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(In) Coherence in the European Union's policies related to the
economy and migration on the southern shore

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مخبر اصلاح السياسات العربية في ظل تحديات العولمة

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Abstract : This article addresses a wide range of practices known as "externalizing border control," which are funded through countless political and security tools. The European Union has used a complex mix of incentives and pressures to ensure the cooperation of North African countries regarding border management and organization, involving them more effectively in the process of reducing migration flows across the Mediterranean, while at the same time pushing for an agenda that ensures further liberalization of trade exchanges in the region.

Keywords: Migration, Economic Liberalization, European Union, Security

1.Introduction

Economic liberalization has long been a cornerstone of the European Union's foreign policies, while migration control has become a top political priority. The migration agenda has taken center stage in the EU's internal dynamics and debates surrounding its external policies and resource allocation under the multiannual financial framework. Since 2015, the EU has increasingly reinforced measures requiring cooperation from source or transit countries to control and reduce migration flows to Europe. To address this, the research paper poses the following question: **What is the substance of the EU's mechanisms and solutions for combating irregular migration while promoting economic cooperation?**

To answer this question, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **Intensifying cooperation in migration monitoring is among the key mechanisms for curbing migration.**
- **Security threats and challenges form the basis for bolstering economic cooperation to achieve regional stability and peace.**

Through this study, the following conclusions are reached: Migration issues cannot be resolved through "iron-fist" policies or border fortification alone. Instead, they require collaborative efforts among partners to implement deep-rooted political reforms in migration-source countries, alongside developmental

policies that restore hope and create conditions for stability, enabling people to remain in their homelands.

2. Economic Liberalization

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) serves as the primary comprehensive framework for institutionalized relations between the EU and its neighbors in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean. It is grounded in a series of bilateral "third-generation" partnership agreements, which aim, among other objectives, to establish conditions for the gradual liberalization of trade in goods, services, and capital. Morocco and Tunisia were the first North African countries to sign these agreements in 1995 and 1996, respectively, with implementation beginning in 1998 and 2000 (Oxfam, 2020, p. 5).

Although migration was not prominently addressed in these agreements, reducing migration was cited as a key objective within their associated funding mechanisms. From the outset, the economic liberalization driven by these agreements exacerbated the preexisting severe trade imbalance across the Mediterranean. For instance, trade with Europe constituted over 50% of total trade for Maghreb countries, whereas Europe's trade with these nations accounted for less than 1% of its total trade (Oxfam, 2020, p. 7).

Following the Arab Spring in 2011, the ENP was revised to prioritize political, economic, and security stability. As part of this approach, the European Commission selected Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan as frontline Southern Neighborhood countries eligible for EU financial incentives under programs such as the **Partnership for Reform and Inclusive Growth**. Tunisia and Morocco adopted new ENP action plans in November 2012 and December 2013, respectively, replacing the 2005 frameworks (Oxfam, 2020, p. 8).

3. EU Border Management Policies

Beginning in 2005, the European Union developed a set of policies to externalize its borders, making it increasingly difficult for migrants to reach Europe. These policies include agreements with neighboring countries to accept deportees, effectively transforming these nations into guardians of Europe's borders (Arcam,

2020, p. 2). Following the 2015 EU-Africa Summit in Valletta, such agreements accelerated significantly. The EU and its member states allocated millions of euros to fund projects aimed at halting migration, utilizing mechanisms like the **European Neighborhood Instrument** and the **EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF)** (Arcam, 2020, p. 3).

3.1 European Neighborhood Policy

This policy emerged from the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy framework. Its origins trace back to March 2003, when the European Commission published the official document *Wider Europe—Neighborhood*, outlining a new approach to relations with Eastern and Southern neighboring states. Initially, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) aimed to foster political and social dialogue with these countries, emphasizing trade and economic ties.

However, following subsequent revisions, the ENP evolved. A 2011 review, documented in the statement *A New Response to a Changing Neighborhood*, expanded its pillars to include advancing democracy, deepening political and security cooperation, and supporting sustainable development (Nabil & Ahlam, 2016).

Regarding irregular migration, the revised ENP seeks to address root causes, mitigate its impacts, and ensure dignified repatriation of individuals without legal residency in the EU. It also prioritizes readmission agreements with migrant-source countries.

a. The European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI):

As the primary funding tool for the ENP, the ENPI channels financial assistance to partner countries. Managed by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation, it translates political decisions into actionable programs. Launched in January 2007, the ENPI replaced the MEDA Program, which financed Euro-Mediterranean partnerships, among other mechanisms. For the Mediterranean Southern region, the ENPI allocated **€333 million** between **2007–2013**. Algeria received **€120 million** during this period,

with most funds directed toward labor market reforms, job creation, and investment management (Ahmed & Lamia, 2016).

b. From ENPI to ENI

Starting in 2014, the **European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI)** replaced the **European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)**. The ENI operated until 2020, aiming to provide a framework and secure the majority of funding for EU relations with partner countries under the renewed **European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)**. Alongside bilateral and multi-country programs, support was channeled through cross-border cooperation, including the **ENI Mediterranean Basin Program** (Oxfam, 2020, p. 8).

The ENI sought to advance relations and objectives by reflecting evolving needs and priorities. Its founding regulation emphasized funding initiatives aligned with the ENP's political goals, such as the **Union for the Mediterranean** and **Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity**. The ENI's two core principles were:

1. **Incentivizing performance:** Rewarding countries demonstrating progress in reforms.
2. **Flexible funding:** Faster and more adaptable financial disbursement. With a budget exceeding **15 billion € for 2014–2020**, the ENI prioritized stability, security, and addressing root causes of irregular migration (Oxfam, 2020, p. 8).

To bolster this agenda, the EU established the **Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF)** in 2015, focusing on stability and tackling drivers of irregular migration. Initially funded with €3.8 billion (90% of its total budget), the EUTF drew heavily from the **European Development Fund (EDF)** and contributions from EU member states. It aimed to create flexible financing mechanisms aligned with priorities from the Valletta Summit (Oxfam, 2020, p. 8).

Morocco emerged as the sole North African country receiving substantial EUTF support, securing seven projects worth **€175 million** focused on migration

governance, asylum system improvements, and migrant rights. Tunisia received only one project (€12.8 million) targeting migration management. Morocco also obtained **€101 million** directly from the EUTF for border control—a unique allocation in North Africa. Regional projects covering Maghreb countries totaled over **€100 million** (Oxfam, 2020, p. 9).

3.2 Bilateral and Multilateral Security Agreements

Modern migration from Maghreb countries traces back to postcolonial labor demands in Europe. Early bilateral labor agreements—such as those between Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and France, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany—facilitated low-skilled worker migration, creating large diasporas. Current estimates indicate **2.5 million Moroccans, 1.4 million Tunisians, and 877,000 Algerians** reside in the EU (Khalil, 2014, p. 420).

Despite shared Mediterranean concerns, Maghreb nations remain key sources of irregular migration. In Italy, migrant numbers surged **30-fold between 1970 and 2007**, with nearly **triple growth from 2000 to 2007** (1.34 million to 3.33 million) (Faiza, 2014, p. 24). A 2018–2019 Moroccan national survey found **53.3% of migrants cited economic reasons** (primarily employment), while **23.4% pursued education**, and **19.9% sought family reunification** (Oxfam, 2020, p. 10).

The EU has prioritized **partnership agreements** with Southern Mediterranean states to curb irregular migration. The **1995 Barcelona Process** exemplifies this, emphasizing joint security measures, detention camps, deportations, and logistical support for border surveillance. Examples include:

- **Tunisia-EU Agreement (2011):** Linked €200 million in aid to migration cooperation, including repatriation (Ali, 2019, p. 9).
- **Spain-Morocco Agreement:** Allows 3,000 seasonal Moroccan workers into Spain annually, prioritizing prior workers (Sufyan, 2018, p. 2).

- **Italy-Libya Agreements (2000, 2003, 2007):** Funded detention centers, joint patrols, and repatriated 13,000 migrants in 2011 (Ali, 2019, p. 9).
- **Italy-Algeria Agreement:** Exchanged intelligence on smuggling routes and deported over 500,000 Algerians, while offering 2,000 work visas in 2008 (Samir, p. 237).

In addition, linking the readmission agreement to development aid exacerbates the problem. Since the European Council held in Seville in June 2002, the European Union has imposed a readmission clause in all cooperation, partnership, and similar agreements concluded with any country. Thus, the European Union has established a link between development aid and the management of migration flows. It is noteworthy that these agreements remain limited to a number of countries located on both shores of the Mediterranean basin, and have not taken on a broader, comprehensive character that includes all EU countries, such as Britain and Malta, which have been criticized for not sharing the burden with other European countries regarding illegal immigration. Malta, for example, refuses to even rescue migrants at sea and does not allow ships carrying migrants rescued at sea to enter its ports. More than 1,000 migrants arrived in Malta in 2008.

In addition, the logistical support provided under these security agreements is limited, with significant material resources, equipment, and capabilities, such as helicopters, coastal radars, speedboats, and night-vision goggles, remaining insufficient to combat illegal immigration. The countries nominated by European security circles to serve as "subcontractors" in suppressing migration flows do not possess the modern and adequate equipment and trained personnel to protect borders, especially when they extend over thousands of kilometers shared with African countries.

Some of these countries may also refuse to assume the role of police to protect the European Union's external borders. In addition to these agreements, in late 2006, at a meeting held in Stansted, England, attended by European interior

ministers, France and Germany proposed a solution to the problem of illegal immigration in the Mediterranean basin. This was done by reviving the guest worker formula, by concluding fixed-term employment contracts with foreign workers, and by granting countries with high rates of illegal immigration a large number of available job opportunities. However, this proposal was not binding on all European countries.

In April 2015, the joint meeting of Foreign and Home Affairs Ministers, chaired by High Representative Federica Mogherini and held in Luxembourg on 20 April, unanimously adopted a 10-point plan for immediate action in response to the crisis in the Mediterranean, presented by the Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship. These points focused on the security aspect, namely strengthening joint operations in the Mediterranean, organizing efforts to seize and destroy vessels used by smugglers, coordinating between European security agencies and the European Asylum Support Office, fingerprinting, providing centers to accommodate people in need of protection, and establishing a rapid program for the return of irregular migrants in coordination with Frontex and frontline countries, in addition to resettlement. Immediately after adopting the Ten-Point Plan, the European Commission presented the so-called European Agenda for Migration on May 13, 2015, which is based on four main axes: (Ali, EU Policies in Managing the Migrant Crisis in the Mediterranean after 2011: Between Security and Humanitarian Considerations, pp. 189-203)

- **Reducing the incentives for irregular migration.**
- **Managing borders, saving lives, and securing external borders.**
- **Adopting a strong common asylum policy.**
- **Adopting a new legal migration policy.**

A simple reading of the ten-point plan and the axes of this agenda reveals that the security approach remains in place, through reducing the incentives for migration, which cannot be separated from combating smuggling networks and resettlement, and securing borders through specialized agencies in this field, and through technological means such as smart borders. The only humanitarian factor

remains saving lives and transferring migrants to detention centers, which have been criticized by many human rights organizations and accused of mistreating and neglecting migrants, especially in France, Greece, and Italy. This is considered a flagrant violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits inhuman or degrading treatment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the global landscape, particularly with regard to migration. This health crisis has led to tightening movement restrictions, border closures, and the suspension of socio-economic activities worldwide, including in West and North Africa. In mid-2020, the governments of some European countries resorted to gradually lifting these measures. The International Monetary Fund also predicted that this health crisis would lead to a global recession, and that the gross domestic product of African countries would decline by more than 3 percent, affecting the internal conditions of these countries in the long term. This would, in turn, lead to a change in migration trends from North and West Africa towards Europe. (Rima, 2021, p. 13–14).

Due to the rapid development of the health situation, and according to statistics from the International Organization for Migration, there has been a 14% decrease in the number of irregular migrants crossing the Mediterranean, especially between March 2020. A 40% decrease was also recorded between January and May 2020, with migration flows returning by 53% in May, particularly across the southern borders of the Maghreb countries, from the Sahel and Sahara region. Despite the dangerous travel conditions, compared to the first six months of 2020 and their counterparts in 2019, the total number of irregular migrants has decreased by 25% along the eastern and western Mediterranean routes. (Rima, 2021, p. 13)

While the percentage increased after this period on the central Mediterranean route, with arrivals to Italy increasing by 15% and Malta by 33 percent, this is actually a much lower percentage than in 2019. The reasons are attributed to the ongoing violence in the Sahel countries and political instability. It also appears that COVID-19 has succeeded in achieving what the European strategy to combat

illegal immigration has been unable to achieve since 2011. The pandemic has spread terribly in European Union countries, especially those bordering the Mediterranean, the destinations for illegal immigration—Italy and Spain—making illegal migrants reconsider migrating to Europe to avoid contracting the disease. Statistics on the phenomenon have been borne out since the beginning of 2020 (Rima, 2021, p. 14).

In the context of combating illegal immigration, the European Union seeks to conclude several agreements related to the return of anyone who entered a country's territory illegally. To this end, the European Union and its member states work to persuade countries of origin and countries through which migrants transit to agree to conclude readmission agreements and clauses within the framework of policies related to development aid. These countries have tried to include these agreements in partnership agreements with countries of the southern Mediterranean. However, some countries have refused to return citizens of third countries to their territories, which has made the matter more difficult. (Asia, p. 8)

4. Cooperation Agreements and Their Impacts

4.1 Tunisia : Measuring the broad economic benefits outlined in interim evaluations has proven challenging. Over the past seven years, Tunisia's GDP growth fluctuated between **1% and 3.5%**, with poverty affecting **15%** of the population in 2015 (compared to less than **5%** in Morocco). Unemployment stood at **15%**, rising to **36.3%** among youth. These figures underscore Tunisia's entrenched structural crisis, rooted in fiscal policies, unproductive sectors, and governance challenges. Recent analyses highlight key obstacles:

- **Elite capture:** Dominance of productive sectors by politically connected individuals and firms, perpetuating cronyism under successive governments.
- **Labor insecurity:** Rigid open-ended contracts versus precarious short-term employment, pushing workers into informal jobs.

- **Financial systems:** Structural reinforcement of social, demographic, and regional inequalities.
- **Agricultural policies:** Inequitable focus on capital-intensive coastal farming over labor-intensive inland crops, exacerbating unemployment and regional disparities.

While consensus exists on these challenges, proposed solutions vary widely (Oxfam, 2020).

4.2 **Algeria: Reassessing the Partnership Agreement**

Algeria has not achieved the desired goals of the Algerian-EU Economic Partnership Agreement, as the economy has remained as it was before the partnership agreement. Algerian exports still depend on the hydrocarbon sector, accounting for 98% of GDP. Global markets remain inaccessible to Algerian companies due to their slow development and lack of competitiveness. (Sonia, 2017, p. 10)

The Algerian authorities are seeking a legal outlet that would enable them to review large parts of the partnership agreement with the European Union due to its "inequity." The European Union's handling of the 2019 popular movement (Reassessing the Algeria-EU Partnership Agreement: Putting the Agreement Back on Track, 2021) has deepened Algeria's desire to free itself from the consequences of joint committees with the Europeans, which included recommendations under the "fundamental freedoms" clause regarding women and the status of civil society. (Atef, 2020)

Immediately after assuming his position as Minister of Trade, Dr. Kamal Rezig openly criticized the Association Agreement with the European Union, which has been in place since 2005, as part of a "screening process" that Algeria intends to undertake with a number of economic and political blocs. Mr. Rezig shifted responsibility for any expected change in the wording of the initial agreement with the EU to "extensive consultations with economic operators and experts to evaluate the agreement." The statements by the Minister of Trade in the first government formed by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune come after several

attempts by Algeria to impose a different logic in its dealings with the Old Continent, coinciding with declining public treasury revenues. However, internal political considerations have rendered Algeria's position too weak to be officially declared in regular bilateral meetings (Atef, 2020).

During the Council of Ministers held on August 22, 2020, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune instructed Minister of Trade Kamel Rezig "to begin evaluating multilateral trade agreements (...), particularly the Association Agreement with the European Union, which must receive special attention to promote the country's interests for balanced relations." (Algeria-EU free trade zone at stake amid intense criticism, 2020). President Abdelmadjid Tebboune ordered a "clause-by-clause" reassessment of the terms of this Association Agreement with the European Union, signed in 2002 and entered into force in 2005, according to a "sovereign vision and a win-win approach." This reassessment must also take into account the interests of the national product to create an industrial fabric and job opportunities.

Today, 16 years after its implementation, experts, senior executives, economic operators, and civil society agree that the agreement has not truly benefited Algeria, particularly at the economic and commercial levels. This is confirmed by an assessment of the agreement's impact on the country's foreign trade over a ten-year period (2005-2015) (Reassessing the Algeria-EU Association Agreement: Putting the Agreement Back on Track, 2021; The Algeria-EU Free Trade Area at Stake Amid Severe Criticism, 2020). Total Algerian exports, excluding hydrocarbons, to the European Union, the country's primary partner, did not reach 14 billion \$ during this decade, while total Algerian imports from the EU were estimated at 220 billion \$, at an annual rate of 22 billion \$. Furthermore, the agreement left a deficit of more than 700 billion dinars in Algerian customs revenues during the same period.

Over a period of 15 years (2003-2018), Algerian non-hydrocarbon exports to the European Union increased from 344 million\$ in 2003 (two years before the agreement's implementation) to 889 million\$ in 2018. However, through the

agreement, Algeria aspired to boost its non-hydrocarbon exports to Europe and increase European investment in Algeria. Economic journalist Sofiane Slaoui says, "Algeria's dependence on European goods is an economic reality confirmed by trade figures, as the European Union is the primary supplier to the Algerian market." All of this makes "Algeria's desire to adopt any amendment to the agreement difficult." On the one hand, while on the other hand, the Algerian authorities signed the agreement and were unable to withdraw from it, and "repeatedly resorted to requesting a postponement regarding the customs dismantling provisions, as the postponement solutions were exhausted twice, the first time in 2012, and the second time in 2017, ending in 2021, under the pretext of protecting the local product, which is not competitive with what Europe imports". (Atef, 2020)

There is near consensus among a number of politicians, economic experts, and businessmen regarding the need to reevaluate this agreement. They also denounce the clear trade deficit in favor of the European Union, Algeria's largest trading partner, at the expense of Africa's fourth-largest economy. (Algeria-EU Free Trade Area at Stake Amid Severe Criticism, 2020)

The head of the National Association of Algerian Exporters, Ali Bay Nasri, explained that Algeria imported goods worth \$320 billion from the European Union between 2005 and the end of 2019, while it exported no more than \$15 billion worth of goods to the EU, excluding oil and gas. He added that negotiations over the agreement were essentially poor. At that time, Algeria ratified the agreement, and the number of EU members was 15. Today, the number is 27, and will increase in the coming years. The Algerian-European Association Agreement, signed in 2002 and entered into force in 2005, was predominantly political in nature. Its aim was to lift the rift imposed on Algeria during the "Black Decade" of the 1990s. Therefore, the Algerian side did not pay attention to the economic provisions, but years later found itself in a predicament due to the financial crisis that swept the country, which explains the lack of literal commitment to the terms of the agreement. (Atef, 2020)

Belbaqi adds, "Algeria is currently working to enter new economic and political blocs. There is a noticeable diplomatic dynamism, most recently the President's visit to Saudi Arabia on February 26, 2020. At the same time, Algeria is opening up more to China." He concludes, "To engage with the European Union in a strong manner, an alternative and diversified diplomatic platform must be prepared that ends the vertical link and leads to a win-win relationship." Due to the disagreements on the economic and commercial fronts, the establishment of a free trade zone between the two parties was postponed to September 2020, despite having been initially scheduled for 2017. On that date, Algeria began new consultations with the European Union and re-evaluated the agreement with a view to reviewing it. During the 12th session of the Algeria-EU Association Council in 2020, the Algerian side affirmed the willingness to engage in dialogue on both sides, as the agreement must balance the interests of both Algerian and European parties.

The Ministry of Trade stated that an interministerial working group had been formed to "evaluate the Association Agreement with the European Union" (SAMER). However, due to the pandemic, the group's work was halted and "only recently resumed to finalize the review of the strengths and weaknesses" of Algeria's trade agreements. Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad promised to "review trade defense rules" by "reconsidering" economic and trade agreements "that do not serve the country's interests" and redirecting the diplomatic apparatus to serve the country's economic interests. Algeria must make greater efforts to keep pace with the changes taking place in the region as a result of entering the free trade zone. It must also prepare its national economy for integration into the global economy, especially with its increasing efforts to join the World Trade Organization.

To achieve satisfactory results, it is necessary to:

- * Accelerate the rehabilitation of Algerian institutions to enable them to compete in both the domestic, European, and global markets, and to focus on sectors where they possess a competitive advantage, such as the tourism sector.

* Pay attention to small and medium-sized enterprises, given the role they play in various national and global economies.

* Encourage foreign and private domestic investment, and remove all restrictions and obstacles, in order to increase national production, which will lead to easing pressure on the trade balance.

* Work to develop and improve the agricultural sector to achieve self-sufficiency and move toward export. (Sonia, 2017)

5. Conclusion:

Finally, it can be said that EU countries must adopt a proactive policy based on addressing the root causes of migration, moving away from reactive policies that have proven ineffective in addressing migration flows. It is imperative to reform the European asylum system to create true solidarity among EU countries and share the burden. This will inevitably reduce pressure on European countries bordering the Mediterranean, such as Italy and Greece, which are the primary destinations for refugees due to their geographical location. At the same time, it will lead to a better reception of refugees and respect for their fundamental rights as a group protected under international and regional treaties, including European ones.

Conversely, countries on the southern shore must organize broader national consultations, including all relevant stakeholders (such as labor unions, representatives of affected sectors, gender experts, and independent economists) to formulate and propose practical amendments to the agreements' policies in a way that prevents significant losses. Insisting that these agreements include the fourth type of services liberalization under the Trade in Services Agreement and reviewing the European Union's inclusion of migration management priorities in these agreements.

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