Figure 1.1. Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East

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Introduction

In recent years, images of migrants and refugees risking their lives to reach Europe from the Middle East and Africa have filled the pages and screens of European media. Migration has turned into a highly politicized matter in Europe, galvanized by xenophobic movements and right-wing parties alike. Increasingly restrictive policies towards migrants and refugees, adopted by numerous European countries, have become the norm. As the Mediterranean Sea turned into a maritime cemetery, with over 20,000 migrants and refugees classified as either dead or missing on their journey across the sea between 2014 and 2020 (IOM 2020), and Europe closed its borders to people escaping war, repression, and misery, the idea of 'Fortress Europe' seemed to be confirmed.[1]

Yet Europe's increasingly restrictive border policies towards its 'southern neighbourhood' reflect just one dimension of the complex relationship between Europe—defined here as the European Union and its member states—and the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Not only do these states in the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa share an extensive history with Europe, with many of them still maintaining broad although often ambivalent cultural ties with their former colonial rulers. They also engage in significant cooperation with the Europeans across a range of policy areas, including trade, energy, security, migration, and border controls. For Europe, the countries of the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa, and ranging from Morocco in the west to Turkey in the east (see figure 1.1) and abbreviated here as MENA,[2] are of vital importance due to their geographical proximity, abundance of natural resources and role as export markets for European goods and services. Given that MENA states take part in a variety of programs and activities conducted by the European Union (EU), Europe and these MENA states are thus deeply interconnected.

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[1] These figures represent conservative estimates.

[2] The term 'MENA' is used in different ways in the literature. In this book, the term will refer solely to the group of states situated on the southern and south-eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, Europe's 'southern periphery'. It is used as an abbreviation for the terms 'the Mediterranean Middle East' or 'the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa'.

The reality of this wide-ranging and often less visible cooperation across different issue-areas challenges the notion of Europe and the Middle East as two entirely distinct regions separated by the Mediterranean Sea. While the concept of 'Fortress Europe' may apply to the circulation of unwanted migrants, the broader context of Europe-Middle East relations clearly defies this notion. How, then, are we to understand relations between Europe and the states in the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa, Europe's 'southern neighbours'? What are we to make of Europe's official claim that its policies towards that region aim to promote stability, prosperity, and peace—claims that the academic literature has been all too ready to take at face value? And does the idea that Europe's power and influence in the region are negligible–particularly when compared to the United States, until recently the main external player in the Middle East–hold any substance?

By investigating the relations between Europe and the so-called southern Mediterranean through the concept of borderlands, this book proposes a fundamentally different reading of these relations. Here, borderlands are defined as areas in close geographic proximity to a border. Very often, these areas are characterized by multiple and disaggregated borders with different degrees of permeability. These borders are differentiated according to different kinds of issues, types of goods, and categories of people. As a result, borderlands often become hybrid zones of crossover from one political, socio-economic, and legal order to another. As discussed in more detail later, European policies towards these MENA states rely on processes by which Europe seeks to extend many of its rules and practices to the countries in the southern neighbourhood, thereby transforming them into Europe's borderlands. They connect the European core with the periphery through various border regimes, shared rules and practices, and the selective outsourcing of some EU border control duties. This modus operandi amounts to a geopolitical strategy, perhaps best encapsulated in the EU's 'European Neighbourhood Policy' (ENP), a policy framework that was adopted in 2003–2004 (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005; Bialasiewicz et al. 2009; Browning and Joenniemi 2008).[3]

Exploring Europe–MENA region relations through this conceptual lens sheds light on the rationale and modalities of European policies towards the region while avoiding the ideological tendencies of the literature on the EU's allegedly normative power. By looking closely at the ways in which Europe

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[3] The ENP covers ten states in the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Palestinian Territories, Syria, and Tunisia, in addition to six eastern 'neighbours' of the EU (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine).

seeks to impose—in a highly selective way—its rules on the neighbourhood with the aim of engineering economic and political change, it is possible to conceptualize Europe as a form of empire with fuzzy borders. Despite the EU's historically normative rhetoric stressing the promotion of democracy and human rights, it is security concerns and economic interests that drive European policies towards the MENA region. To advance these interests, the stability of the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa—Europe's southern periphery—is crucial.[4] Attempts to export selectively the European order beyond the border is a cost-efficient way of pursuing these seemingly imperial interests. It is worth noting that, despite the period of upheavals witnessed in the Middle East region since December 2010, this mode of European policy towards the region has remained largely unchanged during the last two to three decades.

Europe's attempts to transfer its rules and practices to the southern periphery go hand in hand with the construction of a 'neighbourhood', an area which is *not* Europe but which remains closer and more connected than the areas beyond it. But how successful have these policies been? And how have they affected these MENA countries? Europe's southern neighbourhood is hardly more prosperous, stable, or peaceful today by comparison to 1995, the year in which the European Union launched the 'Euro–Mediterranean Partnership' (EMP) with the declared objective of promoting prosperity, stability, and peace in the southern Mediterranean. Of course, other factors, such as the ill-conceived policies of MENA governments themselves or the influence of other (and perhaps more powerful) external actors, may be responsible for this outcome. However, as the EU has remained the largest trading partner of most states in the region in addition to providing financial and technical assistance in support of prescribed reform processes, European policies can hardly be irrelevant to the region. As this study will show, Europe's policies have resulted in the asymmetrical and selective integration of MENA states into the EU's Internal Market without a reciprocal offer enabling these states to participate in European decision-making processes. In this context, it is important to ask whether the process, supported by Europe, of neoliberal restructuring in the MENA region has had the desired effect—particularly in the absence of democratic reforms. Alternatively, is it possible to assume that European policies, in combination with the specific policy choices of MENA governments,

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[4] Designating MENA states as Europe's southern periphery makes sense within the borderlands perspective, which is sensitive to unequal power relations; it obviously does not mean that these states are 'peripheries' in absolute terms.

have actually contributed to the growing socio-economic inequalities and societal polarization that have marked the region in recent decades? Has Europe been partly responsible for strengthening authoritarian regimes in its southern borderlands—unless, or until, they are overthrown by popular revolts? The co-optation of MENA governments in Europe's management of or persistent attempts to manage migration, counterterrorism, and border controls is equally deserving of our attention. Given that most MENA states have remained under or reverted to authoritarian rule, their involvement in the management of European borders raises important questions about the possible unintended (but not totally unforeseeable) consequences that have strengthened authoritarian rule. Important issues of legality and accountability are thus also at stake.

And what of the MENA states themselves? How have they responded to European preferences and policies? How much space for manoeuvre do they have? Given that most states in the Mediterranean Middle East are dependent on European trade and aid, a structural power asymmetry largely characterizes the relationship between Europe and these MENA states. Thus, in theory, unequal power relations enable European preferences to be imposed on the governments and societies of the Middle East. But has this been the case in practice? As exemplified by Europe's reliance on countries in its periphery to stem the influx of refugees in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, Europe is dependent on and vulnerable to the actions and policies of MENA governments in some issue areas. Implying a weakened bargaining position for the EU and its member states, the leverage of MENA states over the Europeans is a direct result of their co-optation in the management of these borderlands. Thirdly, then, this book highlights the response of MENA governments to European policies in the context of what are complex patterns of interdependence within a broader framework of structural dependence. The study shows that power is not unidirectional, with issue linkage remaining an important aspect of relations between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East. In this context, the book also accounts for the agency of MENA states—an additional dimension that the specialized literature tends to overlook (exceptions to this rule include Joffé 2008; Del Sarto 2010; Cassarino 2014; El Qadim 2014; Nicolaïdis 2015; Karadağ 2019; Del Sarto and Tholens 2020).

Finally, studies of the nature of the EU and its external relations generally assume that European foreign policies are a *sui generis* phenomenon that cannot be compared to the external relations of independent states, thus refraining from discussions of broader phenomena in an increasingly globalized world. In the context of globalization, however, the emergence of increasingly interdependent border regions in other geographical areas may be crucial

to understanding European policies of boundaries expansion and the resulting nature of the borderlands. This study will thus conclude by briefly reflecting on whether the development of Europe–Middle East relations mirrors wider global dynamics and trends such as globalization and the neoliberal consensus that continues to define Western development prescriptions.

Focus and Time Span

The book considers relations between Europe—which includes the European Union and single EU member states—and the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa (designated here by the term 'MENA'), which can be defined as Europe's southern periphery (see figure 1.1). The latter comprises the countries of the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya), Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey. And while Jordan is not a Mediterranean country, it is nevertheless included in the EU's vision of its immediate 'southern neighbourhood' while it is also deeply interconnected with Europe. For this reason, Jordan will occasionally be considered in our analysis as well. Except for Libya, all of these countries participated in the EU's Euro–Mediterranean Partnership initiative that started in 1995.[5] Most of these states subsequently took part in the EU's Neighbourhood Policy, with Turkey turning into an 'EU candidate country' after the opening of EU accession negotiations in 2005. Not all of these states will be discussed in detail, however. In particular, Libya and Syria—two countries whose relations with Europe are far less formalized by comparison with other MENA states,[6] and which have also been mired in civil wars since 2011—will only be considered as part of the broader context. Nonetheless, pre-civil war Libya will be used as an example in the examination of migration control. The book thus deals with countries that are marked by very different socio-economic and political traits as well as by diverging forms of relations with the EU and single European states, often former colonial powers. While considering these variations, the study focuses

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[5] When the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was launched in 1995, it included the then-15 member states of the European Union, two 'Mediterranean' non-EU members at the time (Cyprus and Malta), and ten members from the 'southern Mediterranean' (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and the Palestinian Authority).

[6] Syria negotiated with the EU an Association Agreement that never entered into force; in 2011, against the backdrop of the crackdown on demonstrators by the Syrian regime, Brussels suspended the previous cooperation agreement of 1977. As for Libya, the country never signed any trade agreement with the EU or its predecessor. Both Syrian and Libya have been receiving humanitarian aid from the Europeans since 2011, with the EU also financing a number of projects in support of institution-building and civil society in Libya since the fall of the Qaddafi regime in that same year.

on the overarching modus operandi of European policies towards all these countries. Particular attention will be paid to the two most important types of relation: trade and economic policies as well as the issue of migration, security, and border controls. In considering the European interests that underpin these policies, the book discusses the impact of European policies on these countries along with the response of these states to European prescriptions and preferences.

The time span under consideration comprises two decades of Euro–MENA relations, from 1995 to 2015. The year 1995 marked the launch of a major European policy initiative, the Euro–Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)—also called Barcelona Process—towards the so-called southern Mediterranean. The EMP saw the gradual conclusion of a series of bilateral agreements whose primary aim was the liberalization of trade in industrial goods between the EU and most MENA states. This policy also gave rise to the gradual intensi-fication and institutionalization of relations between Europe and its southern periphery.[7] Second, the EU's launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2003–2004, covering the EU's southern and eastern 'neighbour-hoods', embodies most clearly the European approach of seeking to export rules and practices to adjacent regions in a wide range of policy fields in exchange for access to the EU's Internal Market. Turkey continued to partici-pate in some projects funded under the EU's Neighbourhood Policy even after it became a candidate country for EU membership in 2005. Throughout this period, single European member states continued to cooperate bilaterally with MENA countries on border control, migration, counterterrorism, and energy, with France, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Italy being the principal actors here. The end point of this study is 2015, that is, two decades after the start of the EMP/Barcelona Process. Prompted by the refugee crisis that resulted from the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Libya—in 2015 alone, over one million refugees and migrants entered EU territory irregularly, with the great majority crossing the Mediterranean Sea—the EU reformulated its policies towards its southern (and eastern) neighbourhood in November of that year.[8] The end point of the study also allows us to consider the development of Europe–Middle

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[7] Data and interactive maps visualizing the growing cooperation and interconnectedness of Europe and the MENA region since 1995 have been compiled in the framework of the BORDERLANDS research project and are available at http://borderlands-project.eu/DataMaps/Index.aspx; see also Del Sarto 2017a.

[8] The migration crisis was not the only development 'in the neighbourhood' that prompted the EU to rethink its policy framework. Other events included Russia's military intervention in Syria, the terrorist attacks in Tunisia, Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, and France, and Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 2014, to name but a few.

East relations a few years after the 2011 Arab uprisings and the resulting resilience or restoration of authoritarian rule in most of the region's Arab states. As for Turkey, by 2015 the EU accession negotiations had already slowed down because of Ankara's clampdown on mass demonstrations (the Gezi Park protests) in 2013; they would enter a stalemate and subsequently be suspended by Brussels after President Erdoğan's authoritarian crackdown that followed the attempted Turkish coup d'état of 2016.

In addition to the rich academic literature and secondary sources, this book draws from extensive fieldwork conducted within the framework of a research project, directed by the author, on Europe's relations with the Middle East and North Africa. Funded by the European Research Council (ERC), the project, 'BORDERLANDS: Boundaries, Governance, and Power in the European Union's Relations with North Africa and the Middle East' ran from October 2011 to March 2017.[9] Employing twelve researchers and research associates during the course of the project and collaborating with dozens of other academics, the research mainly focused on Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, and Turkey. The numerous interviews conducted throughout the course of the project with government officials and representatives of civil society in MENA states as well as in Brussels and other European capitals were conducted on condition of anonymity. For this reason, there will be no formal references to the interviews and informal discussions. For obvious reasons, fieldwork in the MENA region became a difficult if not impossible undertaking in some countries following the Arab uprisings and the instability and civil wars that ensued in some states. When possible, examples are provided for some of these countries post-2011.

Organization of the Book

As briefly outlined earlier, the present volume examines relations between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa through a borderlands perspective. This approach highlights the extension of European rules and practices to Europe's southern periphery and shows how interconnected the two regions have become as a result. The approach is anchored in the conceptualization of the European Union and its member states as an empire of sorts. The first chapter, then, presents the conceptual and theoretical

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[9] For more information on the BORDERLANDS project, see <https://www.eui.eu/Departments-AndCentres/RobertSchumanCentre/Research/ArchivesMigration/Borderlands>.

framework of the book. It delves into the meaning and implications of adopting a borderlands approach to the study of Europe–Middle East relations. The chapter also underscores the usefulness of this conceptual framework in the context of various flaws and gaps in the existing literature.

The historical context for contemporary relations between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East is provided in the second chapter. The chapter demonstrates that European policies towards its southern periphery developed from the imperial policies of single European states during colonial times into the quasi-imperial policy of the common European bloc. In other words, when the history of European–Middle East relations is considered alongside the beginnings and subsequent development of European integration, the imperial foreign policies of the former colonial powers vis-à-vis the Middle East may be seen to have undergone a conspicuous process of 'Europeanization'.

The third chapter focuses on the concrete modus operandi of European policies towards the MENA region in the time span under consideration, that is, from 1995 to 2015. The chapter highlights the modalities of Europe's attempts to export large parts of the European order beyond its borders, which has entailed the co-optation of political and economic elites in the MENA states in addition to the selective 'outsourcing' of EU border controls to its southern periphery. While the chapter focuses principally on trade policies and cooperation on migration, security, and border controls, it also provides other examples from a wide range of policy fields. Based on empirical evidence, the chapter shows that the interests and rationale of European policies towards its southern periphery have remained largely unchanged in these two decades, including before and after the Arab uprisings.

The fourth chapter assesses the impact of European policies on the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa and the restructuring of the socio-economic and political order in MENA states that European policies have actively promoted. These processes must obviously be considered in the broader context of Western policies towards the region at large, including those adopted by international financial institutions and other Western countries such as the United States. Again, the focus here is on trade and economic relations in the broad sense, as well as migration, security, and border management. The chapter indicates that, when combined with specific choices made by MENA governments, European policies have contributed to rising socio-economic inequalities, the emergence of dual economic systems, crony capitalism, and the strengthening of the largely authoritarian regimes in the MENA region (in the event that they have not been overthrown).

Questions of interdependence and the power relations that underpin the dynamics of Europe–Middle East relations are discussed in the fifth chapter. Highlighting the growing interconnectedness between the two regions in a broader framework of structural dependency, the chapter also sheds light on the strategies and policies adopted by MENA states vis-à-vis the Europeans. Highlighting the agency of the MENA states, the chapter provides empirical evidence of the bargaining power single countries have acquired in their relations with Europe, with a particular emphasis on migration, security cooperation, and border controls. These findings are then placed in the broader context of the major debates on dependency, power, and interdependence in the International Relations literature, demonstrating that power is not unidirectional and that issue-linkage is important.

The conclusion synthesizes the empirical and theoretical findings presented in the book. It discusses the study's findings on the interaction between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East in relations to the academic literature and briefly reflects on their comparability with other regions in the world. The book concludes by raising the question of the future prospects of Europe–Middle East relations, particularly considering the European Union's diminishing power of attraction and the increasingly influential position of other players in the region.

In sum, based on empirical evidence from two main policy fields, this study proposes a profound rethink of the complex relationship between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East. While advancing an unconventional approach to the study of these relations, it revisits the motivation underlying European policies towards the southern periphery, the modalities and impact of these policies, and the response and bargaining power of MENA states vis-à-vis Europe. This perspective on EU–MENA relations problematizes the allegedly normative aspect of the EU's export of its rules and practices to the southern periphery, focusing instead on unequal power relations. It also underscores the not-so-benevolent European policies towards its southern periphery and the complex patterns of interdependence that underpin relations between the two regions. The study of these ties is related to broader debates on power and interdependence in the discipline of International Relations, highlighting the centrality of the concept of borderlands for studying relations between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East.