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Contestation, Leverage, and Interdependence

In Europe's attempts to restructure the socio-economic order in its borderlands, relations between the two sides have not simply been defined by Europe's export of its rules and practices. Rather, these relations have also comprised the actions, responses, and strategies of MENA states vis-à-vis European policies and preferences. This chapter therefore shifts the focus of attention to the agency of the states in the Mediterranean Middle East. From this perspective, it investigates two interconnected dimensions in Europe–Middle East relations: first, the wide range of actions and responses that MENA states adopt vis-à-vis European policies, and, second, the multifaceted interlinkages and complex power dynamics embedded in these relations. These considerations permit us to reconsider questions of dependence and interdependence in the relationship between the MENA states on the one hand and the European Union and its members on the other. As in the previous chapters, the discussion focuses predominantly on trade relations and cooperation on migration, borders, and security during the time period 1995–2015. However, where relevant, the discussion will also refer to examples from other policy fields as well as to more recent developments.

Circumventing and Resisting European Rules and Preferences

When confronted with Europe's constant attempts to expand the borders of its socio-economic order southwards, the states in the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa may theoretically respond in very different ways. They may, for instance, choose to accept whatever the Europeans suggest or impose, either because they are in a weaker bargaining position vis-à-vis the large trading bloc or because they accept the premise that the prescriptions for socio-economic restructuring are also beneficial to their country. In reality, no state in the Mediterranean Middle East has consistently adopted this response

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to European policies across all policy fields. Rather, with regard to some issues, MENA governments have openly challenged or rejected European preferences and prescriptions, leading, in some cases, to a renegotiation of these rules. On other occasions, MENA governments have formally accepted European rules but then quietly altered them according to their domestic needs and preferences. In fact, while the rules and practices of cooperation with Europe have theoretically been non-negotiable, the Europeans have often tacitly tolerated, albeit to a limited extent, the decision of MENA governments to adapt these rules to their local context. In still other cases, the modification of European rules and practices by MENA states has affected the order within the European core itself. While the theory and practice of contestation in the context of Europe–Middle East relations has been discussed elsewhere (Del Sarto and Tholens 2020), some prominent patterns and examples are worth highlighting here.

In the realm of trade and regulatory issues concerning the EU's Internal Market, MENA governments have repeatedly engaged in the open contestation of European policies. Ever since the launch of the Barcelona Process, the states of the Mediterranean Middle East have criticized the EU demand that they open up their markets to European competition in industrial goods without obtaining the liberalization of trade in agricultural products in return, or at the very least a massive increase in European aid. Similarly, they have argued with and requested extensions from EU officials with regard to the timetable for tariff reductions on specific goods. In the late 1990s, for instance, Egypt waded into a trade dispute with the EU over Egyptian potato exports, Israel argued with the Europeans over the origin of its orange juice exports, and Morocco squabbled with the Europeans over tomatoes and fishing quotas (Del Sarto 2006: ch. 4, 5, and 6). During Syria's lengthy and eventually unsuccessful negotiations on the Euro–Mediterranean Association Agreement, Damascus similarly contested European demands for the liberalization of capital movements and disagreed with the transition period for the application of intellectual property rights, which, according to the Syrian negotiators, was far too short (Dostal and Zorob 2009). In sectors that may have been tangential to EU–Middle East trade relations, MENA governments also decided to adopt a different regulatory model than that promoted by the EU. This was the case, for example, in Morocco, which in the early 2000s decided to adopt a Latin American model for universal service obligations aimed at extending telecommunication services to remote locations (Wavre and Freyburg 2020).

In other cases, MENA governments have responded to European policy preferences by officially complying with EU rules which they have then

selectively and inconsistently applied. This attitude has certainly marked the response of Arab regimes to the EU's democracy and political reform programmes in the region (Malmvig 2014). However, the most glaring example of this lies in the way that the region's largely authoritarian states have captured the neoliberal economic restructuring process, discussed in the previous chapter. As we have seen, a selective and distorted application of Western-crafted market liberalization and privatization rules in Arab Mediterranean states resulted in the intensification of crony capitalism and corruption, rising inequality, and the strengthening and personal enrichment of authoritarian rulers. In the absence of meaningful political reform through which to implement the rule of law, judicial independence, the accountability of political rule, and respect for human rights, these neoliberal reforms may well have led to negative outcomes for MENA societies at large even if their governments had implemented them by the book. However, the modification of this set of rules and practices by authoritarian MENA regimes in line with their insatiable quest for power and wealth only made matters much worse.

EU-supported banking sector reform in Egypt, discussed in chapters 4 and 5, is a particularly illuminating example here. Egyptian political and economic elites effectively 'talked the talk' of structural reforms while exploiting their own position to implement these reforms to their advantage. While the Europeans tacitly accepted these profoundly distorted banking reforms, the rest of the population suffered the costs of an even more limited access to finance (Roccu 2020). Another example is the Moroccan programme for human development funded by the EU and the World Bank and launched in 2005 with the aim of improving socio-economic conditions in poor areas through new participatory mechanisms of local governance. Deviations from the original design led to unelected officials at the powerful Moroccan Ministry of Interior gaining increased power at the expense of local government and thence to the rearticulation and consolidation of centralized state power (Bergh 2012). EU-funded agricultural development programmes in several Arab Mediterranean states, also discussed in previous chapters, serve as an additional example of the 'localization' of European rules and practices according to domestic interests. Once again, while officially agreeing to the prescribed reform process, economic and political elites in MENA states successfully hijacked it for personal political and economic benefit—and at the expense of poor rural populations (Kourtelis 2015; 2018).

The reality of Europe–Middle East cooperation on migration, security, and border controls provides a plethora of additional examples of the tacit or explicit contestation practices that MENA states adopt vis-à-vis European

policies. As we have seen, the Arab states in Europe's southern borderlands, particularly those located in the Maghreb, have used cooperation on migration and border controls with the Europeans to strengthen their power over citizens and migrants from third countries. They have responded to European pressures to curb unwanted migration to the EU by criminalizing migration altogether, thereby strengthening their authoritarian rule to the general detriment of human rights and protections for refugees. Since 2011, in the face of growing European pressure, MENA governments have also formally agreed to sign cooperation agreements with the European Union on migration, the so-called Mobility Partnerships, but in practice have employed different tactics to delay their implementation, as is the case with Morocco and Tunisia (Limam and Del Sarto 2020). At the same time, the European preference for shifting the burden of hosting millions of Syrian refugees onto neighbouring states in the Middle East in exchange for providing financial assistance has prompted the governments of host countries such as Lebanon and Jordan to openly criticize European policies and demand greater support (Fakhoury 2020). Pointing to Europe's dubious policies on 'readmission', these governments responded with indignation to calls from Brussels to respect human rights standards in dealing with the thousands of Syrian refugees on their territory (Dionigi 2017).

Throughout their cooperation with Europe on security sector reform and counterterrorism, MENA governments have cherry-picked according to their interests as well. From the Maghreb countries to the Palestinian Territories and Lebanon, EU-funded security cooperation has been used to strengthen existing power structures while circumventing meaningful reform of the underlying domestic security architecture and governance (Bouris 2014; Kartas 2014; Zardo and Cavatorta 2016; Tholens 2017b). Human rights violations and a lack of accountability have continued. Similarly, in Turkey, an EU candidate country, various EU-funded 'Twinning' projects conducted between 2002 and 2009 sought to improve the human rights record of the Turkish police, but were utilized by local police forces to further their own objectives, which mainly involved improving working conditions. Actors within the Turkish police force have also employed cooperation with the Europeans to their advantage in the context of their competition with other elements of the security apparatus, such as the military (Bahçecik 2014). The effectiveness of these various European training and technical assistance projects, which aimed to address the widespread mistreatment and torture of suspects and prisoners detained in Turkey, was mixed at best.

Equally, in the daily practice of Europe–Middle East cooperation, MENA governments and their officials often try to renegotiate and thereby alter the

rules that the Europeans seek to export. In many cases, this occurs out of the public eye. For example, research on French–Moroccan cooperation on migration control has pointed to the role of Moroccan mid-ranking police officers in challenging the practices, underlying concepts, and statistics used by their French counterparts with the aim of altering modes of on-the-ground cooperation (El Qadim 2014). The study of EU–Turkey police cooperation mentioned earlier also demonstrated how Turkish local actors have sought to modify the concrete content of European rules and practices according to their own ideas and preferences (Bahçecik 2014). The Turkish coastguard has similarly tried to shape the framework of cooperation by engaging in an antagonistic relationship with its European counterparts, usually at the expense of migrants and refugees, whose situation became even more precarious (Karadağ 2019).

In considering Europe's attempts to strategically engineer the border controls at its outer fringes, Turkey's reactions and strategies stand out as particularly striking. Ankara's earlier-mentioned resistance to the EU's 'smart' and human rights-oriented model of border control—the so-called Integrated Border Management system—became especially explicit once the civil war in Syria had begun to unfold. What is remarkable is that in the context of the deteriorating security situation at Turkey's borders and as Europe became increasingly reliant on Ankara to stem the flow of refugees, Turkey succeeded in turning the tables on the Europeans. Implementing the 'smart' model of border control was no longer a precondition for Turkey's accession to the EU, as had previously been the case. Instead, Brussels came to accept Ankara's security-oriented approach to border control (Okyay 2020), in which civilian control and human rights play a subordinate role, if at all.

That Europe is reluctant to insist on political reform whenever Arab regimes in the Mediterranean Middle East invoke the threat of Islamist terrorism is itself an example of how Europe has gradually accepted the arguments and narratives put forward by its MENA counterparts (Gillespie and Whitehead 2002: 198). While political reform in the MENA region was never a European priority to begin with, it is interesting to note that, in the first years of the Barcelona Process, Arab governments had protested the European narrative that tended to equal Islamism (or even Islam) with terrorism. Yet authoritarian regimes very quickly learned to play the 'Islamism card' with the Europeans, claiming that it was only thanks to their uninterrupted reign that ferocious Islamist terrorists would not take over the Middle East, leading to instability and chaos that would eventually also engulf Europe. In a process that has been termed 'externalization-in-reverse' (Joffé 2008: 158), that is,

third states transferring their rules and practices to Europe, the Europeans gradually adopted this logic. This entailed that they continued to deal with 'moderate'—but repressive—Arab regimes. As tumultuous scenes have unfolded in (parts of) the borderlands in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, Europe's preference for stability over democratic reform has only grown stronger.

Of course, processes of contestation and the continuous renegotiation of norms, rules, and practices are defining features of politics and of social relations in general. It is therefore unsurprising that the states of the Mediterranean Middle East have also resisted and modified norms and rules advanced by other international actors, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. As in their confrontation with the Europeans, MENA governments have also attempted to seize on the opportunities offered by specific reforms promoted by these institutions to advance their interests (for example Bergh 2012). While scant attention is typically paid to the actions and strategies of non-Western states in the Western-dominated International Relations literature (Bilgin 2010)—an observation that applies to Europe–Middle East relations in equal measure (Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013; El Qadim 2014; Nicolaïdis 2015; Karadağ 2019; Del Sarto and Tholens 2020)—the interesting question is why recurrent episodes of contestation take place in asymmetrical power relationships.

Elaborating on previous studies of empire, but shifting the perspective to the territories at its fringes, Magali Gravier (2020) provides a compelling explanation here. The hybrid and commonly accepted implementation of European rules in its borderlands, which she terms *petits arrangements* ('small arrangements'), allows peripheral states to engage with the wealthy European core by navigating between two extreme alternatives: at one end, a complete rejection of European rules and practices, which may be undesirable for political and economic reasons, and, at the other, the complete acceptance of these rules. The latter option would however demand far-reaching—and far too costly—processes of political and socio-economic transformation. For the European core, on the other hand, tolerating these *petits arrangements* is a reflection of imperial pragmatism: throughout history, empires have tolerated a considerable amount of autonomy in the borderlands in return for compliance, tribute, and military collaboration with the core (Tilly 1997: 3), as noted earlier. For Europe these accommodating arrangements at its fringes 'may be the best possible deal to keep some form of influence in remote territories' (Gravier 2020: 43). We should also add that the highly selective interpretation and application of rules and practices, which is typical of *both* Europe and the

Mediterranean Middle East, is acceptable to both sides as long as the economic and political elites on both shores of the Mediterranean continue to benefit from it.

However, the adoption of diluted versions of European norms and practices in the borderlands may not only negatively affect the societies in the Middle East in their entirety but, in the long run, also the order in the core itself. This would be a case of imperial overreach, which can be thought of 'as overambitious attempts at social engineering in a culturally very different periphery' (Hinnebusch 2020: 187). Such an overreach may result in 'blowback', whereby disorder in the periphery affects the core. For Raymond Hinnebusch (187), the Arab uprisings and their aftermath are a clear case of such dynamics. Europe's attempts to export a neoliberal economic order to its southern periphery, combined with a diluted form of democratic governance, can be read as a policy of social engineering that has exceeded the powers of the EU and its member states. This imperial overreach played an important role in the socio-economic and hence political destabilization of MENA states, according to Hinnebusch. Yet the uprisings and subsequent civil wars in Europe's borderlands posed the dual threats of terrorism and mass migration to Europe, with the destabilized neighbourhood becoming the site of 'blowback'. From this vantage point, Europe's adoption of restrictive immigration and counterterrorism policies—with their inherent human rights violations—together with the rise of right-wing, xenophobic, and anti-EU movements in Europe, are concrete manifestations of this 'blowback'. Brexit is but one example in this context. Consequently, Europe's prevailing liberal order is undermined, and the very survival of the EU as an empire of sorts is at stake (see also Mezzadra 2004).

Practices of contestation and resistance by MENA states vis-à-vis Europe's selective extension of its borders, constant negotiation on prevailing rules and practices, and the resulting 'hybrid order' in the borderlands are a central aspect of Europe's relations with its borderlands. This raises the question of what types of power dynamics are at play in this complex relationship, as discussed next.

Power Dynamics and Leverage

Within the hub-and-spoke system that European policies created through the partial integration of MENA economies into the EU's Internal Market, power relations are clearly asymmetrical. Moreover, as we have seen, MENA governments perform the 'dirty job' of blocking unwanted migration to Europe

while assisting in Europe's counterterrorism efforts with dubious methods. By and large, these dynamics operate in Europe's favour—as well as to the benefit of elites in the MENA periphery. To state the obvious, however, countries such as Algeria and Libya that have at their disposal the natural resources on which Europe depends, have an important bargaining power vis-à-vis the European bloc. Algeria, for instance, is, after Russia and Norway, the EU's third-largest supplier of natural gas. These states are able to ignore and resist the demands of the much larger and economically much more powerful EU, precisely because securing oil and gas supply from these areas is such a vital concern to Europe (Darbouche 2008). European overtures towards Libya in the 2000s may similarly be explained in terms of markets, oil concessions, energy security, and arms sales, which empowered the Libyan regime (Zoubir 2009).

The decades-old reliance of European countries on MENA states as regards counterterrorism and security is also a good case in point. In this vein, Algeria and Morocco, for example, have become valuable assets for Europe. This had already been the case prior to the Arab uprisings, but Europe's dependence on these states increased as instability grew in the Maghreb and with the rise of Islamic State-related groups after 2011 (Hernando de Larramendi and Fernández-Molina 2015). Similarly, a number of states in Europe's southern periphery such as Israel, Lebanon, and Jordan have a relatively diversified set of economic and political relations with Europe, and thus a greater space of manoeuvre vis-à-vis the Europeans. The case is different for, say, small and resource-poor Tunisia, which is highly trade-dependent on Europe. Yet in this European 'neighbourhood', even materially less powerful states have demonstrated an ability to defend their positions and even impose their own demands on the materially stronger Europeans.

Morocco's relations with the European neighbour are a good example of these multiple dependencies and complex power dynamics. Morocco depends on the EU for its trade, but is also a key partner in European counterterrorism efforts and migration control and maintains excellent relations with the United States, including in the realm of security cooperation. Moreover, the kingdom is a major exporter of phosphates, on which European industry depends. In separate agreements, Morocco has granted specific fishing quotas to European vessels—particularly Spanish and French vessels—along its Atlantic coast. Thus while Morocco is materially less powerful than the European Union and its members in absolute terms, Rabat could still 'allow' itself to suspend all relations with the EU in February 2016 in protest at a ruling handed down by the European Court of Justice in December 2015. The court had rejected Morocco's territorial claims over the Western Sahara by

declaring an EU–Moroccan agreement on liberalized agricultural trade invalid because it included the Western Sahara in its territorial scope. The ruling was in line with international law, according to which Morocco's rule over the Western Sahara is illegal. In practice, however, the court's decision ran contrary to the reality of European–Moroccan relations, which had witnessed a gradual shift towards the Europeans' tacit acceptance of Rabat's claim over the disputed territory occupied by Morocco. Rabat resumed its dealings with the Europeans only in early 2019, after the European Parliament had approved a bilateral EU–Moroccan fisheries agreement. Incidentally, this agreement also included the Western Sahara in its territorial scope (a separate European Court of Justice ruling had equally declared this agreement as invalid). Driven by economic and security interests and prodded by France, one of Morocco's key trading partners, the EU thus agreed to implement the disputed fisheries agreement in plain disregard of the ruling of its principal judicial authority.[1] The European fishing industry undoubtedly rejoiced: for a period of four years, the agreement allows around 130 vessels from EU member states to access the rich fishing grounds of Morocco and the Western Sahara, in exchange for the EU paying €208 million in compensation (European Commission 2019c).

Europe's relations with Israel provide a further example of the multiple dependencies and complex power dynamics that define Europe's relations with its southern borderlands. With Europe's dark historical legacy still shaping relations, Israel is linked to the European bloc today through a complex web of economic, political, and cultural ties. Israel has by now aligned much of its trade-related legislation with European rules and standards (European Commission 2019d: 138–142), and commercial and institutional relations have progressively deepened in recent decades. In economic terms, Israel is not as important to the EU as the EU is to Israel, but it remains a compelling trading partner for the Europeans because of the country's advanced bio-tech, information, and security/surveillance technology sectors. In short, Israel's economic relations with the EU are beneficial for both sides (Tovias and Magen 2005; Tovias 2007; Pardo 2008; 2009). The country also maintains close relations with single member states, particularly Germany, and, more recently, the four Visegrád countries Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia (Pardo and Gordon 2018). Nevertheless, this does not

[1] Brussels explained this decision by pointing to the establishment of a consultation mechanism with all the populations concerned and the expected socio-economic benefit for all populations (European Commission 2019c).

mean that Israel accepts European policies and preferences deferentially. While a number of trade disputes marked the first decade of the Barcelona Process (Zemer and Pardo 2003), the EU's positions on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its ambitions to play a substantive role in peace negotiations have repeatedly caused disagreements and major clashes (Pardo and Peters 2010; 2012; Del Sarto 2014; Pardo 2015). In this realm, Israel's privileged relations with the United States account in no small part for the country's large space of manoeuvre vis-à-vis the Europeans.

In fact, when the Palestinian dimension of Europe's relations with Israel is taken into consideration, a curious triangular relationship emerges (Del Sarto 2015). Certainly, the dynamics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have changed considerably in recent decades (Klein 2010): Suffice it to recall that, at the launch of the Barcelona Process, Israel and the then-newly created Palestinian Authority under Yasser Arafat had been engaged in the Oslo peace negotiations. Yet by the time EU and MENA representatives issued their joint declaration in November 1995 with the stated ambition of creating 'a zone of peace, stability, and prosperity' (Barcelona Declaration 1995), Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had been killed by an Israeli fundamentalist just a few weeks earlier; Israel's relations with its Arab neighbours would begin to deteriorate shortly afterwards. This is not the place to discuss the reasons for the demise of the Oslo Process. What is certain, however, is that the second Palestinian Intifada with its numerous terrorist attacks, Israel's continuous expansion of its settlements in and persistent domination over the Palestinian territories, and the separation between the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip and the West Bank where the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority rules over major urban centres, all contributed to considerably altering the parameters of Europe's engagement with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

By contrast to its agreements with Morocco and the Western Sahara, Brussels clarified that its trade agreement with Israel did not apply to the products originating in the Israeli settlements; this was also because, from a legal perspective, all of the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel are covered by the EU–Palestinian interim trade agreement of 1997. Palestinian trade volumes with the EU are ridiculously low, poorly diversified, and strongly unbalanced in favour of the Europeans (European Commission, DG Trade 2019c).[2] However, the EU and its single member states have

[2] In 2017, the EU's exports of goods to the Palestinian territories amounted to €300 million and its export of services to €100 million. Palestinian exports to the EU amounted to less than €100 million in goods and were almost non-existent in services.

remained the largest donors to the Palestinians since the start of the Oslo Process: for instance, varying between approximately €10 to €20 million a month, European aid supports the salaries and running costs of the Palestinian Authority. In addition, EU programmes train the Palestinian civil police as well as Palestinian judges, fund various programmes aimed at improving economic governance, the rule of law, and education, and support numerous civil society activities (for example Bulut Aymat 2010; Bouris 2014). The EU and its members also contribute substantially to the budget of the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. While continuing to ostracize Hamas, Europe has also provided extensive humanitarian aid to Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip.[3]

What is striking is that Europe's cooperation with the Palestinians takes place within parameters set by Israel, which ultimately controls the West Bank and which, together with Egypt, has maintained a strict blockade on the Gaza Strip since 2007 (World Bank 2018). While clinging to the (arguably no longer relevant) 'two-state solution' model proposed for resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict,[4] European policies have actually contributed to the preservation of the status quo. Yet, considering the ongoing nature of Israeli settlement expansion, the status quo is hardly a static one. Above all, Europe's policies, while often the target of Israeli criticism, are, in fact, in Israel's interest: they ensure the survival of an increasingly illiberal Palestinian regime which cooperates with Israel in fighting Hamas and, moreover, absolve the occupying power of the responsibility of taking care of the Palestinian population living under its control (Del Sarto 2019; see also Tocci 2009; Huber 2018).

Moving beyond the specificities of the Israeli case, our discussion so far has shown that migration and border controls represent the issues which lend MENA states the most leverage over the Europeans, as a growing body of literature has highlighted (Cassarino 2007; 2010, 2014; Durac and Cavatorta 2009; Lutterbeck 2009; Del Sarto 2010; Paoletti 2011; Hollis 2013; El Qadim 2014). Here the bargaining power of MENA states, particularly those in North Africa, has only strengthened in recent decades. Using migration as leverage is in no way a novel development, however. Morocco, for example, had already sought to obtain trade concessions from the Europeans in the

[3] The EU joined Israel and the United States in boycotting Hamas until it renounces terrorism, recognizes Israel, and abides by previous agreements, that is, the Oslo Accords.

[4] In addition to contradicting the realities of an unrelenting Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank, Israel's right-wing governments have long abandoned the two-state solution and have been discussing the implementation of a (partial) annexation of the West Bank instead.

mid-1990s by threatening to relax its border controls during negotiations on the Euro–Mediterranean Association Agreement. As the *Economist* (9 September 1995: 47–48) put it at the time, 'give us a deal', Morocco demanded, 'or we will give you our people'. Over the years, additional MENA states, including Egypt and Tunisia, would discover—and exploit—their crucial role as Europe's gatekeepers.

The master in playing the 'immigration card' vis-à-vis Europe was, undoubtedly, Libya's Qaddafi. As we have seen, the late Libyan ruler extracted considerable support from Brussels and other European capitals (most notably Rome) for his role in preventing refugees and migrants mainly hailing from sub-Saharan Africa from reaching Europe (Paoletti 2011). Qaddafi's 'threat' to 'turn Europe black' unless the EU paid Libya at least €5 billion a year to block unwanted migration of 2010 is probably the most (in)famous illustration of Qaddafi's sense of power over the Europeans. Indeed, it was through such threats that Qaddafi obtained the suspension of the economic embargo while gaining international legitimacy (Perrin 2009), in addition to financial aid amounting to around €60 million for the period 2011–2013 (Paoletti and Pastore 2010; Zaragoza Cristiani 2016). Qaddafi would—albeit unsuccessfully—repeat his threat to 'turn Europe black' before the NATO campaign of 2011 that eventually led to his demise (Squires 2010).

More recently, Turkish President Erdoğan has become an equally skilful player in Europe's immigration debacle. As unprecedented number of refugees and irregular migrants attempted to enter the European Union in 2015, triggering a deep political crisis among the member states and revealing the failures of a common asylum and migration governance, Turkey gained exceptional bargaining power over the Europeans. With the EU–Turkey deal of March 2016, in which Germany played a prominent behind-the-scenes role, Ankara succeeded in obtaining €6 billion from Brussels for blocking unwanted flows of (mainly Syrian) refugees and migrants to Europe (Okyay and Zaragoza Cristiani 2016). Europe's concessions were not solely financial, however. In addition to reopening the stalled EU accession negotiations and the promise of visa liberalization for Turkish nationals traveling to the European Union, the 'urgency' of the refugee crisis in the summer of 2015 also prompted the European Commission to delay the publication of a critical document on the 'progress' of candidate country Turkey on its way to EU membership. Giving in to Erdoğan's requests, the Commission did not release the report in mid-October as had previously been scheduled, but only after the Turkish parliamentary elections of 1 November 2015, in which Erdoğan's AK party regained its majority. During the same period, the Europeans refrained from publicly

voicing criticism at Turkey's deteriorating record on human rights, the rule of law, and democracy in general. What was more, the Europeans remained conspicuously silent on Turkey's worsening relations with the Kurdish population, which coincided with Ankara's declared efforts to fight (Kurdish) terrorism within and across its borders (also Karadağ 2019: 7). Once the Turkish government had delegitimized the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) by accusing it of supporting terrorism, the Kurdish peace process was abandoned and armed conflict in the south-eastern regions resumed. Military actions in the region's predominantly Kurdish cities led to civilian fatalities and the displacement of Kurdish populations. Erdoğan's boast that he had the power to challenge the very existence of Europe's Schengen system of open borders whenever he wanted by putting 'refugees on buses' and opening its borders with Greece and Bulgaria (quoted in Okyay and Zaragoza Cristiani 2016: 59) had apparently made quite an impression on the Europeans.

Attempts by refugees and migrants to reach Europe via the Balkans and Turkey diminished in frequency after 2016. In the spring of 2020, Erdoğan sought to repeat his strategic move by opening the border to EU territory to Syrian refugees fleeing the embattled Syrian province of Idlib, as alluded to above. There were precedents to this, however. Since the signing of the 2016 EU refugee deal, Turkey had repeatedly threatened to relax border controls for refugees and migrants heading to the EU, stressing that the country was neither able nor willing to shoulder the burden of hosting millions of Syrian refugees on its own—by 2019, Turkey hosted over 3.6 million Syrian refugees. In this vein, the number of refugees and migrants entering EU territory via Turkey increased notably in 2019, by around 46 per cent over the previous year (Cook 2020). Meanwhile, Brussels remains unable to verify how (or, for that matter, if) Turkey has spent over €1 billion in European public funds on Syrian refugees since Ankara refuses to grant access to relevant documents (Nielsen 2018).

Finally, it should be noted that according to various reports in the media, Libyan militias, which are paid by Europe to control the borders, are engaging in a similar cat-and-mouse game with the Europeans, by strengthening or relaxing border controls according to their (financial) needs.

It is no small irony that on the issues of 'migration and mobility', defined as 'one of the main fields of cooperation', the EU has formulated a number of options for leverage vis-à-vis third countries (European Commission 2016: 8–9). These include visa policies, pilot projects for legal migration, training authorized migrants according to the needs of European labour markets, EU support for the transfer and reinvestment of migrant remittances in countries

of origin, and information exchange. In addition, the European Commission stated that technological development, 'notably biometrics and digital identification, can act as a practical tool to bring migration management services together' (8–9). The reality is, however, that Europe has exposed itself to a considerable degree of blackmailing power to MENA states when it comes to border and migration control. Given that Europe has co-opted MENA states in the management of its borderlands, this power is 'the leverage of the gatekeeper', as Okyay and Zaragoza Cristiani (2016) have concisely put it.

Based on our discussion of contestation, accommodation, and leverage thus far, what can be said about the form of interdependence that prevails in Europe–MENA relations?

Dependence and Interdependence Reconsidered

Our discussion of compliance, contestation, and leverage in Europe–MENA relations has brought a complex web of mutual dependencies to the fore. While it is safe to say that Europe and its southern borderlands are linked to each other through multilayered patterns of interdependence, how can we think about the nature of this relationship and the underlying dynamics of power? What is the broader picture of the interactions and mutual dependencies governing Europe and its southern borderlands?

Relations between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East exhibit two of the major features of complex interdependence, the influential concept formulated by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1987; 2011). The existence of multiple channels of contact, the first marker of complex interdependence, certainly applies to relations between Europe and its southern borderlands. As we have seen, formal and informal ties between government and business elites, including between border control authorities and security services, figure prominently in these relations. The existence of formal and informal contact at both the EU level and at the level of single EU member states adds a further dimension to the multiplicity of channels and contacts. While not the focus of this book, Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East are also linked to each other through various transnational networks of civil society organizations such as EuroMeSCo, EuroMed Rights, and FEMISE (see also Jünemann 2002).[5] Societies and communities of people across Europe and

[5] EuroMeSCo (the Euro–Mediterranean Study Commission) was founded in 1996 and is a network of research centres on politics and security in the Euro–Mediterranean area. EuroMed Rights (formerly

the Mediterranean Middle East are thus increasingly interconnected as well. The second characteristic of complex interdependence according to Keohane and Nye, namely the lack of the use of military force, is rather obvious in our case, if we consider the nature of the European Union and its history, together with the fact that the EU does not have an army. It is important to keep in mind here that Keohane and Nye originally advanced their concept in the late 1970s, meant as an ideal type of the global system, and with a major focus on the United States.[6]

The third feature of complex interdependence, that is, the absence of a clear hierarchy of issues in the relationship, is not present in our case. Trade relations and cooperation on migration, borders, and security are far more important than, say, Europe's promotion of democracy in the Middle East and North Africa, or cultural relations, for that matter. Incidentally, commercial ties and the realm of security and border controls are also two sectors marked by reversed patterns of dependence. Hence relations between Europe and its southern borderlands do not fully correspond to Keohane and Nye's ideal-type model of complex interdependence in the liberal tradition of International Relations theory. While the real world never corresponds to sophisticated theoretical models, as the authors underline themselves (Keohane and Nye 1987: 731), the existence of a distinct hierarchy of issue areas and patterns of dependence across different sectors would indicate that a particular type of interdependence is at stake in Europe's relations with the Mediterranean Middle East. What, then, are the main characteristics of this complex relationship?

To begin with, in light of the nature of trade relations between the EU and MENA states and their relevance in the interaction between the two regions, the broader picture of Europe–MENA relations is certainly one of relational inequality. Indeed, as we have seen, specialization in different types of products and the clear division of labour characterize strongly vertical trade relations, with most states in the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa relying on Europe for large quantities of important goods, investments, aid, and export markets. Conversely, Europe could theoretically look beyond

the Euro–Mediterranean Human Rights Network or EMHRN) is a network representing eighty human rights organizations and institutions in over thirty countries that was created in 1997. FEMISE (Forum Euroméditerranéen des Instituts de Sciences Économiques, or Euro–Mediterranean Forum of Institutes of Economic Sciences) was established in 2005 and is a network of more than a hundred economic research institutes.

[6] In this specific historical and geographical context, the concept represented a major challenge to the dominant realist world view of global politics, in which military and economic power were the main determinants of foreign policy behaviour.

the MENA states for the far smaller quantities of goods it acquires from them without incurring enormous costs, perhaps with the exception of natural gas. With the omission of Israel and, to some extent, Turkey, this type of Europe–MENA interaction qualifies as dependence, or dependency (Caporaso 1978: 22).[7] Importantly, this asymmetry, which is inherently a relationship of dominance, is a structural condition in the interaction between both sides. It is structural because it is anchored in a long history of economic and political asymmetries that produced durable and stable patterns of interaction over time, leading to a set of significant distortions. The strong linkages between the economies and elites of the MENA and European states, the southward expansion of European capital, the fragmented nature of MENA economies, their insufficient technological development and innovation, and the growing gap between elites and populations in these states, are all examples of such distortions. In this type of structural dependence, 'economic productive activity and the structure of social relations [in dependent states] are largely reflections of processes elsewhere in the world' (Duvall and Freeman 1981: 109)—including, in our case, those in Europe. As a consequence of the selective and asymmetrical integration of MENA economies into the European (and global) economic system, the range of policy options available to MENA governments is restricted. By and large, structural dependence demands their compliance with European, and more broadly Western, preferences and prescriptions.

Second, while it may be difficult—if not impossible—for MENA states to adopt policy choices that plainly run counter to European preferences, consensus is an important aspect of their interaction with Europe. Johan Galtung's observation that the 'centres in the peripheries' share the interests, values, and perceptions of the centres in the core within relationships of structural dependency (Galtung 1971: 83) strongly resonates in our case. This affinity between elites in both Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East, particularly those in the Maghreb, often has a cultural dimension as well, rooted in colonial history. Consensus-based compliance, however, can also be thought of as a function and an outcome of structural dependence: it is precisely this condition that tends to shape the preferences of elites in peripheral states (Moon

[7] In the literature, the terms 'dependence' and 'dependency' are at times used as synonyms, and at others to denote qualitatively different concepts embedded in distinct theroretical traditions. Without going into detail or referring to the rich literature on this topic—including the body of literature of dependency (or dependencia) theory that was prominent in the late 1960s and 1970s and that focused on the lack of development in Latin America—I use the two terms interchangeably when denoting a structural condition. For a good discussion of relevant terms and their conceptual underpinnings see Duvall 1978.

1985: 333). In other words, elites in the periphery are themselves deeply enmeshed in the web of structural asymmetry and dependence and may thus be quite satisfied with the existing economic order and 'their share of the pie' (Fagen 1978: 295).

Third, various forms of resistance are taking place within the broader framework of compliance and consensus exhibited by the MENA states, as illustrated earlier. Contestation and a distorted application of European (and more broadly Western) rules and practices in MENA states, and the Europeans' tacit acceptance of these strategies and responses, are typical patterns of core–periphery relations, as we have seen. Importantly, these practices of contestation, renegotiation, and accommodation shape the interaction between the European bloc and the Mediterranean Middle East, resulting in a hybrid order in the borderlands.

Finally, power relations vary according to different issue areas. In the sphere of migration and border controls, the patterns of Europe–Middle East interaction that characterize commercial ties between the two regions are inverted. As Europe has actively shaped MENA states as their southern borderlands and become dependent on it for the management of its migration policy, MENA governments often use their bargaining power to obtain concessions in other areas. Leverage and issue linkage, however, still take place within the broader context of a profoundly asymmetrical relationship. In this sense, the materially far more powerful EU and its members employ a combination of incentives and disincentives—to ensure the compliance of MENA governments with their preferences, with varying degrees of success. Moreover, Galtung's observation that, in a relationship of structural dependency, there is a perceived disharmony of interests between the peripheries in peripheral states and the peripheries of the core is illuminating in our context (Galtung 1971). The perceived 'threat' of mass migration and the significant rise of xenophobia and right-wing populism in Europe of recent years is a clear indication of this perceived divergence of interests, which also prevents any type of solidarity between the peripheries (or the disenfranchised masses) on both sides of the Mediterranean. Ironically, perhaps, it is precisely the construction of the 'threat' of immigration in European countries that provides MENA states with such bargaining power and forms the basis of Europe's dependence on its borderlands.

The patterns of dependency in Europe–Middle East relations thus differ from one other when we disaggregate them on a sector-by-sector basis. But what is more important is the distinction between *structural conditions* and the *behavioural dimension* of the interaction between states and regions (Caporaso 1978). The leverage acquired by MENA states on migration and

border controls, together with the varying strategies of resistance and contestation, clearly shows that even within structurally asymmetrical relationships, states and governments do have choices and a certain amount of room for manoeuvre. Consistent with a liberal view of International Relations, which focuses on states' behaviour and bargaining dynamics, it has been emphasized that being the stronger side in an asymmetrical relationship is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to exercise influence over the weaker side (Keohane and Nye 1987: 734). Indeed, the fact that the Europeans are less dependent on MENA states does not mean that they can exercise their influence as they please. The weaker MENA states may have strong preferences on an issue such as trade or financial aid and thus make concessions in another such as migration control. In the same way, Europe will not exercise all of its power on one issue, say, judicial reform in Arab MENA states, if this requires concessions in another realm, such as security cooperation. As highlighted in this chapter, this kind of negotiation, together with various practices of contestation and accommodation, forms an important dimension in the relationship between Europe and its southern borderlands.

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When we shift our focus to the strategies and responses of the states in the Mediterranean Middle East vis-à-vis Europe's preferences and prescriptions, we gain a far more comprehensive understanding of their relationship. Various practices of resistance to European rules adopted by MENA states figure predominantly here. The contestation of European rules may result in either their 'localization' according to domestic interests to which Europe tacitly acquiesces or in continuous negotiation over their meaning and scope. Such negotiation may also impact the rules that Europe originally intended to export, thus shaping the order in the borderlands, and, in some cases, the order within the European core itself. At the same time, Europe's shaping of its southern borderlands and the co-optation of MENA states in the management of migration, borders, and security policies, has given MENA states—particularly the North African states and Turkey—considerable bargaining power over Europe. This leverage and the resulting practice of issue linkage prompt us to qualify the idea of unidirectional power relations in the interaction between Europe and its southern borderlands. A focus on the agency of MENA states thus throws into relief a complex picture of interaction with different dimensions and vectors of power. This interaction, however, continues to be defined by—and occurs within—the deeply ingrained structural

dependency of the MENA states on Europe. This finding is fully consistent with the core–periphery perspective on Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East that underpins a borderlands approach to these relations. At the same time, this perspective also casts light on the intrinsically hybrid nature of the borderlands, in which rules and practices are constantly contested and renegotiated, and hence ambiguous.