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# The External Dimension of European Union Counter-Terrorism Discourse: Good Governance, the Arab “Spring” and the “Foreign Fighters”

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## ABSTRACT

The central objective of this article is to contribute to studies on EU counter-terrorism discourse by bringing the “external dimension” in. To that end, it borrows concepts of the Discourse-Historical Approach and provides an in-depth linguistic examination of the international aspect of the EU’s counter-terrorism discourse. The article identifies good governance and the Arab “Spring” as two central themes of this discourse and illustrates the linguistic means in which the two topics are made “natural” and “normal” by reference to counter-terrorism. The analysis also discusses the political and normative effects of EU discursive construction of counter-terrorism.

**Keywords:** European Union, Counter-terrorism, Discourse-historical Approach, Good Governance, Arab Uprisings

## Avrupa Birliđi Terörle Mücadele Söyleminin Dış Boyutu: İyi Yönetişim, Arap “Baharı” ve “Yabancı Savaşçılar”

## ÖZET

Bu makalenin ana amacı, AB’nin terörle mücadele söylemleri üzerine yapılan çalışmalara, bu söylemin “dış boyutu” konusunu inceleyerek katkıda bulunmaktır. Bu amaçla makale, “söylemsel tarihsel” yaklaşım kavramlarından faydalanmakta ve AB’nin terörle mücadele söyleminin uluslararası yönünün derinlemesine bir dilsel incelemesini sunmaktadır. Makale, bu söylemin iki ana temasını iyi yönetim ve Arap “Baharı” olarak tanımlamakta ve bu iki konunun terörle mücadeleye ilişkin “doğallaştırılmasında” ve “normalleştirmesinde” kullanılan dilsel araçları göstermektedir. Analiz AB’nin söylemsel inşasının siyasi ve normatif etkilerini de tartışmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Avrupa Birliđi, Terörle Mücadele, Söylemsel-Tarihsel Yaklaşım, İyi Yönetişim, Arap Baharı

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

It is argued that the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States (US) have had a significant effect on the emergence of counter-terrorism as a major political and academic discourse in Europe.<sup>2</sup> Studies have explored the central narratives utilized to define and understand (counter-)terrorism by focusing either on individual European countries<sup>3</sup> or on European Union (EU)<sup>4</sup> discourses. These works provide rich analyses as to the various strands of the (counter-)terrorism discourse constructed in Europe, including “Islamic terrorism”,<sup>5</sup> the “securitization of political Islam”<sup>6</sup> and the discursive construction of “identity”<sup>7</sup> through the formation of “an EU self in opposition to a terrorist ‘other’”<sup>8</sup>, while pointing at the problematic aspects of such discursive constructions<sup>9</sup>, their deeply politicized nature, asymmetric, flawed and unfounded assumptions<sup>10</sup> and effects on civil liberties<sup>11</sup>, including the stigmatisation and exclusion of particular segments of the European societies.<sup>12</sup>

The central objective of this article is to contribute to studies on EU counter-terrorism discourse by bringing the “external dimension” in. To that end, it carries out a linguistic analysis by drawing upon concepts and insights of the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). The critical discourse analysis provides an in-depth linguistic examination of the international aspect of the EU’s counter-terrorism discourse. It illustrates the linguistic means and ways in which EU external action on counter-terrorism is made “natural” and “normal” and discusses the asymmetric and exclusionary power effects of language in representing subjects, objects and geography. The analysis identifies two central themes underpinning the international dimension EU counter-terrorism discourse: 1) good governance as an opportunity to combat terrorism and 2) the Arab “Spring” as both an opportunity and a security risk by reference to terrorism.

The external dimension of EU counter-terrorism discourse and the two specific topics analysed here deserve special attention. To start with, counter-terrorism is a primary theme in EU statements on security in third countries, and a securitising language is easily discernible – the one that directly

1 The author thanks the two reviewers for their very constructive and helpful comments on the paper.

2 Richard Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’ in Political and Academic Discourse”, *Government and Opposition*, Vol.42, No.3, 2007, p.394-426; Federica Bicchì and Mary Martin, “Talking Tough or Talking Together? European Security Discourses towards the Mediterranean”, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol.11, No.2, 2006, p.189-207. Charlotte Heath-Kelly, “Counter-Terrorism and the Counterfactual: Producing the ‘Radicalisation’ Discourse and the UK PREVENT Strategy”, *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, Vol.15, No.3, 2013, p.394-415.

3 Darren Kelsey, *Media, Myth and Terrorism*, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; Stef Wittendorp, “Unpacking ‘International Terrorism’: Discourse, the European Community and Counter-Terrorism, 1975–86”, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.54, No.5, 2016, p.1233-1249; Anastassia Tsoukula, “Democracy in the Light of Security: British and French Political Discourses on Domestic Counter-Terrorism Policies”, *Political Studies*, Vol.54, No.3, 2006, p.607-627.

4 Richard Jackson, “An Analysis of EU Counterterrorism Discourse Post-September 11”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol.20, No.2, 2007, p.233-247.

5 Jackson, “Constructing Enemies”.

6 Bicchì and Martin, “Talking Tough or Talking Together?”, p.191.

7 Adam Hodges and Chad Nilep, *Discourse, War and Terrorism*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007.

8 Christopher Baker-Beall, “The Evolution of the European Union’s ‘Fight against Terrorism’ Discourse: Constructing the Terrorist ‘Other’”, *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol.49, No.2, 2014, p.222.

9 Beste İşleyen, “Protection or Prevention? Different Visions of EU International Terrorism Policy”, Caterina Carta and Jean-Frédéric Morin (eds.), *EU Foreign Policy through the Lens of Discourse Analysis: Making Sense of Diversity*, Farnham, Ashgate, p.59-78.

10 Jackson, “An Analysis of EU Counterterrorism Discourse Post-September 11”.

11 Tsoukula, “Democracy in the Light of Security”.

12 Bicchì and Martin, “Talking Tough or Talking Together?”.

links EU internal security with the dynamics happening outside EU borders, especially in the “Southern Neighbourhood”. This was clearly expressed shortly after the Paris Attacks at the Justice and Home Affairs Meeting in Riga in January 2015: “The increasingly unstable situation in certain parts of the EU’s neighborhood, such as Libya and Syria, is of great concern to the EU’s security and requires special attention.”<sup>13</sup> This statement is one example of the multifarious securitising strategies employed in EU counter-terrorism discourse to construct the Southern Mediterranean as both a source and a multiplier of terrorism. Despite its recurrent usage in various EU documents, the discursive construction of the external dimension of counter-terrorism is yet to be systematically analysed. This study aims to fill this gap: What are the main themes, assumptions and argumentative strategies through which the EU defines and describes the nature and cause of the terrorist threat in other parts of the world? How does it construct the kind of response required to address problems attached to terrorism? And what political and normative consequences do such discursive formations have?

The good governance theme is a relevant and interesting case to study EU counter-terrorism discourse. Part of the PREVENT pillar of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy of 2005<sup>14</sup>, good governance has proven to be a primary topic in EU visions of the fight against terrorism. Differentiated from military and security-focussed approaches, good governance is presented as a “soft” instrument in the prevention of radicalisation and terrorism. Notwithstanding its critical examination in the field of, for instance, EU institutional-building exercises in third countries and enlargement<sup>15</sup>, the meaning of good governance in EU counter-terrorism discourse remains unaddressed. This article highlights that despite its representation as a “soft” instrument, the good governance aspect of EU counter-terrorism discourse is laden with contested assumptions, boundary drawing argumentation strategies and is embedded in broader political discourses that are highly disputed.

The Arab “Spring” has become a major theme in EU counter-terrorism discourse since the start of the mass protests in 2010. With the spread of the protests to several countries in the Middle East and North Africa throughout 2011, a high sense of emergency and alarm has come to characterize EU constructions of the events by reference to their security implications both domestically and for the EU. This is reflected in the words of the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Gilles de Kerkchove, in a news conference in September 2011: “You have not seen anyone demonstrating in the street referring to al Qaeda or al Qaeda rhetoric. ... But of course, we all agree that it has provided a huge opportunity for al Qaeda to reenergize.”<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, there has been a growing securitisation by the EU of different forms of human mobility, including refugees, irregular migrants, third country nationals and most recently the so-called “foreign fighters”. It is therefore vital to examine the ways in which the Arab “Spring” is discursively constructed and associated with EU external action on counter-terrorism.

The article analyses ninety EU counter-terrorism documents by the following EU institutions: the Council of Ministers, the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament. The corpus of data includes action plans, strategic documents, regulations, framework decisions, common positions, conclusions as well as press releases as well as speeches by EU officials. Data selection concerns the period of 2001-2017 due to the significance of the September 2001 events for the construction of the external dimension of EU counter-terrorism discourse.

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13 Council of the European Union, “Riga Joint Statement”, ANNEX, 2 February 2015, 5855/15, p.7.

14 Council of the European Union, “The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy”, 30 November 2005, 14469/4/05.

15 David Chandler, “The EU and Southeastern Europe: The Rise of Post-Liberal Governance”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.31, No.1, 2010, p.69-85.

16 Johanna Somers, “EU anti-terror chief highlights Arab Spring risks”, 5 September 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-arab-spring-risk-idUSTRE7843TV20110905> (Accessed on 16 February 2017).

## A Discourse-Historical Approach to EU Counter-Terrorism Policy

This study examines the external dimension of EU counter-terrorism from the perspective of DHA, which is a distinct strand of Critical Discourse Analysis. DHA takes discourse - the written and spoken language in use - as its object of analysis to understand social phenomena.<sup>17</sup> The central contention is that discourse is powerful, and its power lies in the way language constitutes social actors, objects, institutions and processes along with their relationships.<sup>18</sup> This critical approach is interested in the ideological consequences of discourse and looks at how language serves the production, consolidation and transformation of unequal and asymmetrical power structures in the social.<sup>19</sup>

For DHA, language is a medium to project power, maintain power and transform power. Power reveals itself in the portrayal of the social in particular ways that give rise to dominant understandings and asymmetrical social structures.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the question is how language manifests power by rendering particular meanings and understandings plausible and legitimate, and how these representations strengthen particular political mechanisms and apparatuses, while excluding others through de-legitimation. The focus is on the interplay between language as power and on the emergence, consolidation and modification of social structures manifesting relationships of hierarchy, authority and discrimination.<sup>21</sup>

Examining EU counter-terrorism action from the perspective of DHA requires exploring the ways in which language operates in the constitution of (counter-)terrorism and its related concepts. In addition, it invites a careful consideration as to how the particular constructions of terrorism-related phenomena, including subjects, objects, events and geography, come to be seen plausible and true. In this regard, texts prove significant in discourse analysis as they serve as the “specific and unique realization of a discourse.”<sup>22</sup> In a similar way, EU counter-terrorism discourse rests on particular political texts in order to describe and define the threat of terrorism and the best strategy to counter it.

Texts are linked with other texts belonging to the past and the present. This is called *intertextuality*, to which the DHA attaches great importance with the aim of manifesting how representations, meanings and relationships evolve in line with social and political developments.<sup>23</sup> Texts are interrelated if they point to the same issues and/or make similar claims, while referring at the same time to other texts with similar topics and arguments. From this perspective, the analysis of EU counter-terrorism discourse requires looking at *intertextual* connections by means of focusing on different texts which have terrorism and its related topics as their objects of investigation and utilize similar argumentation schemes.<sup>24</sup> Similar to texts, discourses are also correlated, and this necessitates considering the issue of *interdiscursivity* in the analysis of discourses. *Interdiscursivity* means that a discourse on a particular subject matter is connected with other discourses with different

17 Martin Reissigl and Ruth Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach”, Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London, SAGE, 2009, p.87-121.

18 Senem Aydın-Düzgüt, “Avrupa-Birliği-Türkiye İlişkilerinde Postyapısalcı Yaklaşım: Almanya Örneğinde Dış Politika ve Söylem Analizi”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol.8, No.29, Spring 2011, p.49-70.

19 Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, “Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology”, Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London, SAGE, 2009, p.1-33.

20 Reissigl and Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach”.

21 Aydın-Düzgüt, “Avrupa-Birliği-Türkiye İlişkilerinde Postyapısalcı Yaklaşım”.

22 Reissigl and Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach”, p.6.

23 Sinem Aydın-Düzgüt, *Constructions of European Identity: Debates and Discourses on Turkey and the EU*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

24 Reissigl and Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach”, p.90-91.

themes.<sup>25</sup> This implies that EU discourse on terrorism and counter-terrorism refer to the themes of other discourses when constructing meanings, establishing linkages and building up argumentation structures.

## **Methodology: Analytical Categories, Data Selection and Strategies for Analysis**

Data selection is informed by the object of the study; namely, EU counter-terrorism discourse. Thus, the corpus of data includes documents by those EU institutions that engage, both through discourse and everyday practices, in the development and implementation of EU counter-terrorism approach. In total, I have analysed ninety EU counter-terrorism documents by the Council of Ministers, the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament. I have primarily focused on action plans and strategic documents, regulations, framework decisions, common positions and conclusions. In addition, I have analysed press releases as well as Commissioners' speeches. The selected documents are significant in the formulation of an EU approach to counter-terrorism.

The period of data analysis is 2001-2017. This selection relates to the importance of 11 September 2001 attacks for the development of the external dimension of EU counter-terrorism policy. Cooperation among European countries in terrorism goes back to the 1970's through operational cooperation within the TREVI group. The Maastricht Treaty, which entered into force in 1993, acted as a milestone by providing a treaty basis for member state cooperation in terrorism matters. Yet, terrorism was then treated more as a domestic/national issue rather than a European one. Cooperation was restricted to internal security with limited action in the development of a common threat definition, harmonising resources and building up a strong institutional basis for EU level cooperation. Though the summit of Tampere (1999) represents a "critical juncture" in that the external aspect of EU counter-terrorism cooperation found its way in EU official documents<sup>26</sup>, it was only after the terrorist attacks of September 2001 that counter-terrorism acquired significant weight in EU relations with third countries. In the post/9/11 period, the external dimension of EU counter-terrorism gained real momentum through "the construction of a 'European interest' in counter-terrorism" by framing "Islamic terrorism" as a global threat and the main security risk for the EU<sup>27</sup> and the concomitant proliferation of international cooperation in counter-terrorism issues.<sup>28</sup>

The examination of EU counter-terrorism discourse is based on three steps. First, it starts with the specification of the topics of this discourse with a view to offering a picture of the central themes and subthemes that EU discourse on terrorism revolves around. The second step is to choose the central analytical categories for discourse analysis -a process which is consistent with the relevant research question. This is followed by the third step, which involves an in-depth investigation of the main linguistic patterns and relevant socio-political context-related elements.

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25 *Ibid.*; Ruth Wodak and Gilbert Weiss, "Analyzing European Union Discourses: Theories and Applications", Gilbert Weiss and Ruth Wodak (eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinary*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p.126-127.

26 Sarah Wolff, "The Mediterranean Dimension of EU Counter-Terrorism", *Journal of European Integration*, Vol.31, No.1, 2009, p.140.

27 Christian Kaunert, Sarah Léonard and Alex MacKenzie, "The Social Construction of an EU Interest in Counter-Terrorism: US Influence and Internal Struggles in the Cases of PNR and SWIFT", *European Security*, Vol.21, No.4, 2012, p.474-496.

28 George Joffé, "The European Union, Democracy and Counter-Terrorism in the Maghreb", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.46, No.1, 2008, p.147-171.

There are three “discursive strategies” that guide the analysis of the study.<sup>29</sup> The first strategy is based on “nomination”, which is about the discursive construction of social actors along with objects, incidents and practices in linguistic terms. The second strategy is “predication”, which includes the examination of what sort of positive and negative features are associated with social actors, objects and phenomena. As for the third strategy, “argumentation”, the goal is to illustrate arguments utilized with a view to making claims plausible and necessary.<sup>30</sup> Here, the central argumentative strategy is *topos*, which refers to “the formal and content-related warrants or ‘conclusion rules’ which connect argument(s) with the conclusion, the claim.”<sup>31</sup>

## EU Counter-Terrorism Discourse: Language as a Power Medium

This article examines two main discourse topics through which the external dimension of EU counter-terrorism is constructed. The first topic relates to good governance through which terrorism and radicalisation leading to terrorism are rendered a problem of governance capacity. The second topic relates to the representation of the Arab “Spring” in two central ways: the uprisings as an opportunity for non-violent change and the uprisings as a potential security risk for the EU. Both topics rely on various argumentation strategies that serve important functions in the construction of events, actors, space and themes with powerful discursive effects.

### *Promoting Good Governance, Building Capacities*

Good governance is one major theme that shapes the external dimension of EU counter-terrorism discourse. A relation of equivalence is established between terrorism and radicalisation on the one hand, and problems of governance on the other. EU counter-terrorism discourse draws selectively from the United Nations (UN) post-Cold War discourse and programme on good governance, which has shaped the rationale, techniques and mechanisms of the latter’s interventions into third countries around the world since the 1990’s. The UN discourse understands good governance as “the quality of state institutions” measured by the ability of the states to effectively govern the political, social and economic field within a given territory. The central constituents of the UN good governance discourse are the rule of law, democratic institutions and a well-functioning regulatory and administrative state apparatus.<sup>32</sup>

The discursive strategy that renders terrorism and radicalisation as the failure of governance makes extensive use of the *topos* of danger. The *topos* of danger sees problems of governance as significant security risks for terrorism and radicalisation to gain a strong foothold in societies that are poorly governed. It draws an alarming picture of the threat posed by bad governance through the use of stigma words, such as “state failure”<sup>33</sup>, “failed & failing states” as “potential havens ... for terrorists”<sup>34</sup>, “countries in transition or those characterized by weak governance” and “fragile states prone to violent extremism.”<sup>35</sup> The European Security Strategy (2003) states that radicalisation “arises out of complex

29 Aydın-Düzgüt, *Constructions of European Identity*.

30 Martin Reisigl, “Analyzing Political Rhetoric”, Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyżanowski (eds.), *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p.96-120; Reisigl and Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach”, p.93-94.

31 Reisigl and Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach”, p.110.

32 Laura Zanotti, “Governmentalizing the Post-Cold War International Regime: The UN Debate on Democratization and Good Governance”, *Alternatives*, Vol.30, No.4, 2005, p.461.

33 European Council, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, “Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy: Providing Security in a Changing World”, 11 December 2008, S407/08, p.1.

34 Council of the European Union, “EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy – Discussion Paper”, 26 November 2009, 15359/1/09, p.6.

35 European Commission, “Communication: Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism:

issues. These include pressures of modernisation, cultural, social and political crises, and the alienation of young people in foreign societies.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the EU’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2005) defines good governance as one of its key priorities:

There is a range of conditions in society which may create an environment in which individuals can become more easily radicalised. These conditions include poor and autocratic governance; rapid but unmanaged modernisation; lack of political or economic prospects and of educational opportunities. Within the Union these factors are not generally present but in individual segments of the population they may be. To counter this, outside the Union we must promote even more rigorously good governance, human rights, democracy as well as education and economic prosperity, and engage in conflict resolution.<sup>37</sup>

The European Commission engages in a similar discursive strategy in its Communication on terrorist recruitment:

...steps must be taken to prevent state fragility at an early stage, before a possible ‘breeding ground’ for terrorism might emerge. The Community will step up its assistance to support partner countries’ and regional organisations’ efforts to strengthen early warning systems, governance/institutional capacity building and promotion of human rights protection to enable them to engage effectively in a preventive approach. It will also improve its ability to recognize early signs of state fragility through improved joint analysis, joint monitoring and assessments of difficult, fragile and failing states with other donors.<sup>38</sup>

In both excerpts along with the quotations above, the “danger” presented by problems of governance are overlexicalized in order to strengthen their relationship of equivalence with terrorism and radicalisation. In the first excerpt, radicalisation is elaborated upon through excessive description attained by overlexicalized words of “poor and autocratic governance”, “unmanaged modernisation” and “lack of political or economic prospects.” Overlexicalisation in the second excerpt is achieved through hyperbolic words of “difficult, fragile and failing.” Together with the container metaphors of “environment” and “breeding grounds”, overlexicalisation serves the negative predicational strategy of homogenising a group of countries as being vulnerable to radicalisation and terrorist activity. The “fragility” metaphor is repetitively used to accentuate the *topos* of danger by pointing to the volatility, breakability and delicateness of the states, their institutions and governance structures. As such, EU counter-terrorism discourse dovetails with the UN good governance discourse in that the heavy reliance on the quality of state institutions renders issues primarily as domestic/local while ruling out the intertwining of and strong interdependence between the internal and external in political and economic terms.<sup>39</sup>

The *topos* of danger invokes a binary opposition by juxtaposing those countries framed as fragile against those associated with good governance. The latter are described via positively predicated qualities, such as “governance/institutional capacity”, “democracy”, “human rights” and “prosperity”. While the first excerpt acknowledges the likelihood of the existence of some factors of radicalisation in the EU on the surface, these factors are framed more as exceptional cases -“individual segments of the population”- rather than the norm. In fact, the EU is predicated positively in several official documents as regards good governance.

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Strengthening the EU’s Response”, 15 January 2014, COM (2013) 941 Final, p.11.

36 European Council, “European Security Strategy: A Secure World in a Better World”, 12 December 2013, Brussels, p.3.

37 Council of the European Union, “The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy.”

38 European Commission, “Addressing The Factors Contributing to Violent Radicalisation”, 21 September 2005, COM/2005/0313 Final, p.9.

39 Zanotti, “Governmentalizing the Post–Cold War International Regime.”



This becomes particularly evident in discursive strategies that ascribe the EU an international role in the form of an external strategy of promoting good governance. The EU Plan of Action in Combating Terrorism calls for the “more efficient use of relevant external assistance programmes including in particular good governance and the rule of law to address factors which can contribute to the support for terrorism.”<sup>40</sup> Similar referential strategies are evident in the excerpts above, where an international identity for the EU as a promoter of good governance is constructed *vis-à-vis* those countries facing the danger of terrorist activity and radicalisation. The use of the “we” pronoun, which refers to “the Union” and of the “Community” metaphor work to naturalize the EU that is put in oppositional terms with an essentialized entity -both predicated by reference to governance, positively and negatively respectively. The positive predication of the EU has close intertextuality with the representation of the EU as a “force for good” in international politics.<sup>41</sup> In both excerpts, the EU is described via soft expressions, such as “promote”, “engage in” and “assistance to support” to the fight against radicalisation and terrorism in third countries. The predication strategy around good governance forms a relationship of equivalence among EU member states by textually subverting their differences as to politics, economy and society. Yet, this homogenising vision of the EU ignores the shortcomings and failures faced by certain EU countries with respect to the very elements of good governance<sup>42</sup> that the EU seeks to promote elsewhere.

Furthermore, good governance relies on the *topos* of preventability. This *topos* correlates with broader “politics of pre-emptive security” in European counter-terrorism strategy, which draws explicitly from the US “War on Terror” discourse with its precautionary action in the area of law, finance and data. Preventive security rests on “imagined catastrophic futures” through which precautionary policies are justified and implemented.<sup>43</sup> The *topos* of preventability in EU good governance discourse engages in a similar strategy by means of connecting state fragility with extreme future formulations of terrorism and radicalisation in line with which a future strategy, named in the second excerpt as “a preventive approach”, is devised. This preventive strategy is put forward through overlexicalisation by means of expressions as “at an early stage”, “early warning systems” and “early signs of state fragility.” The repetitive use of the word “early” helps in calling for acting pre-emptively to address extreme future cases that have a high likelihood of emergence due to problems of governance. Preemption proposes an external strategy aiming at “building capacity abroad, to assist third countries to form and implement their own policies for preventing and countering radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism and how to address messages supporting terrorism.”<sup>44</sup>

### ***The Arab “Spring”: Opportunity for Non-Violent Change and a Security Risk***

Another topic which the EU’s counter-terrorism discourse draws upon concerns the 2011 uprisings in several countries across North Africa and the Middle East. There are two main topics through which the establishment of a linkage between terrorism and the 2011 events is realized: the uprisings as an opportunity for non-violent change and the uprisings as a potential security risk for the EU.

40 Council of the European Union, “EU Plan of Action on Combatting Terrorism – Update”, 14 December 2004, 16090/04, p.42.

41 Michelle Pace, “The EU as a ‘Force for Good in Border Conflict Cases?’”, Thomas Diez, Mathias Albert, and Stephan Stetter (eds.), *The European Union and Border Conflicts: The Power of Integration and Association*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.203-219.

42 Michael Merlingen, “Everything Is Dangerous: A Critique of ‘Normative Power Europe’”, *Security Dialogue*, Vol.38, No.4, 2007, p.435-453.

43 Marieke de Goede, “The Politics of Preemption and the War on Terror in Europe”, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol.14, No.1, 2008, p.179.

44 Council of the European Union, “Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism”, 19 May 2014, 9956/14, p.14.

The first discursive strategy utilized in EU counter-terrorism discourse relates to the conceptualisation of the 2011 events as an opportunity for non-violent change. Accordingly, the 2011 uprisings are argued to open up new prospects for political, economic and social change without recourse to violent means understood as terrorism. The following two excerpts are good illustrations of the first discursive strategy:

The Arab spring has allowed people from across the Arab world to express their legitimate aspirations to live in societies which respect principles of dignity, democracy, freedom, economic opportunity, the rule of law and human rights. By setting in motion processes of democratic reform, the peoples of the region have discredited the terrorists' argument that change can only be brought about through violence.<sup>45</sup>

The developments in the Arab world have shown that it is possible to achieve real political change in Arab societies other than through terrorism. This was a clear political defeat for Al Qaeda along with the military disasters it has suffered.<sup>46</sup>

In both excerpts, "change" and "real political change" exemplified by the 2011 events are juxtaposed against terrorism. The uprisings are predicated positively through a relationship of equivalence with "democracy" and its constituents as "freedom", "the rule of law" and "human rights." The events are defined as non-violent and contrasted with "terrorist arguments" and "terrorism" predicated by reference to "violence." This binary opposition is based on the assumption that the populations of the countries concerned have only two options for change, which stand at two opposite poles. This discursive binary not only predicates terrorism as one definitive and homogenising attribute of political life and the publics of the countries concerned. But it also constructs the past and the present as distinct temporal units. While the present is ascribed positive attributes, such as offering an opportunity for democratic change, the past is reduced to a totalising trait of terrorism that is supposedly one option to achieve change in the region. As such, the discursive bipolarity achieved between the past and the present simplifies and even disguises the sophisticated history of political, social and economic struggles in the region.<sup>47</sup>

A common argumentative strategy in both excerpts concerns the repetitive association of the 2011 events and actors as well as geography with an essentialized and binding "Arab" entity. This is done via referential strategies through several metaphorical expressions that serve a boundary drawing function by constructing a group of countries and populations as a homogenized unit denoted as "Arab". In the first excerpt, this is manifest in the use of the "spring" metaphor to predicate the 2011 uprisings. The uprisings are likened to the spring, which is the season of awakening, blossoming and sudden appearance. Together with "Arab" as its defining trait, the spring metaphor suggests a sudden democratic wakening and coming to life of Arab people just like the nature emerging from hibernation after winter. Similar to the spring that gives way to new beginnings, "the Arab spring" -with an agentive capacity to "allow"- wakes people from their sleep "by setting in motion processes of democratic reform". The spring metaphor feeds into the past/present binary, which makes the diverse and complex history of democratic battles and social movements in these countries invisible.

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45 Council of the European Union, "Council Conclusions on Counter-Terrorism", 3109th GENERAL AFFAIRS Council meeting, 12 September 2011, Brussels, p.2.

46 Council of the European Union, "EU Action Plan on Combatting Terrorism", 25 November 2011, 17594/11, p.2.

47 Nicola Pratt, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Arab World*, Boulder CO, Lynne Rienner, 2007.

Furthermore, combined with the container metaphor of the “world” in both excerpts and the “society” metaphor in the second excerpt, it establishes a relationship of equivalence between a large group of countries by naturalising them as an entity predicated as Arab. This constructs the 2011 events as all-encompassing without allowing for any variation across countries with Arab populations in terms of history, political system and social movements as well as context-specific struggles and experiences during the uprisings.<sup>48</sup> Also, the labelling of the events as “the Arab spring” masks the presence and active participation of non-Arab people in the 2011 mass protests by silencing them in both texts.

In the second excerpt, the juxtaposition of change against terrorism relies on the nominalisation<sup>49</sup> of “defeat” by reference to Al Qaeda. Defeat is an abstract representation of the complexity of the 2011 uprisings, including their social base, content, goals and effects and reduces change to a single function; that is the defeat of terrorism. A similar argumentation is seen in the first excerpt, which refers to the events as a battle between “terrorism” and “democratic reform” and positively predicates the 2011 uprisings for having “discredited the terrorist argument” as regards political change. Here again, the countries are left with merely two options for change that are at opposite poles without room for a third alternative. Little salience is given to the protesters’ demands for social justice and denunciation of corruption, authoritarian rule and economic marginalisation.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the second excerpt describes the events as a demonstration that “it is possible to achieve real change in Arab societies other than terrorism” as though such a counter-argument were needed against one that contests the ability of these countries for political change. This has implicit intertextuality with the public and academic discourse on Arab “exceptionalism”, which suggests a notable absence of democracy and an obstinate resistance to democratic transition in Arab countries.<sup>51</sup>

The second discursive strategy describes the uprisings as a potential security risk. The *topos* of threat underlines argumentation strategies as become evident in the following excerpt by the Commission on “the impact on the EU of the external dimension of security”:

The internal security of the EU is closely linked to the security situation in its neighbourhood, as demonstrated by recent events in the Arab world. These encouraging events which bring democracy and prosperity to the region, have also created considerable movements of people, putting increased pressure on neighbouring countries’ border management capabilities including the EU’s external border. Equally, continued displacement of people, and gaps in governance, may create conditions for increased criminal and terrorist activity across the Sahel area.<sup>52</sup>

Likewise, the Council states that: “The development in Syria is a key concern and there are warnings that this state might turn into a new jihadist theatre and also spill over into neighbouring countries.”<sup>53</sup>

48 Beste İşleyen, “The European Union and Neoliberal Governmentality: Twinning in Tunisia and Egypt”, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol.21, No.3, 2015, p.672-690.

49 Michael Billig, “The Language of Critical Discourse Analysis: The Case of Nominalization”, *Discourse & Society*, Vol.19, No.6, 2008, p.783-800.

50 Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio, “The Unbearable Lightness of Authoritarianism: Lessons from the Arab Uprisings”, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol.16, No.2, 2011, p.321-327; Corinna Mullin and Polly Pallister-Wilkins, “Introduction: The West Asian and North African Uprisings and the Limits of Liberal Governance”, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol.9, No.2, 2015, p.151-161.

51 Andrea Teti, “Beyond Lies the Wub: The Challenges of (Post)Democratization”, *Middle East Critique*, Vol.21, No.1, 2012, p.5-24.

52 European Commission, “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council”, 25 November 2011, COM (2011) 0790 Final, p.2.

53 Council of the European Union, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, “Annual report on the implementation of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy”, 7 December 2012, 16471/12, p.2.

Both excerpts invoke the *topos* of (security) threat that posits an interconnectedness between the security of the EU and the developments related to the 2011 uprisings. In the first excerpt, the EU, while celebrating the “events” as “encouraging” for political and economic transition on the surface, discursively prioritizes their security implications. In the second excerpt, the developments in Syria are understood by reference to their security implications pertaining to terrorism. In both excerpts, the *topos* of threat engages in a strategy to depict the 2011 events primarily from a securitising perspective that is observed in discourses of nation states that link state survival to the elimination of existential security threats.<sup>54</sup> Here, the container metaphors of the “neighbourhood” in the first excerpt and that of the “theatre” in the second excerpt help to establish a demarcation between the EU and the South - the latter also defined by the spatial metaphor of the “world.” The *topos* of (external) borders is utilized for the representation of the EU as a clearly demarcated space that can be sealed and clearly separated from the outside.<sup>55</sup> Coupled with the container metaphor of “pressure”, the *topos* of borders represents the EU as a geographically bounded unit that can be infiltrated and potentially exposed to the spill-over effects of an insecure neighbourhood. Here, human mobility resulting from the events is problematized in relation to its security consequences by an explicit reference to terrorism. With its securitising focus and geographical imaginations, this excerpt links directly with the EU’s post-Cold War security discourse that depicts “Europe as a ‘zone of peace’” to be safeguarded against the conflictual, instable and dangerous South.<sup>56</sup>

Radicalisation is a key theme of the EU’s counter-terrorism discourse. Describing the 2011 events, this discursive strategy draws on the *topos* of threat resting on a heightened sense of alarm about the consequences of the uprisings: “We must be aware...of the risk that disappointment about the expected improvement in the situation in the Arab world might lead to an increase in radicalisation.”<sup>57</sup>

This excerpt is illustrative of the ways in which EU counter-terrorism discourse discusses the 2011 events as a potential security risk via the *topos* of threat. In this excerpt, two future scenarios are outlined for the outcome of the uprisings: either an “expected improvement” or “disappointment” connected with a dangerous future scenario of radicalisation. Similar to the binary division discussed under the first discursive strategy, the options of the populations are limited to an either-or option. Here, disappointment serves as nominalisation that simplifies a variety of possible public reactions to the outcome of the uprisings by reducing it to a single disastrous future. Alternative responses by the population to limited progress in reforms, such as a stronger and more determined social movement, are left out as the future is limited to one scenario attached to radicalisation. Furthermore, Arab majority countries are again constructed as a homogenized entity by silencing cross-country variations in political, economic and social traditions and conditions as well as demands raised and context-specific experiences during the uprisings.

It is through the construction of radicalisation as a security threat tied to the 2011 events that the “foreign fighters” as “possibly the first of its kind”<sup>58</sup> appear as a key topic in EU counter-terrorism discourse. It is not only (potential) radicalisation in the neighbourhood that is constructed as a security

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54 Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework of Analysis*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1998.

55 Aydın-Düzgüt, *Constructions of European Identity*, p.53.

56 Pınar Bilgin, “A Return to ‘Civilisational Geopolitics in the Mediterranean? Changing Geopolitical Images of the European Union and Turkey in the Post-Cold War Era, *Geopolitics*, Vol.9, No.2, 2004, p.272.

57 Council of the European Union, “EU Action Plan on Combatting Terrorism”, p.1-2.

58 Council of the European Union, “Report on the implementation of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy”, p.4.

risk. But it is the travel of EU citizens to and their presence in the region that is highly securitized. It concerns the mobility and activities of both “European citizens who have been radicalized” and those “who are at risk of becoming radicalized”.<sup>59</sup> As the European Agenda on Security puts it:

European citizens continue to join terrorist groups in conflict zones, acquiring training and posing a potential threat to European internal security on their return. While this issue is not new, the scale and the flow of fighters to ongoing conflicts, in particular in Syria, Iraq and Libya, as well as the networked nature of these conflicts, are unprecedented.<sup>60</sup>

Likewise, when referring to 2013, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator states that:

At the time, the numbers of foreign fighters travelling from Europe to Syria and other hotspots were on the increase. The figures today are unprecedented. More than 3000 European citizens and residents have left for Syria to fight. Given that foreign fighters are a serious problem not only for regional stability but also for European internal security, a number of measures and initiatives have been taken both internally and externally.<sup>61</sup>

In both excerpts, the threat posed by the travel and acts of the “foreign fighters” is described via the *topos* of magnitude to create a high sense of panic and unease about security. This is done in the first excerpt through the metaphorical words of “scale” and “flow” to accentuate the alarming nature of peoples’ mobility to those countries where the uprisings took place. The *topos* of magnitude in the second excerpt is achieved through overlexicalized expressions referring to quantity, which help “gain credibility and a heightened sense of urgency”<sup>62</sup> in the construction of the security threat. By referring that “the numbers...are on the increase” and that “the figures today are unprecedented” estimated to be “more than 3000 European citizens and residents”, the *topos* of magnitude stresses the necessity of preventive measures to target the “foreign fighters”. In both excerpts, Europe/the EU is represented as a bounded geographical unit juxtaposed against an insecure outside. The latter is defined through the metaphorical expression of “hotspots” and also negatively predicated through the repetitive use of “conflict” to denote geography and events. The spatial imagination of Europe/the EU as a homogenized entity with clear boundaries rests on a hierarchy of security representations as seen in the second excerpt. Whereas the “foreign fighters” are considered a problem “for European internal security”, they are framed as a threat to “regional stability.” The necessity of providing European “security”, involving protection and well-being, is imagined different from the “stability” of the outside – the latter being more about equilibrium than the safety and the welfare of the populations.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have applied a discourse-historical approach to examine the external dimension of EU discourse on counter-terrorism. The analysis has identified two key themes underlying the external aspect of EU counter-terrorism discourse: good governance as a strategy to fight against terrorism and the Arab “Spring” as both an opportunity to combat terrorism and a security risk for radicalization leading to terrorism. Bringing the linguistic element into the analysis of this discourse, I

59 European Parliament, “The Prevention of Radicalisation and Recruitment of European Citizens by Terrorist Organisations”, 25 November 2015, Resolution 2015/2063(INI).

60 European Commission, *The European Agenda on Security*, 28 April 2015, COM(2015)185 Final, p.12.

61 Council of the European Union, “Report on the implementation of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy”, p.6.

62 Aydın-Düzgüt, *Constructions of European Identity*. p.61.

have illustrated the power of language in the production and reproduction of asymmetric and unequal representations of social actors, objects and relationships and its boundary making qualities, also through intertextuality and interdiscursivity.

While associating terrorism with governance capacity, the good governance discourse reduces problems to technical and institutional deficiencies to be sought at the domestic level. In doing so, it reproduces the international good governance discourse that has so far failed in its vision. A good example is the limited engagement of the EU's counter-terrorism discourse with wider questions related to war, conflict and violence in the EU's neighbourhood and elsewhere. An exclusive focus on the local sidesteps the wider context of domestic and regional conflict and the resulting displacement of people and the spread of violence, including those defined as terrorism, in different parts of the world.

Furthermore, the discursive constructions surrounding the Arab "Spring" rely on controversial assumptions and uneven representations as to politics, social movements and the populations of the countries where the uprisings took place. On the one hand, though it predicates the 2011 events positively by seeing them as a chance for transformation in the region, it simultaneously reduces the past to terrorism as one determining feature of politics in Arab majority countries. This not only conceals the variety of political, economic and social struggles –both past and present– in the countries concerned. But it also smoothly connects with academic and non-academic discourses with their claims about Arab "exceptionalism". On the other hand, the EU's counter-terrorism discourse sees the 2011 events as security risks with possible spill-over effects for the EU depicted as a bounded space. It is within this discursive strategy that human mobility – both to the EU and from the EU– are turned into high security risks with a growing focus on individuals described as the "foreign fighters."

These findings advance the existing literature on EU counter-terrorism discourses and practices. Preferring a focus on the "linguistic" over "broader representational practices"<sup>63</sup>, the discourse-historical approach highlights the means and the ways in which language becomes powerful in the construction of subjects, objects and identities at the expense of alternative representations. For example, the good governance aspect of EU counter-terrorism discourse contributes to studies on "preventive security" in European (counter-)terrorism practices.<sup>64</sup> It shows how a discursive connection is attained between good governance and counter-terrorism through linguistic tools of predication, the uses of the *topos* of preventability and overlexicalisation that help in rendering a preventive approach as "normal" and "natural". Similarly, an in-depth linguistic analysis of EU representations of the Arab "Spring" throws into relief the power of discourse in reducing politics and change in the countries of the uprisings to an either-or scenario, whereby the lack of a successful democratic transition is tied to an extreme case of radicalisation resulting in terrorism. These empirical findings are illustrative of the value of a linguistic approach in accounting for important, yet subtle, aspects of the EU's discourse on counter-terrorism. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that future research would significantly benefit from the ideas and analytical tools of the discourse-historical approach when analyzing politics in general and the foreign policy discourse of the EU in particular.

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63 Senem Aydın-Düzgit, "Critical Discourse Analysis", p. 3.

64 Louise Amoore and Marieke de Goede, *Risk and the War on Terror*, London, Routledge, 2008.

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