7

Conclusions and Outlook

This book has proposed an alternative, sobering understanding of the relationship between the European Union and its member states—or 'Europe'—and the countries in the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa, Europe's 'southern neighbours'. In defiance of the overly simplistic notions of European 'normative power' and 'Fortress Europe' alike, this study has suggested that Europe can be thought of as a kind of empire in relation to its southern borderlands. Through this prism, the book has examined relations between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East in the twenty-year period between 1995 and 2015 by focusing on the two most important dimensions of their interaction: trade relations on the one hand and migration, border, and security cooperation on the other. In the period under consideration, relations between the two sides progressively expanded, deepened, and institutionalized following the start of the Barcelona Process in November 1995, with the Europeans recurrently stressing the need for shared prosperity and democratic reforms in the 'southern neighbourhood'. Exactly twenty years later, a major revision of European policy towards the region would take place, coinciding with the peak in the number of refugees seeking to reach Europe due to the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Libya. From that moment on, European policy and rhetoric adopted a markedly pragmatic and security-oriented approach, an approach which also emerged in response to the growing number of terrorist attacks in the Middle East and Europe and the rise of the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Yet despite the rhetoric and the various policy reformulations that have taken place in the interim, the basic features of Europe's engagement with its southern neighbours have remained unaltered. European policies are based on continuous attempts to make neighbouring Middle Eastern and North African states adopt EU or EU-compatible rules and regulations, integrate these countries into parts of the EU's Internal Market, and tie them to European border control and counter-terrorism policies. Using a borderlands approach to study the interaction between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East allows us to shift our attention to the dimensions of these complex and partly ambiguous relations that are often overlooked. This approach begins by thinking of the European

Union and its members as an economically powerful and empire-like entity with disaggregated internal and external borders, which continuously seeks to expand its order to neighbouring regions. In addressing states that have no—or, in the case of Turkey, highly qualified—prospects for EU membership, these policies create borderlands: areas that are connected to the European core through shared rules and practices but still lie beyond it. Governments in these borderlands are substantially involved in the implementation of European policies. Within a relationship that remains asymmetrical, hybrid and ambiguous norms and rules define the order in these peripheral regions. Notwithstanding any normative discourse, the transfer of European rules and practices to these states is in reality a cost-efficient means of pursuing Europe's economic and security interests, for which the stability of the periphery remains key. By considering how an interest-driven strategy towards the near abroad intertwines with an allegedly normative set of practices and principles, the author of this book has proposed to think of the European polity as a 'normative empire'.

Adopting such a perspective to study Europe's relations with the Mediterranean Middle East may be provocative and, at first sight, counterintuitive. However, it captures precisely the nature of these relations. First, it accounts for the long colonial history that linked these parts of the Middle East to Europe and laid the foundations for a profoundly distorted set of economic relations. Equally, this perspective allows us to trace the specific mode of Europe's engagement with these areas to the beginning of the European integration process, with the colonial attitudes of single member states, mainly the former colonial powers, progressively morphing into the common enterprise of the European bloc. Imperial or quasi-imperial policies towards North Africa and the Mediterranean Middle East thus form an integral part of Europe's political DNA. Second, for all of the EU's talk of partnership, a borderlands approach acknowledges upfront the unequal power relations between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East. As Europe has created a vertical hub-and-spoke type of relationship by trading market access for security and stability, most MENA states have remained structurally dependent on Europe, albeit to varying degrees. In this system, MENA and European economic and political elites share an interest in maintaining a stable order. Third, thinking of Europe–MENA relations in these terms resolves the apparent contradiction between the EU's normative discourse and its interest-driven policies. The EU's perception of its normative superiority is certainly linked to its history and raison d'être, but it translates into a paternalistic civilizing mission vis-à-vis third states. Even if Europe's

conspicuously orientalist attitude towards the Middle East has diminished since Edward Said's (1979) analysis, the critique nevertheless remains valid. A borderlands approach thus also allows us to distinguish between Europe's ambitions to diffuse liberal norms on the world stage and the technocratic reality of transferring regulations pertaining to trade, efficient economic governance, and administrative practice to the periphery. Finally, the actions and strategies of MENA governments vis-à-vis European prescriptions contribute to the hybrid order in the borderlands, with the contestation and negotiation of European rules and their selective and often distorted application figuring prominently. The agency of MENA states is thus properly accounted for.

What are the main findings of this book? First, the study has shown that relentless efforts to expand various functional and territorial borders to the southern periphery are the essence of European policies, irrespective of the specific contractual relations in place with single MENA states. This book has provided numerous examples of how these policies work in practice: Europe's attempts to impose its preferences and engineer socio-economic change in its borderlands rely on a plethora of formal and informal agreements, numerous projects and programmes, and various training activities on a wide range of issues. The EU's financial and technical assistance in support of the implementation of the prescribed reform process in MENA states is an integral part of Europe's modus operandi.

In the trade sphere, the gradual transfer of European rules and regulations has integrated MENA economies into select sectors of the EU's Internal Market, thereby seeking to create an environment that is favourable to (European) business. While the borders of European capital have expanded southwards in this process, agricultural products—a sector in which MENA states have a comparative advantage—continue to be largely excluded from the so-called free trade regime. Overall, this process appears to be driven by EU institutions, large European companies, single EU member states, and MENA elites, with a focus on those aspects that best fit their shared commercial interests. These policies have undoubtedly brought Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East nearer to one other, with Maghreb economies aligning themselves with Europe's economic interests particularly closely.

European policies on migration, security, and border controls follow a similar script, although the role played by single European states is far more pronounced here. The Maghreb features predominantly in these areas, too. By co-opting the governments and law enforcement agencies of MENA states with the help of mostly informal, often shady agreements and various

incentives and pressures, Europe has attempted to turn the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa into its southern buffer zone. In this rather opaque process of externalizing European border controls, aimed at preventing unwanted migration to Europe, the Europeans have exported a highly selective set of rules of practices. At the same time, they have willingly ceded responsibility for respecting international refugee law and human rights to a number of MENA states with dismal human rights records. A similar consideration applies to the cooperation on security and counterterrorism between single EU member states and their MENA counterparts. Here, again, European security concerns drive the agenda—and appear to justify pernicious means and outcomes.

A second set of findings revolves around the impact of European policies in the time span under consideration. Assessing impact here is not without difficulty: In particular, the EU's trade policies and prescribed regulatory reforms cannot be completely isolated from the actions of other international actors with similar neoliberal economic preferences. This is even more the case as commercial relations between Europe and its borderlands are deeply embedded in the global capitalist economic system, with the Europeans playing a prominent role in the process of integrating its borderlands into this system. A second factor is the limited nature of the existing literature, with the exception of migration studies, in the fields of economic relations and border policy. Indeed, the question of post-facto policy impact has not been the focus of attention of much of the political economy literature, and the generally secretive nature of security and border policies often coincides with a lack of reliable data. A third problematic aspect is that the ramifications of European policies are also dependent on the choices and strategies of the MENA governments themselves, in addition to the extant socio-economic conditions in individual states. Given that Europe remains the largest trading partner of all the states in its southern periphery and the largest provider of foreign aid in most cases, it is nevertheless possible to establish a strong correlation, if not a causal link, between European policies and specific developments in the MENA region. What is of interest here are not quantitative measurements of micro-processes, but the larger picture of Europe–Middle East relations.

And this larger picture is neither positive nor encouraging. During the twenty years examined in this book, European policies have certainly not created an 'area of peace, democracy, and shared prosperity', the Barcelona Declaration's solemnly declared objective of 1995. Rather, Europe's attempts to restructure the political and socio-economic order in the borderlands have stood to the detriment of the societies of the Mediterranean Middle East. Both

the EU's trade policies and the modalities of Europe's cooperation on migration, borders, and security with single MENA governments have played a significant role in producing this outcome.

Reflecting the divergence in economic conditions as well as the relative willingness and ability of MENA states to deepen economic ties with their European neighbours, the integration of MENA economies into the EU's Internal Market occurred at different paces and to varying degrees of scope and intensity. But although the overall volume of traded goods has increased over time, commercial relations have continued to be asymmetrical. With the exception of the natural gas-exporting countries in the Mediterranean Middle East, Europe has consistently recorded a trade surplus with all the MENA states. Excluding Israel, and, to a certain extent, Turkey, the division of labour and specialization in different types of products that typify core–periphery relations still mark Europe's commercial exchange with its borderlands. The developing Arab states in Europe's southern neighbourhood have thus remained trapped in a peripheral economic position vis-à-vis the more advanced European core. At the same time, these are the same countries where authoritarian regimes have succeeded in hijacking the neoliberal restructuring process. The absence of any noteworthy European incentives for meaningful political reform that would have established the rule of law and rendered political rule accountable is significant. As a result, crony capitalism and corruption have intensified massively, socio-economic and regional inequalities have increased, and a dual economic system, including in the vital agricultural sector, has emerged in these states.

It would be easy to claim that Europe is not to blame for this outcome. Other external players, most notably the United States and the international financial institutions, have promoted similar policies. Moreover, it could be argued that many—and perhaps most—responsibilities lie with the autocratic regimes in the Mediterranean Middle East. Yet as long as commercial ties with the Europeans remain most relevant for the region, European trade policies have clearly prioritized and relied on the ruling political elites in the region and their cronies for the sake of Europe's economic benefit and political stability. As European companies have profited from these developments, MENA elites have become the conveyor belt of the European (and global) neoliberal economic order. European policies have thus directly fed into deteriorating socio-economic conditions for large swathes of the population in these states, which have paid the price of profoundly distorted economic development. The Europeans could and should have known better: from the late 1990s onwards, scholars and observers of Euro–Mediterranean relations—many of

them working within EU-funded projects and networks—had anticipated the negative effects of the EU-prescribed reform process that coincided with the liberalization of trade in industrial goods. What is more, an EU-funded impact assessment study of 2007 had warned of the adverse effects of these policies as well, particularly in the absence of targeted measures to create jobs, alleviate poverty, and improve education. The EU repeatedly adjusted its policies over the years, but these changes were generally too little and too late.

The EU's trade policies have had important political consequences as well. The Europeans have de facto tolerated and partly contributed to the accumulation of power and private wealth by the repressive rulers of the MENA region. From this vantage point, the Arab uprisings should not have come as a surprise to anyone. However, in the wake of the Arab revolutions, Europe did still not change substantially its modus operandi. To the contrary, it proposed even deeper integration into the Internal Market through 'Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements' according to EU rules, from which MENA states—and especially their societies—are unlikely to draw substantial benefit. The promotion of meaningful political reforms has remained a rhetorical device.

Turkey and Israel are outliers here. Turkey, the seemingly eternal EU candidate country, has become part of the European economic order in many ways. Following the 1995 completion of the customs union in industrial goods, and as a result of the lengthy (and by now suspended) EU accession process, Turkey has over time adopted a vast array of EU-compatible trade rules and regulations. Links between European and Turkish business elites have grown deeper. Since Turkey is the EU's sixth-largest trading partner at present, commercial relations between both sides are thus substantive, with stronger diversification and the gradual closing of Turkey's trade deficit more recently marking relations. This does not alter the fact that Turkey, as a non-EU member, has no say in the Brussels decision-making process. As with the rest of Europe's southern neighbourhood, crony capitalism and social inequality have increased in Turkey as well, reinforcing the impression that the neighbourhood has become the conveyer belt of an unchecked and EU-promoted neoliberal economic order. Moreover, as the rule of law and respect for human rights continue to retreat in Turkey, the questions could be asked as to whether and to what extent the EU's selective rule transfer, in combination with the endless dangling of the EU membership carrot, may have contributed to the country's illiberal turn. The protracted nature of EU accession negotiations, in which Ankara has been treated as the junior partner, coupled with the EU's preferential treatment for eastern European (and thus 'Christian')

candidate countries, which overtook Turkey in the accession queue, may well have informed Turkey's adoption of revisionist policies, which have sought to reverse the country's perceived denial of its international role by the Europeans (Fisher Onar 2013).

Following Israel's alignment of much of its legislation with European rules and standards, the country's economy is also well integrated into the EU's Internal Market. In these rather diversified commercial ties, trade in services and advanced high-tech products figure prominently. Given that Israel shifted to a neoliberal economic model over three decades ago independently of European preferences and maintains such extensive trade ties with the US, it would be difficult to ascribe to Europe responsibility for the country's growing social inequalities and the concentration of economic power in the hands of a small wealthy elite. However, when we consider the Palestinian aspect of Europe's relations with that area, it becomes evident that European policies have responded to Israel's prerogatives while pursuing shared business and security interests. Europe's engagement with Israel and the Palestinians has not contributed to the economic development of the Palestinian Territories, which remain economically dependent on Israel. Rather, European policies have kept the Palestinians dependent on foreign aid, of which the Europeans are the largest providers, while relieving Israel of its obligations as the occupying power.

The book's findings on European cooperation with MENA states on migration, security, and border controls are further proof of Europe's pronounced self-interest in its dealings with the borderlands, in plain disregard of the liberal norms it pretends to uphold. The collaboration of single European states with the authoritarian regimes in North Africa has been most intense here, with disturbing consequences. Europe has been expanding its borders for unwanted people southwards with the overall aim of reducing unwanted migration to Europe, fighting terrorism, and providing security to EU citizens. It has engaged in joint patrols of the Mediterranean coastline with these states while delegating specific border control duties to them. In this process, the Europeans have tacitly accepted the increasingly repressive policies adopted by MENA governments towards both their citizens and foreign migrants and refugees. In fact, in its endeavour to prevent irregular migration and terrorism on European soil, Europe has rewarded these states with financial, political, technical, and material support—the latter including sales and donations of patrol boats and sophisticated surveillance equipment. While controlling mobility has become a central element in the broader Western consensus on migration governance, Europe, and particularly single EU member states, have

been particularly active players. As a result, Europe's externalization of its migration and border controls, together with security cooperation, have further contributed to the strengthening of authoritarian rule in the southern neighbourhood. While the European arms industry has profited considerably from the securitization of Europe's external borders (see for example Akkerman 2020), Europe's selective export of its rules and practices southwards has also watered down or even suspended the norms of human rights and refugee protection at Europe's fringes, as we have seen.

A third set of findings revolves around the type of power relations and dependencies that underpin the interaction between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East. The nature of trade relations between the two sides and their development over time clearly point to a broader picture of structural dependency. While limiting the choices of MENA governments, this structural asymmetry also conditions the preferences of MENA elites, which in practice stand to benefit from their position in the system. Within this framework, however, MENA states have some room for manoeuvre, evidenced by their resistance to and contestation of European rules. In accordance with the conceptualization of Europe as an empire of sorts, the Europeans often accept a distorted application of their rules in the borderlands as long as it allows them to pursue their interests and exert a degree of influence. While the dynamics of rule contestation, renegotiation, and accommodation serve the aim of reaching the best possible deal for both sides, it is striking that both Europe and MENA states engage with rules and norms in a highly selective way, resulting in the hybrid order observed in the borderlands. Moreover, our discussion has evidenced the importance of issue linkage and reversed power relations on specific issues. Above all in the realm of migration control and security, Europe has become dependent on MENA states, particularly those in North Africa and, more recently, Turkey. With the perceived threat of mass migration dominating the political agenda in most EU member states, opening the border to unwanted migrants and refugees—or, at the very least, threatening to do so—has become a powerful and rewarding strategy for whoever controls the outward movement of people in the region, be it states or militias (as in the case of Libya). Situated as they are within a broader framework of structural dependency, power relations between Europe and its southern borderlands are thus far more complex, variegated, and multidirectional than most studies account for.

When read together, the findings of this book allow for a number of final considerations. The first general conclusion regards the often problematic academic study of Europe's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbours and

the generally limited contribution of International Relations theory to this endeavour. This book has adopted some conceptual eclecticism: no single International Relations tradition proves useful in providing a comprehensive account of these relations, which comprise diverse and complex fields of cooperation between equally complex political actors and regions. Realism and neorealism may account for European interests driving Europe's policies as well as for the distribution of material power in Europe–Middle East relations. However, these approaches are incapable of accounting for the role that European identity construction plays in underpinning its policies, an identity which in turn is deeply intertwined with European interests. Equally, these theories cannot account for the social construction of borders and the threat of immigration. However, these constructions are significant: most notably, the ever-growing importance assigned to the 'migration threat' and border controls in most European states is the basis of, and nurtures, Europe's dependency on materially weaker states in the periphery. In similar fashion, dependency theory addresses deeply engrained structural features in unequal north–south relationships, which apply to our case. However, this approach ignores the room for manoeuvre and bargaining power demonstrated by the materially weaker states in Europe's southern borderlands, and is therefore blind to the resulting practices that define the interaction between both sides. Conversely, the liberal tradition of interdependence and bargaining pays insufficient attention to structural inequality in the global system. More generally, since most Western International Relations approaches were developed in the context of prolonged US hegemony after the Second World War, they fail to account for the specificities of the European Union and its policies. They often conveniently ignore the implications of structural dependence and generally pay insufficient attention to the agency of materially weaker states. Lastly, as neoliberal economic theory assumed hegemonic status, such theory fails to seriously question the underlying assumptions and adverse implications of neoliberalism's predatory variant in advanced economies and developing countries alike.

In what could be termed realist constructivism, this study has combined realist and constructivist tenets in its conceptualization of the relationship between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East. At the same time, it has treated structurally unequal power relations as a starting point but also accounted for the agency of MENA states, multidirectional power relations, and the presence of hybrid orders in the borderlands. The study has thus highlighted that negotiations over the scope and meaning of rules as well as continuous processes of social construction take place within limits imposed

by structural conditions, which may, of course, also change over time. This book thus lends its voice to the call by a growing number of scholars to transcend the dogmatism, narrow views, and Western-centric tendencies of traditional International Relations theory (for example Acharya 2014; Bilgin and Ling 2017). However, it also invites the European studies literature to be more critical in its evaluation of European policies. Although a growing number of scholars have criticized the literature's Eurocentric and self-congratulatory approach (for example Zielonka 2001a; 2006; Bialasiewicz 2012; Cebeci 2012; 2018; Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013; Nicolaïdis 2015; Keuleers et al. 2016; Keukeleire and Lecocq 2018), the mainstream literature has remained preoccupied with the EU's positive normative influence in the 'neighbourhood'. Yet some twenty-five years after the start of the Barcelona Process, with the adverse developments in Europe's southern periphery in plain sight, the fixation on Europe's solemn declarations and (undoubtedly) good intentions is plainly anachronistic.

A second general consideration regards the extent to which the specific dynamics that mark the relationship between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East are applicable to developments in other parts of the world. Are these interactions a *sui generis* phenomenon or is the transformation of the southern periphery into Europe's borderlands a local manifestation of a much broader phenomenon? There is no clear-cut answer to this question. For one, the EU and its members have treated the neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe—Europe's eastern borderlands—in a similar fashion. Indeed, European policies towards its eastern neighbours are equally characterized by rule expansion and the attempted co-optation of governments in border control duties and migration management (Schumacher, Marchetti, and Demmelhuber 2018). We may posit that European policies have had a similar impact on the socio-economic and political order in these states. A major difference, however, is that some of these countries face the realistic prospect of EU membership, at least in the longer term. An analysis of these ties through a borderlands lens and the comparison of the findings would certainly be an interesting academic exercise.

Beyond Europe, there is no doubt that trade and globalization, along with technological innovations and the growing demand for cooperative frameworks to address complex issues, have transformed the nature of state borders in our times (for example Rosenau 1980; Perkmann and Sum 2002; Fawcett and Serrano 2005; Bach 2017). Considering the emergence of increasingly interdependent border regions and widespread patterns of cross-border

governance, some basic features of Europe's relations with its borderlands may be observable elsewhere as well. However, with its internal political set-up comprising single member states but also supranational institutions and laws, the absence of a unified military power, territorial instability, and disaggregated borders, the European polity is a very specific case. There is a clear link between the way in which Europe interacts with its borderlands and the particular nature of the EU and its members; 'normative empire Europe' does what it does because it is what it is. It is possible, nevertheless, to compare Europe's relations with its borderlands to the interaction between bordering states or regions in other parts of the world, provided that a number of equivalent features are given. Based on our discussion, these should include asymmetrical trade relations that are embedded in the global capitalist system, in addition to significant differences in wealth and economic development between bordering states or regions—factors that almost inevitably produce migratory flows from poorer to richer areas. While relations between the United States and Mexico, or between China and its neighbours may qualify for such a comparison (see for example Foot 2016; Martinez 2016), a deeper investigation of these and other cases through a borderlands prism may prove a productive site for further research.

Finally, what are the implications of this analysis for current and future relations between Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East? Where do we go from here? It is worth stressing that it is perfectly legitimate for a political entity such as the European Union and its member states to define its interests and adopt policies to achieve them—ideally for the benefit of its citizens. After all, this is the nature of politics and International Relations. Equally, as much as collective amnesia and denial are essential ingredients in Europe's strategy for dealing with its colonial legacy (Nicolaïdis 2015), this feature characterizes many nations around the world when it comes to inglorious periods in their past. But while the EU's so-called Mediterranean policies were never meant to primarily address sustainable development and democratization in the neighbourhood, as noted some fifteen years ago (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005), the EU's pretention that its policies are 'normative' and 'different' has remained difficult to dislodge. Unsurprisingly, these claims have raised expectations while fomenting endless accusations that Europe is inconsistent, if not to say hypocritical. This state of affairs could be avoided were Europe to either adapt its policies to its narrative, which would be the ideal scenario, or at least begin aligning its narrative with its actions. Given the EU's current shift towards security-oriented policies and discourses, the latter would appear to be closer to reality.

In fact, while the geopolitical and economic considerations of the EU and its single members have dominated European policy for decades, they have clearly supplanted other considerations such as human rights or democratic reforms in recent years. Examples abound. EU funding for surveillance, intelligence, and border controls has massively increased in recent years (Youngs and Gutman 2015), reflecting the Europeans' double concern with migration and terrorism (which are in fact uncorrelated). In the same vein, Europe has maintained good relations with al-Sisi's repressive regime because of Egypt's important strategic location, the instability in neighbouring Libya and the Sahel, the discovery of large offshore natural gas fields, and potential benefits for European business. Italy's oil and gas company, ENI, which discovered these gas fields in 2015, has continued its operations in Egypt undaunted. Moreover, despite the Egyptian authorities' failure to cooperate with Italian prosecutors in investigating the murder of the Italian doctoral student Giulio Regeni, whose body was found in the outskirts of Cairo in 2016, Rome approved the sale of two naval frigates as part of a €9 billion arms sale to Egypt in June 2020 (De Marchi and Tecce 2020). France has significantly increased its arms exports to Egypt, too; these exports include personal surveillance and crowd control technologies that have been strongly criticized by human rights organizations (Irish and Louet 2018). Meanwhile, in June 2015, the German multinational company Siemens was awarded its largest order to date for the construction of power plants in Egypt, with the German government subsequently promising €500 million in loans in exchange for Cairo's cooperation on migration control (Deutsche Wirtschaftsnachrichten 2017). The same state of affairs characterizes Europe's relations with Algeria's regime, which has demonstrated continued reluctance to reform. Through its position as one of the main exporters of natural gas to Europe and by portraying itself as an 'island of stability' in a chaotic neighbourhood it shares with Libya and the Sahel, Algeria retains a privileged relationship with the Europeans, irrespective of its lamentable human rights record (Amnesty International 2019; also Bennati 2019: 82–84). To this list may be added: the accords on migration control that Italy and Malta signed, in 2017 and 2020 respectively, with the Libyan al-Serraj government; the contracts of British pharmaceutical and oil service companies in Algeria; the energy and business interests of major Italian, French, and British companies in Libya; Germany's recent hydrogen production deal with Morocco; and the list goes on. The Europeans no longer even declare the promotion of democracy and human rights in the neighbourhood to be one of their foreign policy objectives.

Certainly, Europe may also be forced to adopt far less ambitious policies vis-à-vis its southern borderlands because of its diminishing power of attraction, prompted by the 2008–2009 financial crisis and the internal divisions that culminated in Britain's tortuous separation from the EU. Moreover, although the United States have been retreating from the Middle East in recent years, they continue to be a key player in all matters security. To date, energy interests, Israel's security, and the stability of the region have remained Washington's primary concerns, and this is unlikely to change. No less relevant, a number of other players have significantly increased their presence and influence in the Mediterranean Middle East in recent years. These include China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Their support for specific regimes, parties, or factions in the region is rarely tied to any request for economic or political reform, with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi financing the counterrevolution and the restauration of authoritarian rule in the region since the 2011 uprisings.

Europe's reduced influence and power of attraction, however, do not imply that the Europeans have the luxury to disengage from their southern neighbourhood. Whatever happens in that region is bound to impact on Europe, as most clearly evidenced by the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. Thus, instead of superficial policy revisions that result in 'more of the same'—or, if EU funding is reduced, 'less of the same' (Bicchi 2014; Bennati 2019)—Europe must radically rethink its priorities and policies vis-à-vis the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa. Such reflection must start with the acknowledgement that trade policies are never only about economics; they are inseparable from politics. When it comes to the Arab states in Europe's periphery, this book has shown that recent European trade policy, based on a neoliberal model of development which primarily stands to benefit the EU, has resoundingly failed to provide prosperity, dignity, and employment for ever-growing sections of MENA societies. Yet the model has proved stubbornly persistent: a highly technical 350-page interim report of an EU-funded study that sought to evaluate the impact of the EU's trade agreements with six Arab MENA countries, published in March 2020, still relies on the same narrow conceptual framework. While it vaguely establishes that access to some markets has improved across different sectors for some of the MENA countries under consideration (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon) over time, the study finds that the competitiveness of these economies appears to have stagnated or even worsened over time. The social impact of the trade agreements, which the report suggests merits further study, is deemed to be moderate for MENA economies, but the overall benefits for European

exporters are (unsurprisingly) confirmed (European Commission 2020b). Such assessments cannot be the way ahead. Moreover, it must be acknow-ledged that neoliberal economic systems are perfectly compatible with authoritarianism. In fact, they often mutually reinforce one another. Yet continued support for repressive regimes that plainly ignore worsening socio-economic conditions in large parts of their societies in the name of (Europe's) stability and security cannot be in Europe's interest in the long term. As evidenced by the Arab uprisings, this type of 'stability' will, in the absence of meaningful political reforms, sooner or later come to an end, possibly as the result of violent unrest. Any meaningful stability in Europe's periphery—a legitimate objective for European and Middle Eastern societies alike—needs to be based on genuinely sustainable development. To repeat here the propositions that have been formulated in the specialized literature for decades, what is needed are fairer terms of trade and a greater focus on measures that mitigate the adverse effects of neoliberal reforms, or the aban-doning of the neoliberal paradigm of economic development altogether. Equally essential is greatly increased aid for developing countries, tied to respect for the rule of law and human rights.

A courageous long-term strategy on migration, borders, and counterterror-ism is also urgently needed. Working in these realms with authoritarian regimes and unreliable 'partner states', such as Turkey, is short-sighted for the reasons stated above. Not only does it reveal Europe's normative hypoc-risy, it also hands a considerable degree of blackmailing power to these states. Moreover, what needs to be recognized is that persistent poverty, conflict, and climate change in the Global South will inevitably result in greater migratory pressures. Rather than reward MENA governments for becoming more repressive and spending billions of euros on 'border wars' (Mezzadra 2004; Balibar 2009) at Europe's fringes, European interests could be better served if these monies were not only spent on addressing the causes of migration but also on providing refugees and migrants with adequate living conditions and opportunities in Europe.

The final word regards the governments of the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa, Europe's southern neighbours. As much as there is a real material basis for accusing the Europeans of neo-imperial policies, not to mention duplicity, this book has shown that these refrains have also served MENA governments, Israel included, as a convenient scapegoat for their own human rights violations and abject failure to govern responsibly. This applies to their profiteering from neoliberal reforms, and, for the Arab states—with the exception of Tunisia—their stubborn desire to preserve strict control in

plain disregard of the needs and aspirations of their citizens. For the region's authoritarian regimes, the observation concerning the unsustainable nature of repression in combination with worsening socio-economic conditions for the majority of their populations applies in equal measure. The main causes of the Arab uprisings in 2011—a lack of economic opportunity, rampant corruption, rising inequalities, and repression—remain patently unaddressed. In many MENA states, the socio-economic and political conditions have actually deteriorated. Given that more popular revolts may just be a matter of time, meaningful, gradual reform undoubtedly represents a better long-term strategy than ever-increasing oppression. Moreover, with regard to the unequal power relations that MENA states repeatedly lament in their dealings with Europe, the failure to confront European preferences as a group of states, or as a region, is largely their responsibility as well. Considering the dismal history of successful regional cooperation in the Middle East in recent decades and the persistence of various conflicts in the region, a change of strategy is highly unlikely, however. Finally, while this book has highlighted the agency of MENA states, the explicit or tacit contestation of European preferences may not be sufficient to change the rules of the game. Presenting the Europeans with constructive counterproposals and strategies, as Tunisian scholars have been recommending to their government with regard to migration policy (for example Limam 2020), is certainly the better approach.

At the time of completing this book, and as the world is facing the devastating economic and social implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be unrealistic to expect drastic alterations to the modalities of engagement between Europe and its southern borderlands. However, as in all times of crisis, this moment also presents an opportunity to change things for the better.