

QATAR UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

THE FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATIONS OF QATAR AND THE ROLE OF THE

EUROPEAN UNION

BY

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## ABSTRACT

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Title: The Role of the Interdependence of the European Union and Qatar in the Gulf Monarchy's Foreign Policy

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Qatar has transformed its foreign policy orientation between 1995 and 2020, especially since the anti-Qatar quartet of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt cut their diplomatic ties with Qatar in June 2017 (“the Gulf crisis”) which forced the Gulf country to rebuild its relationships. Besides its bilateral relations, Qatar has pivoted towards international institutions, including the European Union, by implementing resilient strategies and reforms in order to survive the negative consequences of the crisis. The researcher investigates both strategic and historical relations between Qatar and the European Union highlighting the changes, which have taken place during the reign of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (1995-2013) and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani since 2013. This research aims to understand this transformation by analyzing the changing dynamics of the foreign policy of Qatar and the evolving relationship with the European Union with regard to political, economic, and security dimensions.

This research explores the implemented soft power strategies which contributed enormously to the transformation of Qatar. The researcher provides a geopolitical context in order to understand reasons behind the success of a small state in international politics. The qualitative approach is followed by analyzing relevant literature to investigate the changing dynamics of Qatar`s foreign policy, followed by an analysis of economic diversification and growing diplomatic relations with the European Union.

Finally, this thesis investigates the limitations of the role of the European Union in the Gulf Crisis and explains why the European Union remained in a neutral position with regard to this dispute. Furthermore, the researcher highlights significant cooperation agreements which provided a platform for further opportunities between the European Union and Qatar in order to strengthen their relationship especially in terms of mutual political and economic interests.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1. Problem Statement**

There has been a significant transformation in the relationship between Qatar and the European Union between 1995 and 2020, during which time Qatar has experienced enormous political and socio-economic changes. This thesis aims to investigate the changing dynamics of Qatar's foreign policy since 1995, focusing on the reigns of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (1995-2013) and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani since 2013. The researcher specifically highlights the role of the European Union, and analyses both historical and strategic relations between the two, giving consideration to the impact of isolation caused the air, sea and land blockade initiated against Qatar by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates in 2017. This thesis provides a more detailed explanation of the transformation in social, economic and political relations of Qatar and the European Union, and investigates existing bilateral relationships based on statistics and available resources.

The 2017 blockade had a significant impact on Qatar, which required them to strengthen their relations regionally and internationally, including with the European Union, by initiating new strategies and reforms. Qatar promotes peaceful ideologies by being an important mediator of international politics. The Qatari leadership has implemented resilient survival strategies in order to maintain peace and regional stability, and focused on economic diversification, which has transformed Qatar tremendously. These strategies made Qatar a less vulnerable, and a more economically independent nation in the region regardless of the negative consequences caused by its neighbouring countries.

German diplomat Wolfgang Friedrich Ischinger highlighted the political and economic cooperation between the European Union and the Gulf region, which he regarded as essential in order to strengthen relations in a region, which has become more and more important to European countries. Ischinger highlighted the importance of crisis management and emphasized that the future of the GCC region is important to the European Union; therefore, he encouraged the European leaders to play a more active role in the Gulf region (Ischinger, 2018).

Ischinger explained the importance of cooperation and peace by cautioning the GCC countries to avoid the same or similar mistakes, which had happened in the past in Europe, during the World Wars I and II. He promoted the idea of focusing more on conflict resolution among the nations as an essential step to ensure regional stability and security by suggesting following the same path amongst the GCC members, even though major differences exist in the Gulf region (Ischinger, 2018). He has provided some historical examples of the dramatic consequences of World Wars I and II in Europe, and according to him, “we should help to our friends always, otherwise the challenges will come to us one day” (Ischinger, 2018).

## **1.2. Research Objectives**

This thesis aims to investigate the changing dynamics of Qatar’s foreign policy, and the role of the European Union in this context, by focusing on important strategic relations. This thesis highlights the period of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani who initiated drastic changes and reforms in Qatar.

The researcher highlights the resilient foreign policy strategies of Qatar, which contributed to significant economic development with the European Union. Furthermore, this thesis examines economic diversification in Qatar during the period

of the blockade and its consequences in order to provide more applicable information, and a greater understanding of the relationship with the European Union.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

The researcher emphasizes the importance of resilient strategies in the context of economic and political relations of Qatar over the past decades. This thesis explores the changing dynamics of the foreign policy of Qatar and focuses on the consequences of the Gulf Crisis. The researcher investigates further transformations in the context of the evolving economic relationship between Qatar and the European Union.

This thesis attempts to answer the following research question:

- What is the role of the European Union in the context of the changing dynamics of Qatar`s foreign policy in the past decades?

The researcher provides answers to three sub-questions, which helps illuminate a holistic understanding of the research question:

- How has Qatar transformed its diplomatic relationship with the European Union during the Gulf Crisis?
- How has Qatar`s resilient strategies and implications contributed to economic diversification since the Gulf dispute has started?
- What are the dominant issues between Qatar and the European Union?

In order to address the research problem, this chapter starts with an investigation into the historical background of Qatar and the relevant literature, before a discussion of methodology and research design.

#### **1.4. Historical Overview of the British Empire and Qatar**

This chapter examines the relations of the Persian Gulf region and the British Empire during the era of colonization (1820 and 1971) in order to understand the background of the relations with Great Britain as a significant strategic partner of the Gulf region among European countries since the time of British hegemony (Onley, 2009). The sheikhdoms were often threatened by external enemies, thus the rulers continuously sought protection from Britain in return for defending the sheikhdoms from external threats (Onley, 2009). The Persian Gulf region emerged into the international arena and has experienced tremendous changes in terms of political, economic and social dynamics. The rulers of the sheikhdoms established the so called Bashire Resident on Qishm Island in the Strait of Hormuz in 1822 in order to control the relations of the British Government and the rulers of sheikhdoms and protect the British Indian ships from piracy and bedouin threats (Onley, 2009).

Initially, the role of the British Empire was to ensure regional stability and peace by focusing on the protection of oil supplies. This strategy changed during the World Wars I and II, when Britain signed a maritime agreement to avoid Ottoman, German, French or Russian involvement in the region (Onley, 2009). In the beginning, the British Government was afraid of Saudi dominance and a possible regional destabilization; therefore, the presence of the British military forces became significant in the region, which was also later supported by the US government in order to avoid an expansion of nationalism or communism (Onley, 2009).

The first ruler of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Thani (1851-1878) signed an agreement with the British Empire which has recognized Qatar as an independent and prominent state (Amiri Diwan, 2020). Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al Thani (1913-1949) made significant changes in Qatar by strengthening its diplomatic ties regionally and internationally (Amiri Diwan, 2020). Moreover, he signed a protection treaty with Great Britain in 1916 in return for protection from any interventions and military aids by refraining from arms trafficking, slavery and piracy (Kamrava, 2013). Britain became an influential player in the Persian Gulf region, yet its protection has negatively affected the power of sheikhs under their own territories (Onley, 2009).

The discovery of oil and later natural gas ( see Figure 1) resulted in economic changes and also had an impact on its conservative society in the country (Kamrava, 2013). In 1909, the British Government established the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) in Iran – which was the most significant foreign investment of Britain – in order to secure its oil supplies for the Royal Navy (Onley, 2009). Furthermore, George Martin Lees – a geologist of APOC – was able to receive a permission and license of two years of exploration from Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al Thani in the territories of Qatar (Sorkhabi, 2010). Shortly thereafter exploration of oil resources began in earnest in the Gulf.

Qatar provided an oil concession for APOC in 1935 with the discovery of Dukhan fields for oil exploration and production for 75 years (Sorkhabi, 2010). The Petroleum Department was established in Qatar in 1937 which has taken over the permission of concession and operations of APOC (Sorkhabi, 2010).

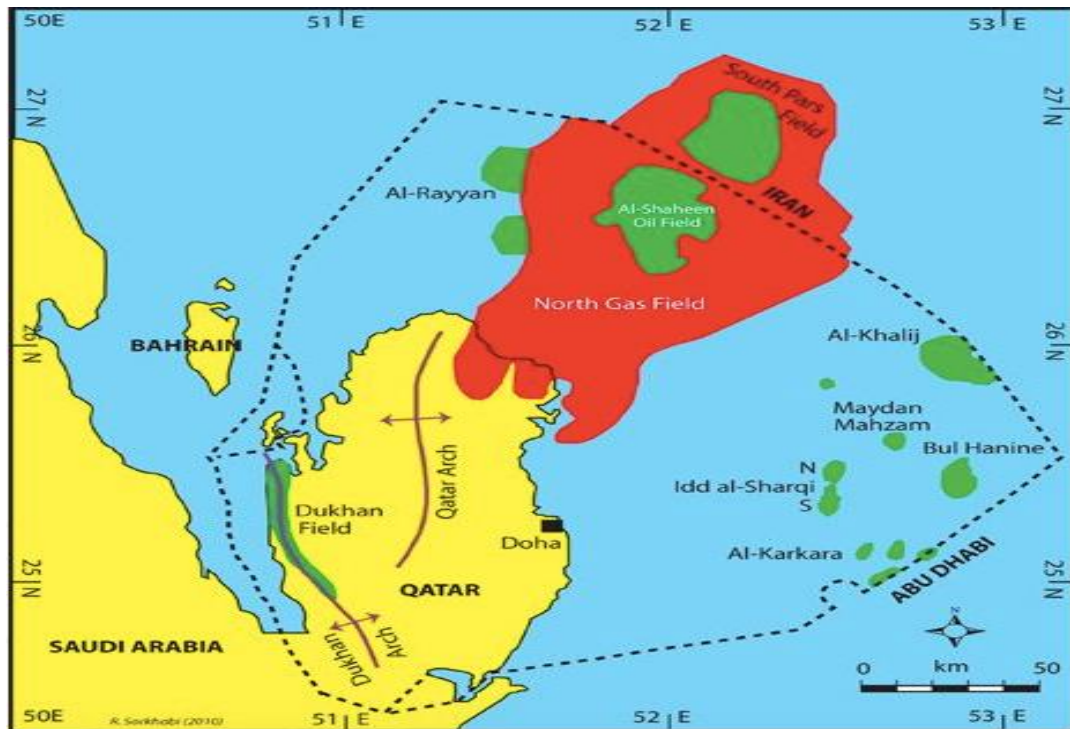


Figure 1: The major oil and gas fields of Qatar (Sorkhabi, 2010).

Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah Al Thani (1949-1960) signed an agreement with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and agreed to the establishment of the British Political Resident in Qatar (Amiri Diwan, 2020). In 1953, Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah Al Thani initiated organizational changes by forming Qatar Petroleum Company and providing concession for Shell Overseas Exploration Company which completed the first export shipment in 1964 from Halul Island (Sorkhabi, 2010).

The American and the British forces formed a naval and air base on Diego Garcia island, in order to protect the oil fields of the Persian Gulf region from Soviet expansion in the territories of the Indian Ocean (Onley, 2009). Britain became one of the main suppliers of military weapons in the Persian Gulf region, despite its official withdrawal from the region in 1977, and even though the British Government withdrew its military forces from the Persian Gulf region by giving independence for its sheikhdoms in 1971 (Onley, 2009).

Nevertheless, the oil industry, along with the many relationships influenced by it, has played a significant role in economic diversification, and the revenues of natural resources contributed to further transformations of the region (Halliday, 2009). Qatar has been gifted with natural resources which has significantly influenced its roles regionally and internationally. In the 1970s, the foreign aid assistance was rapidly growing when the oil prices reached a peak during the period of economic boom (Watanabe, 2017). Furthermore, Qatar has the third largest natural gas reserve in the world, which has allowed the Qatari leadership to practice an active foreign policy (Peterson, 2006). The increase of wealth has given it the chance for the small state to enhance military support and influence other Arab countries in the region (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017). In addition, the increasing oil revenues provided unique opportunities to intervene in regional and international conflicts (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017).

Sheikh Ahmad bin Ali Al Thani (1960-1972) focused also on political development by rectifying the first Qatari Constitution in April of 1970 (Amiri Diwan, 2020). Qatar became independent in 1971 and has grown into an extremely powerful state under the rule of the Al Thani family (Onley, 2009). Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (1995-2013) transformed Qatar completely (Amiri Diwan, 2020) and made further significant changes, including forming Qatar Petroleum in 1974 and establishing Qatar University as the first university in Qatar (Sorkhabi, 2010). In the 1980s, the Qatari ruling family became extremely wealthy within a short period of time and had direct control on the economic and political system by providing governmental and military positions within the Al Thani family (Kamrava, 2013).

In 1995, tension increased when Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani came into the power by initiating a coup attempt against his father Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al

Thani while he was abroad in Switzerland. Nevertheless, Sheikh Khalifa returned to Qatar, and the consequences dramatically changed the relationship with the neighbouring countries as a result of their support in the coup attempt (Kamrava, 2013).

The Qatari foreign policy had experienced significant changes ,especially during Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who has initiated drastic reforms (Jamal, 2014). The father of the current emir built an internationally recognized state and placed Qatar on the map by transforming its regime and decreasing the tension within the ruling families (Kamrava, 2013).

### **1.5. Literature Overview**

This section examines existing studies related to the transformation of Qatar's foreign policy and the role of the European Union. This relationship is relatively new and resources are limited, especially in light of the ongoing blockade. Qatar has experienced drastic changes with its regional and international allies since the blockading nations – the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt – cut their diplomatic ties with Qatar in June 2017. Therefore, after detailing the existing studies on Qatar's blockade, and on the relationship with the European Union, this research will fill a significant gap in the literature.

Some researchers investigated in their research work the impact of the isolation of Qatar caused by its neighbouring countries and analyzed the implemented resilient strategies of the foreign policy of Qatar in order to survive the negative consequences of the blockade, despite its smallness demographically and geographically. The siege countries attempted to force Qatar to fulfil their demands and destroy its economy through isolation; however, they have provoked a backlash against themselves. As a result, Qatar has survived the negative impact of the Gulf rift without any major



consequences (Szalai, 2019).

Some scholars focused on the expanding relations of Qatar beyond the Gulf region. In these relations, Qatar has built a strong relationship with the European Union and diversified its economy, while simultaneously maintaining sovereignty and protecting heritage (Baabood, 2017; Kristian & Theodore, 2018). Qatari leaders strengthened their diplomatic relationships with multiple regional and international allies, and implemented resilient strategies by focusing on economic diversification since the siege countries imposed their embargos on Qatar (Baabood, 2017).

Baabood (2017) and Szalai (2017) argued that Qatar is in a paradoxical situation where, on the one hand, they are in a process of surviving the current regional crisis, while on the other hand, they are playing a mediation role in regional conflicts and international disputes. With regard to broader foreign policy transformations, Kamrava (2011) has previously pointed out that Qatar has been playing an increasingly important role as a regional peacekeeper, which has transformed its image of political, economic, and social contexts, and shaped its reputation at an international level. Moreover, Qatar has become a significant mediator despite its geographical smallness in numerous conflicts in the region to promote the values of regional stability and peace (Kamrava, 2011).

In investigating the broader implications of the crisis, Szalai (2017) reported difficulties during the current diplomatic crisis, which had an enormous impact on Qatar and affected its society. The citizens and residents of Qatar lived with fears and doubts, especially at the beginning of the blockading period. For instance, numerous expatriates moved from Qatar and returned to their homelands out of fear of a possible war caused by the diplomatic dispute. Moreover, Qatari nationals and residents – who support Qatar – believe in the existence of isolation as a result of the illegal blockade by closing

its air, land and sea borders (Szalai, 2017).

In addition, Szalai (2017) named the blockade an 'attempt of isolation' and investigated the economic and political consequences of the crisis by focusing on the domestic implications and providing answers for the possible outcomes of the illegal blockade. The researcher also highlighted further negative impacts of the isolation by explaining possible threats of destroying the image of Qatar on regional and international levels (Szalai, 2017).

Szalai (2017) and Baabood (2017) explained the immediate and drastic political, economic, and social impacts of border closures, since the majority of import products came from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The isolation and the imposed embargos consequently resulted in severe obstacles in the field of trade relations. Nevertheless, Turkey and Iran helped Qatar in supplying food and dairy products, especially in the beginning of the diplomatic crisis, which resulted further tension in the region (Szalai, 2017).

Szalai (2017) mentioned significant changes in various fields which had an extreme impact on Qatar, causing negative effects on its society and its relations with neighbouring countries. The researcher described the domestic political and economic implications of the blockade and he claimed that the current diplomatic crisis seems to be unsettled since the siege countries are not willing to negotiate with Qatar, despite the mediation efforts led by Kuwait (Szalai, 2017).

Qatar has grown into a regional and international entity in the past decades, while focusing on economic diversification. In this, the European Union plays a significant role. Some researchers highlighted the evolving economic relationship between Qatar and the European Union which was strengthened immensely as a result of the blockade. The European leaders are demonstrating peaceful negotiation efforts

to avoid further escalation and protect their economic interests in the Gulf region. However, the relationship within the European Union members is complicated since all members did not reach a consensus regarding their foreign policy approaches towards to the Gulf region (Görgülü, 2019).

Other research projects focused on the importance of enhancing the relationship between Qatar and the European Union because of energy security, despite the negative consequences of the isolation caused by the siege countries. For example, Woertz (2012) explained the importance of a strong relationship with Qatar, as it plays a crucial role in the energy markets. This has been done in order to reduce the dependency on the Russian oil and gas supplies in Europe (Woertz, 2012). As seen in Figure 2, Qatar remained the leader of the natural gas exporting countries worldwide followed by Australia, United States and Russia.

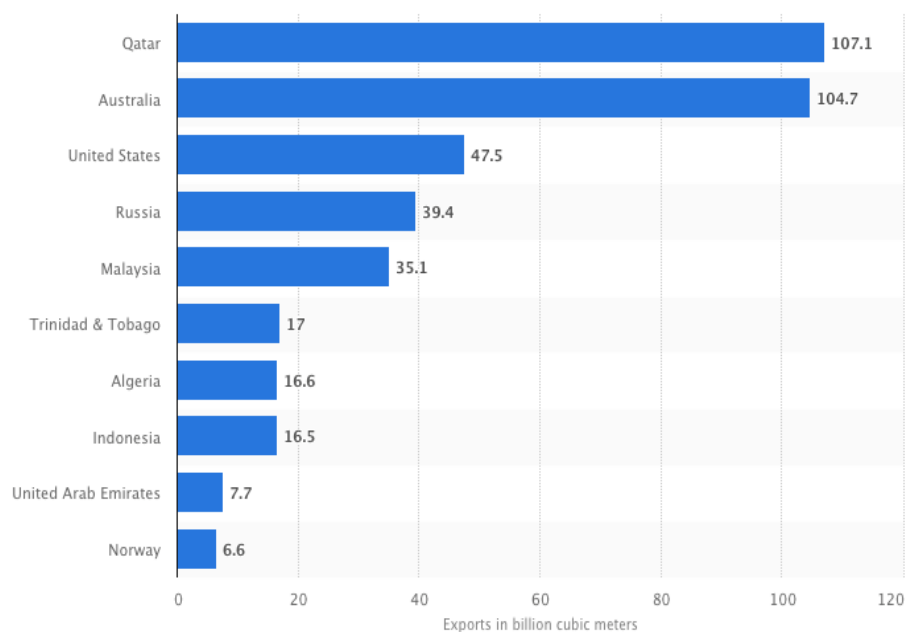


Figure 2. Major liquefied natural gas exporting countries in 2019 (in billion cubic meters) (Statista, 2020)

In addition, Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) has invested an enormous amount into numerous European countries, which, according to Woertz (2012), should not be neglected. Overall, Woertz (2012) argues that Europe should focus more on the importance of relations with Qatar, which has been transformed into an international hub by implementing soft power strategies such as educational initiatives and diplomatic mediation in regional and international disputes.

There are studies written about Qatar highlighting the importance of mediation role in regional and international conflicts, which is a main characteristic or attribution of the Qatari foreign policy. Fromm (2016) and Woertz (2012) argue that European leaders underestimated the influence of European interaction with Qatar. Moreover, Fromm (2016) stressed that the European Union should develop its long-term relations with Qatar in order to enhance economic and security interests. In contrast, Fromm (2016) argues that the European leaders should build strategic relations with Qatar to create a bridge within the regions in order to mediate in international disputes. Finally, Fromm (2016) mentioned that European leaders should consider Qatar as a partner without criticism, and this could ultimately contribute to transformation of the European perception of Qatar (Fromm, 2016). Fromm's study and arguments are based on the pre-blockade period.

Miller and Al Mansouri (2016) investigated bilateral and region-to-region cooperation between Qatar and the European Union. Qatar is focusing on developing its bilateral relations with European countries, while simultaneously the European Union supports Qatar in building institutional harmonization by providing examples as a role model and strategic partner in numerous fields. Qatar has expanded its bilateral partnership with the European Union including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Spain in the past decade. Furthermore, the leadership of Qatar has improved

its relations with smaller European Union member states such as Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Luxemburg and Malta in the past years (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016).

Overall, with regard to the current crisis, the authors mainly focused on the current situation without providing in depth historical background that contributed to the isolation of Qatar caused by its neighbouring countries. In addition, the existing literature are limited regarding the foreign policy orientation of Qatar and the role of the European Union, although this aspect has become important, especially since the blockade has started. Therefore, this thesis investigates strategic aspects of their relations by introducing the most significant partnerships and underlining some crucial platforms which have contributed to further cooperation between the European Union and Qatar. This thesis also examines the economic opportunities of the evolving relationship.

## **1.6. Research Design and Methodology**

The researcher implements a qualitative research method in this study to provide reliable information in order to ensure that the collected data answer the research question, and focuses on the nature of the relationship between the European Union and Qatar in terms of economic, political and security contexts despite the existing literature limitations.

This thesis also implements a case study in order to highlight Qatar as a unique state in the region and analyses its strategic relations with some countries in the European Union. Qatar has grown into an independent small state in the region and has diversified its economic and diplomatic relationship, especially since the siege countries imposed their embargos on Qatar. The new generation of leadership has

implemented resilient strategies in order to survive the negative consequences of the blockade and protect their nation and regime from further external threats. The behaviour of the leaders has built an image for Qatar in the international arena and demonstrate unique approaches to transform foreign policy orientation. The case study approach is therefore useful because it highlights the unique ways in which Qatar contributes to a broader understanding of international relations.

The researcher uses an analytical data analysis which helps to understand the context amongst the variables and explain how the relation has transformed followed by the impact of the crisis. The selection of the samples of the study depends on secondary resources which were collected from printed books and journals, documents, as well as academic online resources. The researcher discusses the significant political and economic attributions through charts and graphs, and introduces findings via axial coding in order to provide a better understanding of the research problem.

With regard to the limitations of the methodology of this research, it was difficult to conduct interviews due to security concerns of the Gulf region. Therefore, the researcher preferred to focus on the collected secondary resources including books and academic research papers written by regional and international scholars investigating the region and its relations with the most significant European allies. The researcher decided to analyze data from the existing studies in order to understand the foreign policy orientation of Qatar and the role of the European Union in terms of economic, political and security perspectives especially followed by the impact of the crisis.

The researcher divided this thesis into different chapters in order to highlight the significant importance of its transforming foreign policy orientation, focusing on the period of the blockade caused by its neighbouring countries. Qatar has implemented

resilient strategies and initiated rapid reforms to strengthen its diplomatic relations around the globe in order to survive the negative impact of the crisis. The researcher introduced a historical background of Qatar in order to understand its strategic relations with external actors of the international arena.

Furthermore, the researcher introduces the foreign policy orientation of Qatar and the role of the European Union by highlighting the importance of neutral position with regard to the Gulf rift. Nevertheless, the researcher aims to investigate the relationship between Qatar and the European Union by focusing on the economic diversification of Qatar through significant trade and investments relations with the European Union. Finally, the researcher introduces the limitations of this research and provides further explanations of the developing relationship between the European Union and Qatar, highlighting important political and economic cooperation.

## **Chapter 2: Conceptual Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Theoretical Approaches of Conquering Smallness**

This thesis focuses on small state theories by challenging the English School of international relations and proves that small states could play significant roles in the international arena, despite their geographical and demographic limitations (Rozsa N. & Szalai, 2015). The world has changed progressively into a globalized and integrated economy since 1980 (Harris, 2012). The Middle East merged into this globalized international system which has resulted in significant changes in the region in the past decades (Halliday, 2009). Nevertheless, the Middle East was affected by European influence, even though the cultural principles are based on completely different ideologies which reflects on the international relations and politics. In general, the values and norms of European culture have influenced the region mainly through culture and media. The Middle East became Europeanized by interacting with European societies proven by the institutions of the English School (Halliday, 2009). The idea of centralized sovereign territorial state is based on the European model, which has shaped the Middle East region by adopting the characteristics of European international society. Some values such as human rights or democracy could be the consequences of transnational elements of the European expansion causing tension among societies in the Middle East (Yurdusev, 2009).

Some scholars examined the context of sociological and historical frameworks in order to discover challenges of international relations such as the impact of the external powers (Halliday, 2009). The English school demonstrates further dimensions within International Relations, in which the values and norms are represented by international societies (Buzan, 2009). Furthermore, there are cultural differences among



Western and Muslim societies which resulted in further issues, especially among autocratic elites and secularist leaders (Yurdusev, 2009).

Some researchers discovered a new model in terms of collaboration between small states and intergovernmental and international organizations instead of participating in global conflicts due to their limitations of smallness. Erzsébet N. Rózsa and Máté Szalai (2015) methodologically divided the interregional cooperation into sub-national levels (which means the transnational relations among individuals, social and economic organizations, including universities and NGOs from these regions) and the supra-regional level (which covers the cooperation between the Gulf region and the European Union institutions by interregional cooperation through political, economic and military attributions). This neorealist concept reflects geographical and functional limitations on the foreign policy of small states, therefore, some scholars are against the neorealist approaches due to the phenomenon of globalization which has challenged regional obstacles and tremendously shaped international relations with the development of technologies (Rozsa N. & Szalai, 2015).

Although, there is still a lack of close relationship among the Gulf region and Europe as a result of discrepancies of societies and cultural differences, the geographical limitation reduced obstacles through certain attributions of globalization, such as the development of infrastructure, education and information technologies. In addition, the field of education has become a crucial point in order to decrease cultural discrepancies by promoting transnational alliances and establishing a strong base for cooperation (Rozsa N. & Szalai, 2015).

The European Union (EU) and the Gulf Council Cooperation (GCC) follow different values and norms within different institutional frameworks – the EU is a supranational power and the GCC is an interregional organization – which can be

considered as the main obstacle in terms of building strong alliances among the regions (Kostadinova, 2013). Moreover, one of the reasons the importance of Gulf region was overlooked in the past as a result of these differential institutional structures.

There are numerous definitions of small states provided by different scholars who explored the relationship between the European Union and the small Gulf states in the context of foreign and security policy analyses, however only a few studies have been published on this theme (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017). Some scholars investigated geographical and demographic limitations of small state foreign policy in line with historical narratives in order to understand smallness in international politics.

One approach focuses on the balance of power and defines small states according to the geographic and demographic characteristics. The main interest of small states was survival in a world characterized by dominant superpowers since the decolonization period; therefore, small states were forced to shape their politics and security dynamics with international actors (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017, p. 8). Consequently, small states cannot be defined as international actors and are not able to perform without merging into a system in order to avoid external threats according to the schools of realism and neorealism (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017). External powers such as Great Britain or the United States were not interested in regional predominance, and therefore, small states were able to enhance their interests and focus on state-building processes (Szalai, 2019).

The next approach adopts a different point of view in terms of small states and believes in power which is limited. The relationship between small states and the international system provides a direction for the orientation of foreign and security policies, based on the size of the power (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017). Nevertheless, small states opt to follow defensive strategies, rather than offensive, by joining coalitions and

military alliances in order to ensure regional stability (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017).

The last approach follows the peace theory in which democracies play the most peaceful roles compared with bureaucratic regimes. Strong states always use their capacities in which the transnational attributors influence the weak states (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017). The small states in the Middle East are facing continuous security issues, especially since the number of extreme militant organizations has increased out of political and economic instability in the region. These changes had negative consequences in the region, and created further security threats caused by the Al Qaida, the Islamic State or the Muslim Brotherhood (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017). These kind of foreign and security policies are based on niche strategies characterized by peacekeeping, prevention of conflicts, mediation, human rights protection, sustainable development, military special services including counter-terrorism (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017, pp. 16). Overall, small states were forced to appoint a security strategy and choose to protect their autonomies or expand their influence (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017).

## **2.2. The Impact of Soft Power Strategies in Qatar**

Some scholars investigated the concept of soft power by analyzing foreign policy strategies and implications in the international relations through cultural and political values. The soft power phenomenon demonstrates the growing influence of Qatar in the international arena (Felsch, 2016). Joseph Nye introduced the concept of the soft power in 1990 by analyzing values, cultures, and foreign policy approaches and has discovered the combination of soft and hard power strategies (Kamrava, 2013).

Chong (2010) demonstrated unique survival strategies in the context of virtual enlargement of small states as a new method of analysis of soft power (Chong, 2010).

Chong's virtual enlargement concept focuses on diplomatic mediation strategies and branding activities on one hand, and on the other hand, on merging into the international arena by being acknowledged as an international power despite smallness (Szalai, 2019). The researcher proved that some small states become significant in the regional arena such as Israel, Singapore, Sweden, Denmark or Netherlands in order to enlarge themselves in the international era (Kamrava, 2013). Qatar is another good example of virtual enlargement, demonstrating soft power strategies as survival attributors at both the regional and international level (Szalai, 2019). Qatar has implemented compensatory policies in order to deal with the negative consequences of territorial, demographic and military smallness, and used its smallness as an absolute variable to create advantages for the regime in terms of expanding its international relations (Szalai, 2019).

Szalai (2019) introduces Qatar as an example of the complex model of size by investigating its territorial, demographic, economic and military smallness in order to understand the foreign policy approaches within the framework of international relations. The nature of the Middle East itself might create a protective umbrella for small states in the region, meanwhile other structural variables, such as alliance-making phenomenon, could be also an essential component of foreign policy of small states (Szalai, 2019).

Small states were assumed as weak entities in the international arena; some scholars believe that small states are vulnerable to changes due to their smallness (Miller & Verhoeven, 2020). In addition, the small Gulf states are continuously fighting against regional security threats, therefore, the leaders are following an active foreign policy approach under the US military umbrella in order to balance the regional instability in the entire Middle East (Gervais, 2017). Qatar decided to focus on regional

stability and security by extending its military cooperation with external actors within the international system. Qatar joined in numerous military interventions in order to provide political support for the US and Europe in return for political and economic benefit and protection from external threats (Kaussler, 2015). Nevertheless, Qatar is hosting the US military force in the Middle East which is another essential element of the international relations in order to ensure regional stability and security by focusing on the importance of military engagements in the region and playing a significant role in terms of regional and international mediation (Baabood, 2017).

Qatar is a small state geographically and demographically; however, it is an influential player of the international arena by practicing an active foreign policy along with strategic influence regionally and internationally. Nevertheless, Qatar has grown into one of the most influential players in the international arena (Kamrava, 2013, pp. 53). The small state has shaped its foreign policy orientation within a short period of time which had an impact on the regional and international arena. Qatar has challenged some of the small state theories by responding to vulnerability with resilient strategies in order to survive the negative consequences of the Gulf Crisis, and has transformed itself into an active international player by defending its interests and maintaining its autonomy from the siege countries. The leaders of Qatar decided to strengthen their relations across the world. This resulted in a backlash against the blockading countries and challenged the regional super power Saudi Arabia by proving the strengths of small states such as building strategic alliances via active foreign policy and economic diversification (Miller & Verhoeven, 2020). Still, Qatar has implemented resilient strategies in order to survive the negative consequences of the isolation caused by its neighbouring countries. Qatar had to form new alliances by creating a protective umbrella and maintaining its sovereignty after the recent blockade in order to ensure

economic, political and military stability. Qatar has chosen an active foreign policy by playing a significant role as a regional and international peacekeeper (Kamrava, 2013).

The Qatari leaders initiated compensatory actions in order to create a protective shelter against external threats, and invested in foreign policy in order to protect its national security and balance its military smallness by engaging with regional and global actors of the international system (Szalai, 2019). The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, stressed that “the regional alliance has been undermined by the crisis, therefore, the alliance that existed needs to be reshaped and redesigned to ensure future stability and security of the region” (Al-Thani, 2018). Consequently, the regional turmoil had a negative impact on the international environment and caused further security challenges in the region (Soubrier, 2017).

### **2.3. The Changing Dynamics of Foreign Policy Orientation in Qatar**

Qatar has tremendously transformed its foreign policy orientation especially during the period of the blockade which resulted in significant changes in terms of political, economic and security relations. Qatar has chosen an aggressive branding strategy in the context of regional and international foreign policy by playing an active role of the international arena despite its small size (Kamrava, 2013). Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani intended to expand international relations in the 1980s in order to build an image and reputation for the small country, meanwhile, playing an important role of mediation and focusing on conflict resolution in order to cherishing a good reputation for Qatar (Roberts, 2016). Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani invested billions in the field of education by establishing an educational city based on Western curriculum together with his wife, Shaikha Moza bint Nasser Al Misnad who has

enormously changed the society of Qatar in the past decades (Roberts, 2016). The complex accommodates local branches of Georgetown University, Cornell University, Texas A&M University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Carnegie Mellon University (Peterson, 2006). Sheikha Moza bint Nasser is also an important person in terms of economic and social achievements. She intends to build a knowledge-based economy while protecting cultural and religious heritage, and focuses on the importance of education and quality healthcare in order to support a new future of prosperity and peaceful coexistence (Office Of Her Highness Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser, 2020).

In 1996, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani established Al Jazeera TV Channel in Doha in order to give a chance to scholars and researchers to express their ideas on an international level, by increasing awareness of certain issues around the globe and bring its viewers together by uniting interests and concerns through discussion programs and documentary series. Al Jazeera has affected both regional and international arenas. Furthermore, it has been used as a strategic diplomatic tool to promote the foreign policy of Qatar by allowing the small state to gain support from all around the world (Douai, 2016).

The Al Jazeera phenomenon has changed broadcasting since 1996 by establishing a platform for editorial independence on regional and international affairs. The network has brought together researchers and scholars and connected communities from the diaspora (Ezzeddine & Nouredine, 2016). Al Jazeera mainly criticized or sympathized with various militant organizations or human rights activists in order to raise their voices and address crucial concerns, such as freedom of speech, unemployment or corruption (Douai, 2016). Consequently, the TV Channel has been criticized for sympathizing with political activists and for responsiveness to opposition

groups (Ezzeddine & Nouredine, 2016). Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani has always supported Al Jazeera by admitting its editorial independence, therefore, Al Jazeera Channel has become successful and it is considered as one of the strategic soft power tool of the foreign policy of Qatar (Douai, 2016).

Furthermore, Qatar has diversified its economy and has strengthened its diplomatic relations around the globe through promoting an active foreign policy, including mediation efforts in conflicts and providing humanitarian assistance for vulnerable people around the world. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani is continuously playing the role of mediation in international disputes and supporting people, especially in crisis and catastrophes with humanitarian aid worldwide which demonstrates a positive picture of Qatar on an international level. The Emir of Qatar visited numerous European countries and choose an active foreign policy to strengthen and improve international relations. This led to significant developments with the EU members, not only politically, but also culturally and economically. Nevertheless, Qatar has become one of the most influential aid donors to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region especially in the past decades. Furthermore, the Qatari diplomacy promotes regional stability and peace and influences the international era despite its smallness. (Kamrava, 2013). Overall, the youngest policy maker of the royal family in Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani has achieved progressive changes in terms of political and economic development (Kamrava, 2013).

In understanding the underpinnings of the Gulf Crisis, there is a need to examine some of Qatar's long lasting relationships with Islamist movements, and its involvement with recent international developments. It is important to highlight that Qatar has historical relations with the Muslim Brotherhood since 1950s, which created further problems for the Qatari leadership. In addition, Qatar hosted Yusuf Al



Qaradawi, the Islamic preacher who was never welcomed by the neighbouring countries due to his Islamic principles and ideologies (Roberts, 2016). Furthermore, Qatar supported some of the revolutions of Arab Spring, starting in 2011, which caused further tension in the Gulf region. Qatar has also supported some rebel groups backed by the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya and contributed to the expulsion of Ghaddafi via military operations in Libya in 2011 (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017).

Qatar believes that the Muslim Brotherhood does not affect its internal security; however, some Gulf countries consider the Muslim Brotherhood as a destabilizing factor in the region (Gervais, 2017). Consequently, Qatar angered its neighbours with its close alliances with the Muslim Brotherhood, which led to a diplomatic dispute. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrein withdrew their ambassadors from Doha in 2014 with the aim of forcing Qatar to change its foreign policy orientation (Kristian & Theodore, 2018).

Those demands encouraged Qatar to implement resilient strategies in order to survive a possible and more severe diplomatic crisis in the future. Nonetheless, this suspicion became reality when the siege countries closed their borders with Qatar in 2017, which caused further confrontations among the GCC members and significantly changed the region in terms of political, economic and social relations (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). This time period has been known internationally as the blockade.

## **Chapter 3: Strategic Relations between Qatar and Europe**

### **3.1. EU - GCC Cooperation**

The European Community (EC) started its cooperation with the GCC in the 1980s. The GCC initiated the first joint meeting led by ministers in 1985 in order to promote common economic and political interests especially in the field of energy and security (Kostadinova, 2013). In 1988, the European Union formed its relation with the GCC by signing the Cooperation Agreement with the aim of improving strategic trade relations and strengthening economic and political cooperation in various fields (European Commission, 2020). In the meantime, the number of negotiations increased in order to develop interregional trade relations by supporting investment opportunities in the Gulf region meanwhile ensuring market access for the European products (Kostadinova, 2013).

In 1990, the EU and the GCC initiated negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to boost their economic relations and trade partnerships, however, it was suspended in 2008 due to several obstacles and challenges (European Commission, 2020). The economic cooperation between the European Union and the Gulf region began in 1994 with the Euro-Mediterranean partnership by increasing the number of bilateral trade relations within the two regions in the following years and focusing on mutual economic, political and security interests (Fürtig, 2004). The aim was to strengthen political dialogues, as well to exchange knowledge and promote the understanding of cultural differences (Fürtig, 2004). Overall, there has been a significant economic and political transformation in the Gulf region in the past decades which had an impact on their societies. Furthermore, the implementation of active foreign diplomacies and strategies contributed to further economic and social

developments in the region by promoting multicultural diversifications and breaking the ice among different cultures and traditions.

The European Union hosted numerous international forums and diplomatic programs with the purpose of discussing pragmatic issues meanwhile improving their relations in order to support long-term cooperation. In 1995, the EU-GCC Granada meeting in Spain brought significant changes in the context of political relations. The aim of the cooperation was focusing on the field of education, business and media. One of the first projects was to expand courses in European Studies in the Middle East and Gulf Studies in Europe by promoting understanding of cultural differences beyond the political levels (Kostadinova, 2013). The leaders of the Gulf region insisted to maintain effective cooperation and partnership with the European countries, meanwhile, the European Union started its formal cooperation with the GCC in 1998 (Fürtig, 2004).

There are numerous obstacles in the context of the development in EU-GCC cooperation. On one hand, the European petrochemical producers believe that the GCC competitors acquire unfair access to natural resources (Al-Ubaydli, 2020). On the other hand, the European Union raised concerns in terms of protection of human rights and environment, and promoting global multilateralism (Al-Ubaydli, 2020). Nevertheless, the European Union aims to shape the multilateral system despite facing with internal disputes on regional and international level. Moreover, the European leaders recently initiated further steps in order to strengthen their relations with the GCC in various fields (Al-Ubaydli, 2020).

The European Union established the EU-GCC Dialogue project in 2017 on economic diversification with the aim of fostering investment cooperation away from the hydrocarbon sectors (European Commission, 2020). This platform contributes to a stronger EU-GCC relationship by supporting the national visions of all GCC members,

including the ongoing process of economic diversification. Their meetings occur annually either in Brussels or Riyadh to discuss important topics of the EU-GCC Joint Cooperation Committee (European Commission, 2020).

The financial cooperation among the EU and the GCC countries is based on the Industrialized and High-Income Countries Instrument (ICI) which is supporting numerous projects around the regions including the EU-GCC Clean Energy Network with the aim of promoting clean energy and ensuring sustainable development (Embassy of the State of Qatar, 2019). The EU-GCC Clean Energy Technology Network was established in 2010 in order to foster collaboration among the EU and the GCC in the field of clean energy technologies in order to combat climate change (EU GCC Clean Energy Technology Network, 2020). The EU-GCC Clean Energy Network is a platform which is welcoming all the GCC countries in numerous programs to promote essential environmental projects. In addition, the EU-GCC Clean Energy Technology Network Project was created in 2015 which promoted further cooperation in the areas of climate change; renewable energy resources; energy efficiency; clean natural gas and technologies; electricity interconnections; market integration and carbon capture and storage in line with exchanging experiences and know-how (EU GCC Clean Energy Technology Network, 2020).

The European Union is focusing on renewable energy projects in line with the European Green Deal in order to invest for the next generation. The EU Research and Innovation Program is funded by “Horizon 2020” financial instrument with an estimated € 80 billion of capital in the period of 2014-2020 (European Commission, 2013). The European Commission proposed an important recovery plan by investing in our future in order to ensure sustainable development and growth including the protection of environment and societies (European Commission, 2020). Furthermore,

the European Union supports the transformation to greener fuels for transport with an estimated €142 million (European Commission, 2020). The aim is to focus on alternative fuels and on-shore power supply installations for ports in order to reduce the emissions from the docked ships (European Commission, 2020).

In the energy sector, the European policymakers strongly support sustainable development goals and promote environment-friendly solutions across the globe in order to battle against climate change and its negative consequences (Gulf Times, 2020). The European Union has introduced the European Green Deal and highlighted the importance of cross-border connections (European Commission, 2020).

There is a prosperous future for strengthening relationship between the GCC and European Union members despite the ongoing internal disputes. Concerning the Gulf Crisis, the European Union is providing a platform for further economic and political collaborations with the GCC members, and promoting further negotiations among the disputing parties due to their economic interests in the region and their more pragmatic approach towards the Gulf region in order to ensure regional stability and peace. Nevertheless, European leaders will continue to support the Kuwaiti mediation efforts in order to find solution for the Gulf Crisis meanwhile promoting regional stability in order to maintain social, economic and political interests in the Gulf region without escalating further tension, meanwhile focusing on the importance of the GCC region as a region-to-region relationship. The European Union opened a representative office in Kuwait in 2019, and the High Representative of European Union, Federica Mogherini appointed Cristian Tudor as the first ambassador to Kuwait in order to maintain and strengthen relations with the region (Kuwait News Agency KUNA, 2019).

### **3.2. The Role of the European Countries in Economic Diversification**

This chapter highlights how Qatar has influenced the region and has diversified its economy globally. The researcher focuses on the economic implications and transformations especially since the Gulf dispute has started, and analyses the role of the European Union in the context of economic diversification. The role of the European Union has increased in the recent crisis, contrary to the previous Gulf dispute in 2014 (Ulrichsen & Karasik, 2018).

The Qatari leadership has realized a connection between regime security, domestic stability and economic development which made some European countries as important partners to Qatar. When the financial crisis occurred in Europe in 2008 and 2009 – Qatar became an important investor for the European Union by providing financial assistance and rescuing leading banks in Europe and helped them to survive the negative impact of the crisis (Bianco, 2020). In the meantime, some European countries became significant importers of Qatari products with a level of imports at €5.62 billion, and some of them such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Spain have grown into security partners of Qatar (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016, pp. 55). The latter states are the most important trading partners and significant suppliers of inventive technologies, technical support and know-how boosting the economy (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016). Figure 3 demonstrates the significant increase in trade relations between the European Union and Qatar from 2007 to 2018.

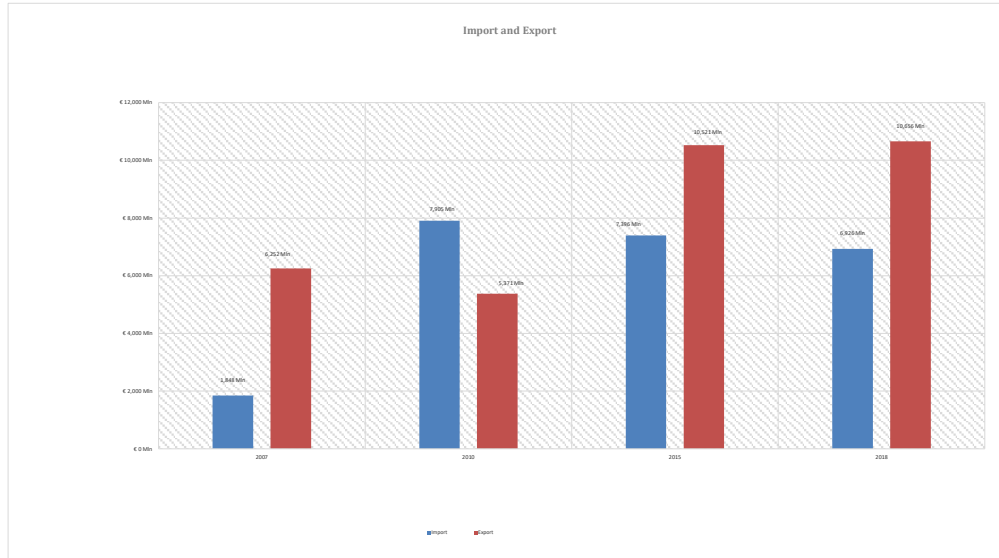


Figure 3. Trade relations between the European Union and Qatar (Eurostat, 2020)

In terms of traditional security, the US protection has decreased the importance of the European Union in the field of security and defense; however, there are some exceptions to this matter – the United Kingdom and France (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016). The Qatari leadership has diversified its arms purchases away from the United States, and notably the United Kingdom entered into a security cooperation with Qatar in 2014 (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016). The Qatari government invested in BAE Systems, produced by the United Kingdom for Typhoon fighters equal with a value of £5 billion, and additional Rafale fighter jets from Dassault by France amounted to €1.1 billion (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). Furthermore, Qatar signed a bilateral agreement with Italy in 2020 in the field of military defense which is including a purchase of seven Italian naval units and the latest NH90 helicopters for €5 billion (The Peninsula, 2020).

Nevertheless, Qatar signed a security agreement with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Brussels in 2018 (NATO, 2018). This significant agreement is focusing on security and military cooperation in order to promote regional stability and peace with the aim of combatting terrorism and destroying the Islamic State (Szalai,

2019). Furthermore, this agreement provides further engagements among NATO members by allowing them to use the Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar to expediting military operations in the Middle East to ensure the regional security and stability in the region. This military and security agreement has strengthened further the relationship among Qatar and European countries (Lifang, 2018).

Qatar improved its strategic relations with numerous European countries, including Italy, which has become one of the most significant trade partners for Qatar. With Italy, there is an enormous trade exchange, over one billion euro, with the aim of promotion of common investments projects in which Italian companies play a significant role, especially in construction and infrastructure projects in line with the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

This relationship is significant because Qatar was facing with economic difficulties in the beginning of the 2017 blockade, as a result of the dependence on trade relations – including construction sector – with its neighbouring countries. The majority of raw materials for its giant constructions came from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia (Szalai, 2018). This has created an opportunity for greater European economic relationships, despite attempts by the blockade countries to thwart Qatar's progress. Furthermore, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani visited numerous European countries since and signed bilateral agreements in various fields in order to foster the cooperation between Qatar and the EU, which has been significantly strengthened in the past decades.

Another example of relations between Qatar and European Union members has to do with food security. Qatar has also experienced drastic changes in the food industry since 2017 when the siege countries imposed their embargos on Qatar and the need for this change was also highlighted during the blockade. Qatar National Development



Strategy was announced in 2018 with the aim of reducing reliance on regional and international partners as a part of its national food security program (Wright, 2019). The Qatar National Food Security Program 2018-2023 focuses on the increase of self-sufficiency level of national food production in order to diversify its import sources (The Peninsula, 2020).

Qatar is located in the desert of the Persian Gulf with an extremely hot and dry climate, which is insufficient for food production; therefore, the majority of its food supplies were imported mainly from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Hence, the closure of the borders with the neighbouring countries has forced Qatar to inject an enormous amount into the food industry by increasing the domestic production (Wellesley, 2019).

The Qatari government has transformed its food production within a short period, during which the dairy producer firm Baladna played a significant role. Initially, 18 000 Holstein dairy cows were imported from European countries. Furthermore, Qatar has also invested in water efficiency in which the government is planning to make more efficient use of groundwater in order to reserve it for crop production by 2025 (Wellesley, 2019). Moreover, Qatar has invested into numerous innovative projects in order to promote the national food security program; hence, the small nation was able to survive the negative consequences caused by its neighbouring countries.

### **3.3. The Sustainable Development in Qatar`s Energy Industry Sector**

Qatar is the world largest LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) exporter and the revenue from the natural gas sector provided a platform to boost its economy around the globe (Wright, 2018). The Minister of Energy Saad Sherida Al Kaabi has made a decision to leave the OPEC in 2019 after 57 years of membership in order to maintain

economic and political independence and focus on the development of gas sector (Kozhanov, 2019). The decision was based on strategic economic attributors focusing on maintaining its leadership position in the LNG sector (Wright, 2018).

The dynamics of the LNG sector have driven Qatar to become one of the richest countries in the world (Roberts, 2016), and have contributed to political and economic integration, especially as crude oil prices were at their peak starting from 2000 until 2014 (Wright, 2019). As seen on Figure 4, the oil and gas revenue had significantly contributed to high economic growth in Qatar.

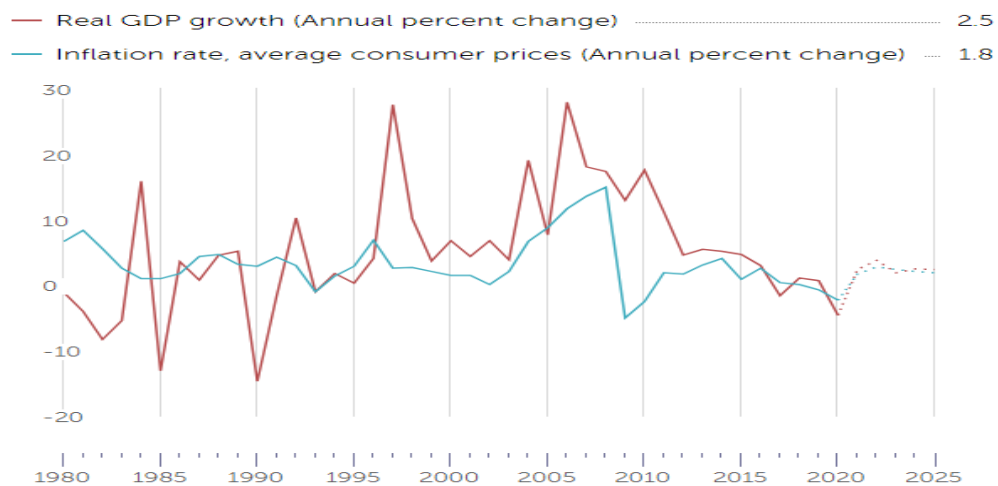


Figure 4. Real GDP growth and Inflation rate of Qatar (annual percentage). (International Monetary Fund, I. M. F., 2020).

Qatar has become a strategic partner for the European countries especially in the energy sector (Salacanian, 2017). Nevertheless, the European countries play a significant role in the energy security in order to reduce dependency on Russian gas resources which means further opportunities for Qatar to strengthen its relation with European countries in the energy sector (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). Furthermore, Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) has also played a significant role in the crisis in Europe

since 2008 and saved numerous financial institutions. For instance, the Qatari government offered an estimated US \$ 5 billion to Greece in order to rescue the country and reconstruct its top banks (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016). In addition, Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) rescued the Polish harbour during the crisis which generated further strategic relations in LNG supplies between Qatar and Poland (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016, pp.56). Poland signed a long-term agreement with Qatar in 2009 for supplying LNG to PGNiG Oil and Gas Company. Furthermore, PGNiG and Qatar Gas agreed to increase the volume of LNG supplies just before the isolation of Qatar in 2017 (Ulrichsen & Karasik, 2018).

Nevertheless, the diplomatic relation has started to improve with the Eastern European countries in 1989-1990 during the regime change in Central Europe (Rozsa N. & Szalai, 2015). The Eastern and Central European countries are focusing on the energy sector in their discussions in order to find alternative partners for natural gas supplies. This has been done in order to reduce their gas dependence on Russia since 2014, when the tension has increased between Russia and Ukraine (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016).

The EU member states have traditionally relied on Russia and Norway in terms of natural gas supplies instead of the Gulf region (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016). Russia delivers natural gas to Europe through the Nord Stream in the Baltic Sea offshore pipeline, which contributed to sell its gas at half of the price of the Qatari LNG (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016). The EU is the fourth export market for Qatar following Japan, South Korea and India (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016). Furthermore, the Qatari exports to the EU have drastically increased from € 983 million in 2004 to € 7.48 billion in 2014, underlining the importance of trade relation for Qatar with the EU (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016, pp. 53).

In 1971, Royal Dutch Shell discovered the North Field as the world largest offshore gas field in Qatar. In 1974, a joint venture was established, namely Qatar Petrochemical Company (QAPCO) and Chimie de France CdF (CFP) – renamed as Total (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016, pp. 56). In 1982, Qatar General Petroleum Corporation (QGPC) offered 7.5 percentage of shares to Shell, CFP and British Petroleum in order to develop the North Field (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016, pp. 56). Qatar Liquefied Gas Company (Qatargas) was formed in 1984 by the joint venture of QGPC, BP and CFP in order to manage operation and export procedures of LNG from the North Field (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016, pp. 56). In 1991, QGPC and the Italian group ENI's Snamprogetti established the Qatar Europe LNG company in order to assemble liquefaction trains on the port of Ras Laffan and ship LNG to Ravenna through the Adriatic Sea (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016, pp. 56). In addition, the opening of Adriatic LNG terminal in 2009 – which receives annually 8 billion cubic meters of Qatari LNG – has become a milestone in the history of Italy (The Peninsula, 2020).

Nevertheless, Qatar has shaped a strategically important alliance with the United Kingdom, combined with a strong historical relation which is going back to centuries (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). In 2012, the former Secretary of State for Energy Lord Howell pointed out on the importance of Qatari gas resources in order to ensure energy security for the United Kingdom (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). In addition to that, Qatar invested over £35 billion in British energy sector and Qatar Petroleum is also holding 67.5 percent of share in the South Hook Gas Company which operates its LNG terminals and receives all the shipments from Qatar in Milford Haven in Wales (Kristian & Theodore, 2018).

The relation between Qatar and France has also developed in the past decades especially during the presidency of Nicholas Sarkozy. Indeed, Qatar maintains a

strategic relation with France despite the fact that the new President of France Francois Hollande has a closer relationship with Saudi Arabia (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). In the field of energy sector, Total has played a crucial role since 1936 and become a 30 percent of stakeholder in Qatar Petroleum in 2016 with the aim of operating together the largest offshore fields in Qatar (Kristian & Theodore, 2018).

### **3.4. Qatar's Major Investments in European Countries**

The high incomes of the energy sector led to the establishment of Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWFs) created by Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) in 2005 with the aim of reducing the impacts of oil price fluctuations, meanwhile, focusing on investment opportunities in Europe (Szalai, 2019). The number of investments in European countries has significantly increased since Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani started his intents to diversify the economy of Qatar. Qatar has become popular for its gigantic investments around the globe, which has resulted in an increasing influence in the international arena (Douai, 2016). Qatar also become a destination for European countries in terms of investments which has influenced the outcome of the Gulf dispute (Salacanin, 2017).

Qatar has strengthened its relationship with Germany since 2013 when Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani met with Chancellor Angela Merkel (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) is investing in major German companies such as Volkswagen, Hochtief, Siemens and Deutsche Bank (Kristian & Theodore, 2018).

Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) has also invested €25 billion in France, and established "Future French Champions" joint venture with the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations amounted to an additional € 300 million in order to support small and

medium entrepreneurs in France (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). Qatar is a major stakeholder in numerous French companies such as Paris Saint-Germain football club. The Chairman of Qatar Sports Investment and the President of Paris Saint-Germain Nasser Al Khelaifi founded beIN Media Group and created beIN Sports as a premium sport broadcasting international network in France which was launched by the Al Jazeera TV Channel (Kristian & Theodore, 2018).

Furthermore, Qatar also invested in the British infrastructure and real estate, including the biggest investment company in London, Canary Wharf Group Investment Holding, which is a joint venture with Qatar Holding and Brookfield Property Partners. Some of the iconic buildings are the London Olympic Village, Chelsea Barracks, Harrods and a part of the Canary Wharf financial district just to mention some (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). In 2014, Qatar Investment and Projects Development Holding Company, led by the former Prime Minister Abdullah bin Khalifa Al Thani, become the sponsor of Royal Ascot (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). In addition, Qatar Holding bought 20 percent of shares in BAA in 2012, which is operating out of Heathrow Airport in London (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). Moreover, Qatar Airways is the largest stakeholder in the International Airline Group with its operational headquarter in London (Kristian & Theodore, 2018).

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani shaped the Qatari foreign policy and initiated further reforms in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030) (Jamal, 2014). The QNV 2030 focuses on economic diversification by continuously reducing dependence on hydrocarbon industries. This has been published in the General Secretariat for Development Planning (GSDP) in 2008 as a pillar of the QNV 2030 (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016). Nevertheless, Qatar focuses on sustainable development

by building resilient strategies which are essential elements of its foreign and national security in order to protect the regime and maintain sovereignty (Krieg, 2017). Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) has developed a new model of sustainable development in line with QNV 2030. It has become a partner in the Establishment of the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) which had an impact on the investments in Europe.

Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) invested in inventive clean-energy projects in order to reduce the CO<sub>2</sub> emission energy demand (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016). Qatar initiated further reforms in terms of sustainable development and established the largest solar-powered charging station with an additional 30 charging points across the country for electric vehicles (Gulf Times, 2020). The aim is to shift 25 % of its bus fleet into electric buses by 2022, which would be used during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 in order to demonstrate its commitments to host a carbon neutral event for first time in history with the aim of promoting eco-friendly services and ensuring clean energy solutions for transportation (Gulf Times, 2020).

In addition, Qatar signed an aviation agreement with the European Commission in 2019, which supports a sustainable framework for flights between the European Union territories and Qatar by fostering improvement in social and labour policies. This platform includes a gradual market opening in the next five years and fair competition to avoid a negative impact on the operations of EU airlines. This agreement as a part of the Aviation strategy for Europe benefits an estimated €3 million and creates 2000 new jobs over the period 2019-2025 (European Commission, 2019). In the end, the European Union and Qatar reached a Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (CATA) providing freedom traffic rights for passenger and cargo flights in line with liberalization opportunities in aviation (ECA, 2019). Each of these efforts in cooperation demonstrates the ways in which these two regions interact.

Nevertheless, further labour legislation reforms were strongly supported by the European Union (Szucs, 2020). The Human Rights Working Group meeting has also resulted in further improvements in terms of social matters (EEAS, 2019). The International Labour Organization (ILO) contributed to the adaption of major changes in the labour market (International Labour Organization, 2020). In addition, Qatar has dismantled the sponsorship (Kafala) system with the implementation of Law No. 19 of 2020 – migrant workers can now change their sponsorship without Non Objection Certificate (NOC), and Law No. 17 – introducing minimum wage of 1,000 Qatari Riyal for migrant workers (International Labour Organization, 2020).

Finally, it is important to note that the approach of World Cup 2022 has also made it increasingly important for Qatar to broaden and diversify its economic and political relationships, so it is to be expected that the links with the European Union will become even closer and stronger in the run-up to that historic event. In 2018, the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni and the Qatar's Representative of the Council of Europe Brigadier Ibrahim Al Mohannadi signed an agreement under the framework of the European Convention on Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports (St Denis Convention). The aim is to follow legal standards and provide safety management and international police cooperation in order to support safety and security requirements for hosting international sport events such as the FIFA World Cup 2022 (Council of Europe, 2018).



## **Chapter 4: Dominant Issues between Qatar and the European Union**

### **4.1. The Role of the European Union in the Gulf Crisis**

The Gulf Crisis has shaped regional norms and international relations. In 2014, when the Qatari ambassadors were withdrawn from the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, Qatar prepared for another unexpected and possible action in the future (Wright, 2019). In 2017, Qatar was able to survive the crisis because of the implemented resilient strategies and cope with the negative consequences of the imposed embargos by its neighbouring countries. The aim of the blockading countries was mainly to damage the economy of Qatar through creating obstacles in trade relations and destabilizing the currency of Qatar (Wright, 2019).

The United Arab Emirates planned to initiate a financial war against Qatar by instigating a currency crisis and stimulating a turmoil by ruining the value of Qatari Riyal (Middle East Monitor, 2017). The IMF (International Monetary Fund) warned the GCC countries to stop this diplomatic dispute in order to avoid an economic crisis in the region (Middle East Monitor, 2017).

The crisis has caused anxiety on regional and international level; however, Qatar has shown its capability to survive the crisis (Wright, 2019). The isolation of Qatar destabilized the Middle East and resulted important lessons. The former US Secretary Rex Tillerson made significant efforts in terms of negotiations in order to avoid further escalations in the region (Bandow, 2017). The reputation of the blockading countries has diminished and Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates isolated themselves more than Qatar (Bandow, 2017). Nevertheless, Qatar has diversified its external relations in order to maintain sovereignty and overcome difficulties (Miller & Verhoeven, 2020). In addition, the major rival of Saudi Arabia,

Iran has strengthened its relations with Qatar which worsen the situation in the region and can be considered as a backlash against Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (Bandow, 2017). In the beginning of the blockade, Qatar shifted its economic relations by depending on Iran due to its geographical position, which resulted further tension in the region (Szalai, 2018). In addition, Qatar follows hedging strategies in order to ensure regional stability and maintain sovereignty of the ruling regime (Rickli & Almezaini, 2017).

Qatar was forced to merge itself into the international arena by focusing on diplomatic negotiations and implementing resilient strategies in order to survive the negative consequences of the crisis and won despite the intention of the siege countries to destroy the Qatari regime (Szalai, 2019). The Qatari leaders believed in Qatar's strength to survive the negative circumstances caused by its neighbouring countries and highlighted in the beginning of the crisis the importance of other international partners including European countries (Middle East Monitor, 2017).

To some extent, the European Union ignored the region with some exception until the European leaders realized the importance of the Middle East (Federiga & Irina, 2012). The reason for neglecting the region was due to the negative perceptions of the European leaders about the Middle East region as a result of the rise of the terrorist attempts led by militant Islamic fundamentalist groups (Federiga & Irina, 2012). This relationship has been tumultuous for several reasons. On one hand, the EU and the GCC experienced several misunderstandings in the past decades as a result of the initiative democratic reforms in the Gulf region confronting with the autocratic regimes (Bianco, 2014). On the other hand, the European leaders were extremely slow to realize the importance of the political relationships and financial resources with the GCC members, especially with Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Bianco,

2020).

There are different divisions within the framework of the European Union which resulted further obstacles in the context of participation in conflicts in the Middle East region. For instance, this could be observed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where Britain and France were more supportive with Palestinians, meanwhile, Germany and Netherlands were more empathic with Israel (Federiga & Irina, 2012). Another problem that demonstrated further splits within the European Union was when a military intervention was launched in Libya to overthrow Qaddafi. During this time, Britain, France and Italy were promoting the actions, meanwhile Germany was against these interventions (Federiga & Irina, 2012).

The blockade had an impact on the relations among the European Union and the Gulf region. The European Union demonstrated a neutral approach towards the Gulf dispute by maintaining their strategic relations with all the GCC members as a result of their economic interests in the Gulf region. Therefore, the European leaders decided to focus on regional peace and stability in order to avoid further escalations in the region, causing more severe negative consequences on the society and economic relations. The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini announced after a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Qatar Sheikh Mohammed Abdulrahman Al Thani that the Gulf rift surprised the entire world, considering it as a threat to regional interests (Salacanian, 2017). Some European leaders became involved directly in the crisis and maintained neutrality in order to ensure of regional and international piece (Salacanian, 2017). Moreover, some of the European countries, including France, Germany and the United Kingdom, made it clear that despite of their mediation efforts they are willing to cooperate with both sides of the disputing countries in order to ensure regional stability and maintain economic interests

in the region (Kristian & Theodore, 2018). Germany has clearly rejected the isolation of Qatar and suspended its relation with Saudi Arabia. This has also affected its relations with the US, especially during the beginning of the blockade when Donald Trump – the President of the United States – was supporting these accusations against Qatar (Salacanian, 2017). This has created further problems in the White House since there were different opponents on different sides in this matter (Kristian & Theodore, 2018).

Although, the European Union declared neutrality in the Gulf dispute in order to maintain economic interests in the region, the mediation efforts of some European politicians – including the British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and the former German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini – influenced the crisis to some extent (Szalai, 2018). In addition, Germany is promoting continuous dialogues within the GCC members to find a solution for this crisis. The former German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel visited the siege countries following the blockade to help in mediation among the blocks, and highlighted that the sovereignty of Qatar should be respected (Ulrichsen & Karasik, 2018).

#### **4.2. Limitations and Suggestions**

This research also investigates the limitations of the relationship between European countries and the Gulf region. In the beginning of the blockade, the European Union maintained a neutral position during the crisis as a result of their social, economic and political interests in the region both with Qatar and with the siege countries in order to avoid further escalations in the Middle East region. The Qatari leadership believes that the EU has the capability of influencing the siege countries in order to find solution

for the dispute and its negative consequences. Nevertheless, the Chairman of the National Human Rights Committee, Ali bin Samikh Al Marri, emphasized that the EU should focus more on human rights issues caused by the blockade (NHRC, 2018). On the one hand, the European Union appears unwilling to promote a position in the Gulf dispute compared with the United States, which demonstrates an active role of mediation in order to find solution for the crisis and ensure regional stability (VoteWatch Europe, 2017). On the other hand, the Gulf dispute has created further proxy battles of narratives among Qatar and the siege countries, therefore, the EU is focusing more on regional stability in the Middle East and the Gulf region to avoid further negative consequences.

The European Union contributed to upholding sovereignty in Qatar in order to avoid its complete isolation in the international arena, despite dealing with internal issues, which has influenced the political approaches and effectiveness towards the Middle East region. In fact, European countries neither played a significant role in regional conflicts in the Middle East, nor occupied a position in the Gulf dispute (Nayef, 2019).

One concern about the findings of the research was the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Brexit Deal) in 2020 which has significantly influenced the relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union. On one hand, the United Kingdom played a crucial role in the EU-GCC trade relations, which means that its withdrawal from the European Union will result disproportionate contribution to the economic outcomes of the regional blocs (Al-Ubaydli, 2020). On the other hand, the United Kingdom has strengthened its relations with the Gulf countries in the post-Brexit period providing security guarantees in return supporting British interests in the region. Furthermore, the GCC aims to maintain its diplomatic

relations with the United Kingdom in order to promote mutual interests and ensure regional security and stability in the Middle East. In addition, the United Kingdom initiated negotiations for a free trade agreement with the Gulf countries, but this will require years to reach a consensus. Notably, Qatar has strong historical relations with the United Kingdom dating back for centuries. The researcher discovered more engagements and additional opportunities for investments without a significant impact on the strategic relationship between the United Kingdom and Qatar (Obeid, 2020).

The Qatari leadership has emphasized the importance of strategic relations focusing on common interests and economic bilateral cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020), and the isolation of Qatar as a result of the blockade has indeed created further opportunities for Qatar to boost its relations with the EU in a variety of fields.

Qatar has used the blockade for discovering further opportunities by expanding its relations around the globe and has taken advantage of the negative consequences caused by the isolation. Consequently, from these results, Qatar has become a closer partner of some European countries in the past years. Together, the present findings confirm that Qatar has survived the negative impact of the crisis and become a more independent nation by transforming its social, economic and political relations regionally and internationally, and reducing its dependency on its neighbouring countries in terms of trade relations.

The European Union increasingly depends on the Gulf region and the relationship has been significantly strengthened, especially after the recent blockade. It is important to highlight that Doha has provided a platform for international conferences and dialogues to advocate the importance of multilateral diplomacy and promote regional stability and peace. The leadership of Qatar is supporting the “Alliance for Multilateralism” initiative introduced by Germany and France with the

aim of international cooperation in the multilateral system in order to reduce global challenges (Gulf Times, 2020). The President of the United Nations General Assembly, Maria Fernanda Espinosa has also highlighted multilateralism in her speech as an important element to promote national interests (Maria, 2018).

The European External Action Service (EEAS) promotes cooperation among researchers and innovators in the EU and GCC, and strengthen regional strategic partnership in the field of research and innovation (European Commission, 2013). The Senior Officials of the European External Action Service (EEAS) signed a Cooperation Agreement with Qatar in 2018 in order to exchange political dialogues on common interests focusing on research and innovation and discuss significant issues around the globe (EEAS, 2020). These annual strategic dialogues are important contributors to the relationship between Qatar and the European Union, and in which Qatar plays an active role in cooperation with the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism in order to combat terrorism around the globe as a regional and international challenge. The Cooperation Agreement promotes peace and sustainable solutions for the existing conflicts in the Middle East region including the Gulf dispute (EEAS, 2019).

### **4.3. Conclusion**

Overall, this thesis explores the changing dynamics of the foreign and security policies of Qatar and the role of the European Union. Qatar`s geopolitical position changed dramatically in June of 2017 when Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt announced with immediate effect an air, sea and land blockade of Qatar. The Qatari leadership was forced to strengthen its economic and diplomatic relations with external actors of the international system. The leadership of Qatar has realized the importance of the engagements with the European Union in terms of cooperation in various fields in order to promote sustainable development globally despite their smallness.

During the three-and-a-half years of the Gulf Crisis, the European Commission in Brussels has been in regular contact with Qatar and the European leaders have attempted to resolve the Gulf Crisis by promoting regional stability and peace through the European Union`s conflict resolution process. Conflict resolution is a main aspect of European diplomacy and demonstrates why the EU remains a significant player in the GCC region.

Over the past two decades, Qatar has drastically reformed its foreign policy, and transformed its economy and its global image. This transformation was significantly accelerated by the Gulf Crisis, which was resolved by the Al-Ula Declaration, signed as this paper went to print. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit in January 5, 2021 in Al Ula, Saudi Arabia led to radical changes in cessation of the air, sea and land blockade against Qatar. The conflict seems to be resolved by signing a declaration agreement to end the ongoing economic, social and political dispute between the blockading nations (Barakat, 2021).

As described in this thesis, the political and economic ties between Qatar and



the European Union have changed significantly as a result of the Gulf dispute, and it is expected that the instability of the Gulf region will create the opportunity for further and closer engagements between the two regions in the coming years.

As discussed, the Gulf dispute led to confrontations between Qatar and its neighbours that destabilized the GCC and the entire Middle East. Qatar responded to the blockade imposed by its neighbours by initiating reforms and countermeasures, and by implementing new political and economic strategies in order to survive as an independent state. The result was a significant transformation of political, economic and security relations, which had a dramatic impact on Qatari society and the nation's economic competitiveness.

Overall, the Gulf Crisis has also opened the doors for further economic engagements by way of diversification between Europe and the Gulf region and creating future opportunities for engagements between the two regions in the years ahead. The researcher suggests further investigations in this topic in order to provide a better understanding for the complex relationship between the European Union and the Gulf countries. In particular, researchers could investigate EU-GCC relations in a detailed manner, as well as the relations of EU members with Qatar in different fields of cooperation. Furthermore, the relations between the United Kingdom and Qatar could be researched in the post Brexit period discovering further developments of the partnerships between the blocks.

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