's rising influence in Jebel Ali. Yet, it comes

¹²⁶ Asia Research Unit, "IMEC and BRI: Beyond Complementary Competition," *Emirates Policy Center* (October 20, 2023): 5, <https://epc.ae/en/details/scenario/imec-and-bri-beyond-complementary-competition>.

¹²⁷ Directorate-General for External Policies, "WORKSHOP: Trade and Economic relations between the EU and the GCC countries," *European Parliament* (December 2017): 39-40, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603856/EXPO_STU\(2018\)603856_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603856/EXPO_STU(2018)603856_EN.pdf).

¹²⁸ "GEFCO UAE Partners in the Middle East with DP World, UAE region for car solutions at Jebel Ali Port," News, DP World, last modified April 6, 2021, <https://www.dpworld.com/en/uae/news/latest-news/gefco-uae-partners-in-the-middle-east-with-dp-world>.

from the European private sector itself, and not by support of the European Union. However, in Oman the European gaze and effort is more directed towards the Duqm (SEZAD) project than that of Jebel Ali.

In May 2022, a delegation of the EU consisting of thirteen representatives from member states visited The Special Economic Zone of Duqm (SEZAD) to be briefed on the investment opportunities at Duqm, as well as the ongoing infrastructure projects taking place there. The visit included a tour of the Hong Tong Piping Factory and Karwa Motors; the first being a Chinese private sector company that produces Reinforced Thermopolyethylene pipes (RTP) for the oil and gas industry, and was the first project to be commenced at the Sino-Omani industrial park at Duqm.¹²⁹ Karwa motors on the other hand is an Omani-Qatari joint venture which will build vans and buses, but in which Chinese Higer Company Limited will provide units of buses and coaches.¹³⁰ The purpose of the visit was to encourage European companies to invest in SEZAD, especially in the developing sectors of tourism, green energy fisheries and of course; oil and gas.¹³¹ The visit highlights that the EU has its eyes on Duqm as it realizes that the economic zone has the potential of becoming an economically booming hub in the aforementioned sectors, which could be beneficial to the European trade industry and increased investment opportunities, consequently improving the GCC-EU relationship and integration project of the region. Noteworthy is that in the same month, May 2017, the *Joint Communication on a strategic partnership with the Gulf* was published. Although Duqm or the visit itself is not mentioned in the document, Oman is mentioned for potentially opening an EU delegation with an EU ambassador to the GCC, whose purpose is to increase the visibility and efficiency of the EU in the GCC.¹³² Also maritime transport interconnectedness is mentioned several times, and may highlight the potential importance the Duqm port has to the EU's trade relations with the Gulf.¹³³ However, the EU may also realize that China is the major investor and stakeholder in the projects involved in SEZAD and the Duqm region, and

¹²⁹ "About Duqm Hongtong Piping LLC," About Us, Duqm Hongtong, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://www.duqmhongtong.com/about-us/>.

¹³⁰ Conrad Prabhu, "China's Higer named tech partner for Duqm bus project," *Oman Observer*, December 5, 2017, <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/67427/Business/chinas-higer-named-tech-partner-for-duqm-bus-project>.

¹³¹ Oman News Agency, "Ambassadors of EU countries visit Special Economic Zone at Duqm," *Oman Observer*, May 16, 2022, <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1119231/oman/ambassadors-of-eu-countries-visit-special-economic-zone-at-duqm>.

¹³² "JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL: A strategic partnership with the Gulf," *European Commission*, 16.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 3 & 7.

if China has an overhand in the supply chain and the Port of Duqm, then there may always be the risk that the EU can be excluded from the maritime trade route between the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Naturally, it would have devastating effects on the European economy. Therefore, the visit may be of a secondary nature; by visiting Chinese private sector companies at SEZAD the EU in a way encourages the European private sector to invest in the partly owned Chinese projects, and thereby opening up a business dialogue between China and the EU on a non-exclusionary basis. Once again, Von der Leyen's "de-risk, not decouple" is brought forward and underlines what the foreign policy of the EU in the Middle East comprises of; China should be kept at a distance, but still not excluded and a dialogue should be kept open on an EU-Sino level. Yet, in the case of Duqm, the EU does not strictly have business plans and opportunities of investment. In February 2022, the EU Council established the Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP), which facilitated dialogue between EU and Omani armed forces in the two ongoing European operations; EUNAVFOR Atalanta outside the Western Indian Ocean and The Horn of Africa, and EMASOH (European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz), where the latter one specifically includes the GCC-member states.¹³⁴ The operations are there to safeguard the navigation environment in the areas, as well as de-escalate possible tensions. However, with the presence of China's Army Base in Djibouti and the fear that Duqm eventually will follow the "Shekou model" by taking advantage of Duqm's geostrategic position, could put sticks in the wheel for the EU's trade with the GCC. What these relatively new military operations indicate is that the EU realizes the strategic value of the Persian Gulf by including it in the EU Maritime Area of Interest, and that the EU is becoming a geopolitical actor in the Gulf region, slowly moving away from the idea that the Gulf is more than a mere energy supplier.

Hereby, the EU's principled pragmatism approach in the Gulf is highlighted once more; China's BRI has set the EU's geopolitical engine in motion, where normative values such as good governance and human rights are brought forward as core principles that should underline the EU-GCC relationship, but more and more so in a realist notion which asserts the EU's own security considerations and economic interest forward. Still the multilateral aspect which the EU builds upon is put in the background by bilateral relation which still shape European relations with the GCC (and public opinion for that matter), but as in the case

¹³⁴ Cinzia Bianco, "The EU's Strategic Partnership with the Gulf: One Year On," *Brussels International Center* (May 2023): 6, <https://www.bic-rhr.com/research/eus-strategic-partnership-gulf-one-year#:~:text=The%20EU%20is%20no%20onger,economic%20competition%20from%202022%20onwards.>

with Denmark's EU foreign policy alignment with the Gulf, the EU may know a way forward in once again commencing the FTA talks and realize the goals of the 1989 Joint Agreement.

Conclusion

The Middle East is currently experiencing a change in its geopolitics; one that not only influences the Arab countries themselves, but also the dynamics of foreign policy in relation to other actors in the region. The right-sizing of U.S foreign policy and the post-Arab spring favorability towards China has left a power vacuum for China, who via its BRI has shown great assertiveness in the Gulf energy and trade sector, aiming to strengthen Sino-GCC relations by sustainable solidarity and strategic cooperation. In turn, this economic activity is translated into political influence, with examples being the WLP in the Jebel Ali Free Zone in Dubai that explicitly excludes Western powers from accessing critical markets in Asia, and the Duqm SEZAD projects which is being feared to follow the Shekou model, and thereby become a military base as in Djibouti. For the European Union, this assertiveness from China hinders European economic and security factors in the Gulf. However, the problem lies not only with China as the EU-GCC relationship has since its start in 1989 never come to an effective cooperation agreement, especially in the trade sector and the negotiations on an FTA. The problem lies on both sides, with the EU hammering that the GCC lacks integration ambitions themselves due to their similar economic structure as rentier states. This also leads to internal problems such as corruption, nepotism and tribalism among the GCC-members. As the GCC-member states lack good governance, the EU included human rights clauses in the potential FTA-agreement, something the GCC not appreciated and found relevant. Yet, EU-GCC relations have not come to a complete halt as the EU has established several projects that aim to both secure its own security and economic interests in the Gulf energy and trade sector, while simultaneously going against China's assertiveness. What the *EU-GCC Clean Energy Network*, *EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification* and *EU-GCC Trade and Investment Dialogue* all demonstrate is that they emphasize the role of the European and Gulf private sector, unlike China that focuses on the public sector. The private sector is important in both targeting the role of the public sector in rentier states who nurtures inequality, and building bridges between European and Gulf companies. The alignment with the Gulf's Vision projects also helps to bring forward the interest of both European and Gulf stakeholders. The problem however is that the EU still has a bilateral

centered approach, meaning that the EU is still involved in the background and is too often represented by her member states themselves. This creates misconception about the EU in the Gulf itself, and further functions as an impediment in enhancing EU-GCC relations. However, EU-member states can choose to align themselves with the EU's ambitions and foreign policy in their own foreign policy like Denmark did. Denmark still represented its own country but promoted the projects it did as part of the EU. This helps both against EU misconceptions and still brings forward the EU's normative values and ambitions. The EU's ambitions are getting even bigger as it is becoming increasingly geopolitical, with one such case being IMEC that aims to compete with China's BRI. The question remains if Europe really should compete with China in that sense. At Duqm, Europe seems to be interested in collaborating and investing with China on its already operational projects there. Also the *EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification* includes the non-governmental Global Energy Interconnectedness Development and Cooperation Organization. What can be drawn from this is that the EU is open to collaborating with China, but preferably if it is a private sector company and if the project is EU led. "De-risk, not decouple", has indeed become the slogan of the EU's foreign policy in the Gulf, and highlighting its principled pragmatism foreign policy; Europe's security and interest in the Gulf prevails as China becomes more assertive, forming a more geopolitical multilateral body but keeps the geopolitical trait toned down by bringing forward normative values as green transition, digitalization and good governance to protect Europe's economic and security matters in the Gulf.

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PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT**Fraud and Plagiarism**

Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.


The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:

- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations.

The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.	
Name:	Arabelle I.V. Hendriksen
Student number:	2317060
Date and signature:	05 June 2024 

Submit this form to your supervisor when you begin writing your Bachelor's final paper or your Master's thesis.

Failure to submit or sign this form does not mean that no sanctions can be imposed if it appears that plagiarism has been committed in the paper.

