



You never listen to me: The European-Saudi relationship after Khashoggi

by Beth Oppenheim

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The murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi shows the European Union needs to re-evaluate its deferential and tentative approach to Saudi Arabia. The EU's relationship with Saudi Arabia is unbalanced and inconsistent with the Union's values, and is failing to promote reforms in Saudi Arabia or stability in the region. That is the key assessment in a new paper by the Centre for European Reform, '[You never listen to me: The European-Saudi relationship after Khashoggi](#)'.

It is in the mutual interest of the EU and Saudi Arabia to have a close relationship. The kingdom is an important oil producer and ally in the West's fight against terrorism, while Europe is a key export market and arms supplier to the Saudis. But hopes that Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman (MBS) would usher in a new era of modernisation and moderation have been deflated by Saudi military action in Yemen, repressive domestic policies and human rights abuses. The murder of Khashoggi, a high profile critic of MbS, in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October was a wake-up call. Europe should no longer turn a blind eye to Saudi violations of human rights for fear of damaging commercial and security ties.

In order to promote reform in Saudi Arabia, and stability across the wider Middle East, the EU should take a decisive and co-ordinated approach to building a new relationship with the kingdom that is more closely and openly driven by its values. The CER paper recommends a series of steps including restricting arms exports to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen; deeper dialogue with the Saudis on regional issues; unequivocal support for a full United Nations investigation into the Khashoggi killing; speaking out more forcefully and publicly against the detention, torture and killing of Saudi dissidents; and increasing support for educational and cultural initiatives aimed at Saudis.

"Europe has maintained business as usual with Saudi Arabia and the Crown Prince, Mohammad bin Salman. This is despite the humanitarian crisis that Saudi Arabia is inflicting on Yemen and brutal human rights violations at home and abroad, including the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. It's time the EU had a firm, united policy towards Saudi Arabia that protects Europe's broad long-term interests in the region. European interests are not identical with those of the Saudi royal family," said Beth Oppenheim, CER researcher and author of the policy brief.

Note for editors:

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