



Chronology of EU-Arab engagement and Cluster of thematic contextual papers on EU-Arab relations

PUBLICATION #41



Funded by the
European Union



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF
KYIV-MOHYLA ACADEMY



SHAPEDEM-EU Publications

Published by American University of Beirut (AUB). September 2025.

This publication is part of WP3, led by American University of Beirut (AUB).

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To cite:

Fahmi, George et al. Chronology of EU-Arab engagement and Cluster of thematic contextual papers on EU-Arab relations. SHAPEDEM-EU Publications, 2025.

Design: EURICE GmbH

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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Abstract

This study synthesizes relations between Europe and the Arab world, focusing on the period following Arab Uprisings that started in 2010-11. These Uprisings presented both challenges and opportunities for Euro-Med relations, prompting the EU to re-evaluate and strengthen its engagement with the region. Initiatives like the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity revealed a shift in EU's approach towards a more responsive framework, aligning with the evolving needs and aspirations of Arab societies. However, the study argues that the failure of the Arab Uprisings led the EU to favour its short-term interests of preventing violent radicalization and irregular migration over its declared aim of supporting democracy and human rights in its Southern Neighbourhood. The study shows that while the EU accommodated and concluded agreements with the generally autocratic Arab governments, its relationship with Arab societies, including regional civil society organizations (CSOs) have been tense. This tension, the study shows, is due to EU security first approach; its definition of democracy that focuses on procedural democracy while ignoring issues like social justice; and its biased position and clear double standards when it comes to the question of Palestine and treatment of Palestinians. The study argues that supporting authoritarian regimes might indeed prevent violent attacks and irregular migration due to these authoritarian regimes' heavy security measures. However socio-economic grievances together with political repression only leads more people, youth in particular, to join violent groups or reach out to smuggling networks to cross the Mediterranean. The EU inaction towards the Israeli genocide in Gaza, moreover, only fuels more violent radicalization among youth in the region. The choices of both the EU and the MENA are not between stabilization and chaos, but rather between investing in short-term stability—what Achraimer and Pace call 'misperceptions of false stability'—or to seek long-term stability by supporting political and socio-economic reforms in the Mediterranean region, as well as a just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The study provides three in-depth case studies elaborating on specific themes regarding Arab-EU relations (available in the annex). The first case study focuses on the EU's role in addressing maritime migration from Southern Neighborhood areas in the Mediterranean and highlighting the human and political implications of EU migration policies. It exposes the limitations of a purely EU-centric and securitized approach that depoliticizes migration by viewing it solely as a legal and technical issue while neglecting the human stories and root causes that drive people to sea. The case study highlights the detrimental consequences of such EU securitized approaches and unethical policies, pointing to the rise of deterrence strategies, border externalization, and the criminalization of essential search and rescue efforts undertaken by civil society organizations. It argues instead for a paradigm shift, re-politicizing migration as a forced human mobility issue, and recognizing the agency of refugees and the political dimensions of their journeys. Rather than viewing them as passive trespassers, it concludes, migrant sea crossings should be understood as acts of resistance against oppressive regimes or desperate attempts to escape war, economic hardship, or ecological disasters.

The second thematic case study explores the complexities of the EU's foreign policy towards MENA, focusing on the EU's role in the Middle East "peace process. It shows the EU has consistently played a contradictory dual role in the Israeli-Palestinian context: serving as the largest donor of humanitarian and development donor to Palestinians, and as a significant economic and strategic partner to Israel, legitimizing and providing support to its arms sector. It argues that European involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has relied on deeply exclusive understandings of security rather than international and human rights norms equally applicable to all. This case study illustrates this assertion by focusing on the aftermath of the major October 2023 attack by Palestinian armed groups against

Israelis and the ensuing Israeli war on Gaza. It shows that EU and EU States' unequivocal condemnation of Palestinian violence and affirmation of Israel's right to defend itself by any means are problematic in international legal terms and exposes EU double standards in the application of EU norms and policies that the EU professes are core values. It argues that with the unprecedented scale of the violence and destruction in Gaza, which the ICJ acknowledged as 'plausibly' genocidal, a new threshold has been crossed for the EU, particularly in the MENA region. EU officials (along with those of Member States) now face accusations of complicity in the commission of war crimes, and unless the EU find a way to act in accordance with its most basic international obligations, its credibility and standing as a champion of human rights and democracy in the MENA region will never recover.

The third and final thematic case study analyses the economic impact of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), established following the Barcelona Declaration of 1995, and ensuing bilateral trade agreements on Southern Mediterranean Countries (SMCs), namely Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. These trade agreements were concluded ostensibly to promote sustainable socio-economic development, improve living conditions, increase employment, and strengthen regional cooperation and integration as means to promote stability and ease migratory pressures. The case study shows that while the reduction in EU tariffs were beneficial to these countries' respective exports, EU exporters are likely to have benefitted significantly more from the trade agreements given the large reductions in duties on imports from the EU. The level of export diversification of the four countries converged over the past twenty years. However, a substantial part of the increase in exports to the EU consisted of petroleum products and of commodities that are not normally associated with small and medium size enterprises which are important for creating employment opportunities. The case reveals that there was a loss of government revenue in the four countries examined. However, the study also shows that despite the significant reductions in customs tariffs, there does not seem to have been a large impact on government revenues in recent years. Despite this, the study concludes that any assessment of the overall effect of the trade agreements would need to be considered in the context of these countries' overall relationship with the EU. Even though these countries may not have benefited directly from the agreements as had been envisaged, there could have been other non-economic benefits that are associated with them.

1 Introduction

The relation between Europe, by which we refer in this paper to the European Community (EC) and later the European Union (EU), and the Arab world, in reference to the 22 countries members of the League of Arab States¹, has gone through different turning points since the Arab Uprisings in 2011. Although the EU showed support for people's aspirations at first, it changed approach after a couple years as most political transitions failed. The EU decided to focus instead on 'investing in stability,' as illustrated by the title of the EU-Arab League summit held in Sharm al-Sheikh in February 2019² (Shikaki 3).

The EU identified two main risks in the Mediterranean: irregular migration, and violent radicalization. That has led European leaders to seek agreements with regimes in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region to counter both challenges, even if that came at the expense of supporting democracy and human rights for people of that region. From their side, MENA regimes found in these EU concerns an opportunity to consolidate their own grab over power. They present themselves as the EU partners in countering both irregular migration and violent radicalization in exchange for Europe financial and political support. However, while the EU has reached an agreement with Arab regimes, its relationship with Arab societies, as well as its relationship with civil society organizations (CSOs) in the region have been tense due to EU 'security first' approach, its definition of democracy that focuses on procedural democracy, while ignoring issues like social justice, as well as its biased position when it comes to the Palestinian cause.

While the issue of EU-Arab relations has been discussed in a wide number of publications, this paper seeks to stress two issues. First, it does not limit analysis of EU-Arab relations to the relation with regimes in the region but brings in how EU policies are also perceived and contested by Arab civil society, and Arab societies in general (Teti et al.). Second, while previous research has pointed out to the contradiction between the EU 'normative image' versus its security interests, this paper while agreeing with this contradiction between EU ideals and interests, argues as well that this EU security/stability approach is unlikely to even address these security interests on the long term.

The paper is divided into five main parts: the first offers a historical account of the main milestones in EU-Arab relations; the second looks at the EU reactions to the Arab Spring in its two waves; the third analyses the interests of both European and Arab policymakers; the fourth looks at the relation between Europe and Arab civil society; and the fifth analyses to what extent this cooperation between the EU and Arab regimes might indeed address the challenges of violent radicalization and irregular migration on the long-term.

The paper provides more in-depth examples of these dynamics through three focused analyses. First, Nikolas Kosmatopoulos exposes the limitations of a Eurocentric and securitized approach to migration, highlighting how it depoliticizes migration and neglects the human stories and root causes. Second, Coralie Pison Hindawi delves into the complexities of the EU's foreign policy in the MENA region, particularly its dual role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, balancing humanitarian aid with strategic

¹ Is a regional organization of Arab states, formed in Cairo on March 22, 1945. The founding Member States were Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Transjordan (now Jordan), Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Other members are Libya (1953); Sudan (1956); Tunisia and Morocco (1958); Kuwait (1961); Algeria (1962); Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (1971); Mauritania (1973); Somalia (1974); the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO; 1976); Djibouti (1977); and Comoros (1993).

² The full declaration is available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/de/press/press-releases/2019/02/25/sharm-el-sheikh-summit-declaration/>

partnerships. Third, Sami Geadah assesses the impact of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Agreements, revealing their nuanced effects on trade, export diversification, and government revenues in Southern Mediterranean Countries. These thematic papers illustrate the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of the EU's policies in the region, highlighting the tension between security concerns and democratic ideals.

2 Description of Activities

2.1 Methodology

The methodology used to achieve the publication's main objectives include a desk research and policy analysis. Through desk research, the paper offers in the beginning a historical account of EU-Arab relations, focusing on key milestones and turning points since the Arab Uprisings in 2011: The Euro-Med relations have seen six main milestones before the Arab Uprisings in 2011: the Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) (1972–92); the Euro-Arab Dialogue (E-AD) (1973–89); the Renewed Mediterranean Policy (RMP) (1992–95); the EMP (1995–2008), the ENP (2004–12); and the Union for the Mediterranean (2008–12).

A policy analysis is then conducted on the EU's policies and their reception by Arab civil society and societies in general. It critiques the EU's 'security first' approach and its implications for democracy and human rights in the MENA region, including the EU's definition of democracy and its position on the Palestinian cause.

A discourse analysis of the EU's signs of support for democracy and human rights and involvement with the conducted alongside the policy analysis. This involves examining statements and texts from official EU documents, statements, and communications. By analysing the language, rhetoric, and framing used in these documents, the paper aims to uncover the underlying messages, priorities, and potential inconsistencies in the EU's stance.

Table 1 Summary of concepts related to the EU practices in the MENA

Concept/Action/ Keyword	EU Position	Criticism/Shortcoming
Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP)	"In 1972, the GMP was launched at the Paris Summit, representing a unified approach towards the Mediterranean region, encompassing countries from Spain to Turkey. This policy was based on three pillars: economic, social and financial cooperation (Ayadi and Gadi; Guasconi)."	"However, these agreements failed to strengthen cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean."
Euro-Arab Dialogue (E-AD)	"The October 1973 war between Egypt and Syria on the one hand, and Israel on the other, and the oil crisis it created raised Europe concerns over its energy security. In December 1973, at the Copenhagen Summit, the Nine Member States of the EC committed to initiating a dialogue with the Arab League. This initiative was officially ratified in 1974. The main interests behind this political frame were to ensure Europe's energy supplies and encourage Arab investments to Europe (Khader)."	Critics argue it prioritized energy security over addressing the Arab-Israeli conflict comprehensively. "From their side, Arab countries thought they could take advantage of this political platform to encourage Europe to formulate a common policy towards the Arab Israeli conflict."
Renewed Mediterranean Policy (RMP)	"To address the shortcomings of the GMP, the RMP (1990–96) was proposed. The RMP was a strategic response to the changing dynamics in the Mediterranean region, particularly after the EU's enlargement to include Greece, Portugal and Spain. This policy aimed to enhance commercial, social and financial cooperation with Mediterranean countries."	"Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a significant transformation in the concepts of security and development impacting Euro Mediterranean relations. Security concerns evolved from mainly military to include various non-military threats like terrorism, human rights violations and environmental issues. To address the shortcomings of the GMP, the RMP (1990–96) was proposed"
European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)	"Later, the ENP, which started in 2004 and involved ten partner countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia) bolstered this cooperation. This policy aimed to deepen political, economic, social, cultural and scientific dialogues, and	"However, one difference between the two frameworks is that while EMP's aim was to build a Mediterranean region, ENP aimed to secure the EU boundaries."

Concept/Action/ Keyword	EU Position	Criticism/Shortcoming
	strengthen cross-border cooperation in security, prosperity, justice, regional stability, conflict resolution and prevention."	"Arab countries favoured the ENP frame, as it allowed countries to decide on the pace of their relationship with the EU individually without being constrained by other countries."
Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)	"In 2009 the EMP was rechristened as the UfM. The UfM aimed to merge and enhance previous cooperative frameworks, with the European Commission playing a pivotal role in this integration (Albion and Amor)."	"However, Arab states expressed skepticism about the UfM, as they were concerned back then about potential normalization with Israel particularly given the strained Arab Israeli relations during that moment (Schlumberger; Postolache)."
European-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)	"Thus, in 1995, the ambitious EMP, commonly known as 'the Barcelona Process,' was launched in Barcelona by the EU Member States and 12 Mediterranean Partners, including Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and since 2004, Cyprus and Malta. The Barcelona conference in 1995 represented a turning point in Euro-Mediterranean relations."	Criticized for its failure to achieve significant progress in economic integration and political stability in the Mediterranean region. "However, the Oslo frame failed to establish peace in Palestine. The Oslo agreements allowed Israel to continue controlling the West Bank and Gaza, while donors, and mainly the EU as the largest aid donor to Palestinians, relieve it from the costs of the occupation." "From its side, the EU failed to influence these dynamics to prevent Israeli unlawful practices (Dajani and Lovatt). The EU even failed to protect its own funded projects from Israeli practices. From 2009 to 2017, at least 236 European Union-funded structures have been demolished or seized by Israel, and, according to the EU, a further 600 structures (worth almost €2.4 million) are subject to orders for demolition, eviction or to stop ongoing work."
Investing in Stability	"Similarly, and despite the EU's discourse on democracy, and human rights to prevent violent extremism in the MENA, it emphasized a 'security first' approach. This security first approach is not solely motivated by the wave of terrorism in Europe, but also by EU policymakers' belief that they have no leverage in negotiation with authoritarian regimes in the MENA."	"While the EU relations with political regimes is strengthened with their cooperation on preventing violent radicalization and irregular migration, the relation between the EU and Arab civil society, and Arab societies in general shows a different picture. " "These surveys found that the Arab publics believed the EU to be more interested in stabilizing its borders and protecting its own security."

Concept/Action/ Keyword	EU Position	Criticism/Shortcoming
		Most Arabs believe the EU and the US will support democracy in Arab countries, 'only as long as it produces friendly governments and stable economic and security conditions, i.e., an outcome-based or conditioned democracy.' (Shikaki 4)."
Democracy Promotion	"EU's democracy promotion focuses on procedural democracy and economic liberalization, neglecting social justice demands raised by Arab societies."	"The EU failed to learn from its past democracy promotion policies and kept reproducing the same malpractices (Achraimer and Pace 2024a 2). As argued by Achraimer and Pace, policies of democracy support became an 'industry' that relies on the 'same approaches and instruments' (2024a 2). Such industry excludes local democratization practitioners (Keukeleire et al.), and how they define democracy in their own local context (Fisher-Onar and Nicolaidis)."
Radicalization	"The rise of Islamic extremism, particularly after the establishment of the ISIS caliphate in Syria and Iraq in summer 2014, has made terrorism a central concern in Euro-Arab relations. In its reaction to this wave of violent radicalization, Arab regimes have insisted on a (specific) approach to violent radicalization: addressing the security and reforming Islam."	"Such an approach intentionally ignores political and socio-economic drivers of violent radicalization. This narrative fits the interests of Arab regimes that seek to avoid any mention of political and socio-economic conditions of violent radicalization, as well as the interests of right-wing European discourses that see Islamic ideas as the main driver for violence."
Irregular Migration	"Nonetheless the EU set controlling irregular migration as the top of its priorities."	"the EU has increasingly used its economic and political leverage to encourage Arab governments to cooperate with the EU on controlling illegal migration and violent radicalization and abstained from raising issues connected to democracy and human rights violations with these regimes."

In this section, Fahmi offers a comprehensive analysis of EU-Arab relations, focusing on key historical developments and policy shifts. Beginning with a detailed historical account, Fahmi traces the evolution of these relations from the Global Mediterranean Policy to the present Union for the Mediterranean. This historical backdrop serves to contextualize the EU's approach, highlighting its initial support for democratic movements during the Arab Uprisings of 2011 followed by a subsequent shift towards a stability-centric strategy as many political transitions in the region faltered.

Critically, Fahmi examines how this shift towards stability has influenced EU policies, particularly in its engagements with authoritarian regimes in the MENA region. The text critiques the EU's emphasis on security and migration control, often at the expense of promoting democratic values and human rights. It highlights the EU's strategic partnerships with MENA regimes to address mutual concerns like irregular migration and radicalization, which has been viewed as bolstering authoritarian regimes and neglecting broader social justice issues championed by Arab civil society.

Moreover, Fahmi explores the impact of these policies on Arab civil society, noting tensions arising from the EU's 'security-first' approach and its narrow definition of democracy focused mainly on procedural aspects. This approach, while aiming to stabilize the region, has marginalized voices advocating for deeper socio-economic reforms and human dignity, as articulated in the original aspirations of the Arab Uprisings.

Another significant contribution of the author is their examination of the concept of radicalization and terrorism, critiquing both Western and Arab perspectives. Fahmi highlights how authoritarian regimes often exploit the ambiguity between political dissent and terrorism to suppress opposition, particularly evident in post-2013 Egypt and Israeli policies towards Palestinian resistance movements.

Additionally, the author critiques the EU's approach, which prioritizes counterterrorism and the control of irregular migration over promoting democratic reforms and respecting human rights. They argue that while this strategy may address immediate security concerns, it neglects underlying socio-economic grievances that contribute to instability and radicalization in the long term.

Ultimately, the text questions the long-term viability of the EU's security-focused strategies in addressing fundamental challenges in the MENA region. By providing this critical analysis, Fahmi enriches our understanding of EU-Arab relations beyond geopolitical dynamics, shedding light on the pragmatic complexities and contradictions inherent in EU policies and their impact on regional stability and governance.

The paper also employs thematic analysis to examine the EU's engagement in the MENA region in a more in-depth manner, revealing the complex intricacies and inconsistencies inherent in EU strategies. This section provides a focused and more pragmatic understanding of the EU's activities across three primary thematic dimensions within its relationship with the Southern Neighborhoods: migration, international relations, and economic development. Nikolas Kosmatopoulos, as part of the first case study, focuses on the EU's role in addressing maritime migration from Southern Neighborhood areas in the Mediterranean and highlighting the human and political implications of EU migration policies. It exposes the limitations of a purely EU-centric and securitized approach that depoliticizes migration by viewing it solely as a legal and technical issue while neglecting the human stories and root causes that drive people to sea. The case study highlights the detrimental consequences of such EU securitized approaches and unethical policies, pointing to the rise of deterrence strategies, border externalization, and the criminalization of essential search and rescue efforts undertaken by civil

society organizations. It argues instead for a paradigm shift, re-politicizing migration as a forced human mobility issue, and recognizing the agency of refugees and the political dimensions of their journeys. Rather than viewing them as passive trespassers, it concludes, migrant sea crossings should be understood as acts of resistance against oppressive regimes or desperate attempts to escape war, economic hardship, or ecological disasters.

He does this by gathering data from sources such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Missing Migrants Project (MMP), as well as Forensic and Witnessing Structures like Forensic Oceanography (FO) and Forensic Architecture (FA) and civil society search and rescue operations. These sources provide more authentic insights into migration trends and fatalities. Additionally, they contribute to a critical analysis of EU policies at sea, documenting human rights violations and state neglect through detailed forensic investigations.

Table 2 Summary of concepts related to the migration, refugees and the sea

Concept/Action	EU Action	Civil Society Response
Approach to Migration	"EU's policymaking today approaches sea-crossing refugees within an EU-focused/Eurocentric framework that addresses refugee mobility as an issue that calls for technocratic and legalistic solutions. The securitization of migrant mobility, the militarization of the Mediterranean, the outsourcing of border control and the criminalization of civil society solidarity at sea constitute important tenets of current EU policy particularly at the borders between EU and North Africa."	"Ten years ago, in 2014, activists and CSOs, alarmed by the flows of refugees—mainly Syrians—and the obvious absence of EU-led rescue policy, began their own search SAR missions in the Mediterranean. The first civil society-led SAR operations were initiated in September 2014. They were followed by MSF (Medecins Sans Frontiers)-led operations in March 2015. Others, such as Jugend Rettet, Sea-Watch and Sea-Eye as well as EU-wide Mediterranean Saving Humans followed suit"(Klipstein)."
Search and Rescue	"The hitherto relatively good cooperation between CSOs involved in refugee rescue and EU agencies' missions deteriorated as focus shifts to deterrence, criminalizing SAR missions."	"Such current practices of seaborne solidarity to refugees and, principal among them, the very model of the civilian ship arguably challenge both the EU top-down refugee policy and the state monopoly on seaborne rescue (Kosmatopoulos). Indeed, the civilian-led refugee rescue ships brought the sea 'back in' as a space for maritime politics 'from below'. Simultaneously, they politicized the sea for the broader civil society and made it accessible to citizen activism."
Border Externalization	"Outsourcing includes EU pursuing agreements with so-called 'priority partners' (Hintjens and Bilgic 2252) in the Sahel like Niger, Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Senegal that record a high number of migrants fleeing along the 'Central Mediterranean migration route' through Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. The goal is once again to primarily prevent migrants from even arriving in the North African coast."	"Together with the EU policy of outsourcing border surveillance, which includes systematic pull backs, to coastguards of Arab countries, especially Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, it constitutes a systematic practice of humanitarian neglect and has clear traces of criminal intent."
Forensic Documentation	Civil society "investigations into state neglect as well as organized pushbacks have provided ample evidence of a systematic and deliberate policy that leads to refugee abandonment and deaths at sea.	"Faced with what they see as humanitarian neglect at sea, researchers and activists created structures to document and critically observe the implementation of EU refugee policy in the Mediterranean. These initiatives operate under the frameworks of 'forensics' and 'witnessing'."

Kosmatopoulos's contribution in "Migration Through the Mediterranean Sea" uniquely focuses on the maritime dimension of EU migration policies, unlike many other studies. He critiques current EU approaches from a distinct perspective that considers the sea as a crucial space where policies are enacted and contested. Kosmatopoulos argues that EU policies, which include securitization, militarization, and outsourcing of border control, fundamentally reshape the Mediterranean into a site of geopolitical and humanitarian concern. His analysis underscores the role of civil society initiatives, such as grassroots search and rescue missions, in challenging EU-centric policies and advocating for more inclusive and humanitarian responses. Additionally, Kosmatopoulos highlights the efforts of forensic and witnessing initiatives that document human rights violations at sea, providing critical evidence of state neglect and the criminalization of solidarity efforts. By emphasizing the political agency of refugees and the sea as a site of resistance against European border regimes, Kosmatopoulos contributes to a broader understanding of migration as a complex political and ethical issue intertwined with global solidarity movements and historical contexts.

In the second thematic case study, Coralie Pison Hindawi explores the complexities of the EU's foreign policy towards MENA, focusing on the EU's role in the Middle East "peace process. It shows the EU has consistently played a contradictory dual role in the Israeli-Palestinian context: serving as the largest donor of humanitarian and development aid to Palestinians, and as a significant economic and strategic partner to Israel, legitimizing and providing support to its arms sector. It argues that European involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has relied on deeply exclusive understandings of security rather than international and human rights norms equally applicable to all. This case study illustrates this assertion by focusing on the aftermath of the major October 2023 attack by Palestinian armed groups against Israelis and the ensuing Israeli war on Gaza. It shows that EU and EU States' unequivocal condemnation of Palestinian violence and affirmation of Israel's right to defend itself by any means are problematic in international legal terms and exposes EU double standards in the application of EU norms and policies that the EU professes are core values. It argues that with the unprecedented scale of the violence and destruction in Gaza, which the ICJ acknowledged as 'plausibly' genocidal, a new threshold has been crossed for the EU, particularly in the MENA region. EU officials (along with those of Member States) now face accusations of complicity in the commission of war crimes, and unless the EU find a way to act in accordance with its most basic international obligations, its credibility and standing as a champion of human rights and democracy in the MENA region will never recover.

Hindawi accomplishes this primarily through a comparative analysis of the EU's longstanding role as a significant foreign actor in the region, contrasting its engagements with Palestine versus Israel over recent decades. Coralie Pison Hindawi also extensively quotes statements by EU officials and critically analyses their discourse on the EU's policies and engagements concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A quantitative analysis is also employed to examine financial data related to aid and arms transfers, focusing on figures, trends, and budget allocations over specific periods.

Table 3 Summary of comparative analysis of EU on Palestine vs. Israel

Concept/Action/ Keyword	EU Action in Palestine	EU Action in Israel
Aspiration for peace	"Born on the ashes of the Second World War, as the UN, the EU aspires to be a force for good in the world. Above all, it aspires to be a force for peace."	"Reaffirmations by EU and EU States' representatives of Israel's right to defend itself, however, are problematic in international legal terms."
Multilateralism and rules-based order	"The EC professes to champion 'multilateralism and a rules-based global order' and work towards 'reinforcing our responsible global leadership' (EC, 'A Stronger Europe in the World')."	"On the other hand, throughout the same period, the EU enhanced its collaboration with Israel as a major commercial and strategic partner."
Middle East Peace process	The EU also claims a particular role in the 'Middle East Peace process', notably to be 'actively supporting efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.'"	"As shown elsewhere, this role is not so much characterized by substantial arms sales, as by less obvious forms of partnership and support, which include joint production of military or dual use goods or indirect support to the Israeli military branch through EU grants and research funds (Kamel)."
Humanitarian aid to Palestinians	"On the one hand, the EU prides itself with having 'always been the largest international donor to the Palestinian people,' providing close to €1.1 billion in 'humanitarian assistance to help meet the basic needs of Palestinians since 2000,' over €2.2 billion allocated to development support between 2014 and 2020, and almost €1.2 billion in development support allocated for the 2021-2024 period ('EU Support to Palestinians')."	"Partnerships are common, and, as the prominent participation of Raphael and Elbit Systems to a major weapons fair in London in January 2024 attest (Cronin 2018), they do not seem to be significantly affected by the very serious concerns over the conduct of the Israeli military in Gaza since October 2023, going all the way to the International Court of Justice for potential breach of the 1948 Convention on the Prohibition and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (ICJ)."
Calls for ceasefire	"By that time, and by the EU Parliament's own account, over 23,000 people, including 10,000 children, 140 UN staff, at least 81 journalists and over 600 medical workers and patients, had been killed, over 60,000 people injured, and almost two million people displaced,	"The EU's reactions to the October 7th, 2023 attack conducted by Palestinian armed groups have been unanimous, across institutions and member states, 'unequivocally condemning, in the strongest possible terms, the violent and indiscriminate terrorist attacks across Israel

Concept/Action/ Keyword	EU Action in Palestine	EU Action in Israel
	<p>with 100% of the population suffering from acute food insecurity and 26% catastrophic hunger and starvation and two-thirds of hospitals in the Gaza Strip destroyed. The European Council waited two additional months before it finally agreed to call for ‘an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a substantial cease-fire’ (Jones)."</p>	<p>carried out on 7 October 2023 by Hamas’ ('Middle East Crisis: Background')."</p>
<p>International legal concerns</p>	<p>"Late January 2024, the EC website's double standards were remarkable: the previously cited unequivocal condemnation of the October 7th attacks was followed by general references to the ‘importance of ensuring the protection of all civilians at all times in line with international humanitarian law’ ('Israel/Palestine: Statement by The Foreign Ministers')."</p>	<p>"Starting with the obvious, the Israeli military and defence industry is strong in its own right. The three Israeli companies in the top 100 arms-producing and military services companies worldwide (Elbit Systems, Israel Aerospace Industries and Rafael, ranking respectively 24th, 35th and 42nd at the time of writing) ('The SIPRI Top 100 Arms'), have seen their arms revenue increase by 6.5% between 2021 and 2022. As of 2023, they represented a 2.1% share of global arms revenue ('Change in Arms Revenue of the SIPRI Top 100')."</p>
<p>Criticism and internal dissent</p>	<p>"A letter signed in October by 850 EU staff urged for example the EU Commission ‘to call, together with the leaders of the whole Union, for a ceasefire and for the protection of civilian life’ (Pugnet and Basso). Adding that: ‘This is at the core of the EU existence’ (Basso). Similar demands for the immediate protection of civilians, cessation of the siege and of the bombings have come as well from the streets of European cities with countless demonstrations, some very large, taking place throughout the Union despite serious attempts to curb the right to demonstrate in support of Palestinians in several countries."</p>	<p>"Overall, European reactions to the carefully called ‘situation in the Middle East’ have highlighted divergences at the very top of the EU. Von der Leyen's first visit to Israel led foreign policy Chief Josep Borrell to issue a public reminder that the EU's foreign policy was determined by its member states rather than by the European Commission or its president (Staunton). Josep Borrell has certainly been one of the most vocal and critical EU figures, tirelessly highlighting the stakes of the crisis and the need to resolve the contradiction between calls for civilians in Gaza to be protected and the continued provision of arms to Israel, noting in a particularly strong speech in February 2024: ‘Well, if you believe that too many people are being killed, maybe you should provide less arms in order to prevent so many people being killed.’"</p>

Concept/Action/ Keyword	EU Action in Palestine	EU Action in Israel
Impact on EU credibility	"Early on, Josep Borrell warned that 'the way we will deal with the current dramatic events in Israel and Palestine will define the EU's credibility and global role for years to come'."	"Von der Leyen's first visit to Israel led foreign policy Chief Josep Borrell to issue a public reminder that the EU's foreign policy was determined by its member states rather than by the European Commission or its president (Staunton)."
Humanitarian aid vs. strategic partnerships	"'I want to reassure you that Europe will always be on the side of humanity and of human rights,' claimed Ursula von der Leyen in late October 2023, noting that the EU had tripled 'humanitarian aid to Gaza and (had been) organizing an air bridge to bring much needed support to the Palestinian people' (Basso)."	"Such a reaction only makes sense if European representatives admit that they primarily stand for certain groups and people, regardless of what they do, rather than for principles and norms equally applicable to all."
Civil society response	"Similar demands for the immediate protection of civilians, cessation of the siege and of the bombings have come as well from the streets of European cities with countless demonstrations, some very large, taking place throughout the Union despite serious attempts to curb the right to demonstrate in support of Palestinians in several countries. Civil society actions have been numerous, including European iterations of the 'Stop Arming Israel' campaign that has led concerned citizens to try and patiently unveil the often discrete forms of collaboration with Israel that European firms may be involved in."	"Yet with the unprecedented scale of the violence, dehumanizing statements from Israeli representatives and high percentage of civilians, in particular children, killed or injured (Hearst), a new threshold has now been crossed. The European position is no longer at risk of being solely criticized for its imbalance and responsibility in letting the situation decay to such an extent by refusing to hold Israelis responsible for their failed implementation of the so-called 'peace process'. The EU's role is no longer at risk of being solely criticized for failing to abide by its own self-proclaimed goals. At this stage, after several months of unabated targeting of civilians accompanied by candid calls for genocide, and after the ICJ acknowledged as 'plausible' that Israel's acts could amount to genocide and adopted three rounds of provisional measures to ensure Palestinians' protection (ICJ 2024), EU officials and representatives of most EU member states now face accusations of complicity in the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and even genocide (Geneva International Peace Research Institute)."

Hindawi offers a distinctive contribution by juxtaposing the EU's aspiration for peace with its engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She critically examines the EU's dual role in the region: while the EU provides substantial humanitarian aid to Palestinians, it also maintains strategic and commercial partnerships with Israel, including in the defence sector. Her analysis delves into financial, legal, and ethical dimensions, scrutinizing the EU's adherence to international humanitarian law and its responses to alleged human rights violations.

The third and final thematic case study by Sami Geadah analyses the economic impact of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), established following the Barcelona Declaration of 1995, and ensuing bilateral trade agreements on Southern Mediterranean Countries (SMCs), namely Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. These trade agreements were concluded ostensibly to promote sustainable socio-economic development, improve living conditions, increase employment, and strengthen regional cooperation and integration as means to promote stability and ease migratory pressures. The case study show that while the reduction in EU tariffs were beneficial to these countries' respective exports, EU exporters are likely to have benefitted significantly more from the trade agreements given the large reductions in duties on imports from the EU. The level of export diversification of the four countries converged over the past twenty years. However, a substantial part of the increase in exports to the EU consisted of petroleum products and of commodities that are not normally associated with small and medium size enterprises which are important for creating employment opportunities. The case reveals that there was a loss of government revenue in the four countries examined. However, the study also shows that despite the significant reductions in customs tariffs, there does not seem to have been a large impact on government revenues in recent years. Despite this, the study concludes that any assessment of the overall effect of the trade agreements would need to be considered in the context of these countries' overall relationship with the EU. Even though these countries may not have benefited directly from the agreements as had been envisaged, there could have been other non-economic benefits that are associated with them.

The case study utilizes quantitative data analysis of sources like IMF Direction of Trade Statistics and evaluations of trade impacts. It includes numerical data on tariffs (both pre- and post-FTA), trade volumes, export diversification (measured by the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index), government revenue impacts, and trade shares with the EU. It compares trends over time (pre- and post-FTA periods) and across countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia) to assess changes in trade volumes, export diversification, and government revenue sources. Each country (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia) is treated as a separate case study to examine the specific impacts of the FTAs on exports, diversification, and government revenues.

Table 4 Summary of comparative analysis of EU FTA impact different case studies

Concept/Keyword	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	Tunisia
Increase in Exports to EU	Increased, especially in gas exports	Limited, 5% of exports to EU	Limited, 14% of exports to EU	Comparable to Egypt, significant
Export Diversification	Increased, notable in electrical/ electronic	Little change, remains low	Less diversified, focus on metal exports	Significant increase, from apparel to electronics
Impact on Government Revenues	Loss estimated at 2.9% of	Loss estimated at 2.3% of	Loss estimated at 2.4% of	Least affected, 0.7% of

Concept/Keyword	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	Tunisia
	government revenues	government revenues	government revenues	government revenues
Trade Integration	Increased, notable with the region	No clear trend increase with the region	Limited increase with the region	Increased, notable with the region
Main EU Trading Partners	Italy, Germany for machines, chemicals	Italy for machines, UK for instruments	Greece for metals, Italy for machines	France for machines, Italy for minerals

These analyses provide a platform for representing dissenting voices and marginalized perspectives often overlooked in broader policy discourses. They offer insights into how EU decisions impact Arab social and economic realities, as well as ordinary, day-to-day populations, from migrants and refugees to local civil society communities. By portraying these interactions in detail, the papers contribute to a more authentic understanding of the social and economic impacts of EU policies on the ground. This nuanced perspective is essential for policymakers, CSOs, and researchers aiming to advocate for more inclusive and equitable policies that consider the realities of everyday people in the MENA region.

2.2 Results

2.2.1 Historical Background

The Euro-Med relations have seen six main milestones before the Arab Uprisings in 2011: the Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) (1972–92); the Euro-Arab Dialogue (E-AD) (1973–89); the Renewed Mediterranean Policy (RMP) (1992–95); the EMP (1995–2008), the ENP (2004–12); and the Union for the Mediterranean (2008–12).

In 1972, the GMP was launched at the Paris Summit, representing a unified approach towards the Mediterranean region, encompassing countries from Spain to Turkey. This policy was based on three pillars: economic, social and financial cooperation (Ayadi and Gadi; Guasconi). The Global Mediterranean Policy emerged in a context where the EC was expanding its relations with Mediterranean countries, driven by both political and economic motives.

The October 1973 war between Egypt and Syria on the one hand, and Israel on the other, and the oil crisis it created raised Europe concerns over its energy security. In December 1973, at the Copenhagen Summit, the Nine Member States of the EC committed to initiating a dialogue with the Arab League. This initiative was officially ratified in 1974. The main interests behind this political frame were to ensure Europe's energy supplies and encourage Arab investments to Europe (Khader). From their side, Arab countries thought they could take advantage of this political platform to encourage Europe to formulate a common policy towards the Arab Israeli conflict.

The Palestinian cause is not only a concern for political regimes, but a main occupation of Arab public opinion that treated the Palestinian cause as an internal matter, not just as an external crisis (Nafea). The Palestinian cause has long been a catalyst for collective Arab action. In its Seventh Arab League Summit Conference in Rabat in 1974, the Arab League affirmed 'the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent national authority under the command of the Palestine Liberation Organization' which is described in the statement as 'the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in any Palestinian territory that is liberated' ("Seventh Arab Summit: The Palestine Resolution").

The ECC's first involvement with the Palestinian issue came through the document submitted by French Foreign Minister Maurice Schuman for political cooperation in 1971. Although the document was internal, it set out a vision for joint approach by the EC regarding the Arab Israeli conflict. The European position developed during the October War of 1973, when the EC called for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution No. 242, calling for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories in June 1967 (Qasim Hussein 2021).

The Euro-Arab Dialogue had indeed secured oil supplies, as well as Arab investments to Europe. Arab countries also achieved their main interest concerning the EC attitudes towards the Arab Israeli conflict. The final declaration of the 1977 Euro-Arab dialogue stated the concern of the Nine European Countries over the continued occupation of Arab territories since 1967 and opposed to the Israeli plans of constructing settlements over the land occupied after 5 June 1967 (Secretariat-General of the European Commission, 65). In 1979, the EC considered building settlements over occupied territories a violation of international law (Bulletin of the European Communities. Vol. 12, 93). In 1980, the Nine Member States of the EC agreed in the Venice declaration that 'a just solution must finally be found to the Palestinian problem, which is not simply one of refugees. The Palestinian people, which is conscious of existing as such, must be placed in a position, by an appropriate process defined within the framework of the comprehensive peace settlement, to exercise fully its right to self-determination' ("Declaration of the Heads of State and Government and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Community"). The declaration insisted as well on 'the need for Israel to put an end to the territorial occupation which it has maintained since the conflict of 1967', and that 'the Israeli settlements constitute a serious obstacle to the peace process in the Middle East'³.

However, this political frame ended with the division within the Arab world between Egypt who decided to sign a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, and the opposition by Syria, Iraq and other Arab countries to this move. Consequently, Egypt was expelled from the Arab League and the headquarters of the League was moved from Cairo to Tunis.

Under the frame of the GMP, several bilateral cooperation agreements were signed, as is the case with Israel (1975), Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia (1976), and Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan (1977) (Tsoukalis). However, these agreements failed to strengthen cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a significant transformation in the concepts of security and development impacting Euro Mediterranean relations. Security concerns evolved from mainly military to include various non-military threats like terrorism, human rights violations and environmental issues. To address the shortcomings of the GMP, the RMP (1990–96) was proposed. The RMP was a strategic response to the changing dynamics in the Mediterranean region, particularly after the EU's enlargement to include Greece, Portugal and Spain. This policy aimed to enhance commercial, social and financial cooperation with Mediterranean countries. This new frame introduced for the first-time civil society as part of this cooperation (Khader).

The 5+5 Dialogue, established in 1990, was a significant precursor to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, involving five countries from the northwestern Mediterranean (Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Portugal) and five from the southwestern Mediterranean (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia). This dialogue, originating from a declaration in Rome in 1990, marked the first structured dialogue to

³ The full text of the Venice declaration is available at:
https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/mepp/docs/venice_declaration_1980_en.pdf.

include these nations' Foreign Affairs Ministers. This structure would later inspire the Barcelona Process in 1995 (Abdelhakim). This framework was particularly favoured by Arab Mediterranean countries due to its intergovernmental nature, which they believed strengthened their own authority and legitimacy (Khader).

Thus, in 1995, the ambitious EMP, commonly known as 'the Barcelona Process,' was launched in Barcelona by the EU Member States and 12 Mediterranean Partners, including Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and since 2004, Cyprus and Malta. The Barcelona conference in 1995 represented a turning point in Euro-Mediterranean relations. This initiative aimed to forge strong, enduring bonds across the Mediterranean, marking a significant shift in Euro-Mediterranean relations by upgrading the status of Mediterranean Third Countries to Mediterranean Partners. The aim of this new process is to turn 'the Mediterranean Basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity' (European Commission 2).

The EMP's establishment between 1995 and 2005 was grounded on three pillars: political cooperation and dialogue for democratic development and good governance; economic cooperation and regional integration, targeting a free trade area by 2010; and socio-cultural cooperation to foster vibrant civil societies and people-to-people contacts (Ayadi and Gadi). Under the EMP, the concept of conditionality was adopted where development assistance and access to the Common Market were made conditional on democratization and respect for human rights. In 10 years, the EMP led to 7 bilateral Association Agreements (AAs) being signed with Lebanon, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Israel, in addition to the Euro-Mediterranean Interim Association Agreement on trade and cooperation with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The EU-Israel agreement Association Agreement stated that it applies only to 'the territory of the State of Israel' ("EU-Israel Association Agreement 1995" art. 83), which led to a dispute over Israeli products made in the settlements. The issue went to the European Court of Justice. The Court ruled in 2010 that 'Member States may refuse to grant the preferential treatment' to Israeli products made in the settlements (*Infocuria C-386/08 – Brita* art. 74).

One of the aims of the EMP was to advance the peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis through economic and financial tools. While before the Oslo agreements in 1993, the EC and later EU involvement in the Arab Israeli offered political legitimacy to the PLO as a partner to achieve peace in the region. After 1993, the EU became the main financier of the peace process. In the European Security Strategy (ESS) of 2003, the EU identified the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict as a strategic priority (Council of the European Union), according to the principle of a 'two-state solution'. (Akgül and Özel 60).

However, the Oslo frame failed to establish peace in Palestine. The Oslo agreements allowed Israel to continue controlling the West Bank and Gaza, while donors, and mainly the EU as the largest aid donor to Palestinians, relieve it from the costs of the occupation. From its side, the EU failed to influence these dynamics to prevent Israeli unlawful practices (Dajani and Lovatt). The EU even failed to protect its own funded projects from Israeli practices. From 2009 to 2017, at least 236 European Union-funded structures have been demolished or seized by Israel, and, according to the EU, a further 600 structures (worth almost €2.4 million) are subject to orders for demolition, eviction or to stop ongoing work. (Dajani and Lovatt).

The EMP aimed to create an area of peace, stability, economic growth, democracy and human rights. Later, the ENP, which started in 2004 and involved ten partner countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan,

Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia) bolstered this cooperation. This policy aimed to deepen political, economic, social, cultural and scientific dialogues, and strengthen cross-border cooperation in security, prosperity, justice, regional stability, conflict resolution and prevention. For Southern Mediterranean Countries, the ENP primarily added a new layer to the existing Barcelona Process, continuing the AAs while introducing documents for strengthened cooperation and creating the Neighborhood Investment Facility (NIF) for increased financial support (Ayadi and Gadi). The ENP was designed to prevent new dividing lines and to balance the EU's southern and eastern dimensions, addressing concerns of both Member and non-Member States (Smith).

The ENP aimed at strengthening the EMP. However, one difference between the two frameworks is that while EMP's aim was to build a Mediterranean region, ENP aimed to secure the EU boundaries. In other words, the EMP was a regional initiative while the ENP was a bilateral one. Arab countries favoured the ENP frame, as it allowed countries to decide on the pace of their relationship with the EU individually without being constrained by other countries.

While joining the EU was never a tool to encourage Mediterranean countries to undergo political and economic reforms, the ENP offered these countries access to the EU common market. In President of the European Commission from 1999 to 2004 Romano Prodi words, 'sharing everything but institutions' (Prodi 6).

In 2009 the EMP was rechristened as the UfM. The UfM aimed to merge and enhance previous cooperative frameworks, with the European Commission playing a pivotal role in this integration (Aliboni and Ammor). Unlike the case with EMP and ENP, the UfM focused on regional cooperation instead of economic reform projects. A key feature of the UfM was the shift towards shared ownership and parity between European and non-European Mediterranean partners, aiming to correct the perceived imbalance of power in the EMP. This new approach was driven by the belief that guaranteeing full sovereignty to Arab governments would foster more constructive engagement in the UfM's activities (Aliboni). This shift towards pragmatic multilateralism was seen as a response to the challenges of political change in Euro-Mediterranean relations (Seeberg). However, Arab states expressed skepticism about the UfM, as they were concerned back then about potential normalization with Israel particularly given the strained Arab Israeli relations during that moment (Schlumberger; Postolache). This has shifted in recent years with the wave of normalization between Arab countries and Israel since 2020. Although, the current Israeli war on Gaza has put this whole normalization process in danger.

2.2.2 The Arab Uprisings

The Arab Uprisings in 2011 took regimes both in the MENA and Europe by surprise. This wave of protest started in Tunisia in December 2010 against police brutality and because of socio-economic grievances, before spreading to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain in 2011. The Tunisian president fled, while the Egyptian one resigned after only few weeks of demonstration. These uprisings were largely driven by youth activism. This period saw youth come to the forefront, highlighting their struggles with unemployment, political and social exclusion and marginalization (El-Shobaki).

After 2011, the EU claimed it has learned from its mistake of supporting autocratic regimes in the name of stability and admitted the need to address the aspirations of the people of the region. EU institutions stated it would make changes in its goals and instruments to take these aspirations into consideration. Strengthening conditionality and increasing civil society were the two main alterations (Achraimer and Pace 2024a, 10). During this phase, from 2011 to 2013, EU discourse included signs of support for

democracy and human rights as is the case with the documents 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity' (PfDSP) in March 2011, followed by 'A New Response to a Changing Neighborhood' in May 2011. These initiatives aimed to address the new political environment in the Arab region with a focus on democracy, shared prosperity and security. Additionally, the EU established the 'Civil Society Facility and the Strengthening Partnership and Inclusive Growth' (SPRING) program, along with proposing the 'European Endowment for Democracy' (Khader).

The PfDSP was seen as a strategic shift in the EU's approach to its Southern Neighborhood. It was perceived as an innovative response, acknowledging past shortcomings and focusing on the demand for democracy raised by the Uprisings. This new approach stressed the need for a 'deep democracy' together with sustainable and inclusive development and offering rewards for partners making progress not only in deepening economic relations but also in democratic political reforms, the so-called 'more for more' and 'less for less' principles.

However, while much is promised in the preambles, little novelty is offered (Tetiet al.). Although there was a stronger stress on democratic aspirations of Arab societies, this EU new framework claims at the economic level that privatization and liberalization are sole road to ensure economic growth. While on the political one, it defines democracy with its only procedural aspect, focusing on regular free and fair elections. Both definitions ignore the demands of Arab protesters for social justice and dignity. The main slogan of protesters in Tahrir square in Cairo was 'Bread, Freedom, Social justice and Human Dignity'. Analyzing the EU narrative shows that its conception of democracy remains 'firmly liberal' that would marginalize socio-economic issues and actors such as trade unions (Tetiet al.). Comparing democracy, as defined by the EU, and the kind of democracy civil society activists are struggling for during this moment shows a wide gap. While the EU defines democracy only procedurally, focusing on free and fair elections and alternation of power, Arab activists insist on social justice and socioeconomic rights as part of the political regime they are struggling for (Tetiet al.; Pace).

A New Response to a Changing Neighborhood adopted in May 2011 maintained the same approach of the PDSP. The EU failed to reflect on its definition of democracy to include the Uprisings call for social justice. As argued by Pace, the EU was slow to respond and arguably did too little, too late.

Despite hopes of people of the region, all Arab countries of this first wave of the Arab Spring saw a restoration of authoritarianism, as is the case in Egypt and to some extent Tunisia under Kais Saied, or slipped into civil wars as is the case in Libya, Syria and Yemen.

On 18 November 2015, the EC and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy announced a significant revision of the ENP. The revised ENP prioritizes the stabilization of the region in political, economic and security terms. This approach has led to a more explicit emphasis on European interests, particularly regional stability, security, controlled migration, as well as trade, investment and energy cooperation (Furness and Schäfer). According to this approach, the EU focus is on building resilience to allow Mediterranean countries to resist external pressures. The 2015 policy review introduced stabilization as the primary political priority, superseding the earlier focus on promoting good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights (Cebeci and Schumacher; Schumacher; Teti). The EU explicitly presented stability as prerequisite for both political and economic reform—even if that meant offering de facto support to authoritarian regimes. This shift in EU policy was further emphasized in the EU's Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, which emphasizes threats of an unstable and insecure neighborhood (European External Action Service). While the 2015 revised ENP is a turning point in EU support for democracy in the Mediterranean, one wonders whether the EU had ever focused its relations with its Southern

Neighbours on the promotion of Democracy and Human rights even before 2015 (Amirah-Fernández). As argued by Hussein, when it comes to its support for democracy, the normative behavior used by the European Union is in fact only a means to achieve its strategic interests, and therefore the behavior adopted by the Union has been always rational and realistic, not normative.

However, eight years after the Arab Uprisings, and while many policymakers as well as journalists and researchers thought the Arab Spring is already dead, the region witnessed in 2018-19 a new wave of popular mobilization. Protesters took to the streets in Sudan, Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon calling for political change and raising again the 2011 famous slogan: ‘the People want to bring down the regime’.

In Sudan, the protest movement started as a reaction to an increase in the price of bread in December 2018, eventually escalating into political demands for regime change. After five months of protests, the military interfered to oust the Sudanese president, Omar al-Bashir in April 2019, after 30 years in power. In Algeria too, protesters took to the streets in February 2019 in objection to President Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s decision to run for a fifth term. Under pressure from the protests, Bouteflika decided finally to step down in April 2019, after nearly 20 years in power. In October 2019, Iraqi and Lebanese protesters took to the streets to contest their corrupt sectarian regimes. However, their struggle is more complicated, as the two sectarian political regimes have no clear centre of authority, unlike the case in Algeria and Sudan. Nevertheless, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri and his Iraq counterpart Adel Abdul Mahdi decided to resign in response to the demands of the protesters.

In the Middle of this second wave of Arab Uprisings, leaders of the European Union and the Arab League had their first summit in Egypt in February 2019. Arab and European leaders agreed to cooperate to achieve shared objectives. The list of these shared objectives includes strengthening the fight against irregular migration, strengthening cooperation on security, conflict resolution and socio-economic development throughout the region, reaffirming the importance to strengthen economic cooperation between the two sides and establishing a strong partnership based on investment and sustainable development⁴. Nonetheless, the summit that came three months after the beginning of the Sudanese uprising, and during the first days of the Algerian Hirak failed to refer to any of these popular mobilizations in its 17 points final statement. In fact, the title of the EU-LAS summit seems to best describe the EU approach towards this new wave of uprisings: ‘Investing in Stability’ (Shikaki 3).

2.2.3 EU Challenges from the Arab Region: Radicalization and Migration

The EU has seen in the post Arab Spring environment two main challenges, or even threats: violent radicalization and irregular migration. However, what the EU considers threats are assets for regimes in the MENA region. Arab regimes, but also armed groups as is the case in Libya, have used these European concerns to consolidate their grab on power. The EU concluded that to face these challenges, it needs to cooperate with authoritarian regimes in the region. Authoritarian regimes from their side as well understand that and are using it to achieve their own interest of consolidating their power and gaining international legitimacy (Nogueira Pinto).

2.2.3.1 Radicalization

Despite the widespread use of the term radicalization, there is no scholarly consensus on how to understand radicalization. For some, radicalization is a purely cognitive process leading to endorsing radical ideas; for others, it implies a behavioral transformation leading to a person having either

⁴ The full statement of the Sharm El-Sheikh summit declaration is available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/02/25/sharm-el-sheikh-summit-declaration/>.

accepted the use of violence or being willing to perpetrate it (Crone 590). Preventing violent radicalization often fails to answer one main question: what is it exactly that we are trying to prevent? Is it radicalization or violence? The distinction between the two sides of this phenomenon is often missed. In a liberal society, where freedom of speech and opinions—within specific limits defined by the law—is a fundamental right, ideological radicalization is not in itself a problem but on the contrary a right (Crone 590).

However, this is not the case for Arab regimes. Authoritarian regimes in the region would often try to blur these lines between political radical voices, and groups using violent means to achieve their goals. This is the case for example in Egypt after 2013, where the Egyptian state designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization (Nasrallah). Israel has been using this same tactic as well to blur the lines between ‘terrorism’ and ‘resistance’ labelling any resistance movement a ‘terrorist’. Missing these differences between radical political voices and resistance movement on the hand, and terrorism on the other hand, has allowed for Arab political regimes, and Israel, to manipulate EU concerns about terrorism to achieve these regimes’ political interests.

In its last war on Gaza, the Israeli government frames the current conflict against Hamas using counterterrorism terms. According to this view, Hamas is ISIS, and Israel is under a terrorist attack akin to the US on 9/11. Ideologically, while groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda follow a Salafi-Jihadi doctrine, Hamas follow the Muslim Brotherhood school. Both schools do share the same aim of establishing an Islamic rule, yet they differ deeply on many core issues. For one thing, Salafi-Jihadi groups excommunicate Muslims who don’t follow their path, while Hamas refuses to use this concept. Salafi Jihadi groups also reject the political game altogether and criticize Hamas for accepting to participate in legislative elections. According to Salafi Jihadism, political competition and party politics contradict the principle of *Tawhid*, to worship Allah alone in one’s inward and outward actions, as democracy gives to men powers accorded only to God and so allows them to legalize what God has forbidden.

These differences have led both Hamas and Salafi Jihadi groups in Gaza to clash on several occasions. The tension between the two groups peaked in 2009, when one Salafi Jihadi group announced the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in Rafah, as a first step to establish the Islamic State in all of Gaza. Hamas answered to this declaration violently. The armed confrontation left 22 dead, including six Hamas members (Bronner). Six years later, and at its height, ISIS released a video threatening to overthrow Hamas rule in Gaza, saying it does not apply God’s law (Reuters). Clashes between Hamas and Salafi Jihadi groups in Gaza never ceased. The last incident was in 2019, when jihadist fighters staged suicide bomb attacks on two Hamas police checkpoints near Gaza city, killing three Hamas police officers (“Gaza Explosions”).

The rise of Islamic extremism, particularly after the establishment of the ISIS caliphate in Syria and Iraq in summer 2014, has made terrorism a central concern in Euro-Arab relations. The wave of terrorist attacks that took place in France, Belgium and Germany from 2015 to 2017 further heightened the focus on counterterrorism efforts. The involvement of European citizens as foreign fighters in ISIS activities both in the MENA and Europe has also necessitated increased consultation and coordination between the EU and Arab countries on this matter (Albinyana and Fernández).

In its reaction to this wave of violent radicalization, Arab regimes have insisted on a (specific) approach to violent radicalization: addressing the security and reforming Islam. Such an approach intentionally ignores political and socio-economic drivers of violent radicalization. This narrative fits the interests of Arab regimes that seek to avoid any mention of political and socio-economic conditions of violent radicalization, as well as the interests of right-wing European discourses that see Islamic ideas as the

main driver for violence. The Egyptian and the Saudi regimes have highlighted the issue of religious reforms as their strategy to face violent radicalization. They branded themselves as bastions of moderation in the face of Salafi-Jihadism in the region. Such a discourse was welcomed by the EU. The President of the European Council Charles Michel, and the Egyptian president agreed in November 2020 on 'the importance of establishing a 'Forum for dialogue', that brings together several parties from Muslim and European countries, with the participation of religious institutions from both sides, with the aim of countering hate speech and extremism' (Ahram Online).

Similarly, and despite the EU's discourse on democracy, and human rights to prevent violent extremism in the MENA, it emphasized a 'security first' approach. This security first approach is not solely motivated by the wave of terrorism in Europe, but also by EU policymakers' belief that they have no leverage in negotiation with authoritarian regimes in the MENA. They feared that raising issues such as democratic reforms will lead these regimes to stop their security cooperation with the EU (Skare). The focus on securitization is evident when analysing the EU's 'Preventing Violent Extremism' (PVE) funding projects in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia from 1 September 2014, until November 2023. The majority of EU 'PvE' funding projects focus on societal cohesion and securitization. 'PvE' funding projects that stress democracy promotion, liberal values and human rights in the Middle East, on the other hand, constitute no more than approximately one tenth of overall projects, despite the insistence on its importance in CT documents of the EU.

2.2.3.2 Irregular migration

The failure of the Arab Spring, and the fall of many countries into civil wars, led the EU to fear migratory movements to Europe. The EU insisted on the narrative of 'migration crisis', even if it received much less refugees than neighbouring countries in the region. According to the UNHCR, Syrian refugees have sought asylum in more than 130 countries, but the vast majority live in neighbouring countries within the region, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Turkey alone hosts the largest population (over 3.6 million), and Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the world – 1.5 million Syrians⁵.

Nonetheless the EU set controlling irregular migration as the top of its priorities. In spring 2015 a 'non-paper' was circulated by the Italian Government on the 'possible involvement of third countries in maritime surveillance and search and rescue' (Statewatch). Shortly after the circulation of this paper, a proposal jointly announced by the EU High Representative of Foreign Affairs, and the European Commissioner for Migration, home affairs and citizenship, suggested the use of a military mission targeting smugglers and their vessels carrying refugees from Libya to Europe. The issue was not only framed as a migration challenge, but also as a terrorist threat. According to Federica Mogherini, then High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in her remarks at the UN Security Council 'it is not only a humanitarian emergency, but also a security crisis, since smuggling networks are linked to, and in some cases finance, terrorist activities, which contributes to instability in a region that is already unstable enough'⁶. In May 2015, the European Council established the 'European Union military operation in the Southern Central Mediterranean'. The operation, that was

⁵ More information is available at: <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria/>

⁶ To read the full speech: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/5570_en

later called Sophia⁷, was aimed to keep migrants away from Europe, and to place the responsibility on Arab states to control migration flows from their side (Geddes and Hadj-Abdou 149).

From their side, Arab regimes offered their support to the EU to counter irregular migration.

In February 2017, the Italian government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Migration with the Libyan government based in Tripoli⁸. This EU-supported agreement is part of a broader defensive strategy being pursued by European governments. This strategy aims at keeping migrants out, instead of giving them protection (Médecins Sans Frontières). In the frame of this agreement, Italy and the EU have been helping the Libyan Coastguard to enhance their maritime surveillance capacity. Since 2017, Italy has set aside €32.6 million for international missions to support the Libyan Coastguard, with €10.5 million allocated in 2021. Human rights organizations criticized the agreement because of human rights violations at Libya migrants' detention centres (Médecins Sans Frontières).

The EU concluded a similar deal with the Tunisian regime. In July 2023, Italian prime minister Meloni, European Commission President Von Der Leyen and Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte launched a 'Strategic and Global Partnership' with Tunisian President Kais Saied. The deal included €105 million in funding for border management and Tunisia's commitment to prevent migrants from reaching European waters (Khan). The EU promised Tunisia technical, economic and financial support—in return for Tunisia tightening its controls on irregular migration to Europe (Schwarz). And once again, in March 2024, President Ursula von der Leyen, together with the heads of government of Belgium, Greece, Italy, Austria and Cyprus signed a Joint Declaration for an EU-Egypt Strategic Partnership including a €7.4 billion in financial aid, including €200 million for migration management. All these agreements follow the same approach of the EC according to which economic and financial support for North African countries are connected to stricter migration control (Schwarz).

2.2.4 Tensions in EU- Arab Civil Society Relations

While the EU relations with political regimes is strengthened with their cooperation on preventing violent radicalization and irregular migration, the relation between the EU and Arab civil society, and Arab societies in general shows a different picture.

The EU suffers from a poor reputation amongst populations and civil society activists across its so-called 'Southern Neighbourhoods' (Teti et al.). According to Arab public opinion, Europe has been perceived as favoring authoritarian stability over democratic political change. The 2014 ArabTrans 'Arab Transformations Project' (EU funded) surveys show for instance that people in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia have a low opinion of the EU's claims to be a normative actor, to facilitate democratization and development or even to be a force for stability in their region. These surveys found that the Arab publics believed the EU to be more interested in stabilizing its borders and protecting its own security. Only a third of respondents thought that the EU has had a positive impact on the development of democracy in their countries (Teti). Most Arabs believe the EU and the US will support democracy in Arab countries, 'only as long as it produces friendly governments and stable economic and security conditions, i.e., an outcome-based or conditioned democracy'. (Shikaki 4). Many Arab voices are suspicious of the western discourse of supporting democracy in the region, as

⁷ Named after Sophia, a baby who was born on 24 August 2015 on board the German frigate Schleswig-Holstein, operating in the Central Mediterranean Sea as part of EUNAVFOR MED Task Force.

⁸ To read the full memorandum: <https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ITALY-LIBYA-MEMORANDUM-02.02.2017.pdf>

this discourse turned into military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 respectively. Western powers themselves have refused to acknowledge the outcome of democratic processes when it didn't suit their interests, as was the case after Hamas victory in 2006 (Shikaki 3).

The EU has also failed to build bridges with local democratic voices in the region. Arab civil society actors who took to the streets during the Arab Uprisings have been often sidelined when it comes to the EU consultations with actors in the Arab region. In Egypt for example, non-organized social movements, individual activists and actors based outside of Cairo, could have brought fresh and truly local ideas into how the EU should support democratic transition in Egypt after 2011; however, they remained largely excluded (Achraimer and Pace 2024a).

Arab civil society has been in a difficult position. While many Arab civil society organizations depend on European foundations for funding their activities, the EU political attitudes have put these organizations in a difficult position. Arab civil society voices have criticized the EU approach towards the region, and in particular, its focus on security, and its lack of interest in questions of political and socio-economic rights. For example, when it comes to European projects on what they label as PVE, CSOs confessed that they had to frame their projects in PVE accepted terms to make sure they get funding. For instance, Tunisian CSOs working in fields such as gender equality, culture or governance frame their work in PVE terms to keep receiving funding. Local Tunisian actors condemned the use of this label by CSOs that in their view only work on violent extremism because there is donor interest (Lestch 181), instead of reflecting the needs of their local societies (Banks and Hulme 12).

Although it is difficult to measure the magnitude of this phenomenon, Tunisia CSOs representatives interviewed in the frame of the Horizon 2020 EULISTCO project⁹ criticised this conflation of security issues with development/democratisation programmes. As a CSO representative acknowledged: 'We've ended up reframing our cultural projects to make them PVE relevant—as if the main objective of our projects was to dissuade our beneficiaries from becoming terrorists. Adopting such an approach not only stigmatised us as civil society organisations but also our beneficiaries' (EULISTCO).

Other CSOs engaged in implementing PVE projects avoid mentioning it when working with their target audience as it could create suspicion and alienation. Others pointed out that the geographical focus of PVE projects imply a view on violent extremism as synonymous with Sunni terrorism. This EU approach risk also antagonizing religious communities perceived by the EU as a suitable environment for violent radicalization. In Lebanon, for example, the cities where most PVE work is currently focused—Tripoli, Saida and Majdal Anjar—are all Sunni-majority cities.

When European funding authorities use words such as 'human rights' and 'democracy', they are only used as the recipe to prevent violent radicalization, not because Arab societies deserve to live in democratic societies where human rights are respected. Supporting Human Rights and democracy are hence supported as means to counter violent radicalization. This approach means simply that there is no need to support these values in areas where there is no threat of violent radicalization. It also means that if supporting these values fails to curb violent radicalization, the EU could just give up on them, in favour of other means. Instead, these values should be supported in themselves, and because Arab societies deserve them, not only because they would prevent violent radicalization.

Contesting the EU approach to security in the region goes beyond civil society groups, to include also academic debates on knowledge production regarding the very meaning of security. The emergence

⁹ To know more about the EULISTCO project: <https://eu-listco.net/>

of post-colonial approaches and Critical Security Studies in the 1990s challenged Euro-centric perspectives and questioned western knowledge production and stressed the relational realities of the powerful and the weak, the colonizer and the colonized. Within this field, local understandings of security have been developed as is the case with The Beirut School for Security Studies. The Beirut School perceives security as lived realities and practices that are often at odds with those embedded and enforced by dominant states or the international community (Achraimer and Pace 2024b).

The level of tension between Arab civil society and Europe has been aggravated by the Israeli war on Gaza, and the EU support to Israel since 7 October 2023, as well as prior to.

In its first reaction to the Israeli war on Gaza, the EU abandoned its value discourse that dominated its previous positions regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which was embodied in statements issued by its institutions. Its statements lacked the call for the establishment of a Palestinian state on the occupied territories after the war of June 1967, labelling Israeli settlements in the West Bank as illegal and the urge to follow diplomatic means and negotiations as a way to resolve the Arab Israeli conflict. EU statements did not refer to a ceasefire and an end to the suffering of the Palestinians. Indeed, they did not mention the Palestinian people at all, nor did they mention the attacks by the Israeli army and settlers on the residents of West Bank cities and villages (Qasim Hussein 2024 4). The EU tried to use this financial tool, being one of the largest donors at the international level, to influence the conflict. Olivér Várhelyi, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood Affairs, was quick to announce, on October 9, that ‘all payments’ to the Palestinians had been ‘immediately suspended’. However, Ireland, Spain and Luxembourg opposed Várhelyi’s announcement to suspend aid for the time being to the Palestinians, considering it an illegal decision taken by a single commissioner in a move that did not enjoy unanimous support from the EU Member States.

CSOs who cooperate with European donors found themselves in a difficult position between needed funding for their activities and western support to Israel that delegitimize their discourse in front of their own local communities. Some of them have ended their cooperation with European foundations. In Tunisia for example, Tunisian civil society activists have refused to cooperate with the Tunis office of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung because of what they considered as the foundation ‘silence’ towards the Israeli war crimes in Palestine (El Atti). In Egypt, Germany cut funding to an anti-human trafficking program operated by the Centre for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance (CEWLA) after its chair called for a stop to Israel’s assault on Gaza. In reaction, Hossam Bahgat, head of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), said that his organization would no longer cooperate on development projects with the German government (Mamdouh).

This dilemma has been already facing Palestinian CSOs since the Oslo agreements in 1993. The writings of Nora Lester Murad, as well as its experience in establishing the Dalia association to create an alternative to international aid though a community directed funds is important to look at in details for future research¹⁰.

2.2.5 Learning the Wrong Lessons

The EU failed to learn from its past democracy promotion policies and kept reproducing the same malpractices (Achraimer and Pace 2024a 2). As argued by Achraimer and Pace, policies of democracy support became an ‘industry’ that relies on the ‘same approaches and instruments’ (2024a 2). Such

¹⁰ To know more about the experience of the Dalia association: <https://www.dalia.ps/>

industry excludes local democratization practitioners (Keukeleire et al.), and how they define democracy in their own local context (Fisher-Onar and Nicolaidis).

The experience of the first wave of the Arab Uprisings, particularly in Libya and Syria has led many European policymakers to think twice before showing their support to any call for political change in the region. Moreover, since 2011, right-wing parties have increased their share in power in several Western countries, which have prioritized issues of migration and counterterrorism at home over supporting political freedom abroad.

Many of the European policymakers have reached the conclusion that authoritarian regimes that can prevent violent radicalization and irregular migration serve their interests better than movements of contestation and opposition that would weaken state capacities to manage these threats. As put by Khalil Shikaki, 'let us face it: Western interest in Arab democracy has never been driven by ideals. If in conflict with stability, the latter has always won' (3). As already shown in section 3, the EU has increasingly used its economic and political leverage to encourage Arab governments to cooperate with the EU on controlling illegal migration and violent radicalization and abstained from raising issues connected to democracy and human rights violations with these regimes.

While it might seem true that authoritarian regimes are better equipped to protect European interests than often weak elected regimes navigating a fragile democratic transition, European policymakers overlook that these authoritarian regimes, while able to control violent radicalization and deter irregular migration to Europe, embody the main causes aggravating these challenges through their economic policies and repressive measures. Once these political regimes lose control, as happened in 2011, Europe will be then faced with much bigger and multilayered challenges that have been growing beneath this façade of stability (Fahmi).

Violent radicalization and irregular migration are not the direct products of the Arab Spring. Moments of transition only unleashed these challenges; they didn't create them. The example of violent radicalization in Tunisia offers a case in point. Since 2011, Tunisia has been facing a wave of violent radicalization. It has been one of the top exporters of Salafi jihadist fighters, with more than 5,500 Tunisians fighting with jihadist groups in Iraq, Libya, Mali, Syria and Yemen as estimated by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 (OHCHR). While some have blamed this wave of radicalization on the Arab Spring, the main cause for this wave is the Ben Ali authoritarian regime itself. Ideological radicalization took place under the old regime, particularly in its prisons (Fahmi and Meddeb). As the old regime was brought down in 2011, it was already too late for Salafi jihadists to reconsider their violent doctrine. With the fall of the regime, Salafi jihadists benefited from a general amnesty and were released. However, by then the newly established democratic political environment had little influence on their already rooted extremist ideas. While weak state institutions, particularly the security apparatus during the transitional period, have allowed these radical voices to organize themselves, the process of ideological radicalization already took place under the old regime.

Another example is that of irregular migration from Egypt. Egyptian officials have made it clear to their European partners on several occasions that they succeeded in preventing any migrants' boat from leaving from Egypt to Europe since 2018. However, these measures didn't stop Egyptians from seeking to cross the Mediterranean Sea, but only made their journey more difficult and riskier, as they cross first to Libya, to take the boats from there to Italian shores. According to 2022 numbers, 20% of migrants who made it across the Mediterranean to Italy are in fact Egyptians, making them the first national group (Schwarz). The regime security measures could prevent boats, but not Egyptians from crossing the sea.

The outcome of the first wave of Arab uprisings resulting in conflict, civil wars, waves of immigrants and rise in terror has shaped EU policymakers' attitudes towards political change in the MENA. While searching for stability is understandable, supporting a return to authoritarianism is however counterproductive (Shikaki). European policymakers need to learn from their previous mistakes. While authoritarian regimes might offer Europe some stability in the short term, beneath this façade, socio-economic grievances coupled with political repression will certainly catalyse violent radicalization and push youth to seek new possibilities abroad.

3 Deviations Summary

This publication has had delays because it was prepared during the huge challenges in Lebanon and at AUB over the last years, including the recent tension and turmoil surrounding the recent attacks by the Israeli army on the south and throughout the country. The insights and findings presented here provide a foundation that sets the stage for the empirical, conceptual, and case study analyses to follow.

4 Conclusion

The Arab Uprisings of 2011 presented both challenges and opportunities for Euro-Med relations, prompting the EU to reevaluate and strengthen its engagement with the region. Initiatives like the PfDSP showed a shift in the EU's approach towards a more responsive framework, aligning with the evolving needs and aspirations of Arab societies. However, the failure of the Arab Spring, led the EU to favour its short-term interests of preventing violent radicalization and irregular migration over supporting democracy and human rights on its borders.

The fact that the Arab Spring countries have failed to successfully transition to a democratic system doesn't mean that Arab societies have given up on the idea of democracy. Despite the mostly negative experience of the last 10 years, the fifth survey of the Arab Barometer has shown that 78 % of Tunisians, 74 % of Libyans, 70 % of Egyptians and 51 % of Yemenis still believe that although democratic systems are not perfect, they are the best option (*Arab Barometer, Wave V*). While many have thought that the Arab Spring is dead, the eruption of the protest movements in Sudan, Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon revealed a strong domestic demand for freedom and justice in the region. Many voices in the region are still determined to challenge their status quo and build new political regimes that would guarantee not only their political rights but also bring about deep socio-economic changes.

On the other shore of the Mediterranean, European policymakers need to understand and support these aspirations. Supporting authoritarian regimes might indeed prevent violent attacks and irregular migration due to these authoritarian regimes' heavy security measures. However socio-economic grievances together with political repression would only lead more people, the youth in particular, to join violent groups or reach out to smuggling networks to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. The experience of the first wave of the Arab Spring shows clearly this pattern. Despite what seemed to be complete authoritarian stability in Tunisia or Syria before 2011, the two countries witnessed a growing wave of radicalization under both Ben Ali and Assad. The Arab Spring has only allowed these radical voices to come to the fore, it didn't create them.

The choices of both the EU and the MENA are not between stabilization and chaos, but rather between investing in short-term stability, what Achraimer and Pace call 'misperceptions of false stability' (2024a 11), by ignoring political and economic grievances in the region and relying solely on coercive means to counter violent radicalization and irregular migration, or to seek long-term stability by supporting

political and socio-economic reforms. It's a choice between a façade of stability that hides beneath it anger, frustration and radicalization, and addressing the root causes of these feelings to build a long-term, sustained stability in the region.

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Annex

Thematic Paper I - Migration Through the Mediterranean Sea by

By *Nikolas Kosmatopoulos*

Introduction

Between 2014 and 2023, an estimated one and a half million¹¹ migrants and refugees embarked on the perilous Mediterranean crossing to Europe (IOM UN Migration). During the same time frame, the Missing Migrants Project (an IOM initiative) has documented approximately 27,845 deaths and disappearances among those undertaking these journeys. In 2023 alone, the number of victims reached 2,096 in August 2023 (MMP).

Exploring EU policy vis-à-vis migration from the Arab shores of the Mediterranean, this paper argues that:

- EU's policymaking today approaches sea-crossing refugees within an EU-focused/Eurocentric framework that addresses refugee mobility as an issue that calls for technocratic and legalistic solutions. The securitization of migrant mobility, the militarization of the Mediterranean, the outsourcing of border control and the criminalization of civil society solidarity at sea constitute important tenets of current EU policy particularly at the borders between EU and North Africa.
- Considering these policies as destructive and unethical, members of civil society and scholars organized initiatives that included seaborne search and rescue operations, forensic structures of witnessing EU refugee policy at sea and critical research on migration movements. These initiatives by grassroots groups, such as activists, researchers and refugees themselves, challenge bottom-down EU policy approaches on the issue.
- Building on these perspectives, this paper concludes that addressing refugee movement and migration through the sea from a Eurocentric perspective leads to depoliticization, the sidelining of refugee voices, the eclipse of the migration origins and contexts and more migrant death in the sea. Inclusion of contexts and actors—beyond 'epistemic communities'—is necessary.

From Rescue to Security: Militarizing the Sea, Outsourcing Border Control

In October 2013 more than 360 migrants and asylum seekers died in a shipwreck off the coast of Lampedusa (Wallis). The public outcry pushed the Italian government to launch Mare Nostrum, a mission with a Search and Rescue (SAR) mandate to patrol the Italian coast and inspect the Mediterranean all the way to the Libyan coast (Musarò). However, only one year later, in November 2014, Mare Nostrum was replaced by Operation Triton (Tazzioli), a militarized version of SAR commissioned by the European Border and Coastguard Agency (Frontex). Frontex had a dual mandate. On one hand, assist in 'humanitarian emergencies and rescue at sea' (EC). On the other hand, secure European borders and cooperate with EU Member States in conducting forced returns of people 'who have exhausted all legal avenues to legitimize their stay within the EU' (Frontex 2). Frontex mandate allowed the agency to conduct 'return operations and charter aircraft also at its own initiative' (5).

The militarized missions are accompanied by forcible pushbacks at sea as well as refugee offshore processing and border externalization. As part of this outsourcing, the EU supports the Libyan Navy and trains the Libyan Coast Guard to pursue pullbacks (Baldwin-Edwards and Lutterbeck 2253). Since 2015 the aim of EU refugee policy towards Arab countries is to curb migration flows from their coasts, particularly Libya and Tunisia. This constitutes a clear violation of international law and often leads to

¹¹ This number includes arrivals, and cases of dead and missing migrants.

migrant deaths at sea. In addition, it ignores the dire situation in detention centres in Libya, which are run by militias known for rape, torturing, abducting and killing detainees (Baldwin-Edwards and Lutterbeck 2247).

In 2020, Operation Irini was launched, adding another militarized mission tasked with training the Libyan coast guard to intercept migrants at sea while simultaneously enforcing the UN arms embargo on Libya (EUCO 2020). Frontex currently operates several ships in the Mediterranean Sea with the mandate to protect the south European borders ‘from smugglers and people carrying drugs, weapons and fraudulent documents’ (EUCO 2023). Only some of these missions list ‘search and rescue’ as one of their duties next to their main areas of responsibility. As a result, there is currently no EU-coordinated operation which solely focuses on search and rescue in the Mediterranean Sea.

Furthermore, the EU policy of border externalization involves so called ‘migration deals’. In 2016, Turkey and the EU concluded an agreement according to which Turkey—labelled a ‘safe country’ - was rewarded generous funding and other concessions (Hintjens and Bilgic 85)—for keeping Syrian refugees away from crossing to Europe. This deal did not only deprive refugees and migrants of their human right to apply for asylum on European shores; it was also criticized as they were forced to stay in a country in which refugees did not feel safe (Klipstein; Hintjens and Bilgic.).

Outsourcing includes EU pursuing agreements with so-called ‘priority partners’ (Hintjens and Bilgic 2252) in the Sahel like Niger, Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Senegal that record a high number of migrants fleeing along the ‘Central Mediterranean migration route’ through Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. The goal is once again to primarily prevent migrants from even arriving in the North African coast. For that purpose, the agreements foresee the setup of EU field offices that document, filter and counter ‘illegal migration flows’ (Hintjens and Bilgic 2249). Thus, the EU effectively externalizes its border control as well as the processing of asylum seekers claims, effectively outsourcing them to Arab Mediterranean countries in exchange for large-scale funding and other benefits.

Civilian Search-and-Rescue Missions: Civil Activism and State Criminalization

Ten years ago, in 2014, activists and CSOs, alarmed by the flows of refugees—mainly Syrians—and the obvious absence of EU-led rescue policy, began their own search SAR missions in the Mediterranean. The first civil society-led SAR operations were initiated in September 2014. They were followed by MSF (Medecins Sans Frontiers)-led operations in March 2015. Others, such as Jugend Rettet, Sea-Watch and Sea-Eye as well as EU-wide Mediterranean Saving Humans followed suit (Klipstein).

To highlight the civil society-operated SAR missions in the Mediterranean between 2014 and 2023, Gesine Klipstein created a visualized overview of all civilian refugee rescue ships operating in the Mediterranean Sea. The map features ship names, operational times, and the titles of the associated CSOs. It also shows the operating locations (see map no.1).

Such current practices of seaborne solidarity to refugees and, principal among them, the very model of the civilian ship arguably challenge both the EU top-down refugee policy and the state monopoly on seaborne rescue (Kosmatopoulos). Indeed, the civilian-led refugee rescue ships brought the sea ‘back in’ as a space for maritime politics ‘from below’. Simultaneously, they politicized the sea for the broader civil society and made it accessible to citizen activism. As a result, refugee mobility and activist rescue missions renewed global attention to borders and state neglect, as well as to the EU policy of securitization of routes and racialization of rules of engagement.

The hitherto relatively good cooperation between CSOs involved in refugee rescue and EU agencies’ missions deteriorated after EU operations began to shift their focus from rescuing people in distress at sea to deterring migrant flows. In the latest phase, EU authorities and member states proceeded to

criminalize civil society SARs accusing them of illegal activities, such as collaborating with smugglers and money laundering (Klipstein).

Forensics: Documenting State Neglect

Faced with what they see as humanitarian neglect at sea, researchers and activists created structures to document and critically observe the implementation of EU refugee policy in the Mediterranean. These initiatives operate under the frameworks of 'forensics' and 'witnessing'.

One example of this type of citizen-science structure is Forensic Oceanography (FO).¹² FO 'seeks to critically investigate the militarized border regime imposed by European states across the EU's maritime frontier, analysing the political, spatial and aesthetic conditions that have transformed the waters of the Mediterranean into a deadly space for the illegalized migrants who attempt to cross it' ("Forensic Oceanography"). Working with a multidisciplinary team of academic researchers, legal experts, software developers, filmmakers, designers, architects and more, FO creates comprehensive visualizations of 'human rights violations including violence committed by states, police forces, militaries, and corporations' ("Forensic Architecture: Who Are We?"). By combining various forensic methods, FO aims to highlight EU operations' neglect and criminal intent in the Mediterranean Sea. Transferring to the maritime domain the work model of its mother organization Forensic Architecture, Forensic Oceanography aims to challenge power structures by exposing the cover-up of crimes conducted by state actors at sea. In terms of the challenges faced by the researchers themselves, 'counter-forensics' as FA calls its investigations (Weizman), relies on the availability of material in the public domain (Klipstein).

Forensic Architecture has released the largest trove of data on drift-backs by the Greek government in the Aegean Sea, revealing a 'systematic' and illegal campaign to brutalize and abandon asylum-seekers approaching Greek shores (Progressive International and Forensic Architecture). The mapping reveals Greece's Aegean border to Turkey to be 'a cruel frontier of violence and lawlessness on an unprecedented proportion'.¹³

These kinds of investigations into state neglect as well as organized pushbacks have provided ample evidence of a systematic and deliberate policy that leads to refugee abandonment and deaths at sea. Together with the EU policy of outsourcing border surveillance, which includes systematic pull backs,

¹² Forensic Oceanography is a subdivision of Forensic Architecture (FA), originally founded by Eyal Weizman and based at Goldsmiths, University of London. The investigations of FA and FO have been presented in various legal and political forums, such as national and international courts, parliamentary hearings, and exhibitions in renowned cultural institutions ("Forensic Architecture: Who Are We?").

¹³ Forensic Architecture presented an [interactive cartographic platform](#) with evidence of 2010 drift-backs in the Aegean Sea, involving 55,445 people. 26 deep 'drift-backs' were recorded, meaning that asylum seekers were intercepted deep inside Greek waters before being taken to the border and left adrift. FRONTEX, the European border and coast guard agency was found to have been directly involved in 122 of these cases. In three cases, the German NATO warship FGS Berlin was present on the scene. 32 cases were recorded where people were thrown directly into the sea by the Hellenic Coast Guard, without the use of any flotation device. In 3 of these cases, the people were found handcuffed. 24 people were documented to have died during a drift-back, and at least 17 more went missing (Klipstein 2023).

to coastguards of Arab countries, especially Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, it constitutes a systematic practice of humanitarian neglect and has clear traces of criminal intent.

Politicizing Refugee Movement at Sea

Overall, the EU refugee policy vis-à-vis EU-Arab relationship increasingly frames refugee mobility in moralist terms. Thus, refugees crossing the sea are conceived either as humanitarian cases and people in need (in positive version) or as smugglers and illegal trespassers (in the negative version). Rejecting the moralist binary of victim/perpetrator, researchers on mobility, civil activism and solidarity in the Mediterranean identify refugees as the principal actors reanimating the sea as a political space.

By moving through the sea, migrants departing from countries such as Tunisia, Lebanon and Libya defy the European border regimes and reassert their 'agency, their wishes and hopes, political and social identities' (Perkowski 333-34). This research acknowledges the sea as a space for contentious politics (Lynch), addressing refugee mobility and activist-led rescue as phenomena of resistance and solidarity. Refugee mobility at sea and the international sea-born solidarity it has invited are seen as political struggles aligned with anti-colonial movements against borders, land grabs and enclosures. Refugee mobility against the frontier is relatable to indigenous struggles against colonial dispossession, state oppression and border regimes. This leads to a more political and historically informed concept of migration that reimagines the sea from a space of systemically fissured territorial divisions to a space of internationalist connections and intersectional struggles.

Similarly, when analysing state control of refugee movement at sea, scholars invoke the colonial condition. Mainwarring and Debono argue that the criminalization of NGO rescue activity at sea is made possible through an oscillating neo-colonial imagination of the sea as *mare nostrum* and *mare nullius*, our sea and an empty sea, respectively. European states, in response to refugee crossings, depict the Mediterranean as an 'empty' sea, thus erasing the historical connections of colonialism, empire, trade and exchange as well as the contemporary legal geographies that govern this space. To account for this erasure, Mainwarring and Debono suggest the idea of a neo-colonial sea, which is simultaneously imagined both as empty and as 'European'. This scholarship asks us to push back against constructions of the sea that suppress non-European histories and imaginations, while systematically exclude of racialized refugees from narratives of 'Europe' and 'Europeanness'.

Conclusion

On June 14, 2023, the *Adriana*, a severely overcrowded fishing trawler, capsized off the coast of the southwestern coast of Peloponnese in Greece, leading to the death of more than 600 people. *Adriana* had begun its journey from Libya five days earlier, with an estimated 750 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers on board, mainly from Syria, Pakistan and Egypt. Only 104 of those onboard survived and only 82 bodies were recovered (HRW). 'The Pylos shipwreck appears to be another tragic example of Greek authorities' abdication of responsibility for saving lives at sea' said Judith Sunderland, associate Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch (HRW). Families of the dead refugees, activist rescuers and CSOs in Greece openly accuse the Greek Coast Guard of deliberately operating a dangerous manoeuvre that eventually topped the boat and led to the drowning of more than 600 people. Few days ago, the 6 refugees that the Greek government had accused of as smugglers have been officially acquitted. No further investigations about the role of the Coast Guard are being currently pursued, either at the national or the EU level.

The Pylos shipwreck exemplifies the state of EU refugee policy at sea. Refugee boats and organized seaborne refugee solidarity, such as the civilian rescue ships, challenge the EU top-down policies of mobility deterrence and criminalization of solidarity. These communities have arguably little or no

impact on the mechanisms and the 'epistemic communities' that deliberate on the current EU policies. Therefore, it is highly questionable whether defining current EU practices at sea as 'malpractices' adequately defines the scope and helps resolve the issue. Equally questionable is to present the conscious policies of criminalization, outsourcing and deterrence as results of 'unlearning'. Rather, the core of the issue lies in the re-politicization of migration as an issue of forced human mobility embedded in regional militarization, economic crises, destructive wars and ecological disasters. If there is some 'unlearning' that must be done, this is perhaps in the direction of learning to frame human mobility in direct relation to these geopolitical contexts and the ethical consequences of EU involvement. This policy of inclusion—both of contexts and actors—would surely benefit our perspectives on the EU-Arab relationship—as well as the lives of millions of people in both regions—a great deal.

Thematic Paper II - From the Ashes of Europe to the Ashes of Gaza: Searching for the EU in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

By Coralie Pison Hindawi

Introduction

Born on the ashes of the Second World War, as the UN, the EU aspires to be a force for good in the world. Above all, it aspires to be a force for peace. Teaching International Politics at the American University of Beirut (AUB) to young women and men, most of them from the Middle-East, for over a decade, I have always encouraged students to reflect on the deeper lesson to be learned from the EU project: the possibility of peaceful coexistence, cooperation and a joint political project in what used to be for centuries a region ridden with conflict and regular waves of extreme violence.

Regardless of EU countries' difficulties to agree on foreign policy matters—undeniably one of the Union's main weaknesses—and despite all shortcomings, the European Union conveys a powerful liberal message to the world, by its mere existence: the message that enduring and apparently intractable conflicts, even the worst forms of hatred and violence, can be overcome and turned into peaceful collaborative projects. As a French citizen who lived for many years in Germany and started my professional life there, I have been shaped very intimately by this European project. Each time I cross the French-German border, a quiet (even boring?) border you almost wouldn't feel if it weren't for the Rhine you cross and the changing colour of the traffic signs, I recall the countless individuals who died, the amount of blood spilled over this border, and I wonder if all that blood was truly necessary to reach the conclusion that we could coexist and even unite in a mutually beneficial way. This, to me, is the most valuable lesson that the EU, in and of itself, teaches the world. This is what I have encouraged my students at AUB to reflect upon, thinking about the Middle East in its current state, and about what it could be.

The EU's Global and Regional Ambitions

It is, of course, difficult to summarize a complex entity such as the EU, with its multiple simultaneous layers, processes and institutions, and decide which one of them most truthfully represents the Union. Yet allowing myself a few shortcuts, I think it is safe to argue that within the EU self-consciousness is an image of responsible, law-abiding, power naturally supportive of moderation and democracy. The EC professes to champion 'multilateralism and a rules-based global order' and work towards 'reinforcing our responsible global leadership' (EC, "A Stronger Europe in the World"). As for the EU's joint foreign and security policy, it presents itself as 'designed to resolve conflicts and foster international understanding' and as 'based on diplomacy and respect for international rules' (EU, "European Foreign and Security Policy"). More specifically, EU foreign and security policy is presented as seeking to:

- preserve peace;
- strengthen international security;
- promote international cooperation;
- and develop and consolidate democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (EU, "European Foreign and Security Policy").

As far as the MENA region is concerned, the EU's policy 'seeks to encourage political and economic reform in each individual country' as part of its so-called ENP. It also seeks to encourage 'regional cooperation among the countries of the region themselves and with the EU (Union for the Mediterranean)' (Strategic Communications). The EU also claims a particular role in the 'Middle East Peace process', notably to be 'actively supporting efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.' It is a member of the so-called Middle East Quartet (US, EU, Russia and UN) (Strategic Communications).

The European Union thus expresses its readiness to endorse responsibilities to the Middle East region in general and more particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such a position can be partly explained by the role that the EU aspires to play in the world, the geographic proximity of the Middle East and widespread European involvement, as well as the strong European representation in the supposedly most powerful international body, the UN Security Council. The fact that some prominent countries within the EU bear a particular historical responsibility for the way in which the Israeli state was established to the detriment of Palestinians' own right to statehood also certainly weighs in this singular European engagement.¹⁴

The EU in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Generously Helping the Dispossessed to Meet Basic Needs... While Unconditionally Partnering with the Strong

Looking at the role that the EU itself, as a major foreign actor, has been playing in recent years, even decades, the trend is an obvious one: a major donor of humanitarian and development aid to the Palestinians, the EU is at the same time a major partner and ally of Israel.

On the one hand, the EU prides itself with having 'always been the largest international donor to the Palestinian people,' providing close to €1.1 billion in 'humanitarian assistance to help meet the basic needs of Palestinians since 2000,' over €2.2 billion allocated to development support between 2014 and 2020, and almost €1.2 billion in development support allocated for the 2021-2024 period ("EU Support to Palestinians").

On the other hand, throughout the same period, the EU enhanced its collaboration with Israel as a major commercial and strategic partner. Although US—rather than European—military assistance is what enabled Israel to turn its military 'into one of the most technologically sophisticated militaries in the world,' the role played by the EU is significant too (Sharp 2).

Starting with the obvious, the Israeli military and defence industry is strong in its own right. The three Israeli companies in the top 100 arms-producing and military services companies worldwide (Elbit Systems, Israel Aerospace Industries and Rafael, ranking respectively 24th, 35th and 42nd at the time of writing) ("The SIPRI Top 100 Arms"), have seen their arms revenue increase by 6.5% between 2021

¹⁴ As former colonial power, the United Kingdom bears, of course, a particular responsibility that has significantly impacted the EU despite the recent Brexit. See notably Pappe, Ilan. "Historical R2P: Britain's Special Accountability." *Security in Context*, 30 Oct. 2023, <https://www.securityincontext.com/posts/historical-r2p-britains-special-accountability>.

and 2022. As of 2023, they represented a 2.1% share of global arms revenue (“Change in Arms Revenue of the SIPRI Top 100”). The strength of these companies is a sign of the vibrant military sector in Israel, which belonged to the 10 largest exporters of arms for the 2018-2022 period, providing weapons to large numbers of countries worldwide, most significantly to India, but also, in decreasing order of significance, to the United States, Turkey, Singapore or Vietnam (“International Arms Transfers”). The United Kingdom is also a recipient of Israeli weapons and military services, alongside—within the EU—Italy, Germany, and to a lesser extent, the Netherlands and Finland (“SIPRI Databases Israeli Exports”).

Looking at arms transfers to Israel, two EU members (Germany and Italy) stand out as significant providers of arms to Israel (“SIPRI Databases Israeli Exports”). It is important to understand that, although German and Italian exports pale in comparison with the military sales and other forms of assistance delivered by the US to their Middle-Eastern ally (as of early 2023, the US had provided Israel with \$158 billion non-inflation adjusted dollars in foreign aid, much of it as military assistance; most recently, the U.S. pledged to provide \$38 billion in military aid from 2019 to 2028) (Sharp), the strategic support to Israel provided by European countries and by the EU as a whole is not as insignificant as it may first seem. As shown elsewhere, this role is not so much characterized by substantial arms sales, as by less obvious forms of partnership and support, which include joint production of military or dual use goods or indirect support to the Israeli military branch through EU grants and research funds (Kamel).¹⁵

Since Israel joined the European Research Area in 1995 as part of an AA with the EU, it has been allowed to apply to and receive funding from the Union, which has paved the way for generous European contributions to the Israeli military and defence sector. During the 2007-13 period, which covered the so-called FP7 funding program one in five security research contracts included an Israeli security partner (Hayes). Under the following program, Horizon 2020, Israeli defence and security companies also largely benefited from EU funding and collaboration opportunities (Cronin 2024b): Elbit Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries notably received a combined total of \$15 million from the program. This, however, is only a portion of the overall \$1.45 billion that Israeli firms and institutions received from the EU under Horizon 2020—substantial funds having been provided as well to universities and research institutes, many of whom are deeply connected to the Israeli defence sector (Cronin 2024a).¹⁶ It is worth noticing that EU direct and indirect support of the Israeli security and defence sector has been flagged as problematic for many years. Among many other actions, a call was issued in 2018 over 150 CSOs throughout Europe, to stop EU funding to the Israeli arms industry (“No EU Money to the Israeli Arms Industry”).

Such protest notwithstanding, Israeli institutions and companies continue to benefit from EU funding and, more broadly, to be seen as important and legitimate partners within the European arms sector. Partnerships are common, and, as the prominent participation of Raphael and Elbit Systems to a major weapons fair in London in January 2024 attest (Cronin 2018), they do not seem to be significantly affected by the very serious concerns over the conduct of the Israeli military in Gaza since October 2023, going all the way to the International Court of Justice for potential breach of the 1948 Convention on the Prohibition and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (ICJ).

¹⁵ On the specific cooperation with France, see Bouveret, Patrice. *La coopération militaire et sécuritaire France-Israël*. Cahier de l’AFPS, no. 28, 2017, pp. 1-100. <https://www.obsarm.info/spip.php?article428>.

¹⁶ See also, for example, "Beyond Dual Use: Israeli Universities’ Role in the Military-Security-Industrial Complex." *European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine*, 24 May 2018, <https://www.eccpalestine.org/beyond-dual-use-israeli-universities-role-in-the-military-security-industrial-complex/>. Accessed 28 Jan. 2024.

The EU's Position Since October 7th, 2023: Sticking to Old Patterns Against All Odds

The EU's reactions to the October 7th, 2023 attack conducted by Palestinian armed groups have been unanimous, across institutions and member states, 'unequivocally condemning, in the strongest possible terms, the violent and indiscriminate terrorist attacks across Israel carried out on 7 October 2023 by Hamas' ("Middle East Crisis: Background"). Given the gravity of the attacks, their appearing targeting, among other targets, of civilians, and the massive loss (according to the figures available in the immediate aftermath, it was estimated that 1,400 people had been killed, a majority of them civilians, and several hundred people taken hostage), such reactions seem in line with the international obligations of the EU as an intergovernmental organization, and of each of its member states when crimes of such a scale are committed.

Reaffirmations by EU and EU States' representatives of Israel's right to defend itself, however, are problematic in international legal terms. First, the right of self-defence corresponds to the right of a country to use military force to repel an armed attack, and it is not an entitlement to retaliate or take revenge after the attack has stopped. Armed reprisals are simply not allowed in contemporary international law and European statements repeatedly referring to Israel's right of self-defence long after the attack had ceased are difficult to reconcile with what self-defence corresponds to in international law.¹⁷ Second, Gaza's status as an occupied territory actually prevents Israel, as occupying power, from invoking self-defence when resorting to the use of military force against the territory.¹⁸

Although the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell warned early on that 'the way we will deal with the current dramatic events in Israel and Palestine will define the EU's credibility and global role for years to come,' it took more than three months for the European Parliament to start calling for a permanent cease-fire ("Israel/Palestine: What the EU Stands For"). By that time, and by the EU Parliament's own account, over 23,000 people, including 10,000 children, 140 UN staff, at least 81 journalists and over 600 medical workers and patients, had been killed, over 60,000 people injured, and almost two million people displaced, with 100% of the population suffering from acute food insecurity and 26% catastrophic hunger and starvation and two-thirds of hospitals in the Gaza Strip destroyed.¹⁹ The European Council waited two additional months before it finally agreed to call for 'an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a substantial cease-fire' (Jones).

As of late January 2024, the EC website's double standards were remarkable: the previously cited unequivocal condemnation of the October 7th attacks was followed by general references to the 'importance of ensuring the protection of all civilians at all times in line with international humanitarian law' ("Israel/Palestine: Statement by The Foreign Ministers"). With no identification of the state responsible for what all UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and renowned NGOs soon recognized as likely war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and

¹⁷ United Nations Charter, Article 51. See Christine D. Gray. *International Law and the Use of Force*. Oxford University Press, 2008, or Olivier Corten. *The Law Against War: The Prohibition on the Use of Force in Contemporary International Law*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.

¹⁸ See for example the reminder provided by Francesca Albanese at UN Special Rapporteur. "Israel Can't Claim 'Right of Self-Defence'." *Al Jazeera*, 15 Nov. 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/15/un-special-rapporteur-israel-cant-claim-right-of-self-defence>. Accessed 13 June 2024.

¹⁹ European Parliament Resolution on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, the need to reach a ceasefire and the risks of regional escalation, 18.01. 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0051_EN.html, accessed on 13.06.2024.

increasingly genocide,²⁰ the only attacks the Commission continued to refer to were those of Hamas on October 7th, stating that '[i]n the aftermath of these attacks, it has become urgent to provide humanitarian aid to the civilians in Gaza who are also victims of Hamas' actions' ("Middle East Crisis: Background"). Reading these lines without any knowledge of the actual context, one could not guess that the 'dire' humanitarian situation the Commission was referring to was the outcome of a systematic attack on civilians and civilian infrastructures conducted by the official army of a close EU state partner, an attack that, at the time of writing, after eight months of hostilities, had killed a number of children more than 11 times higher than the overall number of people killed on October 7th (a number that, by March, had surpassed in four months the total number of children killed in conflicts worldwide in four years) ("Gaza: Number of Children Killed Higher Than from Four Years of World Conflict") ... To the Commission's defence, its website had been modified by mid-June 2024 and it acknowledged the causal link between the Israeli military operation and its blockade of Gaza, and the humanitarian catastrophe in the territory. This acknowledgement, however, was not accompanied by any formal denunciation or condemnation.

Overall, European reactions to the carefully called 'situation in the Middle East' have highlighted divergences at the very top of the EU. Von der Leyen's first visit to Israel led foreign policy Chief Josep Borrell to issue a public reminder that the EU's foreign policy was determined by its member states rather than by the European Commission or its president (Staunton). Josep Borrell has certainly been one of the most vocal and critical EU figures, tirelessly highlighting the stakes of the crisis and the need to resolve the contradiction between calls for civilians in Gaza to be protected and the continued provision of arms to Israel, noting in a particularly strong speech in February 2024:

Well, if you believe that too many people are being killed, maybe you should provide less arms in order to prevent so many people being killed. [...] Everybody goes to Tel Aviv, begging, 'Please don't do that, protect civilians, don't kill so many.' How many is too many? [...] But Netanyahu doesn't listen to anyone. They're going to evacuate. Where? To the moon? Where are they going to evacuate these people? So, if the international community believes that this is a slaughter, that too many people are being killed, maybe they have to think about the provision of arms. [...] It is a little bit contradictory to continue saying that there are 'too many people being killed, too many people being killed, please take care of people, please don't kill so many!' Stop saying please and [do] something (Johnson).

Questioning the EU's Role

²⁰ See, for example, an early UN report ("Commission of Inquiry Collecting Evidence of War Crimes Committed by All Sides in Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories since 7 October 2023." *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 10 Oct. 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/commission-inquiry-collecting-evidence-war-crimes-committed-all-sides-israel>), a report by Human Rights Watch from December 2023 ("Israel: Starvation Used as Weapon of War in Gaza." *Human Rights Watch*, 18 Dec. 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/israel-starvation-used-weapon-war-gaza>), or the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territories Francesca Albanese assessing that there are "reasonable grounds" to believe that Israel is committing genocide, in the report she released in March 2024 ("Rights Expert Finds 'Reasonable Grounds' Genocide Is Being Committed in Gaza." *UN News*, 26 Mar. 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147976>), all accessed on 14 June 2024.

The belated calls for a cease-fire and Josep Borrell's vehement words are, however, insufficient to change much in the overall role that the EU has been playing in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Several months into the latest wave of violence, yet seventy-five years—if not longer—into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and thirty years into the so-called 'Peace process' (Khalidi), one has to acknowledge at least the steadfastness of the EU's so far largely unwavering stand: to provide humanitarian support to Palestinians and political and military support to Israel. This dual approach is obvious, even from the language used, which refers typically to Israel's right to defend and secure itself, using a powerful military apparatus built thanks to significant foreign assistance and partnerships, whereas Palestinians are eligible to humanitarian support provided they do not attempt to resist occupation militarily or question a status quo that has dispossessed them from most of what used to be Palestinian land in a not so distant past.²¹ The European involvement in the conflict over this territory has relied, for decades now, on deeply exclusive understandings of security rather than international and human rights norms equally applicable to all (Pison Hindawi).²²

Yet with the unprecedented scale of the violence, dehumanizing statements from Israeli representatives and high percentage of civilians, in particular children, killed or injured (Hearst), a new threshold has now been crossed.²³ The European position is no longer at risk of being solely criticized for its imbalance and responsibility in letting the situation decay to such an extent by refusing to hold Israelis responsible for their failed implementation of the so-called 'peace process'. The EU's role is no longer at risk of being solely criticized for failing to abide by its own self-proclaimed goals. At this stage, after several months of unabated targeting of civilians accompanied by candid calls for genocide, and after the ICJ acknowledged as 'plausible' that Israel's acts could amount to genocide and adopted three rounds of provisional measures to ensure Palestinians' protection (ICJ 2024), EU officials and representatives of most EU member states now face accusations of complicity in the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and even genocide (Geneva International Peace Research Institute).

Conclusion

'I want to reassure you that Europe will always be on the side of humanity and of human rights,' claimed Ursula von der Leyen in late October 2023, noting that the EU had tripled 'humanitarian aid to Gaza and (had been) organizing an air bridge to bring much needed support to the Palestinian people' (Basso).

Despite Mrs. von der Leyen's claims, at the institutional level, all signals sent by the EU have been all but reassuring. Searching for the EU in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become a synonym for disappointment and lost opportunities. One may have expected that considering the extreme gravity

²¹ And yet Palestinians, as long as they are under attack and/or military occupation and as long as the international community does not come to their rescue, undoubtedly have the right to protect themselves and use military force under the very 'inherent right of self-defence' that Israel keeps claiming for itself.

²² For more on this selective approach, read also Pison Hindawi, Coralie. "Western Arms Transfers and Arms Control Policies towards the Middle East: Constraining Regional Actors or Fuelling Regional Wars?" In *New Conflict Dynamics*, edited by Boserup et al, DIIS/AUB, 2017, pp. 123-134.

²³ Acknowledging that numerous successive thresholds have already been crossed in the past... See for example "A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution." *Human Rights Watch*, 27 Apr.

2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>. Accessed 14 June 2024.

of the breaches of international law taking place since early October 2023, an international partner as implicated and as ostensibly attached to norms and responsibilities as the EU would have found the strength to break old patterns and truly use all available means to demand international law to be upheld. Several months into the war, that principled reaction had not come from Brussels yet.

It is at the level of some individual member states that stronger positions have been adopted (Casert and The Associated Press), or within dissenting groups amidst the European administration. A letter signed in October by 850 EU staff urged for example the EU Commission 'to call, together with the leaders of the whole Union, for a ceasefire and for the protection of civilian life' (Pugnet and Basso). Adding that: 'This is at the core of the EU existence' (Basso). Similar demands for the immediate protection of civilians, cessation of the siege and of the bombings have come as well from the streets of European cities with countless demonstrations, some very large, taking place throughout the Union despite serious attempts to curb the right to demonstrate in support of Palestinians in several countries.²⁴ Civil society actions have been numerous, including European iterations of the 'Stop Arming Israel' campaign that has led concerned citizens to try and patiently unveil the often discrete forms of collaboration with Israel that European firms may be involved in. At the time of writing, one of the campaign's most recent victories was the decision of the French authorities to cancel Israeli firms' participation in the major Eurosatory armament fair, with more legal actions under way (Citrouilleorange).

At the institutional level, though, the inability to find the EU in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where it should have been from the moment the Israeli state decided to completely seal off Gaza and from the moment it started to massively bomb the civilian population and infrastructure of the Strip is bad news for Europeans and Palestinians alike. It is also bad news for Israelis. Because one doesn't need a PhD to realize that massacring and injuring tens of thousands of civilians, most of them children and women, and turning their habitat into ashes, is not how you secure a country. One may understand that the state of shock experienced on October 7th, 2023, by Israelis, many of whom had come to consider Palestinian dispossession, control and isolation as part of a relatively favourable status quo, unleashed a thirst for revenge. It is more difficult to comprehend the European lukewarm reaction to the exceptional levels of violence targeting civilian areas, infrastructures and populations amidst widespread warnings from numerous authoritative institutions, most decisively from the ICJ, that the process at work may constitute genocide.

Such a reaction only makes sense if European representatives admit that they primarily stand for certain groups and people, regardless of what they do, rather than for principles and norms equally applicable to all. This may be the only explanation for a statement that French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné made following the South African genocide case against Israel. He oddly declared that 'to accuse the Jewish State of genocide means crossing a moral threshold,' suggesting that Israel, because of its genesis and inherent connection to the Shoah, could never be itself accused of genocide (Escalona). This may also be the only explanation for the extraordinarily disturbing congratulatory reactions of many European leaders and media to the Israeli operation in Gaza's Nuseirat's refugee camp that freed four Israeli hostages—possibly killing three others—while killing more than 270 Palestinians in the process, many of them women and children: an 'important sign of hope', according to German chancellor Olaf Scholz (Cook).

Of course, as previously mentioned dissent attests, neither Séjourné nor Scholz or even the European Council represent the entirety of the EU. Yet when tomorrow comes, and when Palestinian youth who will have survived the onslaught become the next leading generation, their European counterparts will have a hard time convincing them that the European Union is a responsible power on the side of

²⁴ <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/citrouilleorange/blog/261223/cachez-cette-solidarite-mondiale-que-nous-ne-saurions-voir> , accessed on 02.01.2024.

humanity and human rights. In the meantime, unless the EU finally manages to act in accordance with its most basic international obligations, all European funds dedicated to the promotion of human rights and democracy in the MENA region should rather be reallocated to other, less unbearably ironical, purposes.

In addition to the funding of research seeking to better understand the persistence of democracy support malpractices within the EU (Cook), reallocated funds might serve the creation of an exchange program (a new version of Erasmus +) that would allow Europeans to go and share the everyday life of Palestinian families for a few months, preferably in what will have been left from the Gaza strip.

Thematic Paper III - The Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Agreements: Notes from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia

By Sami Geadah

Introduction

The European Union (EU) and twelve Southern Mediterranean Countries (SMC) agreed on a coordinated approach to the political, economic and social issues facing them, which was announced in the Barcelona declaration in 1995. The declaration recognizes that the:

objective of turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity requires a strengthening of democracy and respect for human rights, sustainable and balanced economic and social development, measures to combat poverty and promotion of greater understanding between cultures, which are all essential aspects of partnership.

The signatories to the agreement accordingly agreed to establish:

a comprehensive partnership among the participants the Euro Mediterranean partnership through strengthened political dialogue on a regular basis, the development of economic and financial cooperation and greater emphasis on the social, cultural and human dimension, these being the three aspects of the Euro Mediterranean partnership (“Barcelona Declaration Adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference”).

The Barcelona Declaration was followed by bilateral trade agreements between the EU and the SMC. These agreements—the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)—focused on promoting sustainable socio-economic development, improving living conditions, increasing employment and strengthening regional cooperation and integration as means to promote stability and ease migratory pressures. The agreements aimed to gradually liberalize trade in goods, services and capital between the EU and partner countries. Areas to be liberalized also included foreign direct investment and capital movements. Non-tariff measures, such as technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phytosanitary measures, were to be addressed at a later stage. The FTAs were signed between 1994 and 2002, put in place between 1998 and 2006, and continue to be applied.

With almost two decades since the establishment of the free trade agreements, this paper provides an assessment of the direct effect of the FTAs on four of the SMC, namely Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia.

Specifically, this paper looks into the following questions:

- Has there has been an increase in exports from these four countries to the EU as a result of the trade agreements? An increase in exports would be associated with higher output growth and employment in the four countries, thereby helping to promote economic development, improve living conditions and increase employment.²⁵
- Have exports from the four countries to the EU become more diversified as a result of the free trade agreements? Increased export diversification is usually associated with the development of new economic activities, especially small and medium size enterprises which tend to generate more employment opportunities than large capital-intensive industries and in particular extractive industries.
- How have the trade agreements affected government revenues in the four countries? Customs receipts are generally an important source of government revenues for countries with less developed taxation systems given the ease in which they are collected. Import duties also provide protection to domestic producers from foreign competition. However, notwithstanding the loss in government customs receipts, there could still be benefits to the country and to government income from taxes that are not levied on imports from the increased production and employment.

This paper does not address whether the free trade agreements led to the wider objectives of the Barcelona Declaration, including the strengthening of democracy, nor does it deal with the decision process related to the FTAs or whether malpractice can be associated with them (Achraimer and Pace). The Barcelona declaration was partly based on the expectation that improved economic conditions would strengthen democracy.

The EU conducted an assessment of these agreements in 2016 (European Commission, Directorate-General for Trade). The EU assessment found that there was an increase in trade, benefiting EU exporters more than exporters from partner countries, reflecting the larger decrease in SMC tariffs on imports from the EU relative to the reduction in EU tariffs on imports from SMC. It also found that SMC fiscal receipts were adversely affected. However, this effect was not substantial given the relatively low and declining contribution of customs receipts to public sector revenues.

The Tariff Reductions

The FTAs led to substantial reductions in the customs tariffs that the EU and the four countries levied on imports from each other.

The EU eliminated tariffs on imports of industrial goods, and it sharply reduced tariffs on imports of agricultural goods from the four countries. Import duties on industrial goods were quite low prior to the trade agreements, in the range of 2.6-3.8 %. The reduction in tariffs on agricultural imports was more significant, as they were initially in the 6.8-9.1 % range.

The reductions in the customs tariffs that the four countries levied on imports from the EU were larger. These tariffs were set initially at relatively high levels, ranging from 14.4-33.0 % for agricultural goods and from 11.8-29.3 % for industrial goods. Customs tariffs were viewed as a source of protection for domestic industry and agriculture, as well as an important source of government revenue.

Based on the tariff reductions alone, the EU is likely to have benefitted more than the four countries from these reductions. As noted above, the reductions in the customs duties levied by the four

²⁵ The analysis is based on official statistics. It accordingly does not look into smuggling or non-recorded trade.

countries were larger than the reductions in EU customs duties. This asymmetry was partly the result of the four countries having higher customs duties than the EU before the agreements were implemented.

The competitive advantage of the FTAs for the SMC was eroded as the EU removed import duties on products from vulnerable developing countries in 2014. Despite some reductions in tariffs by the four countries on imports from non-EU countries, EU exporters continued to enjoy preferential tariffs as these countries maintained relatively high tariffs on imports from non-EU countries.

EU Tariffs on Imports from SMC

	Agriculture				Industry			
	1995		2015		1995		2015	
	FTA	MFN	FTA	MFN	FTA	MFN	FTA	MFN
Egypt	8.5	10.2	0.2	7.5	3.2	6.5	...	4.3
Jordan	9.1	11.1	0	7.9	2.6	6.1	...	4.2
Lebanon	6.9	8.7	0.3	7.3	3.7	7.1	...	4.2
Tunisia	6.8	8.6	3.9	7.3	3.8	7.1	...	4.5

SMC Tariffs on Imports from the EU

	Agriculture				Industry			
	1995		2015		1995		2015	
	FTA	MFN	FTA	MFN	FTA	MFN	FTA	MFN
Egypt	33	33	21.7	30.7	21.8	21.8	1.3	10
Jordan	34.9	34.9	10.7	21.9	21.9	21.9	2.1	10
Lebanon	14.4	14.4	6	10	11.8	11.8	2.1	5
Tunisia	31.9	31.9	16.6	23.3	29.3	29.3	0.1	12.2

Source: Ex-post evaluation of the impact of trade chapters of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Agreements with Six Partner Countries: Country Report Tunisia. FTA refers to the Free Trade Agreements with the EU. MFN refers to Most Favored Nation agreements.

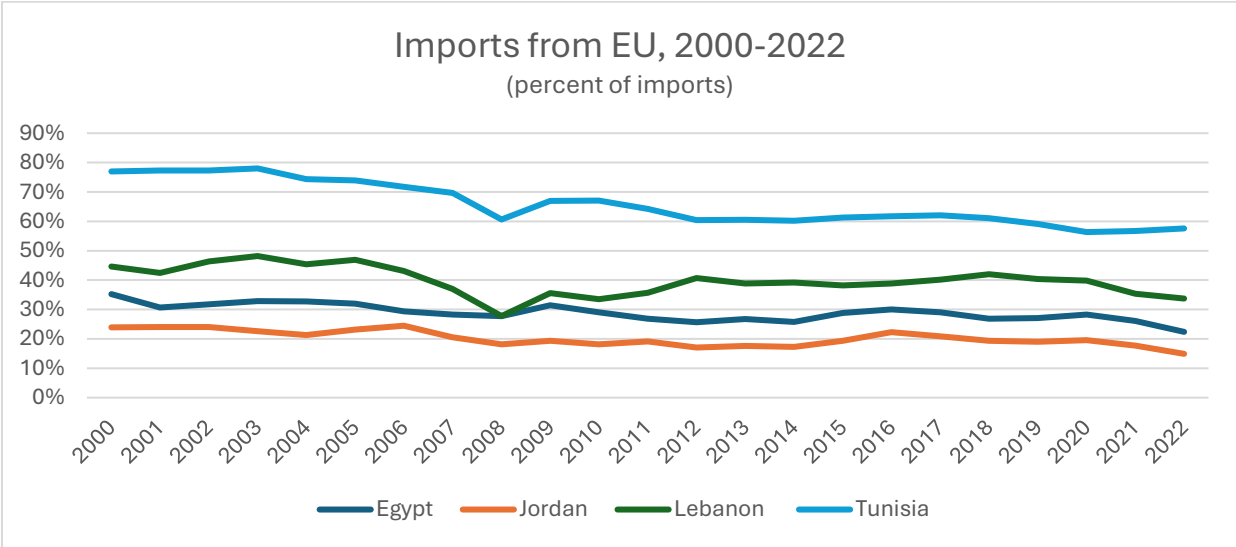
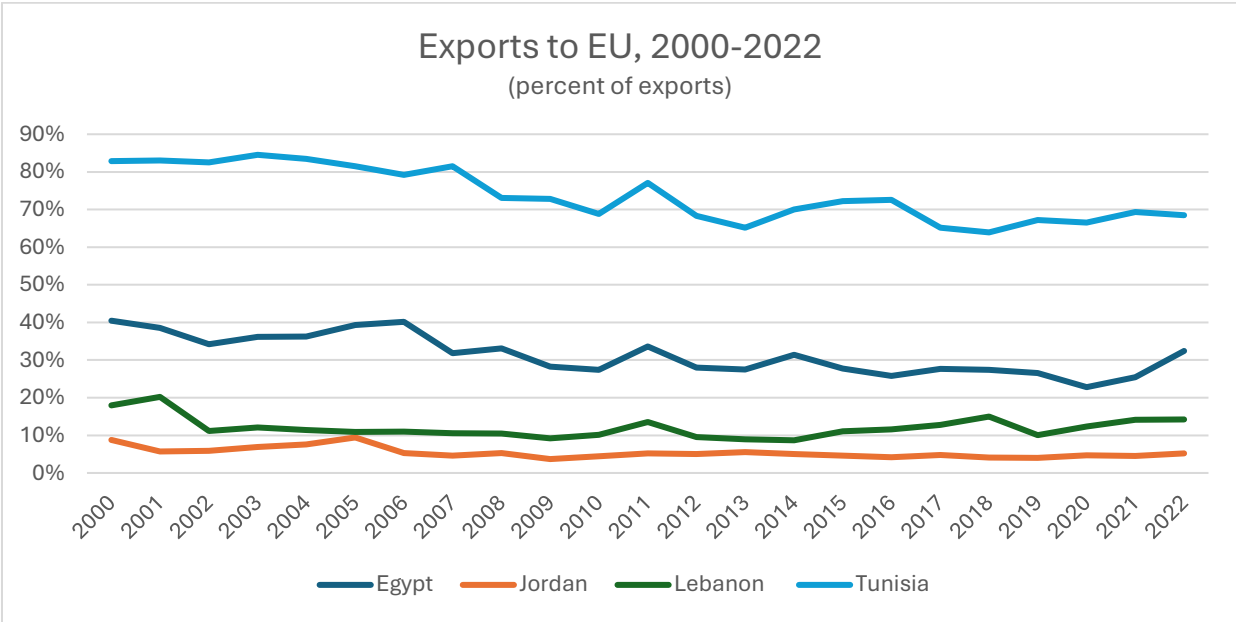
Trade developments

Trade—imports and exports—between the four countries and the EU rose steadily during the past two decades. Trade between the four countries and non-EU countries also rose steadily, at a higher pace than trade with the EU during the period. These trends were reflected in a decline in the share of the four countries’ external trade with the EU. It is therefore not possible to conclude that the FTAs had a significant effect on promoting exports to the EU, even though the decline in the share of trade with the EU may have been steeper without the trade agreements.

There were notable differences in the importance of trade with the EU among the four countries. Tunisia had the closest trade relationship of the four countries with the EU. Despite a generally downward trend, the EU accounted for about two thirds of Tunisia’s exports and more than one half of Tunisia’s imports in 2022. The EU was also an important export market for Egypt, with a sharp increase in exports in 2020-22 reflecting an expansion in gas exports. For Jordan and Lebanon, the EU

accounted for a small share of their exports, which was 5 % for Jordan and 14 % for Lebanon in 2022. All four countries had persistent and increasing trade deficits with the EU.

Trade shares with the EU, 2000-2022



Source: Calculations based on data from IMF, *Direction of Trade Statistics*.

Trade between the four countries and the EU was concentrated in a few European countries. For exports to the EU, the main destination countries were Italy, France, and Spain, which are also Mediterranean countries. A major part of exports to these countries was petroleum products, which is not the type of product that is associated with increased employment or with the development of small and medium size enterprises. More than one third of Egypt’s exports to Italy—Egypt’s largest export market—consisted of petroleum products (crude petroleum, petroleum gas and refined petroleum). The main other export items were aluminium articles, chemicals products and metals, which are also associated with large industries. For Spain—Egypt’s second largest export market—almost one quarter of exports were petroleum products, followed by chemical products and fertilizers, textiles and metal products (iron, steel and aluminium). The main European exporters to Egypt were Germany and Italy. Germany exported to Egypt machines (mechanical machinery and appliances),

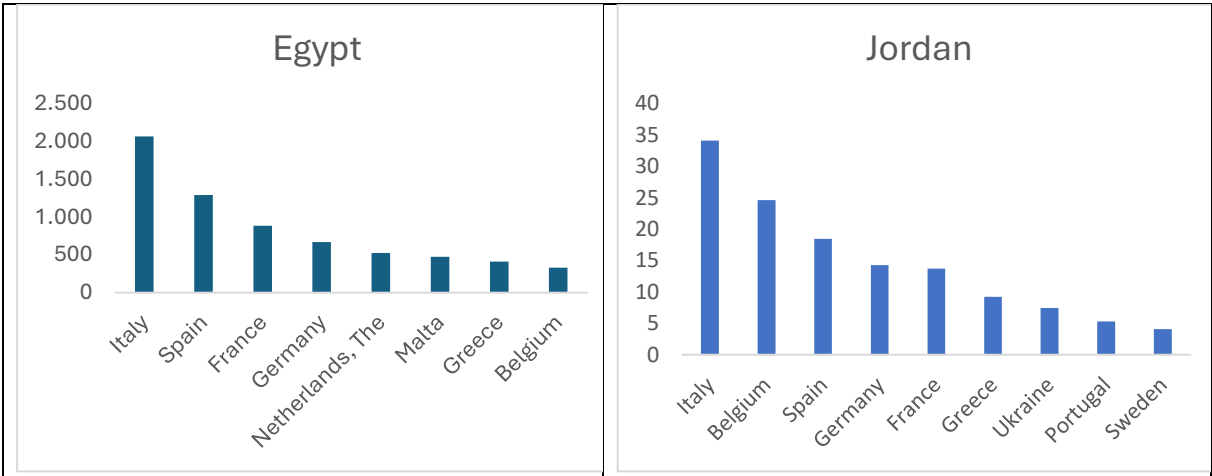
chemical products, transport equipment (cars, tractors and their parts). Egypt’s imports from Italy were mainly machines, mineral products and metals.

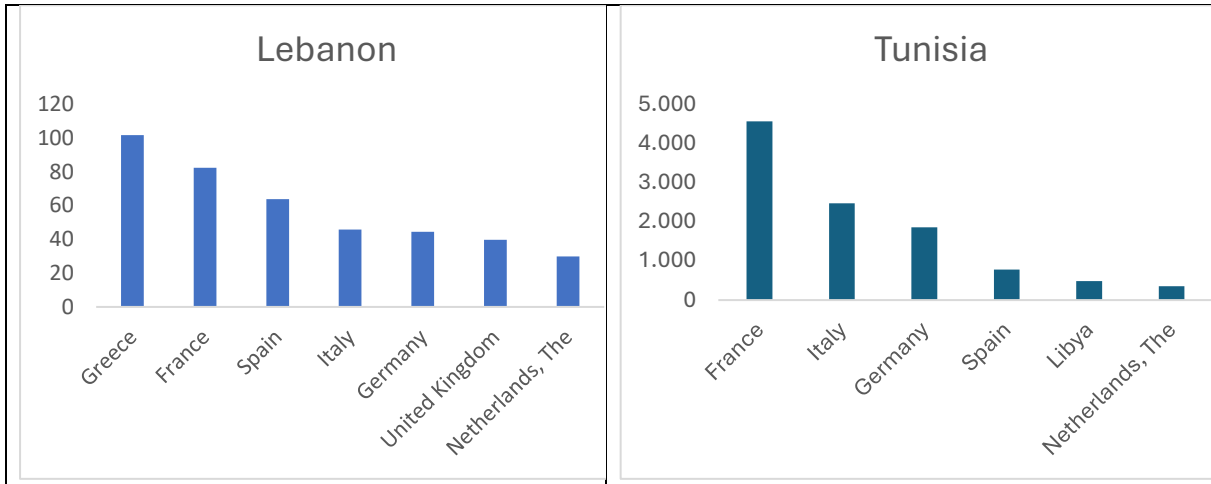
Tunisia had the closest trade relations with the EU among the four countries as noted above. Its exports to the EU were comparable to Egypt despite the substantially smaller size of the Tunisian economy. Its closest trading partners in the EU were France and Italy. France mainly imported machines (insulated wire, protection equipment and broadcast equipment—42 % of the total), textiles, transport equipment and (mainly medical) instruments. France exported to Tunisia machines, textiles and chemical products. For Italy, the main exports to Tunisia were mineral products, machines and textiles.

As for Egypt, Italy was also Jordan’s largest EU export market in 2018. The main exports were chemical products, metals (aluminium, copper and lead), precious metals, and plastics and rubbers. Belgium—the second largest European destination for Jordanian products—mainly imported chemical products and textiles. About one third of exports to the UK—Jordan’s third largest EU export market—was instruments such as optical, photo and film equipment and medical instruments; textiles accounted for about one quarter of exports. Germany was also the largest EU exporter to Jordan, selling mechanical appliances, transportation products (cars, tractors, aircrafts and their appliances) and chemical products. A large part of Jordan’s imports from Italy were machines and jewellery.

Lebanon’s main trading partner in the EU was Greece. About three quarters of Lebanese exports to Greece were metals, with the bulk of the remainder foodstuff and chemical products. Lebanon’s imports from Greece were largely refined petroleum products. The second largest EU exporter to Lebanon was Italy, with mineral products, machines, jewellery and chemical products accounting for the bulk of imports.

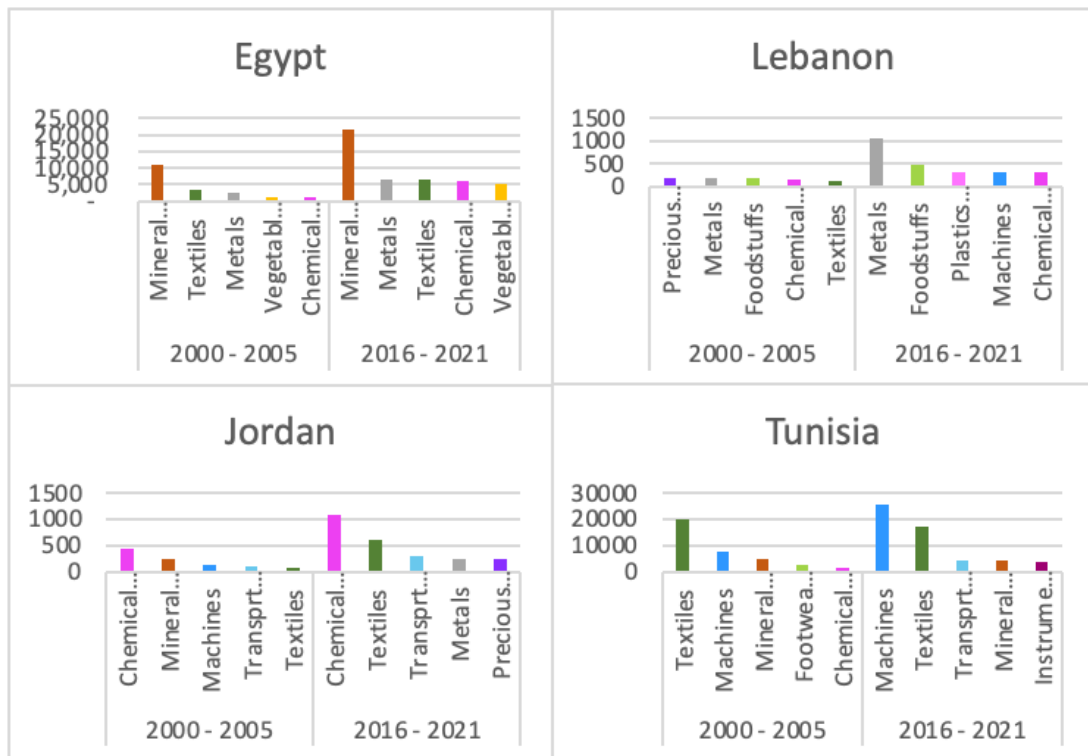
Exports to EU by country, 2018
(in USD millions)





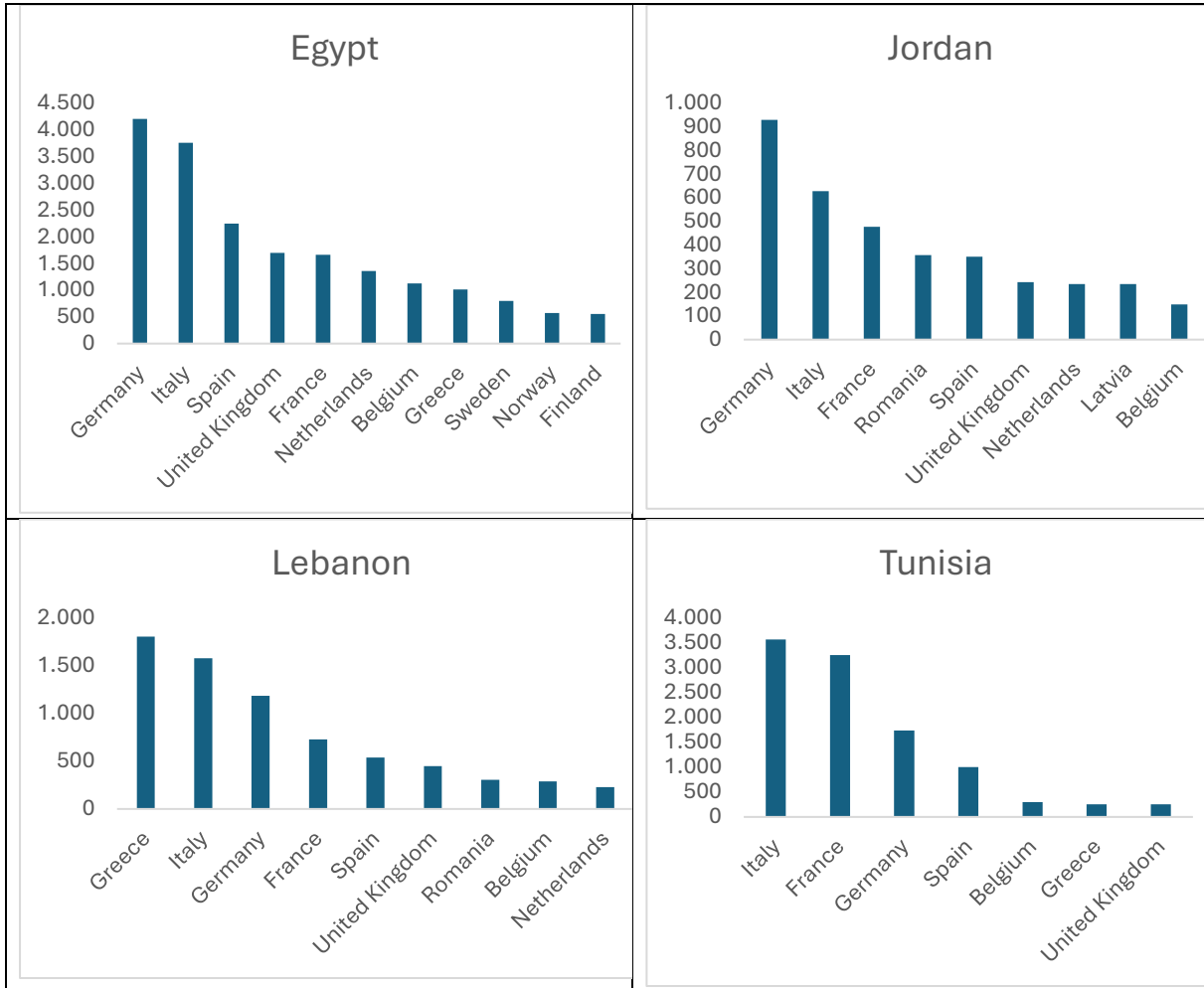
Source: Calculations based on data from *IMF, Direction of Trade Statistics*.

Main exports to EU by product, 2000-2005 and 2016-2021
(in USD millions, cumulative)



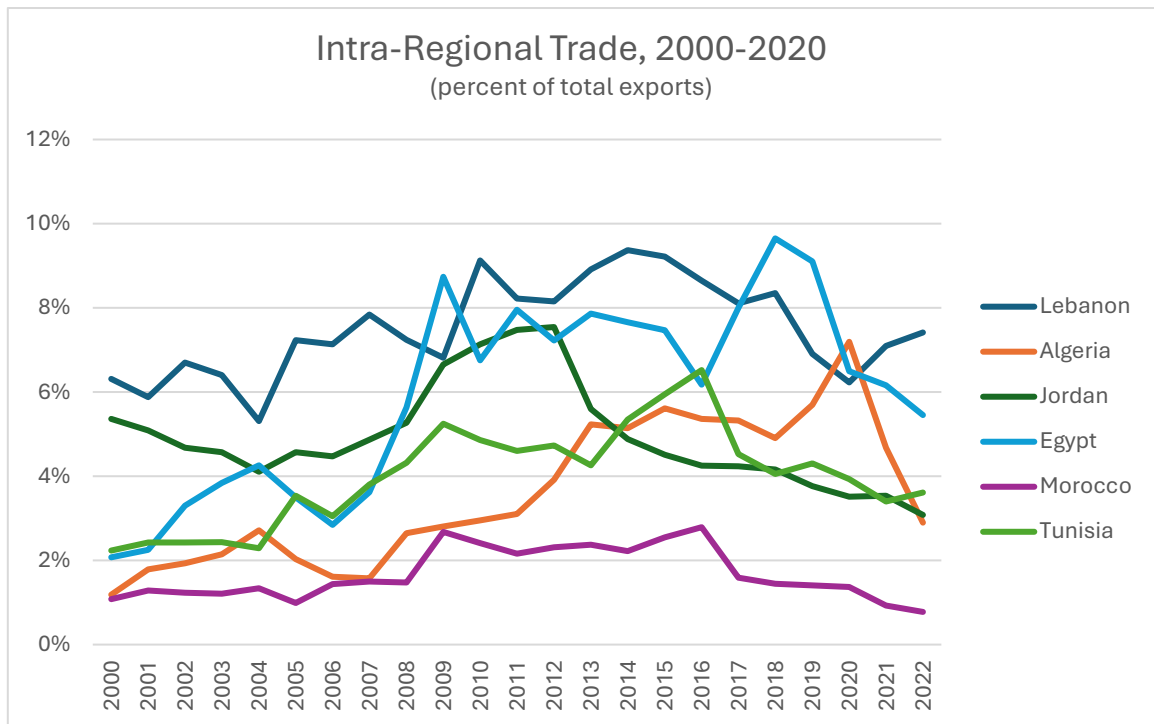
Source: Calculations based on data from *The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC)*, which is a site for international trade data created by the Macro Connections group at the MIT Media Lab.

Imports from the EU, 2018
(in USD millions)



Source: Calculations based on data from *IMF, Direction of Trade Statistics*.

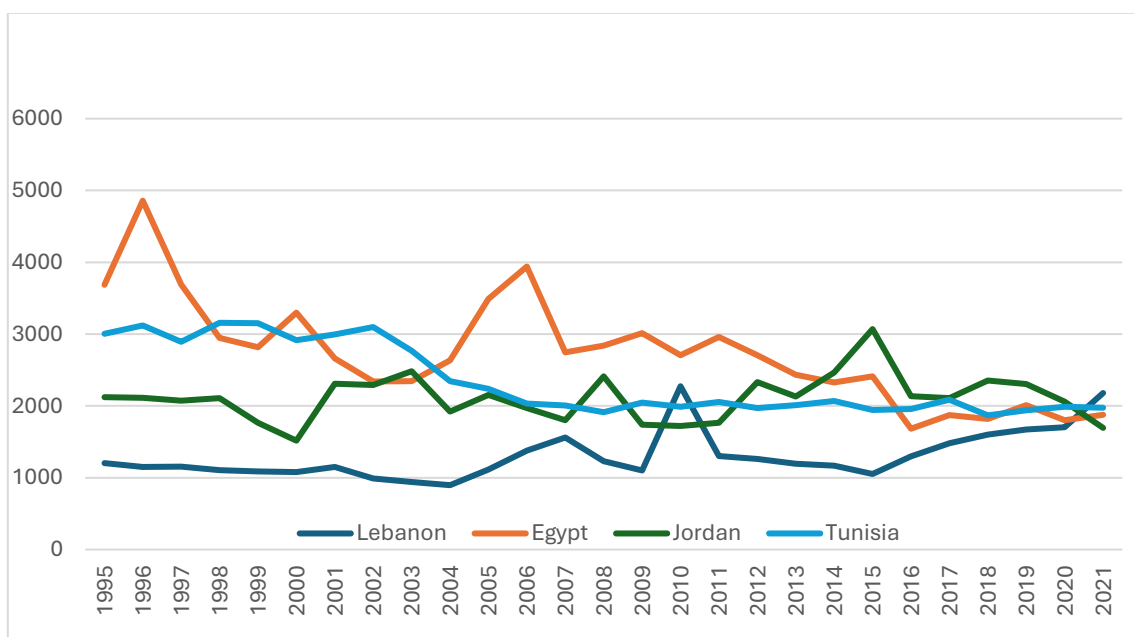
It was envisaged that the trade agreements would lead to greater integration within the region as a lowering of the cost of trade among the SMC countries would help to promote trade among them. Closer trade integration is usually associated with increased specialization in the areas in which countries have a comparative advantage. Trade among the Southern Mediterranean Countries that had FTAs with the EU did increase. However, there was not a clear pattern of increased trade for all countries. The share of exports from Egypt and Tunisia to the region increased. In contrast, there was no trend increase in the share of exports from Jordan and Lebanon to the region.



Source: Calculations based on data from IMF, Direction of Trade Statistics.

A measure of export diversity showed similar levels of diversification across the four countries. There was an increase in diversification for Egypt and Tunisia, little change for Jordan and less diversification for Lebanon. Tunisia—where the FTA with the EU entered into force in 1998—had a pronounced increase in diversification as its exports evolved from being concentrated in articles of apparel in the mid-1990s to being concentrated in electrical and electronic equipment. For Lebanon, the decrease in diversification in recent years reflects the expansion in metal exports, namely scrap metal.

Diversification of Exports to the EU, 1995-2021
(Herfindahl–Hirschman Index)



Notes: The Herfindahl–Hirschman Index (HHI) is calculated as the sum of the squares of the share of each export. Lower numbers indicate higher diversification. HHI values range from 0 to 10,000. Values lower than 1,500 indicate highly diversified exports, values between 1,500 and 2,500 indicate moderate concentration, and values greater than 2,500 indicate highly concentrated exports. Calculations based on data from *The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC)*.

Impact on Government Customs Revenues

Notwithstanding the significant reductions in customs tariffs following the inception of the FTAs, there does not seem to have been a large impact on government revenues in recent years. Customs revenues were an important source of fiscal revenue prior to the agreements, but countries generally reduced import tariffs and increasingly relied on other taxes, including value-added taxes. In Egypt, for example, international trade taxes were about 3-5 % of government revenues during 2018 to 2022. For Lebanon, which has traditionally relied on import taxes, international trade taxes were 12 % of government revenues.

Customs Revenue Forgone, 2018

	USD millions	Percent of international trade taxes	Percent of revenues	Percent of GDP
Egypt	1,552	64.2	2.9	0.5
Jordan	228	55.3	2.3	0.5
Lebanon	261	20.8	2.4	0.5
Tunisia	65	...	0.7	0.2

Source: Calculations based on data from the *IMF, Direction of Trade Statistics, IMF Article IV Staff Reports, and Ex-post evaluation of the impact of trade chapters of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Agreements with Six Partner Countries*.

An assessment of the fiscal impact of the trade agreements could also take into consideration their effect on the overall relationship with the EU. For Lebanon, for example, the EU committed €402.3 million in bilateral assistance for the period 2014 to 2020 to promote growth and job creation, foster local governance and socio-economic development, promote the rule of law and enhance security.

Conclusion

The paper’s main conclusions are the following:

- Trade between the EU and Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia increased, but this increase was slightly lower than the expansion in trade with the rest of the world. While the reduction in EU tariffs was beneficial to these countries’ exports, EU exporters are likely to have benefitted significantly from the trade agreements given the large reductions in duties on imports from the EU. SMC exports may also have faced non-tariff measures which constrained the expansion in trade. It is therefore not clear whether the trade agreements increased exports, thereby contributing to higher output growth and employment in the four countries.
- Tunisia and to a lesser extent, Egypt, seems to have significantly increased the diversification of exports to the EU. Lebanon’s exports to the EU seem to have become less diversified. The

level of export diversification of the four countries converged over the past twenty years. However, a substantial part of the increase in exports to the EU consisted of petroleum products and of commodities that are not normally associated with small and medium size enterprises which are important for creating employment opportunities.

- There was a loss of government revenue in the four countries. However, despite the significant reductions in customs tariffs, there does not seem to have been a large impact on government revenues in recent years. Egypt was estimated to have been the most affected, with the loss in customs revenue estimated at 2.9 % of government (tax plus non-tax) revenues. Tunisia was estimated as the least affected at 0.7 % of revenues.
- Notwithstanding these conclusions, an assessment of the effect of the trade agreements would need to be considered in the context of these countries' overall relationship with the EU. Even though these countries may not have benefited directly from the agreements as had been envisaged, there could have been other non-economic benefits that are associated with them.